

Professional Communication A Mindful Approach

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION A MINDFUL APPROACH

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Preface

The term “interpersonal communication” refers to messages sent and received between two people. Most of our daily lives involve interpersonal communication on some level. When many people hear the word “interpersonal,” they immediately think of intimate relationships, but this is only one small fraction of the types of interpersonal interactions we have daily. Whether we are communicating with our spouse or dating partner, communicating with a coworker, communicating with a physician or therapist, or communicating with a random stranger, you are engaging in interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is the way people connect with other people.

William Schutz proposed three main reasons for why interpersonal communication is important to human beings in his Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientations Theory: control, inclusion, and affection.¹ The first need met through interpersonal relationships is our need to influence other people. People have an inherent need to control situations and the people within those situations. Whether we are talking about using persuasion attempts to get someone to go out with us on a date or using leadership skills to control what happens in the boardroom, control is a fundamental need for our interpersonal relationships. Most people don’t like thinking about interpersonal relationships as an issue of “control” because that doesn’t necessarily sound nice. It’s essential that we clearly distinguish control from manipulation. Control refers to an individual’s ability to influence another person’s behavior or ideas. When we talk about control, we are talking about influencing another person’s behavior or ideas because it is perceived as the right thing to do. Manipulation, on the other hand, is influencing another person’s behavior or ideas to one’s own advantage, often using dishonest, unscrupulous, and insidious means. Control, in, and of itself, is neither good nor bad.

The second need we fulfill through interpersonal relationships is inclusion. Everyone wants to belong. As humans, we have an innate desire to belong to groups and social communities. At the most basic level, we belong to our families when we are born. As we age, the desire to belong to other groups we deem as positive continues. In school, we may want to belong to sports teams or social groups like a fraternity or sorority. When we enter the workforce, we want to feel like we belong in the workplace or belong within our professions by being a member of professional associations. Our need to feel like we belong is a base need, and we fulfill this need through our daily interpersonal encounters.

The final need we fulfill through our interpersonal relationships is affection. The word “affection” stems from the Latin term *affectio*, which refers to emotions or feelings. Kory Floyd and Mark T. Morman defined “affection” as having an emotional state of fondness and positive regard toward a specific target.² As you can see, our understanding of affection is still rooted in the notions of emotion and feeling today. We all want to feel someone else’s positive affection towards us, whether it’s from our parents, coworkers, friends, siblings, children, etc. We also have an innate need to feel affection towards others.

Hopefully, you can see that these three basic human needs—control, inclusion, and affection—are essential constructs to everyone’s daily life and interactions. Furthermore, these are central tenets to who we are as human beings. Much of our success in life is built upon these three needs, so exploring these needs and how people accomplish them effectively is very important. The interpersonal communication strategies we discuss in this book are tools. As with many tools, they can either be used to enhance people’s lives or destruct them. A kind word and smile may make someone’s day, but an evil glare and a cutting remark can just as quickly destroy someone’s day. For this reason, we want you to consider what it means to be an ethical communicator just as much as we want you to consider how you communicate and react to others’ communication with you. Realize that the way you communicate and interact with others will impact their lives as much as it affects yours.

A Note for Students

Welcome to the world of interpersonal communication. We're happy that you're going to be joining us for this journey through the fascinating world of relationships in today's modern world. In addition to this textbook, there's also a student workbook that we'd encourage you to download and print. You can find the workbook on the [Milne Open Textbooks website](#). The workbook has a complete outline of the entire book, a wide range of activities, 20 unique adult color pages, a 16-week course planner, and so many other features. This workbook is a companion to this textbook. And it's also available for you 100% free.

A number of the chapters in this text will contain information about research results, so we wanted to explain a couple of basic social scientific concepts before we jumped right into the text itself. A lot of the research in the world of interpersonal communication is based on statistics. Don't worry; we're not going to throw numbers at you within this textbook. However, it is crucial to understand a couple of basic concepts related to statistics: relationships and differences.

Relationships

The first major statistical concept that anyone studying the social sciences must understand is statistical relationships. We don't want to get too technical in our discussion of relationships, but we do want to explain some of the basic ideas. When we examine relationships, we must have scores on two different variables for a single person. Now the word "variable" simply refers to anything that can vary from person-to-person: for example, your height, weight, public speaking anxiety, best friend relationship satisfaction, etc. There are thousands of possible variables that social scientists studying interpersonal communication can examine. However, we generally don't examine a single variable in isolation. We're more likely to examine two or more variables.

To help us examine the idea of relationships, we're going to use an article from Melissa Wanzer and Melanie Booth-Butterfield that examine someone's "humor orientation."³ The variable "humor orientation" is measured by a survey, which you can learn more about on [Steven Booth-Butterfield's website](#). Humor orientation is the use of jokes and joking during interactions with other people. In this study, the researchers had Person 1 complete the Humor Orientation (HO) Scale (self-reported HO) and had Person 2 complete the HO about Person 1 (other-reported HO).

Positive

One of the first significant findings in this study was a positive relationship between someone's perception of another person's humor orientation (other-reported HO) and their popularity (social attractiveness). The term "positive relationship" here simply means that as someone's score on the HO measure went up (people were seen as using more jokes and joking during their interactions with others), the more popular they were viewed by other people. In a positive relationship, the opposite is also true. People who were not viewed as using jokes and joking during their interactions were viewed as less popular by others. In essence, in a positive relationship as scores on one measure go up, the scores on the other measure go up. As scores on one measure go down, then scores on the other measure go down.

Negative

The second type of relationship we find using statistics is called a negative relationship. A negative relationship occurs when scores on one variable go up and scores on the second variable go down. In the Wanzer and Booth-Butterfield study, the researchers found that people who viewed themselves as having a strong humor orientation (higher scores on the HO scale) reported lower levels of loneliness. As scores for someone's HO went up, then scores for reported loneliness went down. Again, the opposite is also true. As someone's HO went down, their scores for reported loneliness went up.

No Relationship

The final type of relationship regularly found in research by interpersonal communication scholars is no relationship between two variables. In essence, not finding a relationship between variables means that, as scores on one measure went up, scores on the second measure didn't go up or down at all. Most interesting in the Wanzer and Booth-Butterfield study was when they found no relationship between an individual's rating of their HO (self-

reported HO) and someone else's perception of their social attractiveness (popularity). In essence, you can think you're the funniest person in the world, but it will not relate to someone else's perceptions of social attractiveness.

Note of Caution

Now that we've explained the three basic types of relationships commonly discussed in interpersonal communication research, we do want to raise one seriously important point. Correlation does not equal causation. The statistical test that we commonly use to examine relationships is called a correlation. One of the inherent limitations of a correlation is that it cannot say that X caused Y. For example, in the Wanzer and Booth-Butterfield study, we cannot say that someone's HO caused them to be viewed as more popular. All we can tell when using a correlation is that there is a relationship or that there is not a relationship between two variables.

Differences

In addition to examining relationships, researchers are often highly interested in exploring what we call differences. Scholars distinguish between two types of differences: differences of kind and differences of degree.

Differences of Kind

Differences of kind are differences that exist because people fall within a specific category. The class example I always like to use is the behavioral differences between cheerleaders and football players. Cheerleaders will exhibit very specific behaviors (using megaphones, dancing, being tossed into the air, yelling cheers, pumping up the audience, etc.) during a football game. Football players will exhibit a very different set of behaviors (e.g., throwing the football, running with the football, kicking the football, tackling people, etc.). When you have two groups that have very different prescribed sets of behavior, we call this a difference of kind.

Differences of Degree

The difference that social scientists are most interested in is called differences of degree. The term "degree" here means that you are looking and comparing the scores of two different groups on a single variable. Let's take the concept of height and compare females and males. In a study completed by Max Roser, Cameron Appel, and Hannah Ritchie, the researchers examined a wide range of issues related to human height.⁴ Based on data that was gathered from 1896 until 1996, the researchers found that consistently males were taller than females. By 1996, males had an average height of 171 centimeters, while females had an average height of 159 centimeters. This difference is what we call a difference of degree.

Now, it's essential to realize that when we're discussing differences of degrees, we are comparing two or more groups' scores on a single outcome variable (in this case height). At the same time, just because we find that the average male is taller than the average female does not mean that there are not really short males and really tall females. In fact, research has shown us that there is generally a much broader range of heights among males than there is between males and females. The same is also true for females; there is a broad range of different heights of females. However, differences of degrees are not interested in the really short males or really tall females (or really tall males and really short females). Instead, differences of degrees are examined by looking at the average male's height and comparing it to the average female's height.

So, there you have it. You've now learned two very important concepts related to the statistics interpersonal communication scholars commonly use.

A Note for Professors

We want to start by thanking you for adopting this Open Educational Resource textbook. We know that you have many different textbook options available to you today. We hope that you find this book to be both very student-friendly and scholarly-based. Our goal with this project was to create a textbook that could compete with the costly texts currently on the market. Interpersonal communication is one of the most commonly taught courses within the field, so we realized that a massive need existed for a textbook that could be highly competitive and freely available.

If you haven't asked for access to the instructor materials available for this book, please check out the [Milne Open Textbooks website](#) to request access. We understand that instructors' resources are vital, so we created a

comprehensive instructor's manual that includes note outlines, activities, and a test bank. Furthermore, a full set of PowerPoint presentations are freely available. Lastly, if you didn't adopt the student workbook at the same time you decided to adopt this book, we would highly encourage you to do so. The student workbook, which is also free, is aligned with the teaching notes, which makes for a cohesive set of items.

¹ Schutz, W. C. (1960). FIRO: A three dimensional theory of interpersonal behavior. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

² Floyd, K., & Morman, M. T. (1998). The measurement of affectionate communication. *Communication Quarterly*, 46(2), 144-162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379809370092>

³ Wanzer, M. B., & Booth-Butterfield, M. (1996). Are funny people popular? An examination of humor orientation, loneliness, and social attraction. *Communication Quarterly*, 44(1), 42-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379609369999>

⁴ Roser, M., m, C., & Ritchie, H. (2019, May). Human height. *Our World in Data*. <https://ourworldindata.org/human-height>

Attributions

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Adaptations include removing chapters 2, 3, 8 and 11, as well as updating some of the language to represent interactions with the social service sector.

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[1]

Introduction to Human Communication

Introduction

If you're like most people taking their first course or reading your first book in interpersonal communication, you may be wondering what it is that you're going to be studying. Academics are notorious for not agreeing on definitions of concepts, which is also true of interpersonal communication scholars. Bochner (1989) wrote laid out the fundamental underpinnings of this academic area called "interpersonal communication," "at least two communicators; intentionally orienting toward each other; as both subject and object; whose actions embody each other's perspectives both toward self and toward other."¹ This simplistic definition of interpersonal communication frustrates many scholars because it does not provide clear parameters for the area of study beyond two people interacting. Mark Knapp and John Daly noted that four areas of contention are commonly seen in the discussion of interpersonal communication: number of communicators involved, the physical proximity of the communicators, nature of the interaction units, and degree of formality and structure.²

Number of Communicators Involved

As the definition from Bochner in the previous paragraph noted, most scholars agree that interpersonal communication involves "at least two communicators." Although a helpful tool to separate interpersonal communication from small group or organizational communication, some scholars argue that looking specifically at one dyad is an accurate representation of interpersonal. For example, if you and your dating partner are talking about what a future together might look like, you cannot exclude all relational baggage that comes into that discussion. You might be influenced by your own family, friends, coworkers, and other associates. So although there may be only two people interacting at one point, there are strong influences that are happening in the background.

Physical Proximity of the Communicators

In a lot of early writing on the subject of interpersonal communication, the discussion of the importance of physical proximity was a common one. Researchers argued that interpersonal communication is a face-to-face endeavor. However, with the range of mediated technologies we have in the 21st Century, we often communicate interpersonally with people through social networking sites, text messaging, email, the phone, and a range of other technologies. Is the interaction between two lovers as they break up via text messages any less "interpersonal" than when the break up happens face-to-face? The issue of proximity is an interesting one, but we argue that in the 21st Century, so much of our interpersonal interactions do use some kind of technology.



Figure 1.1 Interpersonal Communication. [“Interpersonal Communication.” by Bovee and Thill](#). This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license](#).

Nature of the Interaction Units

One of our primary reasons for communicating with other people is trying to understand them and how and why they communicate. As such, some messages may help us understand and predict how people will behave and communicate, so do those interactions have a higher degree of “interpersonalness?” Imagine you and your partner just fought. You are not sure what caused the fight in the first place. During the ensuing conversation (once things have settled down), you realize that your partner feels that when you flirt with others in public, it diminishes your relationship. Through this conversation, you learn how your behaviour causes your partner to get upset and react angrily. You now have more information about how your partner communicates and what your behaviour does to cause these types of interactions. Some would argue this type of conversation has a high degree of “interpersonalness.” On the other hand, if you “like” a stranger’s post on Facebook, have you engaged in interpersonal communication? Is this minimal form of interaction even worth calling interpersonal communication?

Degree of Formality and Structure

The final sticking point that many scholars have when discussing interpersonal communication is the issue of formality and structure. A great deal of research in interpersonal communication has focused on interpersonal interactions that are considered informal and unstructured (e.g., friendships, romantic relationships, family

interactions, etc.). However, numerous interpersonal interactions do have a stronger degree of formality and structure associated with them. For example, you would not interact with your physician the same way you would with your romantic partner because of the formality of that relationship. We often communicate with our managers or supervisors who exist in a formal organizational structure. In all of these cases, we are still examining interpersonal relationships.

Why Study Communication?

Learning Objectives

1. Understand communication needs.
2. Discuss physical needs.
3. Explain identity needs.
4. Describe social needs.
5. Elucidate practical needs.

