

Institute for Shared Understanding

Creating Communication Effectiveness

A Practical Framework for Achieving Shared Understanding

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Abstract

Communication Effectiveness, defined as the degree to which a communication creates the Shared Understanding necessary for its intended purpose to be successfully carried out, is a measurable, improvable outcome. While communication theory has long studied the dynamics of human interaction, professional practice has lacked a structured, repeatable methodology for evaluating specific communications and identifying where understanding succeeds or falls short.

This paper introduces the **Clario Method™**, a practical methodology developed by the Institute for Shared Understanding (IFSU) for evaluating and improving Communication Effectiveness across professional contexts. The methodology evaluates communication, not communicators, through five observable dimensions called the Five Core Communication Signals: Purpose, Action, Decision, Tone, and Shared Understanding.

The paper establishes the theoretical foundations on which the methodology builds, distinguishes between established communication research and the Institute's contribution, and describes the structured evaluation process that enables individuals and organizations to intentionally create, systematically evaluate, and continuously improve Communication Effectiveness.

"Communication is coached, but it is seldom diagnosed."

The Clario Method™ provides a structured methodology for diagnosing communication so it can be intentionally improved.

1. Introduction

Every organization depends on Communication Effectiveness. Strategy, leadership, decision-making, coordination, innovation, and execution all succeed or fail according to how well people create and maintain Shared Understanding.

Every organization depends on communication. Strategic direction must be understood. Decisions must be aligned. Actions must be coordinated. Relationships must be maintained. And in every one of these domains, the outcome that matters is not what was said but what was understood, specifically, whether the communication created the Shared Understanding necessary for its intended purpose to be achieved.

Yet few organizations have a structured methodology for intentionally creating, evaluating, and continuously improving Communication Effectiveness.

Communication research has long established that meaning is constructed by the receiver, not transferred by the sender. Shannon and Weaver's foundational information theory (1949), the constructivist traditions in communication studies, and decades of research in cognitive psychology have demonstrated that human understanding is shaped by prior knowledge, assumptions, mental models, cultural frameworks, and contextual factors that the sender cannot fully anticipate or control.

Despite this well-established body of research, professional communication practice has remained largely undiagnostic. Organizations invest in communication training, style guides, and messaging frameworks, but rarely examine whether a specific communication, a particular email, meeting, presentation, or set of instructions, actually created the Shared Understanding it needed to create. Communication is coached, but it is seldom diagnosed.

The **Clario Method™** addresses this gap. Developed by the Institute for Shared Understanding, the methodology provides a structured, repeatable process for evaluating Communication Effectiveness through five observable dimensions. It does not replace existing communication theory. It builds on established research to provide a practical framework that professionals and organizations can apply to intentionally create more effective communication.

The Institute's Contribution

The Institute for Shared Understanding does not seek to replace existing communication theory. Rather, it contributes a practical methodology for intentionally creating, evaluating, and improving Communication Effectiveness within professional communication contexts. The **Clario Method™** builds upon established communication research by translating theoretical principles into a structured, repeatable diagnostic process that professionals can apply to real-world communication.

This paper describes the foundations, structure, and application of the **Clario Method™**. It is intended for communication professionals, organizational leaders, educators, consultants, and researchers interested in advancing the practice of Communication Effectiveness as a measurable, improvable professional practice.

Why a Diagnostic Methodology?

For decades, organizations have attempted to improve communication through training, coaching, leadership development, presentation skills, writing guides, and communication style assessments.

These approaches improve the communicator.

The **Clario Method™** addresses a different question:

How can the communication itself be systematically evaluated?

Instead of asking:

“How can people become better communicators?”

The **Clario Method™** asks:

“How can we determine whether this communication contains the elements necessary to create Shared Understanding?”

This diagnostic perspective shifts improvement efforts from subjective opinion toward structured analysis, repeatable evaluation, and evidence-informed revision.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Communication as Construction

The understanding that meaning is constructed rather than transmitted is one of the most important insights in communication research. The constructivist perspective, supported by work in cognitive psychology (Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978), communication theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), establishes that receivers do not passively absorb the sender's meaning. They actively build their own understanding from the communication they receive, using materials the sender did not provide: prior knowledge, assumptions, expectations, cultural norms, emotional state, and contextual factors.

