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Non-violent communication as a path to subversive rationalization: A social technology transforming public organizations

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze the subversive potential of the technical codes of nonviolent communication (NVC), understood as a social technology, in the bureaucratic management system of a public organization. A qualitative and exploratory study was carried out using the case study method, comparing the perceptions of civil servants who had systematic contact with NVC with those who were unaware of it. The material collected in 16 semi-structured interviews was analyzed using discourse analysis. As a result, we observed that the application of the technical codes of NVC favored self-confidence, self-reflection, and cooperation among individuals, emphasizing the subversive potential of NVC in favor of more dialogical and democratic contexts. NVC brings new technical repertoires on how to proceed in specific situations of interaction, deconstructing or rendering meaningless behavioral patterns rooted in alienating forms of communication. In this way, we believe it is possible to subvert the bureaucratic technical system by introducing new contexts for interaction. Therefore, the research contributes to detailing the application of NVC in organizations, as well as presenting a theoretical-methodological framework that can be used in other discursive analyses, especially in the application of social technologies.

Keywords: nonviolent communication; social technology; subversive rationalization; discourse

analysis; public organizations.

Introduction

The Social Technology Institute (2004) defines social technology (ST) as: “a set of transformative techniques and methodologies, developed and/or applied in interaction with, and appropriated by, the population that provide solutions for social inclusion and improved living conditions” (p. 26). In line with the definition of ST, nonviolent communication (NVC) is technically based knowledge at the service of improving interpersonal relationships, self-reflection and social transformation. The application of NVC seeks to humanize interlocutors, accept their integrality, and eliminate oppressive forms of communication that are often implicit in organizational discourse (Rosenberg, 2006; Lasater & Stiles, 2020).

The goal of NVC is to provide communication techniques that promote connection, understanding and empathy between the communicating parties in order to increase the chances of everyone getting what they need (Rosenberg, 2006). However, it should be noted that NVC is still a social technology that has been little explored in academic and organizational circles (Almeida et al., 2018). There is great potential for the application of NVC in organizational settings, whether public or private, as these can involve a detrimental daily routine based on alienating forms of communication (Rosenberg, 2006; Lasater & Stiles, 2020). In this sense, we discuss this potential as a way of subverting forms of domination that underlie organizational systems, ultimately promoting improvements in people’s living conditions.

To this end, we use Feenberg’s concept of subversive rationalization (1999, 2002, 2010) and thinking about social technology (Social Technology Institute, 2004; Dagnino, 2014; Souza & Pozzebon, 2020) as a basis for analyzing the critical and subversive nature that NVC can have when applied, especially in public organizations, the focus of this study. We believe that NVC and subversive rationalization are constructs that follow similar theoretical paths to the construction of the concept of social technology, considering the combination of the social construction of technology with a critical theory of technology, based on the proposition of Feenberg (2002) and supported by Souza and Pozzebon (2020).

For Souza and Pozzebon (2020, p. 233), social technology is “the result of political processes – processes of socio-technical reconfiguration or imbrication – that create spaces and occasions for redefining the agreements between social groups and the artifacts and methods they mobilize in everyday life, especially for production and consumption.” The authors emphasize that at the heart of these political processes are social practices, which include methods and tools that can be reformulated in specific contexts. In this sense, NVC can be understood as a social technology in organizations, since it is capable of promoting the redefinition of communication practices within the organizational context, based on communication techniques that can be adapted to the reality of individuals and groups. We understand that the methods and tools of NVC are based on a form of rationality that is not merely instrumental, but also subversive (Feenberg, 1999).

For Feenberg (1999), the term subversive rationalization makes it possible to conceive how the technological apparatus can undergo changes to its codes to serve the broader interests of society. It is about understanding how technical rationality can be subverted by new,

democratically debated values. Feenberg's theory thus continues in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, with a new emphasis on the possibility of agency in the technical sphere, and an understanding that this would be the most important change to trigger improvements in society at large (Feenberg, 1999, 2002, 2010). In the case of NVC, we seek to understand whether this technology enables the technical and subversive agency of individuals in the face of a traditionally hierarchical and bureaucratic organizational context.

Despite the different models of public administration in Brazil (patrimonialist, bureaucratic, managerial, governance), there is no prospect of replacing one model with another, since the older models always leave traces that are strongly present in the current ones. Today, bureaucracy is reflected, among other things, in the hierarchical structure, rules and standardization of public organizations (Vipieviski Junior & Tomporoski; 2023). Thus, bureaucratic procedures are still dominant and bureaucracy is present in the daily work of civil servants (Faria et al., 2023).

We understand bureaucracy not as a neutral technical system, but as one permeated by ideological values and relations of domination (Tragtenberg, 1974). Thus, interpersonal relations in Brazilian public organizations, whether between colleagues, between civil servants and superiors, or between civil servants and users, are often permeated by alienating patterns of communication (Rosenberg, 2006), implicit forms of oppression that generate misunderstandings and reinforce asymmetrical relationships (Cezne, 2005; Lassance, 2017; Elvie, 2019). Communication is often complex, interrupted, fragmented, rushed, and thus prone to error (Pun et al., 2015).

In a study in a public organization, Pun et al. (2015) identified recurring problems in interpersonal communication that showed a lack of focus on relationships, a lack of empathy, barriers between the areas in which civil servants work and their time in public service, as well as contextual issues due to work overload and pressure. These situations reflect the limitations of the forms of communication typical of bureaucracy and contribute to increasing alienation in the workplace (França, Spirandelli & Verde, 2019).

In a recent international study on the impact of NVC training in the workplace, Korlipara and Shah (2022) found a significant change in participants' behavior. However, they emphasized that the application of NVC skills depends on individual and contextual factors. The authors also reported that NVC is easier to apply in the context of personal relationships, in line with Lasater and Stiles (2020). In this sense, despite the need to relativize the results and the challenges inherent in the work environment, there is already empirical evidence that NVC has the potential to contribute to transforming behaviors and relationships within organizations.

Focusing on the implementation of NVC in internal communication processes in Brazilian public institutions can contribute to further reflection on how bureaucratic ideological values are manifested and reproduced in everyday communication practices, as well as pointing out ways to subvert these patterns. In this sense, this article seeks to answer the following question: What is the subversive potential of the technical codes of NVC – understood as a social technology – in transforming the bureaucratic management system of a public organization?

The public organization under investigation has been given the fictitious name of EMO-MG. It is a public entity located in the municipality of Belo Horizonte, MG. Founded in the mid-20th century, it has an extensive administrative structure composed of around 1,500 employees – 400 permanent, 750 widely recruited, 300 outsourced and 50 trainees. Since 2017, there have been

several lectures, workshops and practice groups on NVC for civil servants, and it was included in the training program for new civil servants in 2018. In this way, a comparative survey was carried out between civil servants who had been exposed to systematic learning about NVC and civil servants who were not aware of it. The results obtained in this research can contribute to broadening the academic debate on NVC in Brazil. National studies published in journals on topics related to administration, especially in the public sector, have not been frequent. In general, these studies have focused on assessing the consequences of verbal violence in organizations (Gonçalves, Rocha & Lima, 2022), theoretically proposing the articulation of NVC as a social technology to improve the well-being of vulnerable consumers (Almeida et al., 2018), and reporting on the application of NVC in the context of managing health professionals (Antoniassi, Pessotto & Bergamin, 2019; Adriani et al., 2023).