Most people think they are great communicators. However, very few people are “naturally” good. Communication takes time, skill, and practice. To be a great communicator, you must also be a great listener. It requires some proficiency and competence. Think about someone you know that is not a good communicator. Why is that person not good? Do they say things that are inappropriate, rude, or hostile? This text is designed to give you the skills to be a better communicator.

Reasons to Study Communication

Hence, we need to study communication for a variety of reasons. First, it gives us a new perspective at something we take for granted every day. As stated earlier, most people think they are excellent communicators. However, most people never ask another person if they are great communicators. Besides being in a public speaking class or listening to your friends’ opinions, you probably do not get a lot of feedback on the quality of your communication. In this book, we will learn all about communication from different aspects. As the saying goes, “You can’t see the forest from the trees.” In other words, you won’t be able to see the impact of your communication behaviours, if you don’t focus on certain communication aspects. The second reason we study communication is based on the quantity of our time that is devoted to that activity. Think about your daily routine; I am sure that it involves communicating with others (via face-to-face, texting, electronic media, etc.). Because we spend so much of our time communicating with others, we should make that time worthwhile. We need to learn how to communicate and communicate better because a large amount of our time is allotted to communicating with others. The last reason why we study communication is to increase our effectiveness. There are several reasons why marriages and relationships often fail. The most popular reason is that people don’t know how to communicate with each other, which leads to irreconcilable differences. People often do not know how to work through problems, and it creates anger, hostility, and possibly violence. In these cases, communication needs to be effective for the relationship to work and be satisfying. Think about all the relationships that you have with friends, family, coworkers, and significant others. It is possible that this course could make you more successful in those relationships.

We all have specific and general reasons why we communicate with others. They vary from person to person. We know that we spend a large amount of our time communicating. Also, every individual will communicate with other people. Most people do not realize the value and importance of communication. Sherry Morreale and Judy Pearson believe that there are three main reasons why we need to study communication.³ First of all, when you study communication behaviours, it gives you a new perspective on something you probably take for granted. Some people never realize the important physiological functions until they take a class on anatomy or biology. In the same fashion, some people never understand how to communicate and why they communicate until they take a communication studies course. Second, we need to study communication because we spend a large portion of our time communicating with other people. Gina Chen found that many people communicate online every

day, and Twitter subscribers fulfill their needs for camaraderie by tweeting with others.⁴ Hence, we all need to communicate with others. Third, the most important reason is to become a better communicator. Research has shown that we need to learn to communicate better with others because none of us are very good at it.

Communication Needs

Think for a minute about all the problematic communication behaviours that you have experienced in your life: personally, or professionally. You will probably notice that there are areas that could use improvement. In this book, we will learn about better ways to communicate. To improve your communication behaviours, you must first understand the needs for communicating with others.

Physical

Studies show that there is a link between mental health and physical health. In other words, people who encounter negative experiences, but are also willing to communicate those experiences are more likely to have better mental and physical health.⁵ Ronald Adler, Lawrence Rosenfeld, and Russell Proctor found that communication has been beneficial to avoiding/decreasing:⁶

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Cancer
- Coronary problems
- Common Cold

Research clearly illustrates that communication is so vital for our physical health. Because most health problems are stress-induced, communication offers a way to relieve this tension and alleviate some of the physical symptoms. It is so vital for people to share what they feel, because if they keep it bottled up, then they are more likely to suffer emotionally, mentally, and physically.

Identity

Communication is not only essential for us to thrive and live. It is also important to discover who we are. From a very young age, you were probably told a variety of characteristics about your physical appearance and your personality. You might have been told that you are funny, smart, pretty, friendly, talented, or insightful. All of these comments probably came from someone else. For instance, Sally went to a store without any makeup and saw one of her close friends. Sally's friend told her that she looked horrible without any makeup. So, from that day forward, she never walked out of the house without her cosmetics. You can see that this one comment affected Sally's behaviour but also her perceptions about herself. Just one comment can influence how you think, act, and feel. Think about all the comments that you have been told in your life. Were they hurtful comments or helpful comments? Did they make you stronger or weaker? You are who you are based on what others have told you about yourself and how you responded to these comments. In another opposite example, Mark's parents told him that he wasn't very smart and that he would probably amount to nothing. Mark used these comments to make himself better. He studied harder and worked harder because he believed that he was more than his parents' comments. In this situation, you can see that the comments helped shape his identity differently in a positive manner.

Social

Other than using words to identify who we are, we use communication to establish relationships. Relationships exist because of communication. Each time we talk to others, we are sharing a part of ourselves with others. We know that people who have strong relationships with others are due to the conversations that they have with others. Think about all the relationships that you are involved with and how communication differs in those relationships. If you stopped talking to the people you care about, your relationships might suffer. The only way relationships can grow is when communication occurs between individuals. Joy Koesten analyzed

family communication patterns and communication competence. She found that people who grew up in more conversation oriented families were also more likely to have better relationships than people who grew up in lower conversation oriented families.⁷

Practical

Communication is a key ingredient in our life. We need it to operate and do our daily tasks. Communication is the means to tell the barista what coffee you prefer, inform your physician about what hurts, and advise others that you might need help.

We know that communication helps in the business setting. Katherine Kinnick and Sabrena Parton maintained that communication is important in workplace settings. They found that the ability to persuade effectively was very important. Moreover, females are evaluated more on their interpersonal skills than males, and males were evaluated more on their leadership skills than interpersonal skills.⁸ Overall, we know that to do well in the business setting, one must learn to be a competent communicator.

Moreover, we know that communication is not only crucial in professional settings but in personal settings. Daniel Canary, Laura Stafford, and Beth Semic found that communication behaviours are essential in marriages because it adds the relationship features.⁹ In another study, Laura Stafford and Daniel Canary illustrated the importance of communication in dating relationships.¹⁰ All in all, communication is needed for users to relate to others, build connections, and help our relationships exist.

Key Takeaways

- We need communication. We need to be able to study communication because we spend so much time doing it, we could learn to be more effective at it, and it is something we have done for a long time.
- Research has shown us that communication can help us with physical needs. When we are hungry or thirsty, we can tell someone this, but also it helps to release stress.
- To maintain, create, or terminate relationships, we need communication. Communication helps fulfill our social needs to connect with others.
- To function, we need communication for practical needs.

Exercises

- Think of an example for each communication need. Which need is most important for you? Why?
- Why do you think it is important to study communication? Is this class required for you? Do you think it should be a requirement for everyone?
- Think about how your identity has been shaped by others. What is something that was said to you that impacted how you felt? How do you feel now about the comment?

Basic Principles of Human Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define and explain the term “communication.”
2. Describe the nature of symbols and their importance to human communication.
3. Explain seven important factors related to human communication.

The origin of the word **communication** can be traced back to the Latin word *communico*, which is translated to mean “to join or unite,” “to connect,” “to participate in” or “to share with all.” This root word is the same one from which we get not only the word *communicate*, but also *common*, *commune*, *communion*, and *community*. Thus, we can define communication as a process by which we share ideas or information with other people. We commonly think of communication as talking, but it is much broader than just speech. Other characteristics of voice communicate messages, and we communicate, as well, with eyes, facial expressions, hand gestures, body position, and movement. Let us examine some basic principles about how we communicate with one another.

Communication Is Symbolic

Have you ever noticed that we can hear or look at something like the word “cat” and immediately know what those three letters mean? From the moment you enter grade school, you are taught how to recognize sequences of letters that form words that help us understand the world. With these words, we can create sentences, paragraphs, and books like this one. The letters used to create the word “cat” and then the word itself is what communication scholars call symbols. A **symbol** is a mark, object, or sign that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention.

Let’s think about one of the most important words commonly tossed around, love. The four letters that make up the word “l,” “o,” “v,” and “e,” are visual symbols that, when combined, form the word “love,” which is a symbol associated with intense regard or liking. For example, I can “love” chocolate. However, the same four-letter word has other meanings attached to it as well. For example, “love” can represent a deeply intimate relationship or a romantic/sexual attachment. In the first case, we could love our parents/guardians and friends, but in the second case, we experience love as a factor of a deep romantic/sexual relationship. So, these are just three associations we have with the same symbol, love. In Figure 1.2, we see American Sign Language (ASL) letters for the word “love.” In this case, the hands themselves represent symbols for English letters, which is an agreed upon convention of users of ASL to represent “love.”

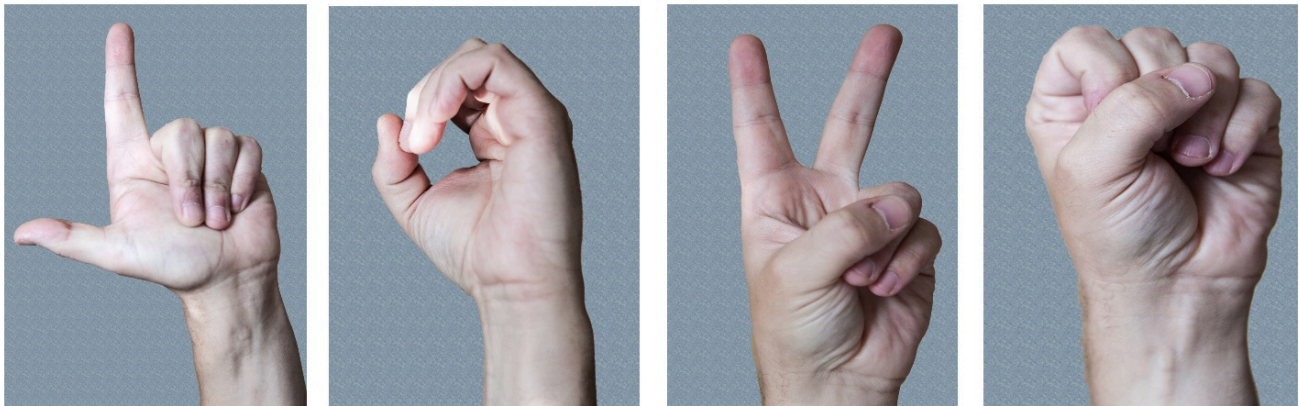


Figure 1.2 Child Using ASL to Sign Love. “love.” By David Pacey. This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license](#).

Symbols can also be visual representations of ideas and concepts. For example, look at the various symbols in Figure 1.3 of various social media icons. In this image, you see symbols for a range of different social media sites, including Facebook (lowercase “f”), Twitter (the bird), Snap Chat (the ghost image), and many others. Admittedly, the icons for YouTube and dig just use their names, but these images have become associated with these online platforms over many years.

The Symbol is Not the Thing

Now that we’ve explained what symbols are, we should probably offer a few very important guides. First, the symbol is not the thing that it is representing. For example, the word “dog” is not a member of the canine family that greets you when you come home every night. If we look back at those symbols listed in Figure 1.2, those symbols are not the organizations themselves. “g+” is not Google Plus. The actual thing that is “Google Plus” is a series of computer codes that exists on the World Wide Web that allows us, people, to interact.



Figure 1.3 Social Media Icons. "[Social Media Mix 3D Icons – Mix #1'.](#)" by [Blogtrepreneur](#). This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license](#).

Arbitrariness of Symbols

How we assign symbols is entirely arbitrary. For example, in Figure 1.4, we see two animals that are categorized under the symbols “dog” and “cat.” In this image, the “dog” is on the left side, and the “cat” is on the right side. The words we associate with these animals only exist because we have said it’s so for many, many years. Back when humans were labelling these animals, we could just have easily called the one on the left “cat” and the one on the right “dog,” but we didn’t. If we called the animal on the left “cat,” would that change the nature of what that animal is? Not really. The only thing that would change is the symbol we have associated with that animal.



Figure 1.4 Dog and Cat. "Dog and cat." by kitty.green66. This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license](#).

Let's look at another symbolic example you are probably familiar with – :). The "smiley" face or the two pieces of punctuation (colon followed by closed parentheses). This symbol may seem like it's everywhere today, but it's only existed since September 1982. In early September 1982, a joke was posted on an electronic bulletin board about a fake chemical spill at Carnegie Mellon University. At the time, there was no easy way to distinguish between serious versus non-serious information. A computer scientist named Scott E. Fahlman entered the debate with the following message:

The Original Emoticons

I propose that [sic] the following character sequence for joke markers:

: -)

Read it sideways. Actually, it is probably more economical to mark things that are NOT jokes, given current trends. For this, use:

: - (

Thus the first emoticon, a sequence of keyboard characters used to represent facial expressions or emotions, was born. Even the universal symbol for happiness, the yellow circle with the smiling face, had only existed since 1963 when graphic artist Harvey Ross Ball created it. The happy face was created as a way to raise employee morale at State Mutual Life Assurance Company of Worcester, Massachusetts. Of course, when you merge the happy face with emoticons, we eventually ended up with emojis (Figure 1.5). Of course, many people today just take emojis for granted without ever knowing their origin at all.



Figure 1.5 Emojis

Communication Is Shared Meaning

Hopefully, in our previous discussion about symbols, you noticed that although the assignment of symbols to real things and ideas is arbitrary, our understanding of them exists because we agree with their meaning. If we were talking and I said, “it’s time for tea,” you may think that I’m going to put on some boiling water and pull out the oolong tea. However, if I said, “it’s time for tea” in the United Kingdom, you would assume that we were getting ready for our evening meal. Same word, but two very different meanings depending on the culture one uses the term. In the United Kingdom, high tea (or meat tea) is the evening meal. Dinner, on the other hand, would represent the large meal of the day, which is usually eaten in the middle of the day. Of course, in the United States, we refer to the middle of the day meal as lunch and often refer to the evening meal as dinner (or supper).

