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Communication Stops Passing Through People

Communication at work is about to stop passing through people: each person will have an agent of their own, and the burden of being understood moves from the speaker to the listener.

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The thing that costs us the most time inside a company is not the work. It is explaining the work to each other.

The way we communicate at work has changed many times: the letter, the memo, the meeting, email, group chats. The medium changed every time; the thing underneath it never did. And that thing is simple: being understood has always been the speaker's job. Whoever sends the message picks the words, tries to be clear, and hopes they got it right. Whoever receives it takes what arrives and makes do.

That is about to flip. Communication, inside a company and between companies, will stop passing through people. Each of us will have an agent of our own, a digital copy of us, and those agents are the ones that will talk to each other. Something deeper than the medium changes with them. The work of being understood moves from the speaker to the listener, because each person receives the information in their own terms, the way they understand it. It reads strangely on paper, but I already work like this every day, and going back is hard.

I am not writing from the outside, and I am not neutral, which is why I can tell you what you gain, what you lose, and what should worry you.

The game of telephone

There is a children's game that explains the whole problem. One child whispers a sentence to the next, who whispers it to the next, and by the time it comes back it has turned into something else. The same thing happens in a company, except it costs money. You explain a task to a colleague on a call, and details are already lost there. He understands it through his own experience and his own department; if he has to pass it to a third person, he tells it his way; and what arrives at the end is a copy of a copy, filtered by someone who may have misread it. No one lied. Each step simply cost a little.

When a team rarely gets this wrong, we say they have good chemistry, and we treat it as a skill and an advantage. But chemistry is luck. Today the most valuable employee tends to be the one who takes in the most and passes it on best, the one who garbles the message least. All that skill exists to make up for a flaw in the channel. That flaw is about to disappear, and with it the need to depend on who carries a message best.

An equal, not a tool

For this to work, each person will have their own agent inside their computer, a digital copy of them. We all know the kind of program that opens for one task, closes when it is done, and starts blank the next time. Your agent does not start blank. It keeps your way of working from one task to the next, like a colleague who has worked beside you for years. I call it your higher self, an idea I have written about before: you, but never starting from scratch.

I understand artificial intelligence as an equal to work with, not as a tool. The brain and the hands belong to the same body, and no one thinks of calling their own hand a tool. You bring the judgment, and your agent carries out what the two of you decided. It does not work for you, it works with you.

What makes that agent different is that it knows you: how you understand things, what you need in order to grasp something on the first try, how you write. That is the piece that makes it possible to turn communication around.

The turn of clarity

With an agent like that on each side, the message stops traveling the way it does in the game. When a matter has to pass through several colleagues, each one has an agent. The first, the one who meets the problem, works it through on its side. It clears up what is missing, asks the questions a person in a hurry would skip, and brings its own judgment to it. What it passes on is the full information, raw, with none of its own reading laid on top.

Then the receiver's agent takes over. It does not hand the block across untouched. It reads it, orders it, and explains it to its person the way that person understands things. Some of us do best with an analogy, others with a plain description, others with a drawing. It seems like a detail, and it is the difference between getting something on the first try and not getting it at all. At that point the ground shifts, in a way that is hard to see at first: being understood stops being the speaker's job and becomes the listener's. Everyone receives the same thing, told to their own measure.

This might look like the game of telephone again, now between machines, where one completes and the other reinterprets. The difference is exactly what made the game unreliable. In the game the message shrank in every mouth, and no one could see where. Here the content travels whole and in writing. What changes from one side to the other is the form it takes, never the substance, and the judgment an agent adds fills in what is missing rather than trimming it to fit. Because all of it is on the record, you can always see what was said and where.

That same agent then shares the information out across the team by each person's role. It never sends anyone what they are not meant to see, such as payroll, billing, or sales. The hierarchy holds, and the information reaches each person whole.

How many times have you sat in a meeting, been asked whether anyone had questions, and said nothing out of embarrassment? When the project reaches each person complete and explained in their own terms before they sit down, the meeting stops being the place where things get lost. Today that information is scattered across half a dozen places: cloud drives, messaging apps, email threads. Gathering it where one agent knows the whole task, and everything that came before it, changes the starting point. The work begins with someone who has already read all of it.

How we already do it

We already communicate this way. I tend to be the one who finds the opportunities and deals with the larger clients, so I get messages that the technical team has to handle, on things outside my area. Before, each of those messages meant a call or a meeting to explain what the client wanted. Now I explain nothing.