Studies that explore the relationship between the learning of NVC and the subjective well-being of workers in all types of organizations (Korlipara & Shah, 2022; Yang & Kim, 2022), as well as the critical and subversive nature of this social technology based on Andrew Feenberg's theory (Souza & Paula, 2022), can contribute both to the critique of alienating communication patterns within organizations and to the proposal of a subversive technical tool in the sense of expanding dialogicity and empathy in relationships. The research therefore contributes to a reflection on the potential or limitations of the application of NVC in Brazilian public organizations.

To this end, we applied a methodological approach to individual and collective discursive practices, using a framework based on different elements of discourse analysis (Maingueneau, 2000; Faria & Linhares, 1993; Bakhtin, 1992; Faria, 2001). This theoretical-methodological framework can also be considered as a contribution to the field of social technology studies, given that systematized advances in this direction are still rare (Souza & Pozzebon, 2020).

Subversive rationalization in organizations: possibilities based on NVC

Subversive rationalization is not fundamentally about the distribution of wealth or administrative authority. It is about structuring communicative practices (Habermas, 1983) so that people have greater access to information about, and influence over, the technologies they use. It is therefore about re-signifying technical action to ensure that broader needs and values are met, based on a democratic and dialogical construction (Feenberg, 2010).

In this sense, Feenberg's political project is based on three premises: technological design is influenced by specific social processes; these social processes take into account culturally defined needs (and not natural needs); competing definitions reflect conflicting ideological views on different technical choices. Given the socio-political nature of the construction of technical systems, and through subversive rationalization, Feenberg (1999) argues for the possibility of re-signifying the technological apparatus, enabling "[...] user interventions that challenge undemocratic power structures rooted in modern technology" (p. 108). In a new politics of technology, social groups would reflect on the very structure that defines and organizes them, becoming subjects of their trajectories.

In this way, Souza and Paula (2022) understand subversive rationalization as a way of overcoming the dichotomy between instrumental rationality and substantive rationality. While instrumental rationality is concerned with matters of worldly survival and the improvement of

objective conditions, substantive rationality is concerned with transcendental values rooted in the belief in the good, the beautiful and the true (Ramos, 1989). In subversive rationalization, technical action (instrumental) can be influenced by increasingly diverse values, interests and perspectives (substantive), leading to more democratic and emancipatory technical systems (Feenberg, 2002).

The best way to achieve a more democratic technical representation is through the transformation of technical codes and the educational process that this entails. According to Feenberg (1999, p. 88):

Technical codes define the object in strictly technical terms, according to the social meaning it has acquired. These codes are usually invisible because, like culture itself, they seem self-evident. [...] Technological regimes reflect this social decision unreflectively, as if it were normal, and only social scientific investigation can reveal the source of the patterns in which it is embodied.

In theory, anyone could break down a technical object and analyze each of its elements in terms of cost versus benefit, safety, speed, reliability, but in practice, few are interested in opening this “black box.” Thus, today’s technical codes reflect the interests of social groups to whom we have delegated the power to define our lifestyles. The task of the Feenbergian critical theory of technology is to conceptualize the processes by which potentialities that still remain in the form of ethics can potentially be realized in effective consciousness and transformed into technical codes.

In general, based on the work of Feenberg (1999, 2002), it is possible to understand management as a technical system whose object of transformation is human work (Souza & Paula, 2022) and whose function also includes the production process of other technical systems. Throughout history, the technical system of management has been based on the values of dominant groups, in line with Tragtenberg’s (1971) criticisms. Especially in bureaucracy, understood as a specific type of technical management system, these values are rooted in technical codes such as hierarchy, job definitions and formalism, characteristics listed in the Weberian model, as pointed out by Tragtenberg (1974). These codes, already naturalized and “invisible,” perpetuate domination via the technical sphere (Feenberg, 1999). In this context, alienating forms of communication are products and (re)producers of domination (Rosenberg, 2006).

To subvert technical management systems, Feenberg (1999) relies on collegial forms of decision making to reduce the operational autonomy of managers and create systematized openings for subversive rationalization. In addition, he argues that the top of technocratic bureaucracies should be chosen by democratic means. The author calls this process deep democratization. This would be an alternative to technocracy. It would be a context in which popular intervention would not be an anomaly, but rather a procedural standard in technical design. The values that will define technological rationality are not just personal and relative preferences. They must emerge from the living experience of nature and be the fruit of a historical process based on rational, critical and dialogical reflection.

In this sense, we understand that the subversive potential of NVC within the Feenbergian political project lies in the possibility of it transforming technical codes that are already naturalized within the bureaucracy. By inserting itself into technical management systems, NVC could help to reduce alienating patterns of communication and promote more dialogical interactions in which each individual is more aware of their subjective position in terms of feelings, needs and values. Using the Feenbergian metaphor, it is about opening the “black box” of bureaucracy and inserting new codes, based on values closer to democratic ideals.

In this sense, NVC can be understood as a social technology capable of promoting the empowerment of actors and solving problems arising from alienating communication patterns. In what follows, we present in more detail what NVC is as a technical system, its codes and values.

Nonviolent communication: a social technology for transforming interactions

When we study NVC, we realize the importance of this social technology in any context of human interaction, especially where there is a tendency for conflict, misunderstanding and implicit oppression, such as in organizations (Lasater & Stiles, 2020). Although seemingly simple, the process of learning NVC requires practice, and theoretical reading alone is not sufficient. For this reason, groups are recommended to discuss concepts and understand how to apply them in everyday life (Rosenberg, 2019).

Marshall B. Rosenberg, an American social psychologist, created the NVC approach inspired by the philosophy and pacifist activism of Mahatma Gandhi and the humanist psychology of Carl Rogers (Rosenberg, 2006). It is interesting to note the convergence between the origins of NVC and the term social technology, since both refer to positions defended by the social movement started by Gandhi, which advocated non-violence (*ahimsa*, in Sanskrit) and the adaptation of technologies to the environmental and social realities of India. Similar to the Indian movement, the South American definition of social technology is based on the historical path of decoloniality, focusing on the periphery as a protagonist and valuing the re-signification of technology based on local knowledge (Albuquerque, 2009; Dagnino, 2010; Pozzebon & Souza, 2020).

The word technology, at the core of the term, is understood as something material (an artifact, a device) or immaterial (a methodology, a way of doing or organizing) or both (Pozzebon, Tello-Rozas & Heck, 2021; Saldanha, Pozzebon & Delgado, 2022). In this sense, “to be called a social technology, a given social innovation must have at its core some kind of tool – material or immaterial – that is recognizable (i.e., we can identify its basic operating principles) and can be reformulated through socio-technical reconfiguration, i.e., it can be reappropriated or re-signified in other contexts” (Pozzebon, Tello-Rozas & Heck, 2021, p. 663).

In this sense, NVC, as a social technology, proposes immaterial communication tools that lead us to connect with the feelings and needs of a specific context, focusing on points that have the potential to give us what we are looking for, rather than judging or analyzing others. In this way, we avoid the violence that comes from judging others as wrong, and at the same time we build ways of communicating that are centered on the intersubjective reality in which interactions take place. NVC would be a social technology capable of promoting the nonviolent empowerment of subjects in their communicative practices, placing knowledge about themselves, their feelings and needs at the center (Rosenberg, 2006, 2019).

For Rosenberg (2006), the deepest root of much, or perhaps all violence – whether verbal, psychological or physical, whether between families, tribes or nations – lies in two types of thinking. The first is the thinking that attributes the cause of the conflict to the fact that the opponents are wrong, and the second is the inability to see oneself and others as vulnerable human beings, which creates a disconnection from the feelings and emotions involved in the situation.