This insight has profound implications for professional communication. It means that the quality of a communication cannot be evaluated solely by examining what the sender produced. It must also be evaluated by examining what the receiver constructed, and whether the two are sufficiently aligned for the communication's purpose to be achieved.

The **Clario Method™** is built on this constructivist foundation. It recognizes that Shared Understanding is not guaranteed by clear expression. It must be intentionally created and, where possible, verified.

2.2 The Curse of Knowledge

Research by Camerer, Loewenstein, and Weber (1989), building on earlier work by Newton (1990), demonstrated that once an individual possesses knowledge, they systematically overestimate the degree to which others share that knowledge. This cognitive bias, termed the Curse of Knowledge, causes senders to omit information they consider obvious, producing communications that feel complete to the sender but are incomplete from the receiver's perspective.

The **Clario Method™** addresses this bias directly. By requiring evaluators to examine communication from the receiver's perspective, asking what the communication actually contained rather than what the sender intended, the methodology helps identify the information gaps that the Curse of Knowledge routinely produces.

2.3 The Illusion of Explanatory Depth

Rozenblit and Keil (2002) demonstrated that individuals consistently overestimate the depth of their own understanding. People believe they understand concepts, processes, and communications more thoroughly than they actually do, a finding with direct implications for communication. Receivers who believe they understand a communication may, in fact, have constructed an understanding that is incomplete or inaccurate, without recognizing the gap.

This research informs the **Clario Method™**'s emphasis on verification. The methodology holds that Shared Understanding cannot be assumed, it must be confirmed through observable evidence, precisely because the receiver's subjective sense of comprehension is not a reliable indicator of actual comprehension.

2.4 Mental Models and Cultural Frameworks

Research on mental models (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Gentner & Stevens, 1983) and cultural dimensions of communication (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Meyer, 2014) has established that individuals and groups interpret communication through deeply embedded cognitive and cultural frameworks. These frameworks shape how messages are interpreted, how decisions are recognized, how authority is understood, and how agreement is expressed.

The **Clario Method™** incorporates this research by treating interpretation as receiver-dependent rather than sender-controlled. The methodology evaluates whether a communication is likely to create the intended Shared Understanding across the specific audience it addresses, including audiences that may bring different mental models, cultural assumptions, and interpretive frameworks to the same message.

3. Communication Effectiveness

Communication Effectiveness, as defined within the **Clario Method™**, is the degree to which a communication creates the Shared Understanding required to achieve its intended purpose.

Communication Effectiveness should not be viewed as a fixed characteristic of a communicator or organization. Instead, it is an outcome that can be intentionally influenced through thoughtful communication design, structured evaluation, and continuous improvement. The Clario Method™ was developed to support this practical objective.

This definition reflects several established principles from communication research while introducing a practical framework for application:

Communication has a purpose. Every professional communication exists to achieve an outcome, a decision, an action, an alignment, or an understanding. Communication Effectiveness is evaluated against that purpose, not against abstract standards of clarity or eloquence.

The outcome of communication is Shared Understanding. Not information transfer, not message delivery, but the degree to which the understanding constructed by the receiver matches the understanding the sender intended. This aligns with constructivist communication theory while providing a practical, observable criterion.

Communication Effectiveness exists on a continuum. No communication achieves perfect Shared Understanding. Communication Effectiveness is a matter of degree, and the degree that is sufficient depends on the purpose the communication serves.

The Institute for Shared Understanding does not claim to have originated the concept of Communication Effectiveness. The concept is well-established in communication research. The Institute's contribution is the development of a structured methodology, the **Clario Method™**, that enables practitioners to intentionally create, systematically evaluate, and continuously improve Communication Effectiveness in professional contexts.

Viewing Communication Effectiveness as an outcome shifts attention away from evaluating communicators and toward evaluating communication itself. This distinction is central to the Clario Method™. Rather than asking whether someone is a good communicator, the methodology asks whether the communication created the Shared Understanding required to support its intended purpose. This diagnostic perspective encourages continuous improvement without attributing communication success or failure solely to individual ability.

4. The Clario Method™

From Theory to Practice

The communication theories discussed in the previous section explain why communication succeeds or fails. The **Clario Method™** translates those theoretical insights into a practical methodology that can be consistently applied across professional communication contexts. The methodology does not attempt to replace theory. It operationalizes theory through a structured diagnostic framework.

