Unity in matrimony is very much related to the mutual and voluntary surrender of the married couple. This surrender is also related to the explicit and implicit decisions of sharing a set of values that are the basic standards that produce harmony in everyday life. This means that the relationship, understood as the habitual communication between the partners, needs a previous resolution. The capacity of giving and sharing in matrimony, and the specific relationship of each couple depends a lot on this. It also depends on the decision making about communication problems that arise from change in the marital relationship or in any other aspect of family.

The unity produced by the initial decision of the commitment for the rest of life will later be reaffirmed by these smaller decisions, taken either together or by each one in their area of autonomy. It is usually said that bad decision making about secondary things is one of the leading causes of problems in matrimony. In our opinion, the fact that some couples don’t come to an agreement about earning or spending money, for example, is not significant by itself, because differences in criterion might exist in subjects that by their own nature are debatable. Nevertheless, if this money disagreement provokes a lack of communication between the couple, then we have to conclude that there was a weak relationship before the money problem even arose. This does not mean that we are trying to minimize the importance of agreeing or disagreeing in the decision-making process in marriage, but we have to realize that possible disagreement doesn’t automatically provoke “incommunication.” At best, it would be the sum of a series of incorrect behaviors in the decision making process that would produce a lack of communication.

As we have already said, difficulties in communication don’t always arise from the relationship itself, but rather from decisions made by the couple together or separately.

We will follow a set of guidelines as a basic structure concerning the decision making process in the relationship of the married couple:

1. A personal decision that does not need to be communicated to the other partner.
2. A personal decision that it is good to communicate to the other partner.
3. A personal decision that can only be made after seeking the advice of the other partner.
4. A decision of one partner that the other partner has to respect because it belongs to his or her autonomy.
5. A consensus decision taken by both partners.
PROBLEMS THAT ARISE IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Concerning a subject where a decision has to be made, several problems exist:

1. What kind of decision is this?
2. Does this decision need to be a shared one?
3. Does it belong to the personal autonomy of each partner or not?

Another problem is to make a good decision. If the decisions that are made are habitually ineffective, it is then logical that a situation will arise where one of the partners might want to invade the personal autonomy of the other partner, or he might blame the partner. This destroys any possible communication. That is why we are now going to consider the necessary conditions for making an effective decision.

To be able to hit the mark when making a decision we first of all must be informed. The information can be gathered by observing, reading, listening, or by gestures. All of these areas will then help us to obtain a correct, complete, and proportional information about the subject that is being studied. We have to be aware of our own prejudices to be sure that we are seeking the information that is in accordance with reality. We also have to be aware that we can give more importance to certain information that we gather, not because this information is objectively more important, but because we ourselves know more about that particular subject.

We are going to try to establish some standards in order to be able to judge the information related to the outcome that we wish to achieve, and we are also going to try to help the reader relate this information to these criteria.

THE AREAS OF AUTONOMY

The initial agreement that we will all search for in marriage is related to the concept of the relationship itself.

Starting from there it seems that there should be a general agreement in the following circumstances:

1. When the subject can have an important influence in the life style of the other partner.
2. When the subject that is being treated can change an important aspect of the life style of that family.
3. When the outcome of the decision might be difficult to rectify once the decision has been made.

SOME SUBJECTS THAT MIGHT FALL UNDER THIS CATEGORY ARE REFERRED TO HERE:

- Family budget and how to handle it
- Aspects related to leisure time
- Aspects related to religion
- Ways of showing love
- Friends
- Intimate relationships
- Norms of social behavior
- Philosophy of life
- How to treat parents and grandparents
- Important objectives
- Amount of time spent together the system followed in order to make important decisions
- Sharing of housework.
- Hobbies
DECISIONS RELATED TO PROFESSIONAL WORK

It is useful to consider the causes of conflicts that can be considered important in marriage. In this sense, speaking about organizations in general, one can detect three principle causes of problems:

1. When there is undue competition to make use of limited resources, money, time, space, etc.
2. When there is a desire to control activities, which belong to the personal autonomy of the other person.
3. When there is disagreement about the goals people want to achieve, or about the manner in which these goals should be achieved.

Between spouses, the first thing to consider could be related to the area of resources. A conflict might start, for instance based on the use of time, time spent in the company of the other partner, or with the children, or working, or with friends, etc. It can also start due to the way money is spent. It could be that each partner feels that he or she should have more autonomy in this area, or because one of the partners feels that the other one in not using the autonomy that he or she possesses correctly. It is also possible that conflict will arise concerning, for example, how much attention he or she is getting from the other partner and in order to compensate for this dissatisfaction they put more of their love and attention on one of the children. The utilization of the space in the house might be the cause of a conflict. For example, putting on the TV in the same room where another is reading.

The key point to all these problems is to find out where there is actually a lack of resources (money, time, space). This will facilitate the avoidance of problems, and the search for solutions satisfactory to all involved.

We can summarize by saying that when the couple competes excessively to gain control over limited resources, there is a greater chance that there will be a lack of communication.

UNITY, AUTONOMY & PERSONAL STYLE

We can now discuss the relationship that exists between unity and autonomy in matrimony and personal style.

If there is an agreement on basic matters, or if the couple is struggling to reach agreement, then positive attitudes in the development of the relationship are seen. These create a deep understanding, care, and congruence. The personal style of each partner enriches the married couple. We are not looking for uniformity in behavior; instead we are looking for a personal interpretation of reality.