The first leads to judgments and comparisons. The second leads to denial of responsibility, demands and threats of blame or punishment. One reinforces the other, and both promote alienating forms of communication, understood by Rosenberg (2006) as specific forms of language and communication that contribute to alienating us from our own humanity and the humanity of others. These patterns of communication are typical of bureaucratic systems, as Arendt (1999) explicitly pointed out, calling them bureaucratese (*Amtssprache*).

In order to subvert alienation in language forms and be able to apply the technical system of NVC, we need to know its basic operating principles or technical codes. Rosenberg (2006, 2018, 2019) proposes a four-component process:

1. Observation: First, try to communicate what we see others saying or doing, separating judgment and evaluation as much as possible. Often judgments are implicit when we communicate our observations, undermining the transparency of the communication and leaving room for ambiguity and misunderstanding.
2. Feeling: After communicating what we have observed, it is important to express how we feel about what has happened – hurt, scared, happy, amused, angry, etc. People often find it difficult to identify and express feelings because of a lack of emotional education in our society. This is especially true in the organizational context, where prevailing technical codes discourage the expression of emotions.
3. Needs: Recognizing and expressing which of our needs are associated with the identified feelings. For Rosenberg (2006), emotions are caused internally by unmet needs. Becoming aware of one's own needs is an important step toward emancipation from oppressive relationships.
4. Request: Communicating a specific request. It is important that we are grounded in the need we are trying to meet, and that we are ready to hear "yes" or "no," receiving both responses with empathy. Making a request is a propositional act in which the subject takes active responsibility in seeking solutions to their needs.

In addition to self-expression, NVC also presents codes for the process of receiving messages, with tools for practicing empathy and self-empathy. According to Rosenberg (2006), when we receive negative messages, four basic reactions are possible: a) blaming ourselves (feeling ashamed, guilty, depressed); b) blaming others (feeling angry); c) listening to our own feelings and needs (understanding what we are feeling in the situation); and d) listening to the feelings and needs of others (focusing on what the other person is feeling and needing). The last two responses are related to NVC. While the third has to do with connecting with one's own feelings, with self-empathy, the fourth has to do with the ability to help others connect with themselves, with empathy.

The techniques of NVC are based on the idea of individual self-responsibility for one's feelings, needs and choices. In a deeper sense, this positioning is subversive and transformative because it stimulates self-reflection and the search for an internal critical sense capable of discerning what we feel, what we need and what we choose (Almeida et al., 2018). In today's highly hierarchical and unequal society, we are led to accept only externally imposed rules and truths, alienating us from our own critical sense. NVC proposes tools to stimulate this, based on self-knowledge of our needs (Rosenberg, 2006, 2018, 2019), from a radical humanist perspective, fulfilling Feenberg's political project (1999, 2002, 2010), and enabling profound individual and group transformations (Korlipara & Shah, 2022; Yang & Kim, 2022), fulfilling the political project of social technology (Pozzebon, Tello-Rozas & Heck, 2021; Saldanha, Pozzebon & Delgado, 2022).

Methodological paths

A qualitative and exploratory study was carried out using the case study method, seeking theoretical generalization based on the results obtained at EMO-MG (Stake, 2005). Data were collected through 16 semi-structured interviews with people working at EMO-MG, only 50% of whom had had systematic contact with NVC. By systematic contact, we mean participation in practice groups and/or ongoing training, lasting at least one month.

The respondents had been employed at EMO-MG for at least two years. The interviewees were randomly selected by the Psychosocial Development Department of EMO-MG, but with the aim of covering a wide range of positions and sectors. Only permanent civil servants were interviewed, as only they have access to the training offered by the institution. The interviews were conducted remotely, recorded and transcribed between January and July 2021. All interviewees signed an informed consent form and the study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (CAAE: 38201120.3.0000.5153).

Table 1 shows the profile of the interviewees, highlighting their age, biological sex, academic background, length of service at EMO-MG, and the position or sector in which they worked at EMO-MG. The interviewees were coded to maintain their anonymity. The acronyms follow the order of the interviews and the division of the groups into those who had had contact with NVC (Research Group - RG) and those who had not (Control Group - CG).

Table 1
Profile of the interviewees

Interviewee	Age (years)	Sex	Education	Time at EMO-MG (years)	Position/sector
RG1	46	Female	Law	2,5	Advisor
RG2	27	Female	Psychology and Accounting	3	Organizational Psychologist
RG3	47	Female	Business Administration and Public	8	Head of the Internal Training Section

Management					
RG4	43	Male	Financial Management	6	Training Department
RG5	33	Male	Computer Science	9	Technology Infrastructure
RG6	44	Female	Letters	10	Budgeting Department
RG7	39	Female	Business Administration	11	Assets Department
RG8	46	Male	Business Administration	21	People Development Department
CG1	42	Female	Speech Therapy	10	Administration and Finance Department Coordination of the Strategic Planning Technical Committee
CG2	45	Female	Systems Analysts	15	Systems Developer
CG3	29	Female	Architecture	2,5	Technician / Functional Records
CG4	26	Male	Production Engineering	2,66	Head of Medical Section
CG5	35	Male	Letters	3	Citizenship Education Projects
CG6	58	Male	Business Administration	31	Security Management
CG7	54	Male	Business Administration	30	Contract Control
CG8	49	Male	Data Processing and Letters	3	Legislative Technician II / Social Section

Source: research data.

The material collected in the interviews was analyzed using discourse analysis, which is a tool for extracting from discourse the ideological formation that permeates it and the underlying meanings that relate to it (Maingueneau, 2000). In this work, various elements of discourse analysis were used to guide the textual and contextual interpretation of the collected discourses, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the reports.

For the textual analysis, the main analytical parameters were: interdiscursive relations (Faria, 2001) and three persuasion strategies – the relationship between explicit and implicit themes, silencing and lexical selection (Faria & Linhares, 1993). Interdiscursive relations occur through support for or opposition to other discourses, either implicitly or explicitly. Persuasion strategies are the ways in which the enunciator attempts to persuade the enunciatee, consciously or unconsciously. The relationship between explicit and implicit themes allows the enunciator to convey meanings in a subtle and interactive way that for some reason could not be made explicit. Silencing occurs when the enunciator omits meanings that are possible but undesirable and/or inconsistent with the point of view held. Lexical selection, on the other hand, reflects the enunciator's argumentative intention through the choice of words, which can be strong or subtle, clear or technical, depending on the situation. The way in which these parameters were applied in the discourse analysis is exemplified empirically in the analysis of four interview excerpts (Table 2).

Table 2
Example of the application of textual analytical parameters

Textual analytical parameters	Excerpts from the interviews	Application
Interdiscursive relations	"I find it more difficult in situations where I'm accused of something. That makes it very difficult for me... I have to go back to the part... that points out the ways in which you can accept the other person's speech, to remind myself of that." (RG 6)	RG6 reports that when faced with difficulties, she goes back to the NVC book, showing the interdiscursive relationship of support that Rosenberg's discourse brings to remind her of how to accept the speech of others.
Relationship between explicit and implicit themes	"I see an opening, but it's not always strategic for me to talk, it's not just anyone I open up to." (CG 1)	It is clear that CG1 is open to talking about her feelings, but is unable to express them on every occasion due to feelings of fear and mistrust implicit in the term "strategic."
Silencing	"I've noticed that at work, in the sector where I work, it's easy to practice NVC, we don't have much friction. It's difficult in the rest of EMO-MG, especially, as I told you, because of the hierarchy thing." (RC 4)	RG4's feelings when reporting the difficulties in applying NVC in his relationships with superiors are silenced.
Lexical selection	"[...] maybe in the relationship with the employees themselves... The ones you spend more time with on a daily basis." (RG 3)	RG3's lexical choice of the adverb "maybe" indicates some doubt as to which aspect of NVC contributed to her work.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The analysis of the transcribed interviews was carried out in three stages, based on the textual analytical parameters of discourse analysis: a) initial reading of the material, identifying general aspects of lexical selection, both specific to each interviewee and common to all; b) analytical reading, delineating the implicit meanings and selecting the most significant passages; c) in-depth analysis of the selected passages, identifying silences and interdiscursive relations.

