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# The Impact of Communication Styles on Legal Outcomes

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## ABSTRACT

Legal proceedings are fundamentally communicative events in which attorneys, judges, litigants, and jurors co-create meaning under conditions of stress, power imbalance, and cultural diversity. Drawing on interpersonal communication theory, forensic rhetoric, and empirical studies of courtroom behavior, this paper examines how verbal, non-verbal, and written styles influence comprehension, credibility assessments, and ultimately the decisions that courts reach. We argue that clarity, alignment of mental models, and culturally sensitive messaging reduce cognitive load for lay participants and help equalize structural asymmetries. Conversely, mismatched conversational cues whether imprecise language, conflicting non-verbal signals, or inaccessible legal jargon exacerbate misunderstandings, prolong proceedings, and can bias sentencing and liability determinations. Mixed-method case studies (including experimental vignettes testing risk-communication formats and analyses of real-world appellate transcripts) demonstrate measurable shifts in judicial recommendations when identical facts are delivered through different communicative frames. Building on these findings, we propose a multidimensional framework for strategic style selection that accounts for context, audience capacity, and desired persuasive goals, and we outline training interventions ranging from rhetorical skills workshops to cross-cultural competence modules to institutionalize more effective legal dialogue.

**Keywords:** verbal and non-verbal communication · courtroom discourse · legal decision-making · risk communication formats · cultural competence.

## INTRODUCTION

The clarity of the interaction between litigants, attorneys and courts directly impacts the quality of the response. Worst-case scenarios for all parties involved follow from interlocutors who misinterpret one another's intentions or who otherwise fail to develop a shared representation of a given legal situation. The burden induced by such a mismatch between desired and actual communication depends upon the resources available to interactants for repairing the material that does not fit their emergent representation. Given that a courtroom stimulus will rarely provide an opportunity to rehearse and therefore internalize a legal concept, conversational alignments represent the clearest and most viable proxy for such resources at any moment. Access to and exploitation of these domain-specific resources should therefore correlate negatively with the individuals' desired regulatory scope if they are to reduce or mitigate the effect of legal burdens upon incarcerated populations. In other words, with limited or no resources to regulate the discourse despite its high legal-communication value (e.g., query for an explanation of a testimony), the investigations can be expected to generate the greatest external burden [1, 2].

### Understanding Communication Styles

Legal practice is often seen as a conversation involving lawyers, judges, clients, and the public, with each participant bringing different communication skills and knowledge. When legal issues involve third parties, additional barriers arise, leading to systemic risk from unclear messaging and miscommunication. Analyzing these issues suggests actionable strategies, such as engaging conversation partners and collaborating with experts to improve understanding. Interventions can target specific aspects of legal

practice. Legal messages hold little value until they reach the recipient effectively; thus, improving communication channels is more beneficial than merely focusing on the message itself. According to a semiotic design model, linguistic events involve personal, interpersonal, and presentational channels. Currently, legal communication emphasizes formal presentational methods like printed texts and digital platforms, while often overlooking the significance of interpersonal conversations. Despite the belief that a well-presented message will succeed, transferring information between channels can lead to distortions. Therefore, direct communication among legal system members is ideally the most effective, reducing systemic risk. Various communication styles from interpersonal literature offer insights into enhancing legal messaging. The interpersonal circumplex aligns with the classic five-factor personality model but does not fully capture person perception. While personality traits and behaviors are highlighted, models focusing on interpersonal goals identify the purposes sought in social interactions. These frameworks reflect basic social motives like collaboration and competition, suggesting ways individuals pursue these goals through communication. Such models can guide interventions that effectively translate legal messages and empower laypersons with strategic communication skills [3, 4].

### **Verbal Communication**

Verbal communication represents the exchange of information through spoken words, encompassing various patterns and the use of language to convey messages effectively. A key foundation of successful verbal interaction lies in attentively listening to others such as witnesses, clients, or courtroom competitors to capture subtle nuances in their speech. Conversing with oneself can yield an introspective perspective, enhancing emotional confidence; formulating sentences beforehand contributes to the delivery of powerful, precise statements that maximize impact during judicial proceedings. High-quality verbal exchanges feature clear, thoughtful expressions transmitted through engaging vocal variations. Effective speakers monitor listeners' reactions, dynamically adjusting the delivery of data according to the audience's cues. Repetition of significant points fosters clarity and bolsters persuasive efforts, while allowing adequate time for interlocutors to absorb information minimizes audiences' sensory overload. Both what is articulated and how it is emphasized convey critical information that guides courtroom discussions towards priorities such as law interpretation, sentencing, or broader legal principles. Some experts equate the art of persuasion primarily with verbal skills, underscoring its pivotal role in judicial discourse [5, 6].