When one reaches me, my agent reads it in full, with all my inboxes in front of it, and instead of summarizing it writes the task with the context inside it: the emails, the threads, the attachments, what it has checked in the product, and how we will know it is done. The task arrives complete. It goes to a board and is assigned to whoever it belongs to by role. My colleague does not get my hurried version. He gets the whole situation, and his agent explains it to him the way he understands it. No one has lost half an hour on a call, and nothing has fallen through.

All of it stays in writing, tagged by client and in order, and anyone can pick it up again later. When the work is done, his agent tells mine, mine tells me we can move on, and it leaves me a draft reply to the client written the way I write, because each of us is, underneath, a bundle of rules, and I have taught mine to my agent.

This is not a program we open in order to work. It is how we talk to each other. And it is what I mean when I say a company's communication will stop passing through people. We already do it here, every day.

What it costs

The cost is belonging. The same optimization that improves the communication closes each person inside their own world. They work more apart from everyone else and talk more with their agent than with their colleagues. There is a great deal to gain, because everyone asks, flags, and explains with the whole context in front of them, nothing filtered, and none of it lost in a meeting. And something goes that was never part of any task: the conversation nobody needed that held people together, the moment colleagues understand one another without trying. It is what remote work brought, taken a step further, and it is better not to pretend it comes free.

It works for almost any job that runs on passing information around, which is nearly all of them apart from the purely manual ones. Communication is one of the biggest drains on time there is; some people spend the whole day in meetings. Many are necessary. Others would sort themselves out on the inside, between agents.

Between companies, not only within

None of this stays inside the company. Today an email comes in from someone outside with an offer, and your agent reads it. In the same way we trade emails now, our agents will pass the information between them, and you will work through it with yours before you decide. Whoever accepts an offer does it with the whole context in front of them and can engage with what they were sent, rather than decide on the little they had time to read.

Many companies already do a version of this, in a crude and makeshift way: people copy and paste their emails into a chat so someone can tell them what is being asked. Once this becomes normal, there will be nothing to copy and paste. The agent will take in the full context of the documents, and you will receive it already shaped and explained, so that all you add is your judgment.

The risks

The first is data leaking out. Inside an organization it has to be absolutely clear that a person's role decides what information they can receive, with strong guardrails at every step so that nothing ever crosses between levels. The second is intent leaking out: what an agent sends to someone outside can reveal an offer that was never meant to leave. For that, you have to think hard about who is on the receiving end and design the communication so that it stays safe without becoming stilted.

The risk that worries me most is not technical. If the agent reads the original and the person gets it already explained, there comes a point when nobody goes back to the source, and a mistake by the agent can travel without anyone catching it. The answer is not to trust that the agent will never slip, because it will. The answer is that the person stays where the decisions are made. You do not hand over the judgment, only the work of carrying the message. The agent prepares, orders, and proposes; the person signs the decision and the reply, which is why what reaches them is a draft and not a settled fact. Without that human part in the decisions, the whole thing comes apart. And because all of it is written down, a mistake can be found and traced, unlike the spoken message, which used to vanish without a mark.

When

I expect it to become the norm within the next decade, though we already work this way ourselves, with our higher self handling both the work and the running of it. The more people lean on artificial intelligence, and the less time they lose fighting with information that arrives half-complete, the sooner it comes. And how well colleagues work together will stop depending on whether they happen to click. It will be good whatever skills each of them has.

What for

It is worth asking what all of this is for, past the time it saves. There is a consequence that answers it, and it is easy to miss. For as long as we have worked, the person who explained themselves best was worth more, because the channel was poor and someone had to make up for it. When the channel stops being poor, that advantage fades. What stays scarce is not carrying a message well but choosing well: the judgment to decide what is worth doing, the taste, the knack for making something matter.

That is where the time we now spend explaining ourselves goes. It does not vanish into the air; it comes back to the person, and what is left is not less work but different work. The mechanical part, carrying and translating the message, falls to your agent. The part that is only yours, the deciding, stays with you, and it fills the space that passing messages around used to take. Working this way does not make you less human. It moves the work from execution to intention, which is where a person's work always had its worth.

One last question is left, and I will not answer it here. Will all of this carry over to the way people deal with one another outside of work? I will save that for another essay.

Earlier essays: The Higher Self, DOI 10.5281/zenodo.23663934; The Death of Search, DOI 10.5281/zenodo.23863805.