For a broader and more contextual analysis, we used Bakhtin's (1992) concept of discursive genres, understood as patterns of discursive practices that delimit individual expression while creating spheres for collective action. According to Bakhtin (1992), it is possible to know who is speaking and to whom from the discursive genre that is used. A genre is always used because every utterance has a standard and relatively stable way of structuring itself. Throughout life, individuals learn a rich repertoire of discourse genres from which they formulate their utterances and access different ways of conceiving the world (Chen, 2003). In addition, we took into account the underlying elements of the discourses, the main points of divergence, that establish relationships of ideological opposition (Faria, 2001). Table 3 shows an example of how the concept of discursive genre was applied in the analysis.

Table 3
Example of the application of the contextual analytical parameter

Contextual analytical parameter	Excerpts from the interviews	Application
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Bakhtin's discursive genre (1992)	"I think what's challenging at EMO-MG... is to combine my desire for growing participation, for growing participatory practices, with a hierarchical structure that can be a bit old-fashioned at times, and with higher positions that are a little distant from that idea." (RG 8)	In discursive terms, there may be a contradiction between individual textual production and what is allowed by discursive genre standards, with the interviewee showing a certain disbelief in changing these standards.
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Source: Prepared by the authors.

The analysis of the two discursive levels, textual and contextual, and of the underlying element, made it possible to understand the potential of NVC as a way of subversive rationalization in the public organization studied. In this way, we propose a theoretical articulation with the concepts of Feenberg (1999). The textual analysis referred to the construction of meaning at the individual level and to technical codes as constituent elements of broader systems that are relatively permeable to agency. The contextual analysis of the discursive genre referred to the possibility that there are patterns, relatively stable types of enunciation, permeated by power relations, that relate to technical systems.

Finally, the presence or absence of critical reflection at the textual level and subversive spaces at the contextual level was indicated by the analysis of the underlying element, which related to the rationalities that permeate the discourses. In this way, we combined the critical perspective with discourse analysis, which allowed us to open the "black box" of the communicative codes within EMO-MG's management system, as Feenberg (1999) calls the critical constructivist position of technology. Figure 1 illustrates the discourse analysis model used in this research, which is based on the model presented by Souza and Carrieri (2012), with the addition of Feenbergian concepts for the analysis of technical systems.

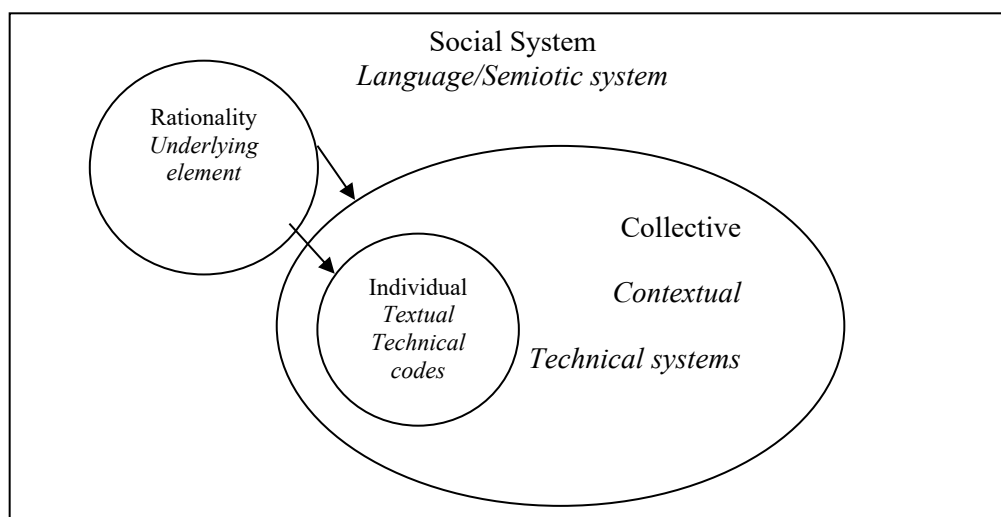


Figure 1. Articulation between the discursive levels for the analysis of NVC as a social technology

Source: Adapted from Souza and Carrieri (2012, p. 62), based on concepts from Feenberg (1999).

Results and discussion

In what follows, we present the analysis of the interviews, which is divided into two topics. First, we looked at the discourse of the interviewees belonging to the research group, highlighting the subversive potential of the technical codes of NVC based on their experience. Second, we sought to compare the discourses of the research and control groups, analyzing the impact of contact with NVC on the interviewees' perceptions of the norms of the bureaucratic management system and the ways in which they interact with this type of system.

NVC for the Research Group

The eight research subjects who had systematic contact with NVC answered specific questions about this technique in order to understand the meaning and impact of NVC on their lives and, more specifically, on their working relationships. First, regarding the meaning of NVC, we found that most of the respondents understood it as a way of life or a philosophy of life.

Nonviolent communication goes from being a strategy to becoming a way of life... because in order to be able to practice it, which isn't something I think I can do yet... I think it becomes a way of life... You need to review your way of being in the world, of perceiving other people. It's a way of life, because you need to be willing at all times, to work with empathy... To get to know yourself and others. So you have to change the whole structure of your life, the way you see things and act. (RG 6)

I think NVC was a real discovery for me... I think it's a great discovery in my life... of important things that I've discovered, that I've had contact with... NVC was one of them... I think because... it's funny because of the depth of the philosophy, which is a philosophy of life, and at the same time the practicality with which that guy wrote that book... he put it in a way that... there are steps, stages... And even though it's in steps and stages, it's not something you're going to be able to do right away, it's a very long process... (RG 8)

In these excerpts, RG6 and RG8 highlight the different levels of meaning of NVC. First, in a more instrumental sense, NVC would be a communication technique or strategy consisting of steps or stages. In a deeper and more subversive sense, NVC would be a way of life or a philosophy of life, since applying the technique requires a long process of learning and changes in the way one relates to others and to oneself. There would be a change in values capable of making a positive contribution to people's lives (Rosenberg, 2019). In the lexical choices of RG6 and RG8, by using the verbs "review," "become," "be (willing)," "change," "do" and the nouns "way, structure, discovery, process," the interviewees point to the possibilities of subverting the technical codes that are already naturalized in their lives and within the organization under study.

As RG6 said in the excerpt above, learning to use NVC requires a process of having to "get to know oneself and others." This is in line with Rosenberg (2006), since NVC is a process that involves two dimensions: self-expression and receiving what is said by others. With regard to self-

expression, self-awareness is needed first and foremost in order to know what and how to express oneself. In this sense, some respondents emphasized the importance of NVC as a way of getting to know their own feelings, as illustrated by RG3 and RG7.