Let’s imagine that you were recently at a party. Two of your friends had recently attended the same Broadway play together. You ask them “how the play was,” and here’s how they responded:

So, we got to the theatre 20 minutes early to ensure we were able to get comfortable and could do some people watching before the show started. The person sitting in front of us had the worst comb-over I had ever seen. Half through Act 1, the hair was flopping back in our laps like the legs of a spider. I mean, those strands of hair had to be 8 to 9 inches long and came down on us like it was pleading with us to rescue it. Oh, and this one woman who was sitting to our right was wearing this huge fur hat-turban thing on her head. It looked like some kind of furry animal crawled up on her head and died. I felt horrible for the poor guy that was sitting behind her because I’m sure he couldn’t see anything over or around that thing.

Here’s how your second friend described the experience:

I thought the play was good enough. It had some guy from the UK who tried to have a Brooklyn accent that came in and out. The set was pretty cool though. At one point, the set turned from a boring looking office building into a giant tree. That was pretty darn cool. As for the overall story, it was good, I guess. The show just wasn’t something I would normally see.

In this case, you have the same experience described by two different people. We are only talking about the

experience each person had in an abstract sense. In both cases, you had friends reporting on the same experience but from their perceptions of the experience. With your first friend, you learn more about what was going on around your friend in the theatre but not about the show itself. The second friend provided you with more details about her perception of the play, the acting, the scenery, and the story. Did we learn anything about the content of the “play” through either conversation? Not really.

Many of our conversations resemble this type of experience recall. In both cases, we have two individuals who are attempting to share with us through communication specific ideas and meanings. However, sharing meaning is not always very easy. In both cases, you asked your friends, “how the play was.” In the first case, your friend interpreted this phrase as being asked about their experience at the theatre itself. In the second case, your friend interpreted your phrase as being a request for her opinion or critique of the play. As you can see in this example, it’s very easy to get very different responses based on how people interpret what you are asking.

Communication scholars often say that “meanings aren’t in words, they’re in people” because of this issue related to interpretation. Yes, there are dictionary definitions of words. Earlier in this chapter, we provided three different dictionary-type definitions for the word “love:” 1) intense regard or liking, 2) a deeply intimate relationship, or 3) a romantic/sexual attachment. These types of definitions we often call **denotative definitions**. However, it’s also important to understand that in addition to denotative definitions, there are also **connotative definitions**, or the emotions or associations a person makes when exposed to a symbol. For example, how one personally understands or experiences the word “love” is connotative. The warm feeling you get, the memories of experiencing love all come together to give you a general, personalized understanding of the word itself. One of the biggest problems that occur is when one person’s denotative meaning conflicts with another person’s connotative meaning. For example, when I write the word “dog,” many of you think of four-legged furry family members. If you’ve never been a dog owner, you may just generally think about these animals as members of the canine family. If, however, you’ve had a bad experience with a dog in the past, you may have very negative feelings that could lead you to feel anxious or experience dread when you hear the word “dog.” As another example, think about clowns. Some people see clowns as cheery characters associated with the circus and birthday parties. Other people are genuinely terrified by clowns. Both the dog and clown cases illustrate how we can have symbols that have different meanings to different people.

Communication Involves Intentionality

One area that often involves a bit of controversy in the field of communication is what is called intentionality. Intentionality asks whether an individual purposefully intends to interact act with another person and attempt shared meaning. Each time you communicate with others, there is intentionality involved. You may want to offer your opinions or thoughts on a certain topic. However, intentionality is an important concept in communication. Think about times where you might have talked aloud without realizing another person could hear you. Communication can occur at any time. When there is intent among the parties to converse with each other, then it makes the communication more effective.

Others argue that you “cannot, not communicate.” This idea notes that we are always communicating with those around us. As we’ll talk more about later in this book, communication can be both verbal (the words we speak) and nonverbal (gestures, use of space, facial expressions, how we say words, etc.). From this perspective, our bodies are always in a state of nonverbal communication, whether it’s intended or not. Maybe you’ve walked past someone’s office and saw them hunched over at their desk, staring at a computer screen. Based on the posture of the other person, you decide not to say “hi” because the person looks like they are deep in thought and probably busy. In this case, we interpret the person’s nonverbal communication as saying, “I’m busy.” In reality, that person could just as easily be looking at Facebook and killing time until someone drops by and says, “hi.”

Dimensions of Communication

When we communicate with other people, we must always remember that our communication is interpreted at multiple levels. Two common dimensions used to ascertain meaning during communication are relational and content.

Relational Dimension

Every time we communicate with others, there is a relational dimension. You can communicate in a tone of

friendship, love, hatred, and so forth. This is indicated in how you communicate with your receiver. Think about the phrase, “You are crazy!” It means different things depending on the source of the message. For instance, if your boss said it, you might take it harsher than if your close friend said it to you. You are more likely to receive a message more accurately when you can define the type of relationship that you have with this person. Hence, your relationship with the person determines how you are more likely to interpret the message. Take another example of the words “I want to see you now!” These same words might mean different things if it comes from your boss or if it comes from your lover. That is, pretending that your boss is not your lover. You will know that if your boss wants to see you, then it is probably an urgent matter that needs your immediate attention. However, if your lover said it, then you might think that they miss you and can’t bear the thought about being without you for too long.

Content Dimension

In the same fashion, every time we speak, we have a content dimension. The content dimension is the information that is stated explicitly in the message. When people focus on the content of a message, then ignore the relationship dimension. They are focused on the specific words that were used to convey the message. For instance, if you ran into an ex-lover who said “I’m happy for you” about your new relationship. You might wonder what that phrase means. Did it mean that your ex was truly happy for you, or if they were happy to see you in a new relationship, or if your ex thinks that you are happy? One will ponder many interpretations of the message, especially if a relationship is not truly defined.

Another example might be a new acquaintance who talks about how your appearance looks “interesting.” You might be wondering if your new friend is sarcastic, or if they just didn’t know a nicer way of expressing their opinion. Because your relationship is so new, you might think about why they decided to pick that term over another term. Hence, the content of a message impacts how it is received.

Communication Is Culturally Determined

The word culture refers to a “group of people who through a process of learning can share perceptions of the world that influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behaviour.”¹² Let’s breakdown this definition. First, it’s essential to recognize that culture is something we learn. From the moment we are born, we start to learn about our culture. We learn culture from our families, our schools, our peers, and many other sources as we age. Specifically, we learn perceptions of the world. We learn about morality. We learn about our relationship with our surroundings. We learn about our places in a greater society. These perceptions ultimately influence what we believe, what we value, what we consider “normal,” and what rules we live by. For example, many of us have beliefs, values, norms, and rules that are directly related to the religion we were raised. As an institution, religion is often one of the dominant factors of culture around the world.

Let’s start by looking at how religion can impact beliefs. Your faith can impact what you believe about the nature of life and death. For some, you live well and you’ll go to a happy place (Heaven, Nirvana, Elysium, etc.) or a negative place (Hell, Samsara, Tartarus, etc.). We should mention that Samsara is less a “place” and more the process of reincarnation as well as one’s actions and consequences from the past, present, and future.

Religion can also impact what you value. Cherokee are taught to value the earth and the importance of keeping balance with the earth. Judaic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.), on the other hand, teach that humans have been placed on earth to dominate and control the earth. As such, the value is more on what the earth can provide than on ensuring harmony with nature.

Religion can also impact what you view as “normal.” Many adherents to Islam stress the importance of female modesty, so it is normal for women to cover their heads when in public or completely cover their entire bodies from head to toe. On the other hand, one branch of Raëlianism promotes a pro-sex feminist stance where nudity and sex work are normal and even celebrated.

Different religions have different rules that get created and handed down. For most Western readers, the most famous set of rules is probably the Judaic Tradition’s Ten Commandments. Conversely, Hindus have a text of religious laws transmitted in the Vedas. Most major religions have, at some point or another, had religious texts that became enshrined laws within those societies.

Finally, these beliefs, values, norms, and rules ultimately impact how all of us interact and behave with others. For example, because of the Islamic rules on and norms about female modesty, in many Islamic countries, women cannot speak with men unless they are directly related to them by birth or marriage. The critical part to remember

about these actual behaviours is that we often have no idea how (and to what degree) our culture influences our communicative behaviour until we are interacting with someone from a culture that differs from ours. We'll talk more about issues of intercultural interpersonal interactions later in this text.

Communication Occurs in a Context

Another factor that influences how we understand others is the context, the circumstance, environment, setting, and/or situation surrounding an interaction. Most people learning about context are generally exposed during elementary school when you are trying to figure out the meaning of a specific word. You may have seen a complicated word and told to use "context clues" to understand what the word means. In the same vein, when we analyze how people are communicating, we must understand the context of that communication.

Imagine you're hanging out at your local restaurant, and you hear someone at the next table say, "I can't believe that guy. He's always out in left field!" As an American idiom, we know that "out in left field" generally refers to something unexpected or unusual. The term stems out of baseball because the player who hangs out in left field has the farthest to throw to get a baseball back to the first baseman in an attempt to tag out a runner. However, if you were listening to this conversation in farmland, you could be hearing someone describe a specific geographic location (e.g., "He was out in left field chasing after a goat who stumbled that way"). In this case, context does matter.

Communication Is Purposeful

We communicate for different reasons. We communicate in an attempt to persuade people. We communicate to get people to like us. We communicate to express our liking of other people. We could list different reasons why we communicate with other people. Often we may not even be aware of the specific reason or need we have for communicating with others.

Key Takeaways

- Communication is derived from the Latin root *communico*, which means to share. As communicators, each time we talk to others, we share part of ourselves.
- Symbols are words, pictures, or objects that we use to represent something else. Symbols convey meanings. They can be written, spoken, or unspoken.
- There are many aspects to communication. Communication involves shared meaning; communication is a process; has a relationship, intent, & content dimension; is culturally determined, occurs in context; and is communication is purposeful.

Exercises

- In groups, provide a real-life example for each of these aspects: Communication involves shared meaning, communication is a process, has a relationship, intent, & content dimension, occurs in a context, communication is purposeful, and it is culturally defined.
- As a class, come up with different words. Then, divide the class and randomly distribute the words. Each group will try to get the other group to guess their words either by drawing symbols or displaying nonverbal behaviours. Then discuss how symbols impact perception and language.
- Can you think of some examples of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? For instance, in Japan, the word "backyard" does not exist. Because space is so limited, most Japanese people do not have backyards. This term is foreign to them, but in America, most of our houses have a backyard.

Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

1. Explain Competence.
2. Distinguish between social appropriateness and personal effectiveness and their relationship to communication competence.
3. Identify characteristics of competence.

Defining Competence

Brian Spitzberg (2000) argued that **communication competence** involved being both appropriate and effective.¹³ **Appropriate communication** is what most people would consider acceptable behaviours. **Effective communication** is getting your desired personal outcome.

You might think about communicators who were appropriate and not effective and vice versa. The two characteristics go hand in hand. You need to have both to be considered competent. Think about coaches who might say horrible or inappropriate things to their players to motivate them. This may be viewed highly effective to others, but possibly very inappropriate to others. Especially if you are not used to harsh language or foul language, then your perceptions could hinder how you feel about the speaker. At the same time, you might have individuals that are highly appropriate but are not effective. They may say the right things, but cannot get any results. For instance, imagine a mother who is trying over and over to get her child to brush their teeth. She might try praises or persuasive techniques, but if the child doesn't brush their teeth, then she is not accomplishing her goal. You truly need a balance between the two.

Understanding Competence

First of all, there is not a best or ultimate effective way of communicating that works for everyone. Think about the speakers that you know. Perhaps, some are very charismatic, humorous, assertive, and more timid than others. Just as there are many types of speakers and speaking styles, there are different types of competent communicators. For example, a joke in one context might be hilarious, but that same joke might be very offensive in another context. What this tells us is that there is no guaranteed or definite methods that will work in every situation. Communication that works in one context and not another depends on the culture and the characteristics of the person or persons receiving the message.

Moreover, we know that communication varies from one context to another. For instance, kindergarten teachers may be wonderful in a room full of five-year-olds, but if you asked them to present in a college classroom, they might get a little nervous because the situation is different. Some situations are better for certain speakers than others. Some people can rise to the occasion and truly deliver a memorable speech in a moment of crisis. However, if you asked them to do it again, they might not be able to do so because of the situational variables that influenced the speech. Some individuals are wonderful public speakers but are truly unable to communicate in interpersonal relationships and vice versa. These situations occur because some people feel more comfortable in certain settings than others. Hence, competency can vary depending on the type of communication.

Also, competence can be taught. The main reason why taking a communication course is so important is to be a better speaker. Hence, this is why many schools make it a requirement for college students. Think about an invention or idea you might have. If you can't communicate that idea/invention, then it will probably never come to fruition.

Characteristics of Competence

Now that you know more about competence, it is important to note that competent communicators often share many similar characteristics. Studies on competence illustrate that competent communicators have distinctive characteristics that differ from incompetent communicators. We will discuss a few of these characteristics in this section.

Skillful

First, many competent communicators are skillful. In other words, they use situational cues to figure out which approach might be best. Think about a car salesperson and about how she/he will approach a customer who is wanting to make a purchase. If the salesperson is too aggressive, then they might lose a sale. For that reason, they need to cater to their customer and make sure that they meet their customer's needs. The salesperson might directly approach the customer by simply saying, "Hi I'm Jamie, I would be happy to help you today," or by asking questions like, "I see you looking at cars today. Are you interested in a particular model?" or they could ask the customer to talk more by saying, "Can you tell me more about what you are looking for?" And perhaps, even complimenting the customer. Each of these strategies illustrates how a salesperson can be skillful in meeting the customer's expectations and, at the same time, fulfilling their own goals. Just like a chef has many ingredients to use to prepare a dish, a competent communicator possesses many skills to use depending on the situation.