4.1 Overview

The **Clario Method™** is a structured methodology for evaluating and improving Communication Effectiveness. It examines communication through five observable dimensions, called the Five Core Communication Signals, and produces a diagnostic assessment that identifies where Shared Understanding was achieved and where Communication Gaps formed.

The methodology evaluates the communication itself, not the intelligence, personality, or intentions of the communicator. This distinction is fundamental. When communication is evaluated as a property of people, the response to failure is personal. When communication is evaluated as a property of the communication, the response is diagnostic: specific, evidence-based, and actionable.

4.2 The Five Core Communication Signals

The **Clario Method™** evaluates every communication through five signals. Each captures a different dimension of whether Shared Understanding is likely to be created:

Table 1. The Five Core Communication Signals

Signal	Evaluative Question
Purpose	Does the communication make clear why it exists and what outcome it requires?
Action	Does it specify what needs to happen next, who, what, by when, and to what standard?
Decision	Is it clear what has been decided, who decided it, and whether it is final?
Tone	Is the emotional and relational dimension likely to be interpreted as intended?
Shared Understanding	What evidence suggests the recipient will interpret this communication as intended?

The five diagnostic dimensions used to evaluate Communication Effectiveness.

These five signals are not intended as a comprehensive taxonomy of all communication dimensions. They represent the dimensions that, in the Institute's assessment, most directly influence whether professional communication creates the Shared Understanding required for its purpose. The selection reflects both established communication research and the Institute's practical experience in evaluating professional communication across organizational, educational, healthcare, and cross-cultural contexts.

The Five Core Communication Signals should not be interpreted as a comprehensive theory of communication. Rather, they represent the five diagnostic dimensions that, in the Institute's experience, most consistently influence whether professional communication creates the Shared Understanding required for its intended purpose.

4.3 The Diagnostic Scoring Scale

Each signal is evaluated using a four-level diagnostic scale:

Table 2. The Diagnostic Scoring Scale

Score	Rating	Meaning
5	Excellent	The signal is explicit, unambiguous, and highly likely to create the intended Shared Understanding.
3	Functional	The signal is present and usable but could be strengthened.
1	Weak	The signal is incomplete, unclear, or only partially present.
0	Missing	The signal is absent.

The four-level scale used to evaluate each Core Communication Signal.

The scale intentionally omits scores of 2 and 4. This design encourages evaluators to make clear diagnostic judgments rather than defaulting to intermediate values, improving scoring consistency and reinforcing the diagnostic nature of the evaluation.

The five signal scores are summed and divided by the maximum possible score of 25 to produce a Communication Effectiveness percentage (CE%). This percentage provides an intuitive summary for organizational reporting while the individual signal scores provide diagnostic precision for identifying and addressing specific Communication Gaps.

4.4 The Clario Diagnostic Process™

The **Clario Method™** follows a six-step diagnostic process that is applied consistently regardless of the communication type:

Step 1 — Observe. Gather the communication as it actually occurred, the words written, the slides presented, the statements made.

Step 2 — Evaluate. Determine what understanding was intended and what understanding was actually created.

Step 3 — Score. Rate each of the Five Core Communication Signals using the diagnostic scale.

Step 4 — Diagnose. Identify where Communication Gaps formed and what produced them.

Step 5 — Improve. Revise the communication by strengthening the specific signals that scored lowest.

Step 6 — Verify. Confirm that the revised communication created the intended Shared Understanding through observable evidence.

This six-step process, Observe, Evaluate, Score, Diagnose, Improve, Verify, is the repeatable diagnostic engine of the **Clario Method™**. The communication changes. The process does not.

5. Relationship to Existing Communication Research

The **Clario Method™** is informed by and complementary to established communication research. It does not seek to replace existing communication theories or claim to have originated the concepts on which it builds. The following table summarizes the relationship between key research foundations and the methodology's contribution:

Table 3. Relationship Between Established Research and the Clario Method™

Established Research	Clario Method™ Contribution
Meaning is constructed by the receiver (constructivism).	Provides a structured method for evaluating whether the receiver's construction matches the sender's intent.
The Curse of Knowledge causes senders to omit relevant information.	Offers a diagnostic framework for identifying what was omitted and where gaps formed.
Mental models and cultural frameworks shape interpretation.	Evaluates communication against the specific audience it addresses, including cross-cultural dimensions.
Communication Effectiveness varies by context and purpose.	Defines effectiveness as the degree of Shared Understanding relative to the communication's specific purpose.
Verification improves comprehension (teach-back, readback).	Integrates verification as a formal step in the diagnostic process.

