Watzlawick: pragmatic of human communication
An introduction ...

Examples:
- Remarkable periodicity in the increase and decrease of fox population in northern Canada
- Konrad Lorenz ducklings experiment
An introduction ...

The previous examples clearly highlight the role of context, that is the necessity to move the attention from a single element to the relationship between the parts of a broader system
Watzlawick, Beavin e Jackson suggest that the study of human communication can be subdivided into three areas:

- **Syntactic** - problems of transmitting information (mathematical logic)
- **Semantic** - meaning of communication (philosophy of science)
- **Pragmatic** - communication affecting behavior (psychology)
While a clear conceptual separation of the three areas is thus possible, they are nevertheless interdependent
Watzlawick, Beavin e Jackson use the two terms communication and behavior as synonyms

“In the perspective of pragmatics, all behavior, not only speech, is communication, and all communication – even the communicational clues in an impersonal context – affects behavior”
The interpersonal systems may be considered as feedback loops, since the behavior of each person influences and is influenced by each other.
We are continuously influenced by communication: also our self-awareness depends on communication
The circularity of communication pattern

All parts of the organism form a circle. Therefore, every part is both beginning and ending.

Ippocrate
The circularity of communication pattern

In human interaction, e.g. between two persons A and B, both person A and person B claim only to be reacting to their partner’s behavior without realizing that they in turn influence the partner by their reaction.
The circularity of communication pattern

It is appropriate to abandon the notion of “sequence” between events for the reason that it is arbitrary: it depends on “where” they choose to break the circle’s continuity
Towards the identification of axioms
1\textsuperscript{st} axiom

It is impossible not to communicate: every behavior is communication
An often overlooked property of behavior:

- behavior has no opposite

There is no such thing as nonbehavior or, more simply, one cannot *not* behave
Activity or inactivity, words or silence all have message value

They influence others and these others, in turn, cannot *not* respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating
“Communication” takes place not only when it is intentional, conscious, or successful, that is when mutual understanding occurs.
The problem is not “to communicate or not to communicate”

**BUT**

To communicate in an effective way or not, that means a clarity of the communicational process purposes
All communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a metacommunication.
Each communication implies an engagement

Implication

A communication does not transfer only data but, at the same time, imposes a specific behavior
Communication can express a:

- **Content** = the question is “what” they say

- **Relationship** = the question is “how” you say it
The connection between communication content and relationship

Example:
1. Please, can you open the door?
2. Open the door!!!
The relationship aspect of communication, being communication about communication, is metacommunication.
The ability to metacommunicate appropriately is not only the *conditio sine qua non* of successful communication, but it is intimately linked with the enormous problem of awareness of self and others.
3rd axiom

The nature of a relationship is contingent upon the punctuation of the communicational sequences between the communicants.
About punctuation ...

The rat who said “I have got my experimenter trained. Each time I press the lever he gives me food” was declining to accept the punctuation of the sequence which the experimenter was seeking to impose.
About punctuation ...

Disagreement about how to punctuate the sequence of events is at the root of countless relationship struggles.
An example ....

Husband said: I withdraw because you nag

Wife said: I nag because you withdraw

... and vice versa
An example ....

Punctuation is the interpretation that interlocutors give to their communication
4\textsuperscript{th} axiom

Human beings communicate both digitally and analogically
Analogical communication has its roots in far more archaic periods of evolution and is, therefore, of much more general validity than the relatively recent, and far more abstract, digital mode of verbal communication.
What then is analogic communication?

It is virtually all nonverbal communication: not limited to kinesics, but comprising of posture, gesture, facial expression, voice inflection, the sequence, rhythm, and cadence of words, etc.
5th axiom

All communicational interchanges are either symmetrical or complementary, depending on whether they are based on equality or difference.
Symmetrical interaction: is characterized by equality and minimization of difference
Complementary interaction: is based on the maximization of difference
Birtdwhistell suggests that:

“...... an individual does not communicate; he engages in or becomes part of communication. He may move, or make noises ... but he does not communicate. In a parallel fashion, he may see, he may hear, smell, taste, or feel - but he does not communicate. In other words, he does not originate communication; he participates in it. Communication as a system, then, is not to be understood on a simple model of action and reaction, however complexly stated. As a system, it is to be comprehended on the transactional level”