Adaptable

Second, competent communicators are adaptable. I am sure you might have seen a speaker who uses technology like PowerPoint to make their presentations. What happens if technology fails, does the speaker perform poorly as well? Competent communicators would not let technology stop them from presenting their message. They can perform under pressure and any type of constraint. For instance, if the communicator is presenting and notices that the audience has become bored, then they might change up their presentation and make it more exciting and lively to incite the audience.

Involved

Third, competent communicators can get others involved. Competent communicators think about their audience and being understood. They can get people excited about a cause or effort and create awareness or action. Think about motivational speakers and how they can get people encouraged to do something. The same idea is for competent communicators; they have the skill to involve their audience to do something such as protest, vote, or donate. Think about politicians who make speeches and provide so many interesting statements that people are more inclined to vote in a certain direction.

Understands Their Audience

Fourth, competent communicators can understand their audience. Keeping with the same example of politicians, many of them will say things like, "I know what it is like not to be able to feed your family, to struggle to make ends meet, or not to have a job. I know what you are going through. I understand where you are coming from." These phrases are ways to create a bond between the speaker and the receiver of the message. Competent communicators can empathize and figure out the best way to approach the situation. For instance, if someone you know had a miscarriage and truly has wanted to have kids for a long time, then it would probably be very inconsiderate to say, "just try again." This comment would be very rude, especially if this person has already tried for a long time to have a child. A competent communicator would have to think about how this person might feel and what words would genuinely be more appropriate to the situation.

Cognitive Complexity

Fifth, knowing how to say the same thing in different ways is called **cognitive complexity**. You might think that the only way to express affection would be to say, "I love you" or "I care about you." What other ways could you express affection? This skill is being cognitive complex. Think about a professor you might have had that used different methods to explain the same concept. Your professor might say, "To solve this problem, you might try method A, and if that doesn't work, you could try method B, and method C is still another way." This illustrates that you don't have to say things one way, you could say it in different ways. This helps your audience understand your message better because you provided different ways to comprehend your intended message.

Self-Monitoring

The last characteristic of competent communicators is the ability to monitor yourself. It is also known as **self-monitoring**. This is the ability to focus on your behaviour, and in turn, determine how to behave in the situation.

In every speaking situation, most people will have an internal gauge of what they might say next or not say. Some people never give any thought to what they might say to others. These individuals would have low self-monitoring skills, in which what you see is what you get. You could have high self-monitors that pay attention to every little thing, how they stand, where their eyes move, how they gesture, and maybe even how they breathe. They pay attention to these minor details because they are concerned with how the message might come across to others. Competent communicators have a balance of high and low self-monitoring, in which they realize how they might be perceived, but they are not overly focused on all the details of themselves.

Key Takeaways

- Competence involves being both appropriate and effective.
- Appropriateness is what is socially acceptable behaviour, and effective is being able to get your desired outcome.
- Characteristics of competence involve skill, adaptability, involvement, complexity, and empathy.

Exercises

- Who do you think are competent/incompetent communicators? Why?
- How would you rate yourself as a competent speaker? Give a brief impromptu speech, then ask someone to rate you based on the characteristics of competence. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Using cognitive complexity skills, think about all the ways you can express affection/hatred. Talk about how these ways would be interpreted by others – positively/negatively and why? Does it make if the other person was a different sex, culture, gender, ethnicity, age, or religion? How and why?

Types of Human Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define Intrapersonal Communication
2. Explain Interpersonal Communication
3. Elucidate Small Group Communication
4. Learn about Public Communication
5. Identify Mediated Communication

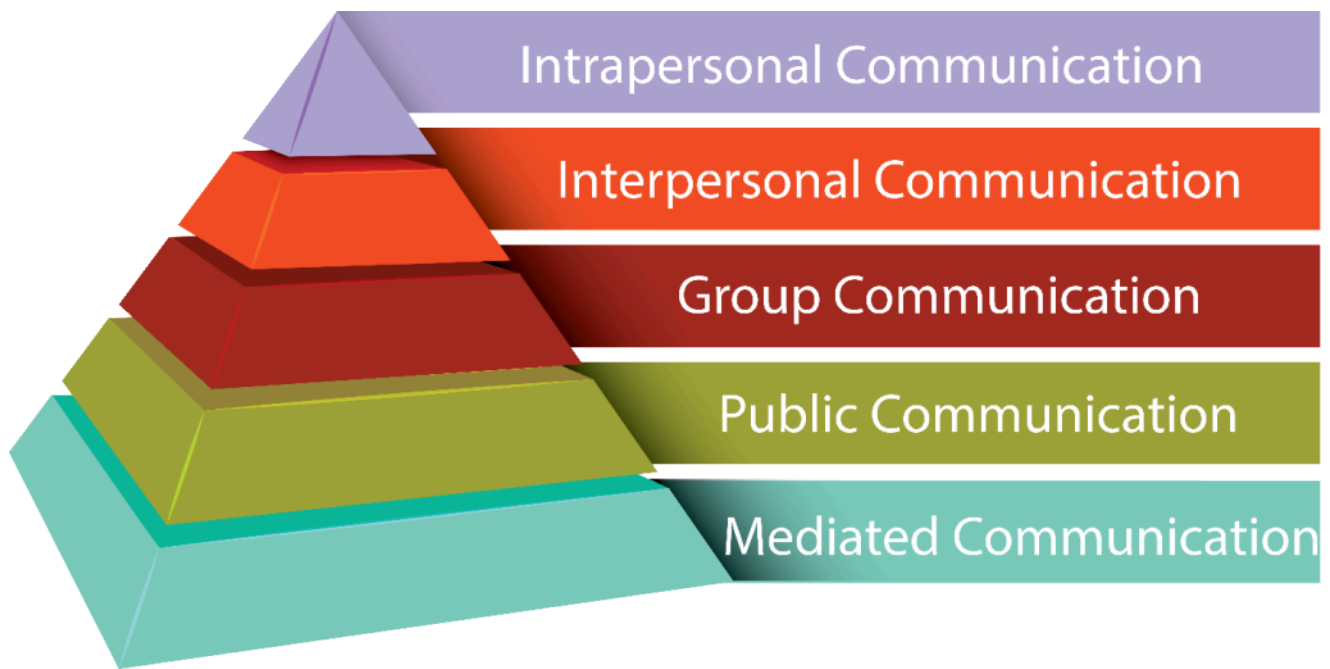


Figure 1.6 Levels of Communication

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication refers to communication phenomena that exist within or occurs because of an individual's self or mind. Some forms of intrapersonal communication can resemble a conversation one has with one's self. This "self-talk" often is used as a way to help us make decisions or make sense of the world around us. Maybe you've gone to the grocery store, and you're repeating your grocery list over and over in your head to make sure you don't forget anything. Maybe at the end of the day, you keep a diary or journal where you keep track of everything that has happened that day. Or perhaps you're having a debate inside your head on what major you should pick. You keep weighing the pros and cons of different majors, and you use this internal debate to help you flesh out your thoughts and feelings on the subject. All three of these examples help illustrate some of what is covered by the term "intrapersonal communication."

Today scholars view the term "intrapersonal communication" a little more broadly than just the internal self-talk we engage in. Communication scholar Samuel Riccillo primarily discusses intrapersonal communication as a factor of biology.¹⁴ Under this perspective, we must think about the biological underpinnings of how we can communicate. The human brain is probably the single most crucial physiological part of human interactions. We know that how people communicate can be greatly impacted by their brains. As such, our definition of intrapersonal communication is broad enough to include both traditional discussions of self-talk and more modern examinations of how the human body helps or hinders our ability to communicate effectively.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication, which is what this book is all about, focuses on the exchange of messages between two people. Our days are full of interpersonal communication. You wake up, roll over, and say good morning to your significant other, then you've had your first interpersonal interaction of the day. You meet your best friend for coffee before work and discuss the ins and outs of children's lives; you're engaging in interpersonal communication again. You go to work and work with a coworker on a project; once again, you're engaging in interpersonal communication. You then shoot off an email to your babysitter, reminding him to drop by the house at seven so you and your partner can have a night out. Yep, this is interpersonal communication too. You drop by your doctor's office for your annual physical, and the two of you talk about any health issues, this is also a form of interpersonal communication. You text your child to remind him that he has play practice at 5:00 pm and then needs to come home immediately afterward, you've engaged in interpersonal interaction. Hopefully, you're beginning to realize that our days are filled with tons of interpersonal interactions on any given day.

Some scholars also refer to interpersonal communication as dyadic communication because it involves two people or a dyad. As you saw above, the type of dyad can range from intimate partners, to coworkers, to doctor-patient, to friends, to parent-child, and many other dyadic partnerships. Now we can engage in these interactions through verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and mediated communication. When we use words during our interaction to convey specific meaning, then we're engaging in verbal communication. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, refers to a range of other factors that can impact how we understand each other. For example, the facial expressions you have. You could be talking to your best friend over coffee about a coworker and "his problems" while rolling your eyes to emphasize how overly dramatic and nonsensical you find the person. A great deal of how we interpret the verbal message of someone is based on the nonverbal messages sent at the same time. Lastly, we engage in interpersonal interactions using mediated technologies like the cellphone, emailing, texts, Facebook posts, Tweets, etc. Your average professional spends a great deal of her day responding to emails that come from one person, so the email exchange is a form of interpersonal communication.

Small Group Communication

The next type of communication studied by communication scholars, but still important for interpersonal communication, is small group communication. Although different scholars will differ on the exact number of people that make a group, we can say that a **group** is at least three people interacting with a common goal. Sometimes these groups could be as large as 15, but larger groups become much harder to manage and end up with more problems. One of the hallmarks of a small group is the ability for all the group members to engage in interpersonal interactions with all the other group members.

We engage in small groups throughout our lives. Chances are you've engaged in some kind of group project for a grade while you've been in school. This experience may have been a great one or a horrible one depending on the personalities within the group, the ability of the group to accomplish the goal, the in-fighting of group members, and many other factors. Whether you like group work or not, you will engage in many groups (some effective and some ineffective) over your lifespan. We're all born into a family, which is a specific type of group relationship. When you were younger, you may have been in play-groups. As you grew older, you had groups of friends you did things with. As you enter into the professional world, you will probably be on some kind of work "team," which is just a specialized type of group. In other words, group communication is a part of life.

Public Communication

The next category of communication is called public communication. **Public communication** occurs when an individual or group of individuals send a specific message to an audience. This one-to-many way of communicating is often necessary when groups become too large to maintain interactions with all group members. One of the most common forms of public communication is public speaking. As I am writing this chapter, we are right in the middle of the primary season for the 2020 Presidential election. People of all political stripes have been attending candidate speeches in record-breaking numbers this year.

The size the audience one speaks to will impact how someone delivers a speech. If you're to give a speech to ten people, you'll have the ability to watch all of your audience members and receive real-time feedback as people nod their heads in agreement or disagreement. On the other hand, if you're speaking to 10,000+ people at once, there is no way for a speaker to watch all of their audience members and get feedback. With a smaller audience, a speaker can adapt their message on the fly as they interpret audience feedback. With a larger audience, a speaker is more likely to deliver a very prepared speech that does not alter based on individual audience members' feedback. Although this book is not a public speaking book, we would recommend that anyone take a public speaking class because it's such an essential and valuable skill in the 21st Century. As we are bombarded with more and more messages, being an effective speaker is more important today than ever before.

Mediated Communication

The final type of communication is **mediated communication**, or the use of some form of technology to facilitate information between two or more people. We already mentioned a few forms of mediated communication when we talked about interpersonal communication: phone calls, emails, text messaging, etc. In each of these cases, mediated technology is utilized to facilitate the share of information between two people.

Most mediated communication occurs because technology functions as the link between someone sending information and someone receiving information. For example, you go online and look up the statistics from last night's baseball game. The website you choose is the link between you and the reporter who authored the information. In the same way, if you looked up these same results in a newspaper, the newspaper would be the link between you and the reporter who wrote the article. The technology may have changed from print to electronic journalism, but the basic concept is still very much alive.

Today we are surrounded by a ton of different media options. Some common ones include cable, satellite television, the World Wide Web, content streaming services (i.e., Netflix, Hulu, etc.), social media, magazines, voice over internet protocol (VoIP – Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.), and so many others. We have more forms of mediated communication today than we have ever had before in history. Most of us will only experience and use a fraction of the mediated communication technologies that are available for us today.

Key Takeaways

- Intrapersonal communication is communication within yourself.
- Interpersonal communication is the exchange of messages between two people.
- Small group communication consists of three or more individuals.
- Public communication is where you have one speaker and a large audience.
- Mediated communication involves messages sent through a medium to aid the message.

Exercises

- What are some benefits to mediated communication? What are some drawbacks? How does it impact the message?
- Which type of communication would be the most difficult/easiest to study and why?
- As a group, think of some possible research studies for each type of communication? Why would it be important to study?

Understanding Mindful Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term “mindfulness.”
2. Describe the basic model of mindfulness.
3. Discuss the five facets of mindfulness.
4. Explain the relationship between mindfulness and interpersonal communication.

The words “mindful,” “mindfulness,” and “mindlessness” have received a lot of attention both within academic circles and outside of them. Many people hear the word “mindful” and picture a yogi sitting on a mountain peak in lotus position meditating while listening to the wind. And for some people, that form of mindfulness is perfectly fine, but it's not necessarily beneficial for the rest of us. Instead, mindfulness has become a tool that can be used to improve all facets of an individual's life. In this section, we're going to explore what mindfulness and develop an understanding of what we will call in this book “mindful communication.”