Just by being aware of our feelings, it changes us a little, it changes our attitude a little. Depending on what you're feeling, you know you need some time. I think that changes a lot. And it also changes because you end up... you think about what you're going to say, especially as the boss. (RG 3)

I have a lot of difficulty communicating... And then I felt that this was a solution for me [...] With NVC I was able to see myself better, exactly, what it is... what I need... what's going on... what's bothering me and try to elaborate in a more appropriate way to talk to other people. (RG 7)

In these excerpts, RG3 and RG7 show how important NVC was for them to become aware of their feelings and needs. When RG7 uses the expression “see myself better,” he is explicitly practicing self-empathy in the process of receiving messages and understanding his feelings, as Rosenberg (2006) suggests. As feelings and needs are identified, it becomes possible to elaborate on them and choose ways to express them more consciously, including in the workplace, leading to significant changes in attitudes and critical self-awareness (Antoniassi, Pessotto & Bergamin, 2019).

On the other hand, RG4 attributes the meaning of NVC to his relationship with others:

I think that NVC gives us a new perspective on life, so that we know how to conduct human interactions, how to meet another person and how to behave, more or less like an etiquette class (RG 4).

By using the metaphor “etiquette class,” RG4 illustrates the importance of NVC in social interactions. According to the Michaelis dictionary, the term “etiquette” can be defined as a “set of rules, norms and style observed on generally formal occasions.” Thus, we can infer that RG4 understands NVC from an instrumental point of view, as a way of dealing with others, of knowing how to respond to what emerges from encounters. The sense of formality implicit in the word “etiquette” allows us to infer that RG4 may be more in touch with NVC through instrumental rationality, underestimating its evaluative content, guided by substantive rationality.

In addition to the meanings of NVC, RG5 demonstrates his understanding of the purpose of NVC, which is to promote a sincere connection with others, building spaces with more empathetic and symmetrical social interactions (Rosenberg, 2006). RG5 and RG2 illustrate this purpose in their particular experiences.

The practice of NVC at first seems to be that you want a return in being attended to ... And that's a mistake. You just want the person to understand how you feel and not to be taken care of, you know? And then it starts to work. (RG 5)

I was able to get closer to other colleagues that I didn't have much contact with and in a way... in a very real way that really brings us closer together, right? And I talked about it ... I also talk about it in my personal circle. (RG 2)

By emphasizing that NVC “works” when we give up the expectation of getting what we ask for, RG5 makes it clear that the purpose of using the technique is not to manipulate, but to connect with others. Therefore, the respondent’s discourse distances itself from the instrumental use of the technique, the risks of which were observed by Freitas (2019). The successful use of NVC occurs when we can get the other person to understand our feelings and needs, and we understand the other person’s feelings and needs, leading to a dialogic and creative flow (Rosenberg, 2018). RG2 illustrates that she has achieved such results, both at work and in her personal life. In terms of the impact on their lives, RG1, RG5 and RG8 emphasize the importance of not judging other people, in line with Rosenberg (2006, 2019). For Rosenberg (2006, 2019), judgmental communication is the main cause of alienating communication in life, which leads to violence and oppression, however subtle. RG1 says that “*what changed the most in relation to NVC [...] was non-judgment... Empathy, you know? Being there without judgment, I think that was one of the coolest things I learned*” (RG 1).

The first thing that certainly came to me, that got inside me, was the thing about judgment... it's not that I don't judge anymore... of course that's impossible, but today I know exactly when I'm judging and I try not to talk about judgment anymore [...] I think it was after a year of NVC that I had this... it was an achievement... which I think is a personal achievement. (RG 8)

But it's like when I learned to listen... I think it improves a lot, and it improves their feelings towards you, when you incorporate it, I think the main part is judgment, right, at least I get that impression a lot in NVC. (RG 5)

In the excerpts highlighted above, we see that the attitude of “non-judgment” was the main technical code internalized by the interviewees in relation to NVC. By using terms such as the verb “learn” and the expressions “got inside me” and “personal achievement,” the interviewees recognize that NVC has expanded their awareness and promoted changes in their behavior. The ability to recognize one’s own judgments can be considered one of the foundations for building a critical sense, as it gives individuals a greater ability to perceive and choose the values that guide their lives without making moral judgments about others (Rosenberg, 2006, 2019). Thus, it can be concluded that this discernment is subversive and transformative, as it stimulates self-reflection, supporting Almeida et al. (2018).

RG5 also notes the change in others' attitudes towards him, to the extent that he became able to suspend his judgments and "learned to listen." In this account, we see the potential of the technical codes of NVC to go beyond the level of individual transformation to the construction of collective spheres, new discursive genres, in which workplace practices could become more dialogic and democratic.

Also on the application in the organizational environment, many respondents believe that NVC has made a positive contribution, supporting the findings of Yang and Kim (2022) and Korlipara and Shah (2022). RG1 states that *"there's a lot more dialogue, that was very important for me,"* RG2 is certain that *"NVC is a tool that not only helped me, but helped the whole team to feel more comfortable about speaking, and also taught colleagues to listen, taught me to listen too,"* and RG3 emphasizes the improvement in relationships with subordinates, reporting that *"maybe in the relationship with the employees themselves... The ones you deal with more on a daily basis."*

RG1 explicitly relates the use of NVC to increased dialogue with her colleagues. RG2 also implicitly suggests that there has been an improvement in dialogue because learning about NVC has made it easier for her entire team to express themselves and listen to others. These reports reinforce the potential for the emergence of new discursive genres based on the technical codes of NVC and subversive rationalization in the EMO-MG environment.

On the other hand, RG3's lexical choice of the adverb "maybe" shows some doubt about which aspect of NVC has contributed to her work. We can assume that it is more difficult to apply NVC with colleagues with whom the interviewee does not interact as often. This assumption that it would be more challenging to use NVC with certain audiences within the organization is reinforced in the following statements by RG3 and RG4: *"I think it's the relationships that... with superiors... Bosses sometimes, people with little contact... I find it more difficult with superiors"* (RG 3). *"I've noticed that at work, in the sector where I work, it's easy to practice NVC, we don't have much friction. It's difficult in the rest of EMO-MG, especially, as I told you, because of the hierarchy"* (RG 4).

In these excerpts, it is clear that it is more difficult to apply NVC with those with whom the respondents do not have frequent contact, especially with those in hierarchically superior positions. These reports contradict the findings of França, Spirandelli and Verde (2019), who reported good acceptance of NVC in hierarchical settings. Given that EMO-MG is a large and highly bureaucratized organization, we can conclude that applying NVC at higher hierarchical levels implies disrespecting the rules of the discursive genres that prevail in bureaucracy, which are rooted in technical codes, as pointed out by Tragtenberg (1974). These codes, as Feenberg (1999) points out, are already naturalized and not made explicit to civil servants. In this way, the feelings of the interviewees are silenced when they take about the difficulties of applying NVC in their relations with their superiors. This silencing of feelings makes it difficult to incorporate NVC into technical management systems, as Rosenberg (2006) notes.

Another challenge faced by the interviewees in applying NVC at EMO-BH is the lack of interest on the part of coworkers. RG2 and RG6 spoke explicitly about this.

Certainly, especially, the first of them (challenges) is that colleague who doesn't want to, so I think I can... but because it depends, right, for me to apply it, I think so, it depends on him knowing or wanting to apply it. But it's difficult, so I think that's certainly my challenge at the moment. (RG 2)

I wanted to set up a multiplication team in my sector, but I couldn't find... any of them willing to participate in the workshop [...] I think they're very work-centered... They don't want to take time off work for anything other than work... (RG 6)

In the excerpt highlighted above, RG2 explicitly states that in order to be able to use the technical codes of NVC, it would be necessary for his colleague to know or want to use them as well. We can infer that RG6 also believes this, since she reports having tried to promote NVC training among her teammates. These impressions are in line with the findings of Santos (2021), who reported problems of misalignment and friction within a public agency due to the fact that not everyone in the organization was engaged in learning about NVC. In this sense, we see here the contrast between individual discursive action aimed at applying NVC and the need to consider the competence of the interlocutor to receive the message, given the dialogical nature of discourse (Bakhtin, 1992).

