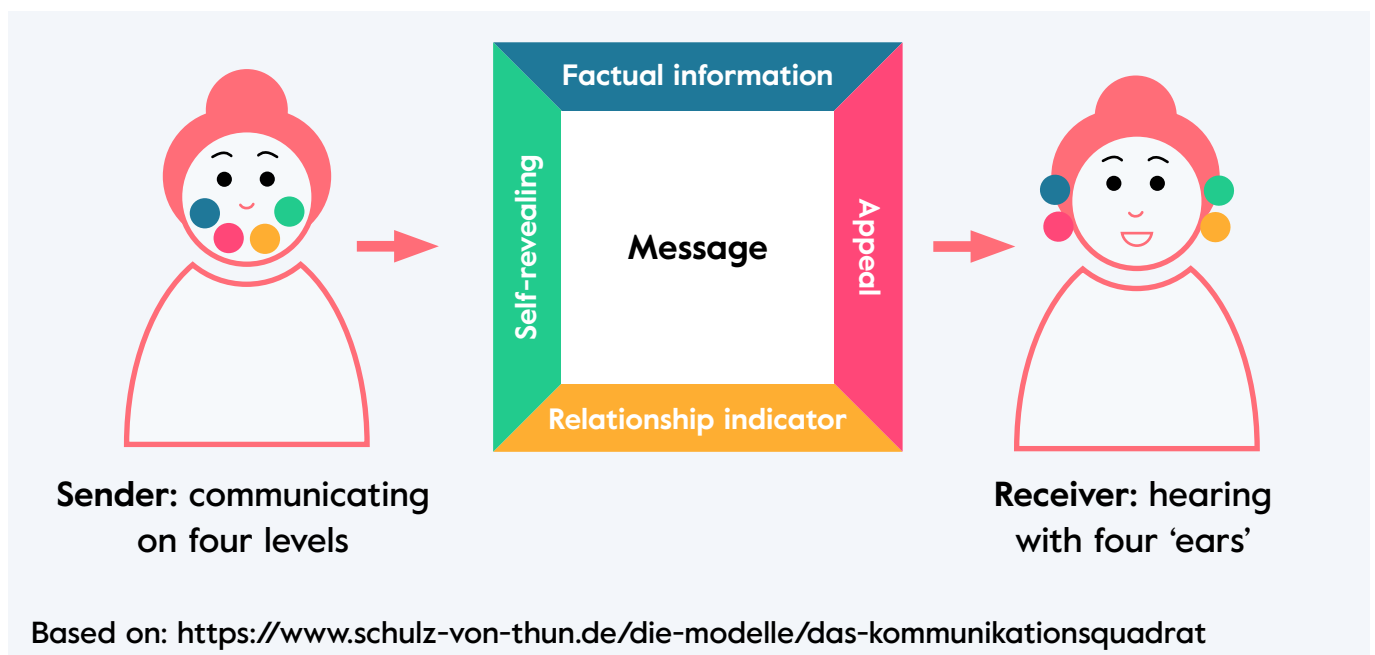


# The four-sides model

There is a classic communication concept called the “four-sides model” defined by Friedemann Schulz von Thun. It describes how a message is communicated by a speaker on four levels and is then received on four levels by the listener.

The four levels are:

- The factual (matter of fact information)
- Self-revealing (what the speaker tells about themselves)
- Relationship (what the speaker thinks about the listener and how they interact with each other)
- Appeal (what the speaker wants the listener to do)



Communication is a complex process and can be confusing. Depending on the level on which a message is sent and on which level the message is understood, misunderstandings and conflicts can occur. Your current mood, your level of stress and your relationship with your counterpart can determine how you send a message and how you receive a message. The way you process things on the ‘relationship level’ is especially important.

# The four-sides model

To avoid any misunderstandings, you should send and receive messages on all four levels. Of course, this is not always easy. Not least because you may not be aware of this yourself and send one-sided messages.

Here's an example that makes things a little clearer.

Student in seminar room: "There is a draft."

- Factual information: The window is open and cold air is coming in.
- Self-revealing level: I'm cold, I don't want to get a cold.
- Relationship level: The people here are selfish, nobody cares about other people.
- Appeal: I want someone to close the window.

Or:

Roommate in shared apartment: "There's no more toilet paper."

- Factual information: We have no more toilet paper.
- Self-revealing level: I have to go to the toilet, I need toilet paper.  
We have been using quite a lot of toilet paper lately.
- Relationship level: The people here are selfish, nobody pays attention when we run out.
- Appeal: I want someone else to buy toilet paper next time.

Can you think of similar situations?

Try to look out for how the different levels work during your next conversation.

Further reading:

Schulz von Thun, F. (2010). Miteinander Reden I: Störungen und Klärungen: Allgemeine Psychologie der Kommunikation. Hamburg: Rowohlt.