Defining Mindfulness

As such, there are several different definitions that have appeared trying to explain what these terms mean. Let's look at just a small handful of definitions that have been put forward for the term "mindfulness."

1. "[M]indfulness as a particular type of social practice that leads the practitioner to an ethically minded awareness, intentionally situated in the here and now."¹⁵
2. "[D]eliberate, open-minded awareness of moment-to-moment perceptible experience that ordinarily requires gradual refinement by means of systematic practice; is characterized by a nondiscursive, nonanalytic investigation of ongoing experience; is fundamentally sustained by such attitudes as kindness, tolerance, patience, and courage; and is markedly different from everyday modes of awareness."¹⁶
3. "[T]he process of drawing novel distinctions... The process of drawing novel distinctions can lead to a number of diverse consequences, including (1) a greater sensitivity to one's environment, (2) more openness to new information, (3) the creation of new categories for structuring perception, and (4) enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving."¹⁷
4. "Mindfulness is a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context, with an open, nonjudgmental orientation to experience."¹⁸
5. "[F]ocusing one's attention in a nonjudgmental or accepting way on the experience occurring in the present moment [and] can be contrasted with states of mind in which attention is focused elsewhere, including preoccupation with memories, fantasies, plans, or worries, and behaving automatically without awareness of one's actions."¹⁹
6. "[T]he focus of a person's attention is opened to admit whatever enters experience, while at the same time, a stance of kindly curiosity allows the person to investigate whatever appears, without falling prey to automatic judgment or reactivity."²⁰
7. "Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."²¹
8. "Mindfulness is the practice of returning to being centred in this living moment right now and right here, being openly and kindly present to our own immediate mental, emotional, and bodily experiencing, and without judgment."²²
9. "[A]wareness of one's internal states and surroundings. The concept has been applied to various therapeutic interventions—for example, mindfulness-based cognitive behaviour therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and mindfulness meditation—to help people avoid destructive or automatic habits and responses by learning to observe their thoughts, emotions, and other present-moment experiences without judging or reacting to them."²³
10. "[A] multifaceted construct that includes paying attention to present-moment experiences, labelling them with words, acting with awareness, avoiding automatic pilot, and bringing an attitude of openness, acceptance, willingness, allowing, nonjudging, kindness, friendliness, and curiosity to all observed experiences."²⁴

What we generally see within these definitions of the term "mindfulness" is a spectrum of ideas ranging from more traditional Eastern perspectives on mindfulness (usually stemming out of Buddhism) to more Western perspectives on mindfulness arising out of the pioneering research conducted by Ellen Langer.²⁵

Towards a Mindfulness Model

Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson, take the notion of mindfulness a step further and try to differentiate between mindful awareness and mindful practice:

- (a) Mindful awareness, an abiding presence or awareness, a deep knowing that contributes to freedom of the mind (e.g. freedom from reflexive conditioning and delusion) and (b) mindful practice, the systematic practice of intentionally attending in an open, caring, and discerning way, which involves both knowing and shaping the mind. To capture both aspects we define the construct of mindfulness as "the awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, caring, and discerning way."²⁶

The importance of this perspective is that Shapiro and Carlson recognize that mindfulness is a cognitive, behavioural, and affective process. So, let's look at each of these.

Mindful Awareness

First, we have the notion of mindful awareness. Most of what **mindful awareness** is attending to what's going on around you at a deeper level. Let's start by thinking about awareness as a general concept. According to the American Psychological Association's dictionary, awareness is "perception or knowledge of something."²⁷ Awareness involves recognizing or understanding an idea or phenomenon. For example, take a second and think about your breathing. Most of the time, we are not aware of our breathing because our body is designed to perform this activity for us unconsciously. We don't have to remind ourselves to breathe in and out with every breath. If we did, we'd never be able to sleep or do anything else. However, if you take a second and focus on your breathing, you are consciously aware of your breathing. Most breathing exercises, whether for acting, meditation, public speaking, singing, etc., are designed to make you aware of your breath since we are not conscious of our breathing most of the time.

Mindful awareness takes being aware to a different level. Going back to our breathing example. Take a second and focus again on your breathing. Now ask yourself a few questions:

- a. How do you physically feel while breathing? Why?
- b. What are you thinking about while breathing?
- c. What emotions do you experience while breathing?

The goal then of mindful awareness is to be consciously aware of what you're physical presence, cognitive processes, and emotional state while engaged in an activity. More importantly, it's not about judging these; it's simply about being aware and noticing.

Mindful Practice

Mindful practice, as described by Shapiro and Carlson, is "the conscious development of skills such as greater ability to direct and sustain our attention, less reactivity, greater discernment and compassion, and enhanced capacity to disidentify from one's concept of self."²⁸ To help further explore the concept of mindful practice, Shauna Shapiro, Linda Carlson, John Astin, and Benedict Freedman proposed a three-component model (Figure 1.7): attention, intention, and attitude.²⁹

Attention

"*Attention* involves attending fully to the present moment instead of allowing ourselves to become preoccupied with the past or future."³⁰ Essentially, **attention** is being aware of what's happening internally and externally moment-to-moment. By internally, we're talking about what's going on in your head. What are your thoughts and feelings? By externally, what's going on in your physical environment. To be mindful, someone must be able to focus on the here and now. Unfortunately, humans aren't very good at being attentive. Our minds tend to wander about 47% of the time.³¹ Some people say that humans suffer from "monkey mind," or the tendency of our thoughts to swing from one idea to the next.³² As such, being mindful is partially being aware of when our minds start to shift to other ideas and then refocusing ourselves.

Intention

"**Intention** involves knowing *why* we are doing what we are doing: our ultimate aim, our vision, and our

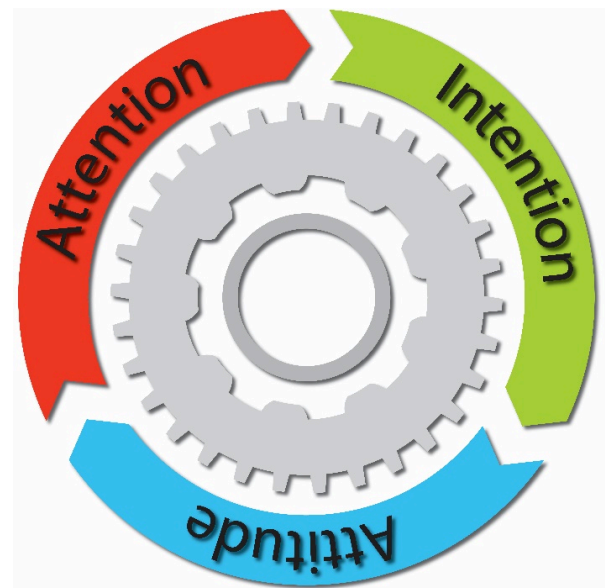


Figure 1.7 Model of Mindfulness

aspiration.”³³ So the second step in mindful practice is knowing why you’re doing something. Let’s say that you’ve decided that you want to start exercising more. If you wanted to engage in a more mindful practice of exercise, the first step would be figuring out why you want to exercise and what your goals are. Do you want to exercise because you know you need to be healthier? Are you exercising because you’re worried about having a heart attack? Are you exercising because you want to get a bikini body before the summer? Again, the goal here is simple, be honest with ourselves about our intentions.

Attitude

“**Attitude**, or *how* we pay attention, enables us to stay open, kind, and curious.”³⁴ Essentially, we can all bring different perspectives when we’re attending to something. For example, “attention can have a cold, critical quality, or an openhearted, curious, and compassionate quality.”³⁵ As you can see, we can approach being mindful from different vantage points, so the “attitude with which you undertake the practice of paying attention and being in the present is crucial”³⁶ One of the facets of mindfulness is being open and nonjudging, so having that “cold, critical quality” is antithetical to being mindful. Instead, the goal of mindfulness must be one of openness and non-judgment.

So, what types of attitudes should one attempt to develop to be mindful? Daniel Siegel proposed the acronym COAL when thinking about our attitudes: curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love.³⁷

1. C stands for curiosity (inquiring without being judgmental).
2. O stands for openness (having the freedom to experience what is occurring as simply the truth, without judgments).
3. A stands for acceptance (taking as a given the reality of and the need to be precisely where you are).
4. L stands for love (being kind, compassionate, and empathetic to others and to yourself).³⁸

Jon Kabat-Zinn, on the other hand, recommends seven specific attitudes that are necessary for mindfulness:

1. Nonjudging: observing without categorizing or evaluating.
2. Patience: accepting and tolerating the fact that things happen in their own time.
3. Beginner’s-Mind: seeing everything as if for the very first time.
4. Trust: believing in ourselves, our experiences, and our feelings.
5. Non-striving: being in the moment without specific goals.
6. Acceptance: seeing things as they are without judgment.
7. Letting Go: allowing things to be as they are and getting bogged down by things we cannot change.

Neither Siegel’s COAL or Kabat-Zinn’s seven attitudes is an exhaustive list of attitudes that can be important to mindfulness. Still, they give you a representative idea of the types of attitudes that can impact mindfulness. Ultimately, “the attitude that we bring to the practice of mindfulness will to a large extent determine its long-term value. This is why consciously cultivating certain attitudes can be very helpful... Keeping particular attitudes in mind is actually part of the training itself.”³⁹

Five Facets of Mindfulness

From a social scientific point-of-view, one of the most influential researchers in the field of mindfulness has been Ruth Baer. Dr. Baer’s most significant contribution to the field has been her Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, which you can take on her [website](#). Dr. Baer’s research concluded that there are five different facets of mindfulness: observing, describing, acting with awareness, nonjudging of inner experience, and nonreactivity to inner experience (Figure 1.8).⁴⁰

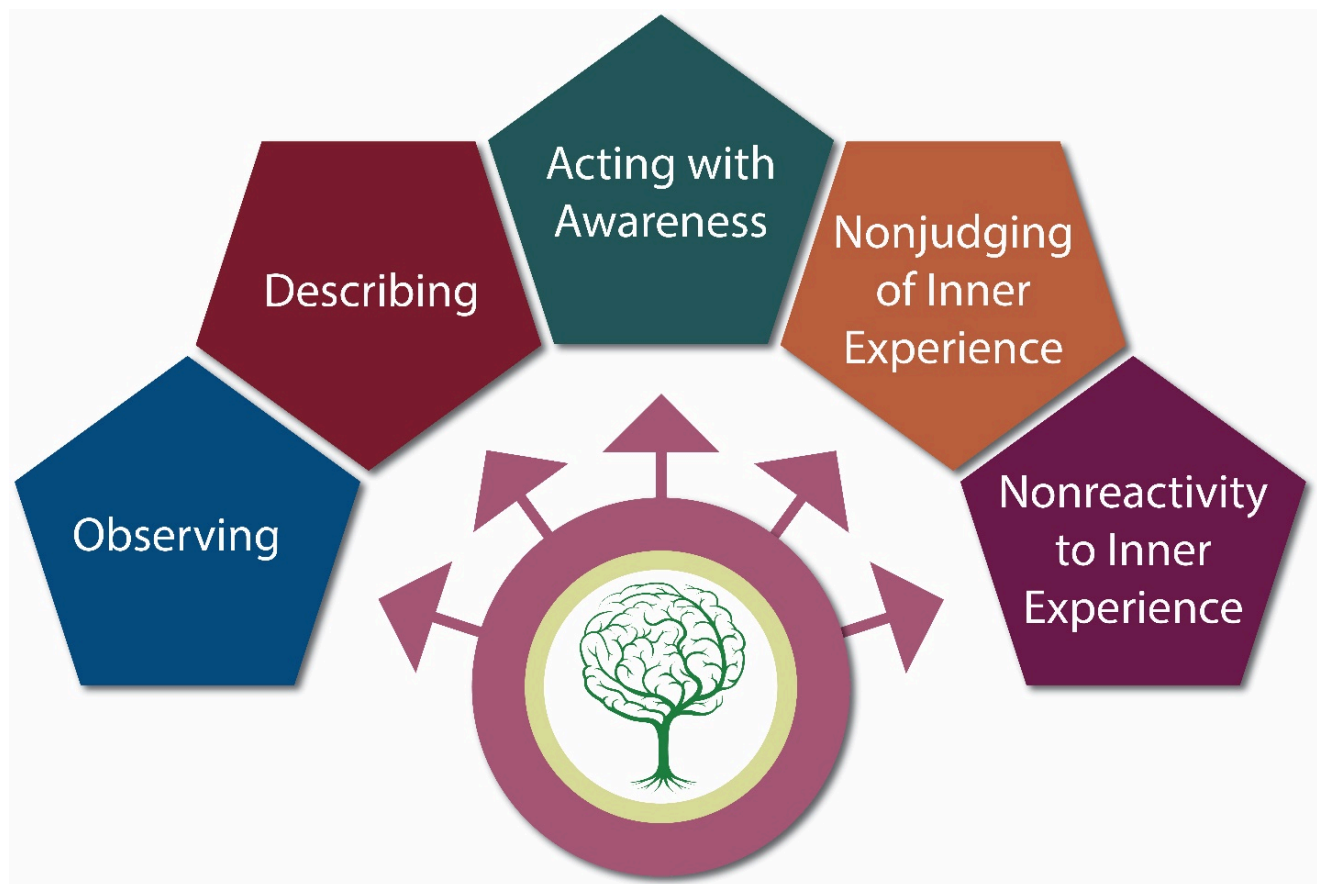


Figure 1.8 Five Facets of Mindfulness

Observing

The first facet of mindfulness is **observing**, or “noticing or attending to a variety of internal or external phenomena (e.g., bodily sensations, cognitions, emotions, sounds).”⁴¹ When one is engaged in mindfulness, one of the basic goals is to be aware of what is going on inside yourself and in the external environment. Admittedly, staying in the moment and observing can be difficult because our minds are always trying to shift to new topics and ideas (again that darn monkey brain).