However, according to Rosenberg (2006), it is possible and desirable for NVC to also be used with people who do not know it, either through self-expression or empathic reception. In this sense, it would not be imperative to separate the practice/learning of NVC from daily activities such as work (Lasater & Stiles, 2020), contrary to what RG6 seems to believe. All that is needed is for the enunciator to adapt their language to make it compatible with the current discursive genre.

Still on the challenges of using NVC, the respondents point to the challenge of dealing with emotions when they arise:

When you're angry, you have to step aside... you have to remember that you have to step aside, you have to analyze the situation from the outside, right? To be able to... when you're angry, you stop and look at what needs aren't being met, sometimes there isn't time, but it's very rare. (RG 1)

Because NVC is this practical thing that's difficult on a daily basis, because when you've seen it, you've already "highlighted" some things that you didn't need to, but I think it has... not just professionally, but it's brought that awareness. (GP 3)

I find it more difficult in situations where I'm accused of something. I have to go back to the part... that shows the ways in which you can accept the other person's speech, to remind myself of that [...] I personally think that for me I lack... to be in the fullness of the present moment so that I don't react instinctively... that's my challenge, not to act instinctively. (GP 6)

In the excerpts above, the interviewees admit that they find it difficult to use NVC when they experience feelings such as anger or annoyance. Nevertheless, they show that they have a critical sense of what to do when they choose to use NVC, which is explicitly expressed in the terms “step aside,” “awareness,” and “be in the fullness of the present moment.” RG6 reports that when faced with difficulties, she goes back to the NVC book, showing the interdiscursive relationship of support that Rosenberg’s (2006) discourse brings to remembering how to welcome the other person’s speech. In this way, we can understand that the technical codes of NVC would be viable strategies for dealing with emotions in a more conscious way, since applying them would make it possible to express emotions in a way that is more coherent with the organizational context and its respective discursive genres.

Another important way NVC was used at EMO-MG was in conflict mediation, according to RG6 and RG8:

I even think that in some situations I managed to avoid major conflicts by using NVC... There were situations where I was able to show the people who were talking to me how to... even approach me, for example, by getting someone to clarify what it was, what they actually wanted me to do... they don't know NVC, but I'd like them to express it clearly. (RG6)

I always said that I didn't know how to mediate such a conflict and I was scared to death and I didn't know what could happen... conflict in a group, conflict with two people. After NVC, I don't have that fear anymore... I haven't studied a very specific technique for conflict mediation, but I feel confident using what NVC brings me, right, to look for people's feelings, what's important about their needs... (RG 8)

According to Rosenberg (2019), NVC can be used to mediate all kinds of conflicts, from internal conflicts to interpersonal conflicts and even macro-political conflicts. In line with this, Silva, Carvalho and Melo (2019) report the effective use of NVC in conflict mediation in the context of public administration. Although there are specific techniques and training in conflict mediation with NVC, the reports of RG6 and RG8 illustrate how mediation can occur tacitly when the technical codes of NVC are well understood. The ability to mediate conflicts is essential in building democratic spaces so that they can be experienced in a constructive way for those involved.

Differences between the groups

When comparing the responses of the research group, which had systematic contact with NVC, and the responses of the control group, which did not have the same contact with NVC, we were able to observe similarities and differences at the textual level in relation to the following themes: expression of feelings; communication and interpersonal relationships in the workplace; criticism of the hierarchical structure; and criticism of the communication channels within EMO-MG.

With regard to expressing feelings, there were respondents in both groups who reported difficulties or barriers to speaking their minds in the workplace.

I feel like there's an environment that's conducive to that... I feel like there's an openness to that... On the other hand, sometimes I find it difficult to give feedback... to express myself in some way, but not from the other people in this institution. (RG 7)

I see openness, but it's not always strategic for me to talk, it's not just anyone I open up to. I talk, but it's not just to anyone... I've tried to build a dialogue with them, so I talk about some things. (CG 1)

In the two excerpts above, the interviewees say that they do not talk openly about their feelings at EMO-MG, although they both understand that there is openness in the organizational environment. RG7 recognizes that she has difficulties with self-expression and attributes this to the fact that she does not always talk about her feelings at work. CG1, on the other hand, feels that it is not always "strategic" to speak up and that she needs to choose her interlocutors. Thus, we can infer that according to RG7, who is familiar with NVC, it would be possible to express her feelings on any occasion if she overcame her personal limitations. In CG1's discourse, on the other hand, it would not be possible to express her feelings on any occasion because of the feelings of fear and mistrust, implicit in the term "strategic."

In this case, we observe the instrumental rationality underlying the belief that expressing feelings and showing vulnerability is risky, which is related to the code of communication as a strategy of self-preservation. This code is pervasive in most bureaucratized organizational environments and hinders transparency and connection in conversations (Rosenberg, 2006; Lasater & Stiles, 2020), making it impossible to give subversive meaning to spaces of interaction.

On the other hand, both groups also reported freedom or ease in expressing feelings in the workplace, as shown in the excerpts below:

Look, it depends on the person, with most colleagues, yes... But I think so, that this space exists, and I've even used this space many times and verbalized to colleagues when I was feeling angry, I've used the term angry, frustrated, dissatisfied, scared. So, I know that this space exists even for a moment of anger. (RG 2)

Today I think I'm more aware of that, so I feel free... that it's better for me to go and find out, sort it out, and talk about what I'm feeling, not to go and cry, not to go and shout, but to really resolve the situation. So I have the freedom to do that with my team, with the people I work with directly. I have the freedom to do that with my direct supervisor (RG 3).

I think the fact that we're working remotely, our contact is remote, I think that's made it a bit difficult, but in general I don't, I'm very objective, very explicit about these things, I

don't mind saying something, not at all, and I have the freedom to do so, most of the time. (CG 8)

I always try to be very clear. Even too much. I think that sometimes I even overdo it, saying what I'm feeling, what I'm thinking... (CG 5)

In these excerpts, we see that the respondents who are familiar with NVC and those who are not claim to have the freedom and a certain ease to talk about their feelings at EMO-MG. RG2 and CG8, however, had reservations about this freedom, explicitly expressed in the phrases “with most colleagues” and “most of the time.” From this we conclude that there is not always freedom within the organization and that there may be restrictions on the discursive genres in force.

Still on the subject of the above excerpts, we observed textual differences between the two groups. RG3's speech is consistent with the principles of NVC when the interviewee states that the focus of expressing her feelings is to “resolve the situation,” in other words, to express how she feels so that her needs and those of others are met (Rosenberg, 2006, 2019). In CG5's speech, it is not clear what his goal is in expressing his feelings, and the interviewee himself says that he can sometimes “overdo” it, and by using the verb “try,” it is implied that he is not always able to express himself.

With regard to the limitations imposed by the technical organizational system on the expression of feelings, the interviewees who were familiar with NVC addressed the code of hierarchy more explicitly. RG6 reports that she does not feel comfortable expressing her feelings “*because the moment I did that... I was penalized in my performance review.*” And RG4, after a long pause in his speech, also says that “*I find it very difficult... Opinion? Feelings? I've never seen much of it... we have to see, we have to not see, we have to not hear, we simply have to obey what comes from them.*”

I think what's challenging at EMO-MG... is to combine my desire for growing participation, for growing participatory practices, with a hierarchical structure that can be a bit old-fashioned at times, and with higher positions that are a little distant from that idea. (RG 8)

Despite the findings already mentioned by França, Spirandelli and Verde (2019), Rosenberg (2006), in line with Tragtenberg (1974), presents a critical view of bureaucratic societies based on hierarchy and domination. For Rosenberg (2006), these are based on the alienation of individuals, whose foundations lie in the disconnection from their feelings and needs. Thus, the capacity for critical thinking is stifled, facilitating docility, alienating communication, and stimulating what Arendt (1999) calls “bureaucratism.” Considering that the application of NVC aims to critically reflect on alienating forms of communication in relationships, this subversive nature of NVC ends up contradicting relationships based on bureaucratic domination.

