The Communication Model by Schulz von Thun

This description has been translated from Schulz von Thun’s website. It can be accessed in German under http://www.schulz-von-thun.de/mod-komquad.html

The communication square is the most familiar, and by now the most widespread, model by Friedemann Schulz von Thun. This model also became known as the ‘four-ear-model’. The four levels of communication are not just significant for private companionship, but especially for the vocational domain—where the professional and human are constantly interlocking.

When I, as a human, make a statement it has four different effects. Each of my statements contains, whether I want it or not, four messages simultaneously.

- Factual information (which I am informing about) – blue,
- A self statement (what I show of myself) – green,
- A relationship indicator (what I think of you and how I relate to you) – yellow,
- An appeal (what I want you to do) – red.

Therefore, Schulz von Thun represented the four sides of a statement as a square and attributed four beaks to the sender and four ears to the receiver. From a psychological perspective, when we communicate 4 beaks and 4 ears are participating on both sides; the quality of the conversation depends on the manner in which these interact.

On the factual level the conversation the factual information stands in the foreground, here the focus is on dates, facts, and factual content. For the factual level there are three applicable criteria: the truth criteria of true or false (correct/not correct), the criteria of relevance (are the listed facts relevant/not relevant for the present issue, and the criteria of sufficiency (are the listed factual indicators sufficient for the issue or do many other things also need to be considered?)

For the sender it is therefore important to clearly and coherently communicate the factual content. The receiver, who has opened his factual ear, listens to the dates, facts, and circumstances and has many opportunities to follow up according to the three criteria mentioned above.

Self statement: When somebody provides a statement, they also provide a part of themselves. Every statement also contains, whether one wants it or not, a self statement, an indication of what is going on inside of me, what I am feeling, what I stand for and how I conceive my role. This can happen explicitly (‘me-messages’) or implicitly. This circumstance turns every message into a small tasting of one’s personality, which can be of some concern to the sender, not just during examinations and encounters with psychologists.

While the sender is using the self-statement beak, implicitly or explicitly, to provide information about themselves, the recipient is taking it all in with the self-statement ear: What does this tell me about the other? What kind of person are they? What is their disposition? Etc...
The relationship side. Whether I want to or not: when I address somebody I also let them know (through formulation, intonation, expression) what my relationship is towards them and what I think of them—in any case in regard to the actual content of the conversation. In every statement there is also a relationship indicator, for which the recipient often has an especially (overly) sensitive relationship ear. On the basis of this ear one decides: ‘How do I feel treated by the way in which the other is treating me? What does the other think of me and how do they relate to me?’

Appeal side: When somebody addresses another person, they usually wish to have an effect, have an influence; not just reach the other but to achieve something with them. Open or closed, this level is about desires, appeals, advice, instructions, effects, etc. Hence the appeal ear is especially open to the question: ‘What should I do, think, or feel now?’