Describing

The second facet of mindfulness is **describing**, or “putting into words observations of inner experiences of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sensations, and emotions.”⁴² The goal of describing is to stay in the moment by being detailed focused on what is occurring. We should note that having a strong vocabulary does make describing what is occurring much easier.

Acting with Awareness

The third facet of mindfulness is **acting with awareness**, or “engaging fully in one’s present activity rather than functioning on automatic pilot.”⁴³ When it comes to acting with awareness, it’s important to focus one’s attention purposefully. In our day-to-day lives, we often engage in behaviours without being consciously aware of what we are doing. For example, have you ever thought about your routine for showering? Most of us have a pretty specific ritual we use in the shower (the steps we engage in as we shower). Still, most of us do this on autopilot without really taking the time to realize how ritualized this behaviour is.

Nonjudging of Inner Experience

The fourth facet of mindfulness is the **nonjudging of inner experience**, which involves being consciously aware of

one's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes without judging them. One of the hardest things for people when it comes to mindfulness is not judging themselves or their inner experiences. As humans, we are pretty judgmental and like to evaluate most things as positive or negative, good or bad, etc.... However, one of the goals of mindfulness is to be present and aware. As soon as you start judging your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, you stop being present and become focused on your evaluations and not your experiences.

Nonreactivity to Inner Experience

The last facet of mindfulness is **nonreactivity to inner experience** “Nonreactivity is about becoming consciously aware of distressing thoughts, emotions, and mental images without automatically responding to them.”⁴⁴ Nonreactivity to inner experience is related to the issue of not judging your inner experience, but the difference is in our reaction. Nonreactivity involves taking a step back and evaluating things from a more logical, dispassionate perspective. Often, we get so bogged down in our thoughts, emotions, and mental images that we end up preventing ourselves from engaging in life.

For example, one common phenomenon that plagues many people is imposter syndrome, or perceived intellectual phoniness.⁴⁵ Some people, who are otherwise very smart and skilled, start to believe that they are frauds and are just minutes away from being found out. Imagine being a brilliant brain surgeon but always afraid someone's going to figure out that you don't know what you're doing. Nonreactivity to our inner experience would involve realizing that we have these thoughts but not letting them influence our actual behaviours. Admittedly, nonreactivity to inner experience is easier described than done for many of us.

Mindfulness Activity



As a simple exercise to get you started in mindfulness, we want to spend 15 minutes colouring. Yep, you heard that right. We want you to colour. Now, this may seem a bit of an odd request, but research has shown us that colouring is an excellent activity for increasing mindfulness, reducing anxiety/stress, and increasing your mood.^{46,47,48,49} Colouring also has direct effects on our physiology by reducing our heart rates and blood pressure.⁵⁰ Colouring also helps college students reduce their test anxiety.⁵¹ For this exercise, we've created an interpersonal communication mandala-inspired colouring page. According to Lawrence Shapiro, author of *Mindful Coloring: A Simple and Fun Way to Reduce Stress in Your Life*, here are the basic steps you should take to engage in mindful

colouring:

- Set aside 5 to 15 minutes to practice mindful colouring.
- Find a time and place where you will not be interrupted.
- Gather your materials to do your colouring and sit comfortably at a table. You may want to set a time for 5 to 15 minutes. You should try and continue your mindful practice until the alarm goes off.
- Chose any design you like and begin colouring wherever you like.
- As you colour, start paying attention to your breathing. You will probably find that your breathing is becoming slower and deeper, but you don't have to *try* to relax. In fact, you don't have to try and do anything. Just pay attention to the design, to your choice of colours, and to the process of colouring.⁵²

After completing this simple exercise, answer the following questions:

1. How did it feel to just focus on colouring?
2. Did you find your mind wandering to other topics while colouring? If so, how did you refocus yourself?
3. How hard would it be to have that same level of concentration when you're talking with someone?

Interpersonal Communication and Mindfulness

For our purposes within this book, we want to look at issues related to mindful interpersonal communication that spans across these definitions. Although the idea of “mindfulness” and communication is not new,^{53,54} Judee Burgoon, Charles Berger, and Vincent Waldron were three of the first researchers to formulate a way of

envisioning mindfulness and interpersonal communication.⁵⁵ As with the trouble of defining mindfulness, there are different perspectives on what mindful communication is as well. Let's look at three fairly distinct definitions:

1. "Communication that is planful, effortfully processed, creative, strategic, flexible, and/or reason-based (as opposed to emotion-based) would seem to qualify as mindful, whereas communication that is reactive, superficially processed, routine, rigid, and emotional would fall toward the mindless end of the continuum."⁵⁶
2. "Mindful communication including mindful speech and deep listening are important. But we must not overlook the role of compassion, wisdom, and critical thinking in communication. We must be able empathize with others to see things from their perspective. We should not continue with our narrow prejudices so that we can start meaningful relationships with others. We can then come more easily to agreement and work together."⁵⁷
3. "Mindful communication includes the practice of mindful presence and encompasses the attributes of a nonjudgmental approach to [our interactions], staying actively present in the moment, and being able to rapidly adapt to change in an interaction."⁵⁸

As you can see, these perspectives on mindful communication align nicely with the discussion we had in the previous section related to mindfulness. However, there is not a single approach to what is "mindful communication." Each of these definitions can help us create an idea of what mindful communication is. For our purposes within this text, we plan on taking a broad view of mindful communication that encompasses both perspectives of secular mindfulness and non-secular mindfulness (primarily stemming out of the Buddhist tradition). As such, we define **mindful communication** as the process of interacting with others while engaging in mindful awareness and practice. Although more general than the definitions presented above, we believe that aligning our definition with mindful awareness and practice is beneficial because of the Shapiro and Carlson's existing mindfulness framework.⁵⁹

However, we do want to raise one note about the possibility of mindful communication competence. From a communication perspective, it's entirely possible to be mindful and not effective in one's communication. Burgoon, Berger, and Waldron wrote, "without the requisite communication skills to monitor their actions and adapt their messages, without the breadth of repertoire that enables flexible, novel thought processes to translate into creative action, a more mindful state may not lead to more successful communication."⁶⁰ As such, there has to be a marriage between mindfulness and communication skills. This book aims to provide a perspective that enhances both mindfulness and interpersonal communication skills.

Key Takeaways

- The term "mindfulness" encompasses a range of different definitions from the strictly religious (primarily Buddhist in nature) to the strictly secular (primarily psychological in nature). Simply, there is not an agreed upon definition.
- Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson separate out mindful awareness from mindful practice. Mindful practice involves three specific behaviours: attention (being aware of what's happening internally and externally moment-to-moment.), intention (being aware of why you are doing something), and attitude (being curious, open, and nonjudgmental).
- Ruth Baer created the five facets of mindfulness. The five facets of mindfulness are (1) observing (being aware of what is going on inside yourself and in the external environment), (2) describing (being detailed focused on what is occurring while putting it into words), (3) acting with awareness (purposefully focusing one's attention on the activity or interaction one is engaged), (4) nonjudging of inner experience (being consciously aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes without judging them), and (5) nonreactivity to inner experience (taking a step back and evaluate things from a more logical, dispassionate perspective). Mindful communication is the process of interacting with others while engaging in mindful awareness and practice. So much of what we do when we interact with people today centers around our ability to be mindful, in the moment with others. As such, examining how to be more mindful in our communication with others is essential to competent communication.

Exercises

- If you haven't already tried mindful colour, please take this opportunity to try it out. Give yourself 10 to 15 minutes in a quiet space to just sit and focus on the colouring. Try not to let yourself get disturbed by other things in your environment. Just focus on being present with your colours and the colouring sheet.
- Want to try something a bit deeper in mindfulness, consider starting simple meditation. Meditating is an important facet of mindfulness and not one that is specifically religious in nature at all. In fact, most religious traditions have some form of meditation practice built into the religion. Even atheists can meditate. Try a simple meditation like:

Seated Breath Meditation: This technique can help you:

- Enhance mental clarity
- Be fully present in the moment
- Understand your inner emotional state
- Feel grounded

Find a quiet place. Light a candle if you wish. Sit tall in your chair, feet on the floor; or sit comfortably on the floor. Align your spine, shoulders over hips, as if suspended from above. Hands can be in your lap or on your thighs, palms up, or press palms together at heart. Feel your posture as both rooted and energetic. Eyes can be closed or softly focused. Mouth is closed, tongue relaxed. Be sure you can breathe comfortably.

Center your awareness on your nostrils, where the air enters and leaves your body. Notice your breath. Begin counting your breaths, returning to one every time a thought intrudes. When thoughts come in, notice them, then let them go. Bring yourself back to your physical body, to the breath coming in and out.

Source: Thousand Waves Martial Arts & Self Defense Center (thousandwaves.org)

- Want to try some longer meditation practices. [The Free Mindfulness Project](#) has links to a number of mindfulness audio files.

Key Terms

acting with awareness

Purposefully focusing one's attention on the activity or interaction one is engaged.

attention

Factor of mindful practice that involves being aware of what's happening internally and externally moment-to-moment.

attitude

Factor of mindful practice that involves being curious, open, and nonjudgmental.

cognitive complexity

communication

communication competence

connotative definitions

denotative definitions

describing

Being detailed focused on what is occurring while putting it into words.

effective communication

group

Three or more people interacting together to achieve a common goal.

intrapersonal communication

Communication phenomena that exist within or occurs because of an individual's self or mind.

intention

Factor of mindful practice that involves being aware of why you are doing something.

interpersonal communication

The exchange of messages between two people.

mediated communication

The use of some form of technology to facilitate information between two or more people.

mindful awareness

To be consciously aware of what your physical presence, cognitive processes, and emotional state while engaged in an activity.

mindful communication

The process of interacting with others while engaging in mindful awareness and practice

mindful practice

The conscious development of skills such as greater ability to direct and sustain our attention, less reactivity, greater discernment and compassion, and enhanced capacity to disidentify from one's concept of self.

nonjudging of inner experience

Being consciously aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes without judging them.

nonreactivity to inner experience

Taking a step back and evaluate things from a more logical, dispassionate perspective.

observing

Being aware of what is going on inside yourself and in the external environment.

public communication

Form of communication where an individual or group of individuals sends a specific message to an audience.

self-monitoring**symbol**

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we explored why it's important to study human communication, the basic principles of human communication, the nature of communication competence, the types of human communication, and mindful communication. We hope this chapter makes you interested in staying with us throughout the rest of the book as we explore interpersonal communication.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Noam is a freshman in college and doesn't understand why he needs to take a communication studies course. He doesn't see the importance or application of this course. He wants to be an engineer. His math and engineering classes are more exciting than a communications course. He has been talking his whole life and is very popular. Can you convince him why communication is important for Noam?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Which of the following are reasons for studying communication?
 - a. to increase our effectiveness
 - b. gives us a new perspective
 - c. because we spend so much time doing it

- d. a and b
 - e. all of the above
2. My mother told me that I would succeed at anything I put my mind to and that I could achieve anything. Which type of need is this example?
- a. physical
 - b. practical
 - c. identity
 - d. social
 - e. affectionate
3. Communication is all the following except:
- a. purposeful
 - b. contains a relationship dimension
 - c. contains a content dimension
 - d. culturally determined
 - e. assumed
4. An individual at a concert flashes a friend the “peace sign” using her index and middle finger to form the letter “v.” This is an example of what?
- a. a sign
 - b. a word
 - c. mediated communication
 - d. an emoji
 - e. a symbol
5. Which type of communication involves the exchange of messages between two people?
- a. intrapersonal
 - b. interpersonal
 - c. small group
 - d. public
 - e. mass

Notes

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[2]

Overview of Interpersonal Communication

Cardi and Tilly have been friends since they were both in kindergarten. They are both applying to the same college, hoping to be roommates. However, Cardi gets accepted, but Tilly does not. Cardi is crushed because she wanted to share her college experience with her best friend. Tilly tells Cardi to go without her and she will try again next year after attending the local junior college for a semester. Cardi is not as excited to go to college anymore, because she is worried about Tilly. Cardi talks about different options with her parents, her other friends, and posts about it on social media. This idea of sharing our experiences, whether it be positive, or negative is interpersonal communication. When we offer information to other people and they offer information towards us, it is defined as interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal Communication can be informal (the checkout line) or formal (lecture classroom). Often, interpersonal communication occurs in face-to-face contexts. It is usually unplanned, spontaneous, and ungrammatical. Think about the conversations that you have with your friends and family. These are mainly interpersonal in nature. It is essential to learn about interpersonal communication because this is the type of communication that you will be doing for most of your life. At most colleges, public speaking is a required course. Yet, most people will not engage in making a public speech for the majority of their life, but they will communicate with one other person daily, which is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication can help us achieve our personal and professional goals. In this chapter, you will learn the concepts associated with interpersonal communication and how certain variables can help you achieve your goals.

In this chapter, you will learn about ways to make communication more effective. You will learn about communication models that might influence how a message is sent and/or received. You will also learn about characteristics that influence the message and can cause others not to accept or understand the message that you were trying to send.

Elements of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Understand that communication is a process.
2. Differentiate among the components of communication processes and communication models.
3. Describe the differences between the sender and receiver of a message.

You may think that communication is easy. However, at moments in your life, communication might be hard and difficult to understand. We can study communication similar to the way we study other systems. There are elements to the communication process that are important to understand. Each interaction that we have will typically include a sender, receiver, message, channel, feedback, and noise. Let's take a closer look at each one.