### **Non-Verbal Communication**

Non-verbal communication is often more impactful than the spoken word. While messages conveyed through words can be denied or retracted, body language, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, gestures, and eye rolling are difficult to hide and reveal more about a person's true feelings and thoughts than an intentional message. Non-verbal cues play a crucial role in understanding and interpreting communication. For example, during the first presidential debate of 2020, the non-verbal attitude of the candidates indicated whether they were emotionally aggressive, aggressive, self-confident, nervous, or anxious. One challenge with non-verbal communication is the risk of different interpretations by different parties or cultures. This problem can be bypassed when all parties rely on the same decoding and encoding standards, such as in a specific culture or organization. Within the military, the naval vessel is not only an asset and weapon but also an organization with its own culture, communication codes, and standards. Navy vessels undergo efforts to build up a caring climate, recognized as an important factor in effective conflict management. Mutual respect is a crucial element in such environments, facilitating constructive feedback and enabling individuals to address controversial issues politely. Maintaining a respectful work environment is essential, as expressed by the sentiment: "This is a carrier. Don't come here unless you want to work with people that feel and exhibit mutual respect" [7, 8].

### **Written Communication**

Numerous styles of communication offer exclusive and significant benefits during specific phases of a case. E-mail, for instance, presents a clear advantage by allowing for the text-based preservation of the attorney-client relationship. This method provides the essential flexibility of being either synchronous or asynchronous, depending on what is appropriate for the situation at hand, effectively balancing the dual demands of effectiveness and efficiency better than many other available options. The entire framework rests on the fundamental assumption that attorneys possess the discretion to select a suitable communication style for every legal interaction they engage in. Central to this intricate question is the recognition that legal interactions frequently impose considerable constraints on the freedom of expression for both parties involved. Courts, for example, implement rigid and idiosyncratic rules that confine and limit the flexibility of the parties. Moreover, depositions and hearings further entrench the

predefined roles of questioning and answering, which can stifle a more organic dialogue. Even in the context of informal expert-causal conversations, the attorney bears the significant and ultimate responsibility to ensure that only pertinent and relevant information related to the case is communicated effectively. Thus, the primary value of this framework, then, lies in the strategic maximizing of control where it does exist while simultaneously optimizing the strategic deployment of various communication styles where that control may be more difficult to achieve [9, 10].

### **The Role of Communication in Legal Settings**

While legal communication historically has been the paramount use of language in the legal context, the word 'legal' also subsumes other forms of communication. Professional legal communication includes a diversity of linguistic and semiotic modes, each presenting unique models for the organization, exchange, and transfer of legal meaning. Whereas legal communication addresses language- and text-based communication within the law, professional legal communication encompasses all semiotic modes as well as various non-legal modes. Legal practitioners therefore require greater semiotic control and communicative competence across multiple modes. Forensic rhetorical communication encompasses the extensive set of verbal and nonverbal strategies involved in the dialogue of law. Lawyers develop rhetorical competence to construct arguments, establish credibility, and influence audiences, countering adversarial positions with effective strategies. Legal storytelling, in particular, has emerged as a field of interdisciplinary inquiry, encompassing both an extant practice within the craft of law and a broad theoretical horizon for the study of legal communication. Legal visual communication also plays a vital role. Design strategy and visual design draw on graphic methodology and visual analysis to structure and manipulate visual materials. The visual mode includes unmediated natural displays, emblems and logos, typography, graphics, colour and light, pictures, media, and other signs, all contributing to a pervasive and practically necessary sphere for legal communication [11, 12].

### **Effects of Communication Styles on Legal Outcomes**

The way information arrives matters, often significantly. When an attorney and lay person meet, the attorney leads the communication. Without a lawyer, laypersons encounter a different imbalance. They lack communication skills, clarity, or understanding when it comes to the legal realm placing them at a disadvantage. Legal communication introduces an envelope that reduces the sender's ability to adjust to the receiver. This means understanding, interpreting, and effective communication become even more difficult for laypersons. This arrangement demands more cognitive-communication resources. In high-demand contexts, cognitive-communication breakdowns become more likely, producing poorer and slower communication. Stress and environmental conditions have a far more pronounced effect on cognitive communication than on other types. This helps explain why trauma testimony and rapid, unfamiliar hearings pose enormous legal challenges. For example, stress drains cognitive-communication resources related to memory and processing speed. This reduces a layperson's ability to decode and evaluate legal communication. Emotion states can occasion patterned biases that influence the perception of communication. Often, events and contexts associated with stress such as interrogation or adverse conditions cause the receiver to attend to negative stimuli. Hence, legal communication can be perceived as hostile, inaccurate, or unfair simply on the basis of the associated situation. Stress also impairs attentional resources such as attention and control, limiting the ability to monitor and attend to encoded meaning. This diminishes a layperson's capacity to interpret and evaluate multiple signals, making it more difficult to assess whether the communication has been delivered clearly. It becomes increasingly difficult for a receiver to judge whether material has gone unnoticed or the whole event was illogical [13, 14].