How the Clario Method™ builds on established communication research.

The Institute's contribution is not theoretical. It is methodological. The **Clario Method™** translates well-established principles from communication research into a structured, repeatable process that practitioners can apply to evaluate and improve specific communications in professional contexts.

6. Applications

The **Clario Method™** is designed to be applied across a broad range of professional communication contexts:

Organizational communication. Meetings, emails, strategic announcements, project communications, and leadership messaging can be evaluated through the Five Core Communication Signals to identify recurring Communication Gap patterns and improve alignment.

Healthcare communication. Clinical instructions, patient education, care team handoffs, and informed consent communications can be evaluated for the degree to which they create the Shared Understanding necessary for safe and effective care.

Education. Instructional communication, lessons, assignments, syllabi, and feedback, can be evaluated for the degree to which they create the Shared Understanding required for learning outcomes.

Cross-cultural communication. Communications that cross linguistic and cultural boundaries can be evaluated for the cultural dimensions that shape how signals are interpreted, how decisions are recognized, and how Shared Understanding is verified.

Human-AI communication. Prompts, instructions, and interactions with AI systems can be evaluated using the same five signals, providing a framework for improving the quality of human-AI communication in an era of increasing AI integration.

The methodology has also been implemented through the Institute's Clario application suite, including **Clario Message Review™**, **Clario Email Review™**, **Clario Meeting Review™**, **Clario Policy Review™**, and **Clario Global Review™**. These applications demonstrate how the methodology can be consistently applied across diverse forms of professional communication while providing structured diagnostic feedback.

The methodology does not prescribe communication style. It provides a diagnostic lens for evaluating whether any communication, regardless of format, medium, or context, is likely to create the Shared Understanding required for its purpose.

7. Why This Methodology Matters

Communication has always been recognized as essential to organizational success, yet organizations rarely possess a practical methodology for systematically evaluating the quality of individual

communications. As a result, communication failures are often attributed to people rather than to the communication itself.

The **Clario Method™** shifts this perspective. Instead of asking whether someone is an effective communicator, it asks whether the communication itself contains the essential elements required to create Shared Understanding.

This distinction transforms communication improvement from a subjective discussion about style into an objective process of structured evaluation and continuous improvement.

7.1 Limitations and Future Directions

The **Clario Method™** is a practical methodology, not a scientifically validated instrument. While it is informed by established communication research and has been developed through extensive application across professional contexts, it has not yet been subjected to formal empirical validation through controlled research studies. The Institute acknowledges this limitation and welcomes research collaboration to examine the methodology's reliability, validity, and impact.

Several questions warrant further investigation:

How do Communication Gaps compound over time within teams and organizations? What is the relationship between Communication Effectiveness, as measured by the Clario Method™, and organizational performance outcomes such as productivity, retention, and innovation? How does the methodology adapt to real-time conversational communication? What are the inter-rater reliability characteristics of the diagnostic scoring scale across different evaluator populations?

These questions represent the research agenda the methodology creates. The Institute is committed to supporting this agenda through collaboration with academic researchers, professional practitioners, and organizations interested in advancing the discipline of Communication Effectiveness.

8. Conclusion

Communication Effectiveness does not occur by chance. It can be intentionally designed, systematically evaluated, and continuously improved.

The **Clario Method™** provides one practical methodology for achieving that objective. By evaluating communication through five observable dimensions, Purpose, Action, Decision, Tone, and Shared Understanding, the methodology enables individuals and organizations to identify where Shared Understanding was created, where Communication Gaps formed, and what specific improvements would close them.

The methodology does not replace existing communication theory. It builds on established research to provide a structured, repeatable process that translates theory into practice. Its contribution is not a new theory of communication. Rather, it is a structured methodology for intentionally creating, evaluating, and improving Communication Effectiveness by translating established communication research into a practical diagnostic framework.

The Institute for Shared Understanding invites communication professionals, organizational leaders, educators, researchers, and practitioners to explore, apply, and contribute to the continued development of this methodology.

The Institute for Shared Understanding believes that organizations should move beyond simply discussing communication toward intentionally creating Communication Effectiveness through structured evaluation, practical application, and continuous improvement. The Clario Method™ provides one practical framework for helping organizations achieve that objective.

Communication is effective only when it creates the Shared Understanding required for the intended purpose.

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