Sender

Humans encode messages naturally, and we don't often consider this part of the process. However, if you have ever thought about the exact words that you would use to get a later curfew from your parents/guardians and how you might refute any counterpoints, then you intuitively know that choosing the right words – “encoding” – weighed heavily in your ability to influence your parents/guardians successfully. The language you chose mattered.

The sender is the encoder or **source** of the message. The sender is the person who decides to communicate and the intent of the message. The source may decide to send messages to entertain, persuade, inform, include, or escape. Often, the sources will create a message based on their feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and past experiences. For instance, if you have feelings of affection towards someone but never communicate those feelings toward that person, they will never know. The sender can withhold or release information.

Receiver

The transactional model of communication teaches us that we are both the sender and receiver simultaneously. The **receiver(s)** is the individual who decodes the message and tries to understand the source of the message. Receivers have to filter messages based on their attitudes, beliefs, opinions, values, history, and prejudices. People will encode messages through their five senses. We have to pay attention to the source of the message to receive the message. If the receiver does not get the message, then communication did not occur. The receiver needs to obtain a message.

Daily, you will receive several messages. Some of these messages are intentional. And some of these messages will be unintentional. For instance, a person waving in your direction might be waving to someone behind you, but you accidentally think they are waving at you. Some messages will be easy to understand, and some messages will be hard to interpret. Every time a person sends a message, they are also receiving messages simultaneously.

Message

Messages include any type of textual, verbal, and nonverbal aspects of communication, in which individuals give meaning. People send messages intentionally (texting a friend to meet for coffee) or unintentionally (accidentally falling asleep during lectures). Messages can be verbal (saying hello to your parents/guardians), nonverbal (hugging your parents/guardians), or text (words on a computer screen). Essentially, communication is how messages create meaning. Yet, meanings differ among people. For instance, a friend of yours promises to repay you for the money they borrowed, and they say “sorry” for not having any money to give you. You might think they were insincere, but another person might think that it was a genuine apology. People can vary in their interpretations of messages.

Channel

With advances in technology, cell phones act as many different **channels** of communication at once. Consider that smartphones allow us to talk and text. Also, we can receive communication through Facebook, Twitter, Email, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, and Vox. All of these channels are in addition to our traditional channels, which were face-to-face communication, letter writing, telegram, and the telephone. The addition of these new communication channels has changed our lives forever. The channel is the medium in which we communicate our message. Think about breaking up a romantic relationship. Would you rather do it via face-to-face or via a text message? Why did you answer the way that you did? The channel can impact the message.

Now, think about how you hear important news. Do you learn about it from the Internet, social media, television, newspaper, or others? The channel is the medium in which you learn about information.

It may seem like a silly thing to talk about channels, but a channel can make an impact on how people receive the message. For instance, a true story tells about a professional athlete who proposed marriage to his girlfriend by sending her the ring through the postal mail service. He sent her a ring and a recorded message asking her to marry him. She declined his proposal and refused to return the ring.¹⁴ In this case, the channel might have been better if he asked her face-to-face.

Just be mindful of how the channel can affect the way that a receiver reacts and responds to your message. For instance, a handwritten love letter might be more romantic than a typed email. On the other hand, if there was some tragic news about your family, you would probably want someone to call you immediately rather than sending you a letter.

Overall, people naturally know that the message impacts which channel they might use. In a research study focused on channels, college students were asked about the best channels for delivering messages.¹⁵ College students said that they would communicate face-to-face if the message was positive, but use mediated channels if the message was negative.

Feedback

Feedback is the response to the message. If there is no feedback, communication would not be effective. Feedback is important because the sender needs to know if the receiver got the message. Simultaneously, the receiver usually will give the sender some sort of message that they comprehend what has been said. If there is no feedback or if it seems that the receiver did not understand the message, then it is negative feedback. However, if the receiver understood the message, then it is positive feedback. Positive feedback does not mean that the receiver entirely agrees with the sender of the message, but rather the message was comprehended. Sometimes feedback is not positive or negative; it can be ambiguous. Examples of ambiguous feedback might include saying “hmmm” or “interesting.” Based on these responses, it is not clear if the receiver of the message understood part or the entire message. It is important to note that feedback doesn’t have to come from other people. Sometimes, we can be critical of our own words when we write them in a text or say them out loud. We might correct our words and change how we communicate based on our internal feedback.

Environment

The context or situation where communication occurs and affects the experience is referred to as the **environment**. We know that the way you communicate in a professional context might be different than in a personal context. In other words, you probably won’t talk to your boss the same way you would talk to your best friend. (An exception might be if your best friend was also your boss). The environment will affect how you communicate. For instance, in a library, you might talk more quietly than normal so that you don’t disturb other library patrons. However, in a nightclub or bar, you might speak louder than normal due to the other people talking, music, or noise. Hence, the environment makes a difference in the way in which you communicate with others.

It is also important to note that environments can be related to fields of experience or a person’s past experiences or background. For instance, a town hall meeting that plans to cut primary access to lower socioeconomic residents might be perceived differently by individuals who use these services and those who do not. Environments might overlap, but sometimes they do not. Some people in college have had many family members who attended the same school, but other people do not have any family members that ever attended college.

Noise

Anything that interferes with the message is called **noise**. Noise keeps the message from being completely understood by the receiver. If noise is absent, then the message would be accurate. However, usually, noise impacts the message in some way. Noise might be physical (e.g., television, cell phone, fan, etc.), or it might be psychological (e.g., thinking about your parents/guardians or missing someone you love). Noise is anything that hinders or distorts the message.

There are four types of noise. The first type is physical noise. This is noise that comes from a physical object. For instance, people talking, birds chirping, a jackhammer pounding concrete, a car revving by, are all different types of physical noise.

The second type of noise is psychological noise. This is the noise that no one else can see unless you are a mind reader. It is the noise that occurs in a person’s mind, such as frustration, anger, happiness, or depression. When you talk to a person, they might act and behave like nothing is wrong, but deep inside their mind, they might be dealing with a lot of other issues or problems. Hence, psychological noise is difficult to see or understand because it happens in the other person’s mind.

The third type of noise is semantic noise, which deals with language. This could refer to jargon, accents, or language use. Sometimes our messages are not understood by others because of the word choice. For instance, if a person used the word “lit,” it would probably depend on the other words accompanying the word “lit” and or the context. To say that “this party is lit” would mean something different compared to “he lit a cigarette.” If you were

coming from another country, that word might mean something different. Hence, sometimes language-related problems, where the receiver can't understand the message, are referred to as semantic noise.

The fourth and last type of noise is called physiological noise. This type of noise is because the receiver's body interferes or hinders the acceptance of a message. For instance, if the person is blind, they are unable to see any written messages that you might send. If the person is deaf, then they are unable to hear any spoken messages. If the person is very hungry, then they might pay more attention to their hunger than any other message.

Mindfulness Activity



We live in a world where there is constant noise. Practice being mindful of sound. Find a secluded spot and just close your eyes. Focus on the sounds around you. Do you notice certain sounds more than others? Why? Is it because you place more importance on those sounds compared to other sounds?

Sounds can be helpful to your application of mindfulness.¹⁶ Some people prefer paying attention to sounds rather than their breath when meditating. The purpose of this activity is to see if you can discern some sounds more than others. Some people might find these sounds noisy and very distracting. Others might find the sounds calming and relaxing.

If you watch old episodes of Superman, you might see scenes where he has to concentrate on hearing the sounds of someone calling for help. Superman can filter all the other sounds in the world to figure out where he needs to focus his attention.

There will be many times in life where you will be distracted because you might be overwhelmed with all the noise. It is essential to take a few minutes, just to be mindful of the noise and how you can deal with all the distractions. Once you are aware of the things that trigger these distractions or noise, then you will be able to be more focused and to be a better communicator.

Key Takeaways

- Communication is a process because senders and receivers act as senders and receivers simultaneously, with the receiver's feedback serving as a key element to continuing the process.
- The components of the communication process involve the source, sender, channel, message, environment, and noise.

Exercises

- Think of your most recent communication with another individual. Write down this conversation and, within the conversation, identify the components of the communication process.
- Think about the different types of noise that affect communication. Can you list some examples of how noise can make communication worse?
- Think about the advantages and disadvantages of different channels. Write down the pros and cons of the different channels of communication.

Perception Process

Learning Objectives

1. Describe perception and aspects of interpersonal perception.

2. List and explain the three stages of the perception process.
3. Understand the relationship between interpersonal communication and perception.

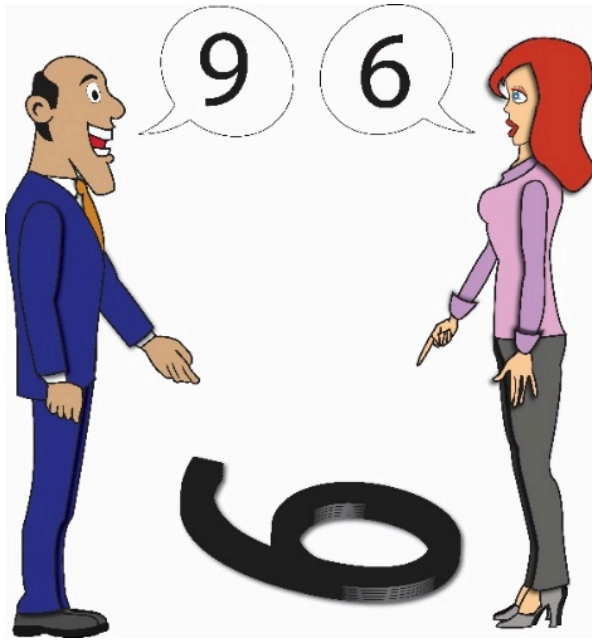


Figure 2.2 It's All About Perception

As you can see from the picture, how you view something is also how you will describe and define it. Your perception of something will determine how you feel about it and how you will communicate about it. In the picture above, do you see it as a six or a nine? Why did you answer the way that you did?

Your perceptions affect who you are, and they are based on your experiences and preferences. If you have a horrible experience with a restaurant, you probably won't go to that restaurant in the future. You might even tell others not to go to that restaurant based on your personal experience. Thus, it is crucial to understand how perceptions can influence others.

Sometimes the silliest arguments occur with others because we don't understand their perceptions of things. Just like the illustration shows, it is important to make sure that you see things the same way that the other person does. In other words, put yourself in their shoes and see it from their perspective before jumping to conclusions or getting upset. That person might have a legitimate reason why they are not willing to concede with you.

Perception

Many of our problems in the world occur due to **perception**, or the process of acquiring, interpreting, and organizing information that comes in through your five senses. When we don't get all the facts, it is hard to make a concrete decision. We have to rely on our perceptions to understand the situation. In this section, you will learn tools that can help you understand perceptions and improve your communication skills. As you will see in many of the illustrations on perception, people can see different things. In some of the pictures, some might only be able to see one picture, but there might be others who can see both images, and a small amount might be able to see something completely different from the rest of the class.

Many famous artists over the years have played with people's perceptions. Figure 2.3 is an example of three artists' use of twisted perceptions. The first picture was initially created by Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin and is commonly called The Rubin Vase. Essentially, you have what appears to either be a vase (the white part) or two people looking at each other (the black part). This simple image is both two images and neither image at the same time. The second work of art is Charles Allan Gilbert's (1892) painting "All is Vanity." In this painting, you can see a woman sitting staring at herself in the mirror. At the same time, the image is also a giant skull. Lastly, we have William Ely Hill (1915) "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law," which may have been loosely based on an 1888 German postcard. In Hill's painting, you have two different images, one of a young woman and one of an older woman. The painting was initially published in an American humor magazine called *Puck*. The caption "They are both in this picture — Find them" ran alongside the picture. These visual images are helpful reminders that we don't always perceive things in the same way as those around us. There are often multiple ways to view and understand the same set of events.

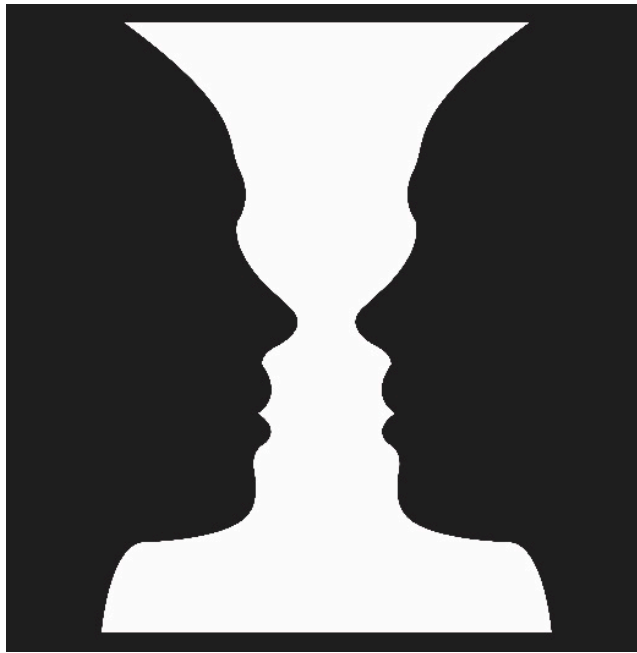


Figure 2.3a The Rubin Vase – based on Edgar John Rubin's (1915) "Vase Ambiguous Figure"



Figure 2.3b Charles Allan Gilbert (1892) "All is Vanity"



Figure 2.3c William Ely Hill (1915) "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law"

When it comes to interpersonal communication, each time you talk to other people, you present a side of yourself. Sometimes this presentation is a true representation of yourself, and other times it may be a fake version of yourself. People present themselves how they want others to see them. Some people present themselves positively on social media, and they have wonderful relationships. Then, their followers or fans get shocked to learn when those images are not true to what is presented. If we only see one side of things, we might be surprised to learn that things are different. In this section, we will learn that the perception process has three stages: attending, organizing, and interpreting.