The personal style is reflected by behavior in everyday life. We can then say that a person who behaves in an unpredictable way does not have a personal style. It is not just a way of behaving; it is also the result of some kind of previous decision. A person who just lets himself be carried along and does not make personal decisions will have little personal style.

Of course we have to take into account the fact that normally a person does not need to think through every decision in the course of the day. Usually one has enough previous information about the subject to adopt a congruent attitude towards it. When one doesn’t stop to think what it is that one really wants, one will usually act in an unpredictable way, unless one is imitating somebody else’s style (the case of the father who blindly deals with all his children the same way his father used to deal with him).

It may be difficult to reconcile personal style, unity and individual autonomy in every day life. To do this it is important to agree on the fundamental questions as related to marriage, but then it will need a flexible approach. Let us imagine the spouses to be musicians who have agreed to play some piece of music. If a melody on the piano or on a violin is played, we can recognize and appreciate the melody. But we also can combine both instruments in
such a way that the violin will lead the melody and the piano will accompany it and far from overshadowing it, the piano enhances it.

Sometimes one partner will firmly establish his/her self in order to obtain goals, accompanied by the background music of the other partner. Afterwards they may exchange roles. In order for the style and the interpretation to be good, both must know the melody and decide upon what to play. They also have to be very attentive to one another to keep the same rhythm, in order that one partner doesn't progress faster than the other. It is not only an initial agreement, but also continuous attention of one partner to the other that fosters unity. Without this agreement, it is very difficult to achieve the unity that will allow each member to have his own role in the family group.

There is a fundamental difference between a permanent relationship of dependence, and a relationship where the roles between him who is the director and person who is being directed change according to the situation. It's logical to think that within the couple, the man and woman will take turns taking the initiative according to the circumstances. Knowing that we depend on the other partner in a given situation is good. Each couple has to define the different areas of their dependency in each particular circumstance. If one partner realizes that the other partner does not have any initiative, and that he or she cannot count on his or her help to solve a problem, then the partner has to realize that this is a cause for alarm. In order to continue a relationship, a personal style must exist in each partner. This style can only be developed if each partner is responsible and accepts the consequences of a decision that he or she has made. Each partner must take responsibility. Roles have to be exchanged so that they can both achieve the results they wish for. It is not independence that we are searching for, but autonomy broad enough to inspire us to use our abilities and skills to serve other people. The personal responsibility that exists at some moments in decision-making is the consequence of a free decision to cooperate with the other partner. It will be fruitful only if it is not just a passive and permanent acceptance.

As we come back to the decisions that we proposed before, we will now study those decisions that one partner can make without having to communicate to the other partner. These decisions are related to things that are personal. For instance, the decision to help a friend in a personal problem does not necessarily need to be communicated. In some cases the fact can be talked about, just because one wants to share something valuable, something that is important for oneself. The same can be said concerning a relationship with God.

There are also some decisions that one has to make by oneself, in order to inform the other person afterwards. At times, in these decisions, a previous consultation can be effective but it is not absolutely necessary. It can be effective as a way of getting acquainted with what is going on, and as a way of getting a clear mind. This decision style might include for example: not going out with a friend, due to the fact that the relationship can no longer be positive (the other partner does not need to participate in the decision, but it is good for him or her to know, so that they can shape their behavior to this new fact). The decision to change one's professional job within the same organization (if this would cause a change in style of the family, the life of the other partner, etc., it should be consulted beforehand), the decision to change a hobby (this does not need to be communicated unless it represents a change in the other partner also, or in his lifestyle).

The decisions that are taken after consulting, but that belong to each one's own area of autonomy, will depend on the rules previously established in relation to that autonomy. It might be possible that the woman is the one who rules the house in many families. She is responsible for this but if she wants to change something that might affect her husband's lifestyle she should consult him.

Concerning decisions that should be made together, we have to point out the importance of the technical procedures in making each decision. The basic questions of the nature of the marriage relationship and the
fundamental values of a child’s education should be decided together. These are common objectives that require a common effort, and they have to be shared. In other situations, if there is disagreement, one partner can always give in.

However this should not always be the same person because a permanent state of dependency can be created.

According to what we have said, a state of "incommunication" can arise:

1. When one of the partners does not recognize the area of autonomy of the other partner.
2. When one of the partners tries to control the activities that belong to the other parent’s area of autonomy.
3. When there is no agreement in the basic objective of matrimony, or in the right means to obtain these objectives.
4. When one of the partners does not know how to give in, in trivial matters.

COMMON - PROJECTS

Until now we have considered how to communicate while making decisions about things that occur in everyday life. To decide in a coherent way continuously is not easy. But even more difficult is making decisions about future plans. The most important thing is to have future projects.

One area of planning for the future relates to the children. It is pointless to try to make children fit into a mold previously decided upon. Instead the couple should consider what would be the best thing for them, taking into account their own characteristics and personal qualities. For this, it will be necessary to agree initially on what those characteristics and qualities are.

It is also good to reflect upon the work situation of the couple, in and out of the home. It is good to plan some projects, like moving to another house during the first years of matrimony, or whether the wife is going to work outside the home once the children are more or less grown-up, or even at the present time. It is also good to plan what kind of priorities exist in the relationship with the other family members, the possibility of promotion in a job, the needs of the children, etc., because all of these subjects need some previous preparation on the part of the couple.

A last point is to think about the future projects concerning friends and the utilization of free time. There should be an agreement about the needs and desires of each partner on these subjects.