It is possible to observe this concept in the excerpts above, based on implicit meanings that show the contradiction between the codes of free self-expression and hierarchy. RG4 makes the

silencing of feelings and opinions explicit by using the expressions “we have to not see, we have to not hear.” In discursive terms, there may be a contradiction between individual textual production and what is allowed by discursive genre standards, and the respondents have a certain disbelief in changes in these standards, considering that, as RG8 states, those at higher hierarchical levels are “a little distant from that idea.”

Another issue that caught our attention among the interviewees familiar with NVC is the negative perception of communication practices at EMO-MG, as exemplified in the following excerpts:

The lack of communication is very great, the lack of clarity, of transparency... it's very great. The lack of answers there, the lack of transparency in communication is one of the biggest obstacles in my work, as far as I can see. (RG 4)

I think that everything at EMO-MG is poorly communicated... EMO-MG doesn't work on processes... So the processes change with a change of manager... There are no established, discussed processes. (RG 5)

At the moment, I don't think so... there was a time when information was clearer. At the moment, I don't think it's always that it's not clear, but I think it's very often that it's not clear. Because sometimes you need to be clear more than just giving the order, sometimes you need to put something in context, and in this administration, that's not done, I don't think it's clear. (RG 6)

In the three excerpts highlighted above, the interviewees criticize the organization's communication practices, characterizing them as unclear or not very transparent or “poorly communicated.” RG4 states that communication problems are “obstacles” to doing his job and talks about them in the present tense, which makes it possible to interpret that the interviewee is generalizing his observations, as if this had always been the case. RG5, on the other hand, relates communication problems to the lack of standardized processes that would be maintained over time, even after changes in management. Thus, we understand that the lack of communication practices is related to the instability of the organization's management. This idea is also present in the speech of RG6, who makes a comparison between the communication practices of the past and the present.

The problem of managerial instability in public sector organizations is quite common. According to Tomio and Fraga (2019), the constant changes in positions of trust and leadership in public administration are generally aimed at electoral and political interests. These same interests compromise more incisive actions to guide a more humanized language and promote more empathetic and dialogical relationships between those involved in the public sphere. The lack of standardization in processes identified by RG5 seems at first to contradict typically bureaucratic technical codes. However, it is in these contradictions that we can see how technical rationality is imbued with ideological values, which in this case operate in terms of the ideological interests of elites (Tragtenberg, 1974; Feenberg, 1999, 2002).

Still with regard to the themes that differed in the responses of the two groups of respondents, we found that the group that was familiar with NVC mentioned more explicitly and emphatically their enjoyment of interacting and communicating with colleagues at work.

I get a lot of pleasure from personal communication, you know, when people recognize our work, when we solve a “hairy” problem, you know? When you show why you’re there and you’re recognized, those are the best moments. (RG 5)

The interaction with colleagues, without a doubt, that part of thinking from a more macro perspective... it’s a very pleasant thing for me, looking for solutions, finding solutions and participating in discussions to come up with solutions to problems, that’s the part that motivates me the most. (RG 7)

When I’m in a group, facilitating, it’s extremely enjoyable, when people connect, doing the dynamics, leaving more excited and saying “Wow, it went by quickly”... It’s really enjoyable, I love it... Being in a group is very good for me... When I see participatory processes working, people being able to give their opinion, their opinion being heard by management... that gives me a lot of satisfaction... (RG 8)

In these excerpts, we see mentions of pleasure and feelings of motivation (explicit) and joy (implicit), in different moments of interpersonal interaction related to each interviewee’s role. In each discourse, we also see implicitly that different needs are met in the interactions. While RG5 seeks recognition, RG7 seems to seek effectiveness and RG8 seeks connection. Given that the respondents who know NVC report more pleasurable feelings and needs met through interactions, we can hypothesize that knowing the technical codes of NVC makes people more confident in interpersonal relationships. Once again, we can see the subversive potential of NVC at the individual level, since trust in interpersonal communication is essential for building more democratic contexts (Habermas, 1983).

On the other hand, the respondents who did not know about NVC more often reported the challenges in dealing with people in the workplace.

All the challenges [laughs] because coordinating this team is a huge challenge! I have to be constantly up to date and looking for new knowledge all the time. And then, apart from the fact that they’re different people, dealing with different people requires a lot of people management skills and patience. So I think that’s what I do, I always try to attend to everyone in the same way, right, and with a lot of patience... (CG 1)

Challenging, I think it’s dealing with some of the more difficult users, so to speak. Difficulty communicating, I guess, or sometimes people who want to... do something yesterday, end up putting themselves under pressure... which is difficult, isn’t it? It seems like they don’t really understand the system or how things work. (CG 2)

Managing people is the most complex thing, because here in my section, for example, there are 15 people, and 15 totally different people who react totally different and who require more or less argumentation and cooperation from me. [...] With everyone you have to keep your standards and your principles, and the decision has to be consistent, whether it's with so-and-so or with so-and-so, I think that's it, you have to be fair. (CG 4)

In the excerpts above, the interviewees describe their challenges in dealing with other people in the organization. One theme that runs through the discourses, either explicitly (CG1 and CG4) or implicitly (CG2), is the difference between people, which requires the interviewees to adapt their behavior. The technical code of meritocracy, typical of the bureaucratic management system, is implicit in the discourses of these interviewees and sometimes seems to be related to feelings of stress and anxiety. We can assume that knowledge of the technical codes of NVC, such as empathy and self-empathy, could help them to deal better with human diversity and make it possible to build more dialogical and subversive spaces within bureaucratic organizations (Lasater & Stiles, 2020; Rosenberg, 2006).

Below, in Table 4, we summarize the main findings of the research regarding the subversive potential of the technical codes of nonviolent communication (NVC) in the organization under study. We know that the seemingly linear relationships shown in the table are much more complex in organizational reality. However, we believe that a certain reductionism is appropriate in order to make our conclusions more didactic.

Table 4
Summary of the analysis of the technical codes of NVC and their perceived subversive potential in the organization under study

Technical codes of nonviolent communication (NVC)	Subversive potential at EMO-MG
Way or philosophy of life	Encouraging a review of values and a change of rationality in communication practices, subverting the instrumental rationality that prevails in bureaucratic systems.
Self-expression of feelings and needs	Enabling significant changes in attitudes and critical self-awareness. Strengthening trust in interpersonal communication, allowing for greater vulnerability and humanization in interactions, which is essential in subverting "bureaucratism."
Non-judgment	Encouraging discernment about one's own judgments, increasing openness to dialogue, and subverting typical meritocratic behaviors such as comparison and competition.
Empathetic listening	Dealing better with human diversity and making it possible to build more dialogical spaces, discouraging defensive reactions of self-preservation.
Dealing with emotions more consciously (self-empathy)	Enabling the expression of emotions in a way that is more coherent with the organizational context and its respective discursive genres, subverting typical "bureaucratic" codes.
Conflict mediation	Stimulating the construction of more dialogic and democratic contexts of interaction that can subvert hierarchical relationships based on meritocracy.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to analyze the subversive potential of the technical codes of NVC, understood as a social technology, in the bureaucratic management system of EMO-MG after the training of the civil servants. To this end, 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted with civil servants with different profiles, comparing civil servants who were familiar with NVC (research group) with those who were not (control group). The analysis sought to show how the codes of NVC could or could not be incorporated into the technical management system in place at EMO-MG.