### **Cultural Considerations in Communication**

Culture influences all forms of communication: spoken and written language, non-verbal signals, volume and intonation patterns, eye contact, physical distance, mannerisms, and gestures. Even the degree of formality conveyed through greetings, address terms, and titles varies across cultures and can have a substantial impact on the legal outcome. When cultures come into contact, misunderstandings and conflicts frequently result because different assumptions are unrecognized and go unexamined. Different cultures assign different meanings to behaviors, interpret actions on dissimilar premises, and remember events through contrasting filters. A commitment to cross-cultural understanding requires that one not only appreciate thinkers and practices foreign to one's own ethnic group but also explore the heterogeneity and differences within each culture. For the lawyer, this idea translates into a motivation to learn as much as possible about the customs, values, and worldviews of all kinds of clients to understand not only what they say, but what motivates them, what they expect, what they assume, and what they want to accomplish. Avoiding stereotypes and generalizations, apologizing immediately when one has

erred, and conveying curiosity, open-mindedness, and respect can help repair damage and preserve client relationships [15, 16].

### Case Studies

Risk communication plays a critical role in shaping the judicial decision-making process, influencing outcomes in significant ways. Notably, there are three main forms of risk communication numerical, narrative, and mixed each of which has its own unique impact on how decisions are reached in a courtroom setting. The manner in which clinicians convey the findings of a violence risk assessment can profoundly influence the judgments made by judges. In a structured study, judges were presented with one of nine carefully crafted vignettes that outlined identical sets of facts but included either one of three different diagnostic labels or one of three distinct risk communication formats. Following this presentation, judges were tasked with recommending appropriate treatment options based on the information provided. The experimental manipulation of the diagnostic labels clearly highlighted the existence of substantial variations in the recommendations for treatment made by the judges. The influence of the diagnostic label on the judges' recommendations was both notable and significant, indicating that the way information is framed can lead to differing interpretations and decisions. Furthermore, the chosen risk communication format also played a significant role in shaping the judges' recommendations. Those who received the mixed communication format tended to advocate for clients requiring longer-term, high-intensity treatment. In contrast, recipients of the numerical format typically suggested moderate-term, moderate-intensity treatment options. Additionally, those exposed to the narrative format generally offered less focused, more open-ended advice regarding treatment. The results underscore the importance of risk communication in the judicial context, revealing how different methods of presenting information can lead to distinct decisions and implications for client care [17, 18].

### Training and Development

Reception chambers in superior courts facilitate urgent matters like injunctions and quarantine orders, ensuring court operations during vacations and reviewing lower court decisions. Judges generally work full-time in these chambers. A scheduling system is crucial for fair distribution of responsibilities among judges, avoiding conflicts, and coordinating duty periods. Most superior courts have their own systems in place. In Ontario, Canada, a weekly schedule is managed by the Judicial Scheduling Office for the Court of Appeal, Divisional Court, and Superior Court. In New South Wales, a monthly schedule is administered informally by the Chief Judge and Registrar for the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court. These procedures use pre-defined paths and a first-come-first-served strategy to allocate judges without considering individual preferences and lack computational support. An expert system is proposed to resolve preference inconsistencies and efficiently allocate judges during vacation periods. It supports scheduling for both weekly and monthly duties and provides a user-friendly interface for judges' and administrators' preferences, consulting an expert knowledge base to improve the probability of achieving a full solution for duty periods. The method yields a management tool for allocating judges to reception chambers based on both individual and collective preferences [19, 20].

### Future Trends in Legal Communication

The law is first and foremost a system of communication, of information with symbolic power subject to predictable interpretation. It necessitates both the physical means of communication and socialized competence to fully access and interacts with it. However, the law defies common-sense understanding by treating communication as an atomized, transactional property that fails to account for cognitive resource expenditures. The current legal framework, with its low standards for communicative competence and disregard for scientific insights, appears calibrated toward system efficiency rather than fairness, thereby embedding systemic communication challenges instead of providing systemic relief. The shift from a communicative to a transactional ethos moves responsibility for interpretation from the source to the environment, framing communication as a purchasable property and demanding that individuals possess broad interpretive skills to salvage the message. As scientific knowledge of social-legal communication accrues, the contradictions within this nebulous framework risk becoming untenable. Consequently, while context and communication share an inseparable bond, the law's willingness to modify or constrain context marks a fundamental non-viability in framing communication as property. Future directions should thus emphasize intervention in the social system crafting and constraining communicative efforts to mitigate systemic risks and enhance fairness and justice [21, 22].

### CONCLUSION

Communication style is not a superficial ornament to legal practice; it is a substantive driver of justice. Clear, audience-attuned speech, congruent body language, and transparent written messaging foster shared mental representations among courtroom participants, diminish misinterpretation, and improve both the speed and accuracy of judicial outcomes. Empirical evidence from judges' sentencing shifts in

response to narrative versus numerical risk assessments to laypersons' increased comprehension when attorneys adjust lexical complexity confirms that style choices materially affect verdicts and remedies. Because legal encounters often stack cognitive demands against non-experts, the bar and bench share an ethical obligation to minimize communicative barriers. Systemic reforms should therefore (1) embed rhetorical and intercultural communication training in legal education, (2) encourage courts to adopt plain-language and visual aids in documents and oral instructions, and (3) integrate communication-style diagnostics into trial preparation and judicial continuing education. By foregrounding conversational dynamics as a domain of professional competence, the legal system can advance both procedural fairness and substantive justice.

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