Most of the interviewees in the research group showed a deep understanding of the values of NVC, understanding it as a philosophy of life, a path to self-knowledge and connection with others, beyond a simple technique of expression or obtaining what is asked for. It can be seen that the code of “non-judgment” was internalized by the majority of the research group, an essential aspect for a non-violent stance, helping to build or strengthen critical thinking on the part of the interviewees.

In terms of application in the organizational environment, the respondents generally believe that NVC contributes with codes that emphasize dialogue, and some said they also use them in conflict mediation. The main challenges reported by the research group regarding the application of the codes of NVC at EMO-MG were the difficulty of communicating with hierarchically superior people, the lack of interest of work colleagues, and the challenge of dealing with emotions when they arise.

Therefore, at the collective level, we observed both possibilities for building a new discursive genre in the workplace, based on a worldview grounded in the values of NVC, and also obstacles to the application of the codes of NVC due to the dominant discursive genres in the organization, related to the bureaucratic system. These genres delimit patterns of discursive practices that disregard the expression of feelings and bring underlying instrumental rationality to communication processes.

In comparing the two groups of respondents, we observed subtle discursive differences that reveal underlying elements about the content and purpose of communication, as well as specific themes that were explicitly addressed in the statements of the research group and virtually silenced in the statements of the control group. In terms of underlying elements, the control group’s discourse suggests a belief that expressing feelings and showing vulnerability is risky. This point refers to a greater distance from subversive rationalization and goes against the technical codes of NVC, preventing conscious self-expression, self-empathy, and the construction of truly dialogical discursive genres. These barriers are intrinsically linked to the technical codes typical of the bureaucratic management system identified in this research: bureaucratism, self-preservation and meritocracy.

On the other hand, the research group noted the explicit belief that the focus of expressing feelings is to resolve the situation, in other words, that there is a conscious purpose of connection and meeting needs in the act of communicating feelings. This point is consistent with the construction of discourse genres that favor subversive rationalization, as it links the construction of individual critical sense to communication with a broader collective purpose.

With regard to the themes most emphasized by the research group, we observed the contradiction between the codes of free self-expression and hierarchy, in other words, between the textual level and the contextual level, of the discursive genres predominant in EMO-MG. In this sense, the interviewees are critical of the lack of participatory and dialogical forms of management in the organization. As a result, the interviewees also criticize the organization's communication practices as unclear, unstandardized and unstable, which are obstacles to doing the work. In this sense, it is possible that the appropriation of the values and codes of NVC has stimulated or strengthened the critical sense of the subjects interviewed, promoting critical reflections on the patterns of discursive practices within the bureaucratic system.

Finally, there was a difference between the groups of respondents in terms of the meaning of workplace interactions. Most of the respondents in the research group said that they enjoyed interacting, implicitly demonstrating that various needs are met in their interactions. The majority of respondents in the control group, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on the challenges of interaction, particularly in relation to the diversity of people. In this way, it can be assumed that knowing the codes of NVC could make people more confident in their interpersonal relationships as forms of self-knowledge and meeting needs, even in the face of the predominance of more restrictive discursive genres permeated by the code of meritocracy.

This research has detailed the employee's point of view on NVC, showing that there are challenges in applying it within a bureaucratic, hierarchical, rigid structure permeated by political interests, typical of the public sector. In this sense, the subversive nature of NVC contradicts an oppressive and alienating technical system. On the other hand, the results generally support the existing literature on the subject and show that NVC can play a positive role in transforming public sector work environments. Despite the limitations, we observed that the use of the techniques promoted self-confidence, self-reflection and cooperation between individuals.

From the theoretical generalization in relation to the results obtained (Stake, 2005), we can understand that NVC provides new technical repertoires on how to proceed in specific situations of interpersonal interaction, deconstructing or rendering meaningless behavioral patterns rooted in alienating forms of communication. In other words, through (individual) textual communicative practices based on dialogic and democratic values derived from the technical codes of NVC, it would be possible to subvert the bureaucratic technical system by introducing new discursive genres or new contexts of interaction. In this way, this research contributes to showing how such subversive mechanisms can work.

In addition, the research shows that contact with NVC can have effects beyond the professional sphere, supporting emotional balance, mental health and, consequently, improving the quality of life of individuals. In this way, we can see the subversive potential of NVC in promoting individual, group and social transformations in favor of more dialogical, inclusive and democratic contexts – in the sense of the deep democratization proposed by Feenberg (1999).

By understanding NVC as a social technology, we help to explain how a technical system can lead to transformative social changes for both individuals and groups. In the case analyzed, these transformations occur through the insertion of subversive codes into dominant technical systems, undermining oppressive power relations from within and introducing broader, more democratic values. From a decolonial perspective, however, this process only becomes a social

technology when the codes of NVC from the Global North are appropriated by the subjects in their own contexts, i.e., when the techniques are applied taking into account the subjective and group conditions of the Global South (Pozzebon, Tello-Rozas & Heck, 2021; Saldanha, Pozzebon & Delgado, 2022). In this research, we highlight challenges and opportunities in this process.

To reach these conclusions, we used theoretical concepts from Feenberg (1999, 2002, 2010) and discourse analysis (Maingueneau, 2000; Faria & Linhares; Bakhtin, 1992; Faria, 2001) to build a theoretical-methodological framework that can also contribute to future analyses of social technologies. Since subversive rationalization is the basis of social technology, understanding how its application permeates and transforms individual and collective discursive practices allows for an “x-ray” of the re-signification of technical systems, revealing underlying rationalities, values and needs. We believe that this theoretical-methodological framework reinforces the proposals of the model presented by Souza and Pozzebon (2020), since both propose to open the “black box” of the processes of application of social technologies.

For future research, we recommend exploring the use of NVC through participatory methodologies, such as action research, to gain a deeper understanding of how the techniques can promote the construction of a collective critical sense. We also recommend exploring the application of NVC in conjunction with other social technologies from the Global South, as well as further problematizing the process of appropriation of NVC from a decolonial perspective.

From the point of view of a political project, it is important to seek synergies between different technologies with an emancipatory bias, capable of granting greater autonomy in different areas of life, such as housing, basic sanitation, food production, self-management, etc. We believe that the transformation of civilization will come from new technological systems combined in a way that promotes human development, environmental regeneration and the strengthening of communities (Feenberg, 1999, 2002; Souza & Paula, 2022).

The comparative methodological approach of this study has limitations. The results may have been biased by the different profile of the subjects most likely to study NVC, given that the training offered at EMO-MG was optional. In other words, even if they did not know about NVC, the respondents in the research group may have given similar answers to the more general questions. In any case, we believe that the results are valid, given that the respondents in the control group would not necessarily tend to have a standardized profile, since they have not studied NVC for various reasons, not only because of a lack of profile, but also because of a lack of availability or opportunity, for example.

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Inclusive language

The authors use inclusive language that acknowledges diversity, conveys respect for all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.

Authors' contributions

First author: conceptualization (lead), data curation (equal), formal analysis (lead), funding acquisition (lead), investigation (lead), methodology (lead), project administration (lead), resources (lead), supervision (equal), validation (lead), visualization (equal), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review & editing (equal).

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