Attending

The first step of the perception process is to select what information you want to pay attention to or focus on, which is called **attending**. You will pay attention to things based on how they look, feel, smell, touch, and taste. At every moment, you are obtaining a large amount of information. So, how do you decide what you want to pay attention to and what you choose to ignore? People will tend to pay attention to things that matter to them. Usually, we pay attention to things that are louder, larger, different, and more complex to what we ordinarily view.

When we focus on a particular thing and ignore other elements, we call it selective perception. For instance, when you are in love, you might pay attention to only that special someone and not notice anything else. The same thing happens when we end a relationship, and we are devastated, we might see how everyone else is in a great relationship, but we aren't.

There are a couple of reasons why you pay attention to certain things more so than others.

The first reason why we pay attention to something is because it is extreme or intense. In other words, it stands out of the crowd and captures our attention, like an extremely good looking person at a party or a big neon sign in a dark, isolated town. We can't help but notice these things because they are exceptional or extraordinary in some way.

Second, we will pay attention to things that are different or contradicting. Commonly, when people enter an elevator, they face the doors. Imagine if someone entered the elevator and stood with their back to the elevator

doors staring at you. You might pay attention to this person more than others because the behaviour is unusual. It is something that you don't expect, and that makes it stand out more to you. On another note, different could also be something that you are not used to or something that no longer exists for you. For instance, if you had someone very close to you pass away, then you might pay more attention to the loss of that person than to anything else. Some people grieve for an extended period because they were so used to having that person around, and things can be different since you don't have them to rely on or ask for input.

The third thing that we pay attention to is something that repeats over and over again. Think of a catchy song or a commercial that continually repeats itself. We might be more alert to it since it repeats, compared to something that was only said once.

The fourth thing that we will pay attention to is based on our motives. If we have a motive to find a romantic partner, we might be more perceptive to other attractive people than normal, because we are looking for romantic interests. Another motive might be to lose weight, and you might pay more attention to exercise advertisements and food selection choices compared to someone who doesn't have the motive to lose weight. Our motives influence what we pay attention to and what we ignore.

The last thing that influences our selection process is our emotional state. If we are in an angry mood, then we might be more attentive to things that get us angrier. As opposed to, if we are in a happy mood, then we will be more likely to overlook a lot of negativity because we are already happy. Selecting doesn't involve just paying attention to certain cues. It also means that you might be overlooking other things. For instance, people in love will think their partner is amazing and will overlook a lot of their flaws. This is normal behaviour. We are so focused on how wonderful they are that we often will neglect the other negative aspects of their behaviour.

Organizing

Look again at the three images in Figure 2.3. What were the first things that you saw when you looked at each picture? Could you see the two different images? Which image was more prominent? When we examine a picture or image, we engage in **organizing** it in our head to make sense of it and define it. This is an example of organization. After we select the information that we are paying attention to, we have to make sense of it in our brains. This stage of the perception process is referred to as organization. We must understand that the information can be organized in different ways. After we attend to something, our brains quickly want to make sense of this data. We quickly want to understand the information that we are exposed to and organize it in a way that makes sense to us.

There are four types of schemes that people use to organize perceptions.¹⁷ First, physical constructs are used to classify people (e.g., young/old; tall/short; big/small). Second, role constructs are social positions (e.g., mother, friend, lover, doctor, teacher). Third, interaction constructs are the social behaviours displayed in the interaction (e.g., aggressive, friendly, dismissive, indifferent). Fourth, psychological constructs are the dispositions, emotions, and internal states of mind of the communicators (e.g., depressed, confident, happy, insecure). We often use these schemes to better understand and organize the information that we have received. We use these schemes to generalize others and to classify information.

Let's pretend that you came to class and noticed that one of your classmates was wildly waving their arms in the air at you. This will most likely catch your attention because you find this behaviour strange. Then, you will try to organize or make sense of what is happening. Once you have organized it in your brain, you will need to interpret the behaviour.

Interpreting

The final stage of the perception process is **interpreting**. In this stage of perception, you are attaching meaning to understand the data. So, after you select information and organize things in your brain, you have to interpret the situation. As previously discussed in the above example, your friend waves their hands wildly (attending), and you are trying to figure out what they are communicating to you (organizing). You will attach meaning (interpreting). Does your friend need help and is trying to get your attention, or does your friend want you to watch out for something behind you?

We interpret other people's behaviour daily. Walking to class, you might see an attractive stranger smiling at you. You could interpret this as a flirtatious behaviour or someone just trying to be friendly. Scholars have identified some factors that influence our interpretations:¹⁸

Personal Experience

First, personal experience impacts our interpretation of events. What prior experiences have you had that affect your perceptions? Maybe you heard from your friends that a particular restaurant was really good, but when you went there, you had a horrible experience, and you decided you never wanted to go there again. Even though your friends might try to persuade you to try it again, you might be inclined not to go, because your past experience with that restaurant was not good.

Another example might be a traumatic relationship break up. You might have had a relational partner that cheated on you and left you with trust issues. You might find another romantic interest, but in the back of your mind, you might be cautious and interpret loving behaviours differently, because you don't want to be hurt again.

Involvement

Second, the degree of involvement impacts your interpretation. The more involved or deeper your relationship is with another person, the more likely you will interpret their behaviours differently compared to someone you do not know well. For instance, let's pretend that you are a manager, and two of your employees come to work late. One worker just happens to be your best friend and the other person is someone who just started and you do not know them well. You are more likely to interpret your best friend's behaviour more altruistically than the other worker because you have known your best friend for a longer period. Besides, since this person is your best friend, this implies that you interact and are more involved with them compared to other friends.

Expectations

Third, the expectations that we hold can impact the way we make sense of other people's behaviours. For instance, if you overheard some friends talking about a mean professor and how hostile they are in class, you might be expecting this to be true. Let's say you meet the professor and attend their class; you might still have certain expectations about them based on what you heard. Even those expectations might be completely false, and you might still be expecting those allegations to be true.

Assumptions

Fourth, there are assumptions about human behaviour. Imagine if you are a personal fitness trainer, do you believe that people like to exercise or need to exercise? Your answer to that question might be based on your assumptions. If you are a person who is inclined to exercise, then you might think that all people like to work out. However, if you do not like to exercise but know that people should be physically fit, then you would more likely agree with the statement that people need to exercise. Your assumptions about humans can shape the way that you interpret their behaviour. Another example might be that if you believe that most people would donate to a worthy cause, you might be shocked to learn that not everyone thinks this way. When we assume that all humans should act a certain way, we are more likely to interpret their behaviour differently if they do not respond in a certain way.

Relational Satisfaction

Fifth, relational satisfaction will make you see things very differently. Relational satisfaction is how satisfied or happy you are with your current relationship. If you are content, then you are more likely to view all your partner's behaviours as thoughtful and kind. However, if you are not satisfied in your relationship, then you are more likely to view their behaviour as distrustful or insincere. Research has shown that unhappy couples are more likely to blame their partners when things go wrong compared to happy couples.¹⁹

Conclusion

In this section, we have discussed the three stages of perception: attending, organizing, and interpreting. Each of these stages can occur out of sequence. For example, if your parent/guardian had a bad experience at a car dealership based on their interpretation (such as "They overcharged me for the car and they added all these hidden fees."), then it can influence their future selection (looking for credible and highly rated car dealerships, and then your parent/guardian can organize the information (car dealers are just trying to make money, the assumption is that they think most customers don't know a lot about cars). Perception is a continuous process, and it is very hard to determine the start and finish of any perceptual differences.

Key Takeaways

- Perception involves attending, organizing, and interpreting.
- Perception impacts communication.
- Attending, organizing, and interpreting have specific definitions, and each is impacted by multiple variables.

Exercises

- Take a walk to a place you usually go to on campus or in your neighbourhood. Before taking your walk, mentally list everything that you will see on your walk. As you walk, notice everything on your path. What new things do you notice now that you are deliberately “attending” to your environment?
- What affects your perception? Think about where you come from and your self-concept. How do these two factors impact how you see the world?
- Look back at a previous text or email that you got from a friend. After reading it, do you have a different interpretation of it now compared to when you first got it? Why? Think about how interpretation can impact communication if you didn’t know this person. How does it differ?

Models of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate among and describe the various action models of interpersonal communication.
2. Differentiate among and describe the various interactional models of interpersonal communication.
3. Differentiate among and describe the various transactional models of interpersonal communication.

In the world of communication, we have several different models to help us understand what communication is and how it works. A **model** is a simplified representation of a system (often graphic) that highlights the crucial components and connections of concepts, which are used to help people understand an aspect of the real-world. For our purposes, the models have all been created to help us understand how real-world communication interactions occur. The goal of creating models is three-fold:

1. to facilitate understanding by eliminating unnecessary components,
2. to aid in decision making by simulating “what if” scenarios, and
3. to explain, control, and predict events on the basis of past observations.²⁰

Over the next few paragraphs, we’re going to examine three different types of models that communication scholars have proposed to help us understand interpersonal interactions: action, interactional, and transactional.

Action Models

In this section, we will be discussing different models to understand interpersonal communication. The purpose of using models is to provide visual representations of interpersonal communication and to offer a better understanding of how various scholars have conceptualized it over time. The first type of model we’ll be exploring are **action models**, or communication models that view communication as a one-directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver.

Shannon-Weaver Model

Shannon and Weaver were both engineers for the Bell Telephone Labs. Their job was to make sure that all the telephone cables and radio waves were operating at full capacity. They developed the Shannon-Weaver model, which is also known as the linear communication model (Weaver & Shannon, 1963).²¹ As indicated by its name, the scholars believed that communication occurred in a linear fashion, where a sender encodes a message through a channel to a receiver, who will decode the message. Feedback is not immediate. Examples of linear communication were newspapers, radio, and television.

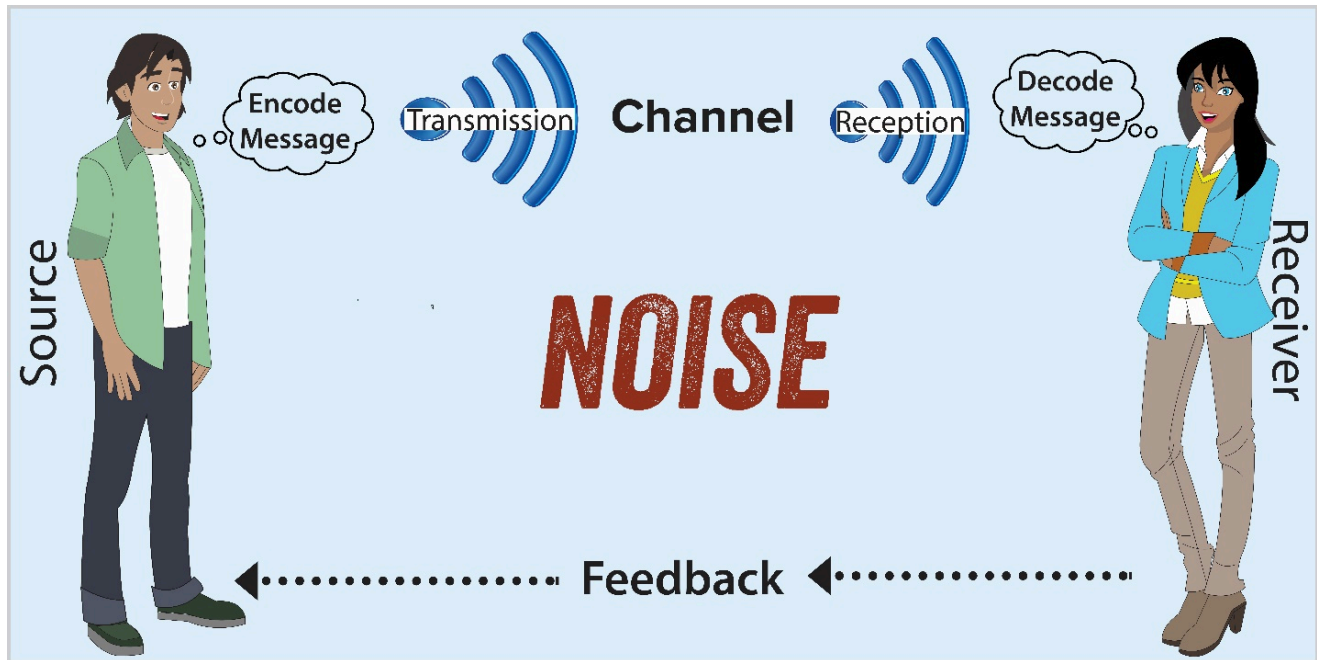


Figure 2.4 Shannon-Weaver Model

Early Schramm Model

The Shannon-Weaver model was criticized because it assumed that communication always occurred linearly. Wilbur Schram (1954) felt that it was important to notice the impact of messages.²² Schramm's model regards communication as a process between an encoder and a decoder. Most importantly, this model accounts for how people interpret the message. Schramm argued that a person's background, experience, and knowledge are factors that impact interpretation. Besides, Schramm believed that the messages are transmitted through a medium. Also, the decoder will be able to send feedback about the message to indicate that the message has been received. He argued that communication is incomplete unless there is feedback from the receiver. According to Schramm's model, encoding and decoding are vital to effective communication. Any communication where decoding does not occur or feedback does not happen is not effective or complete.

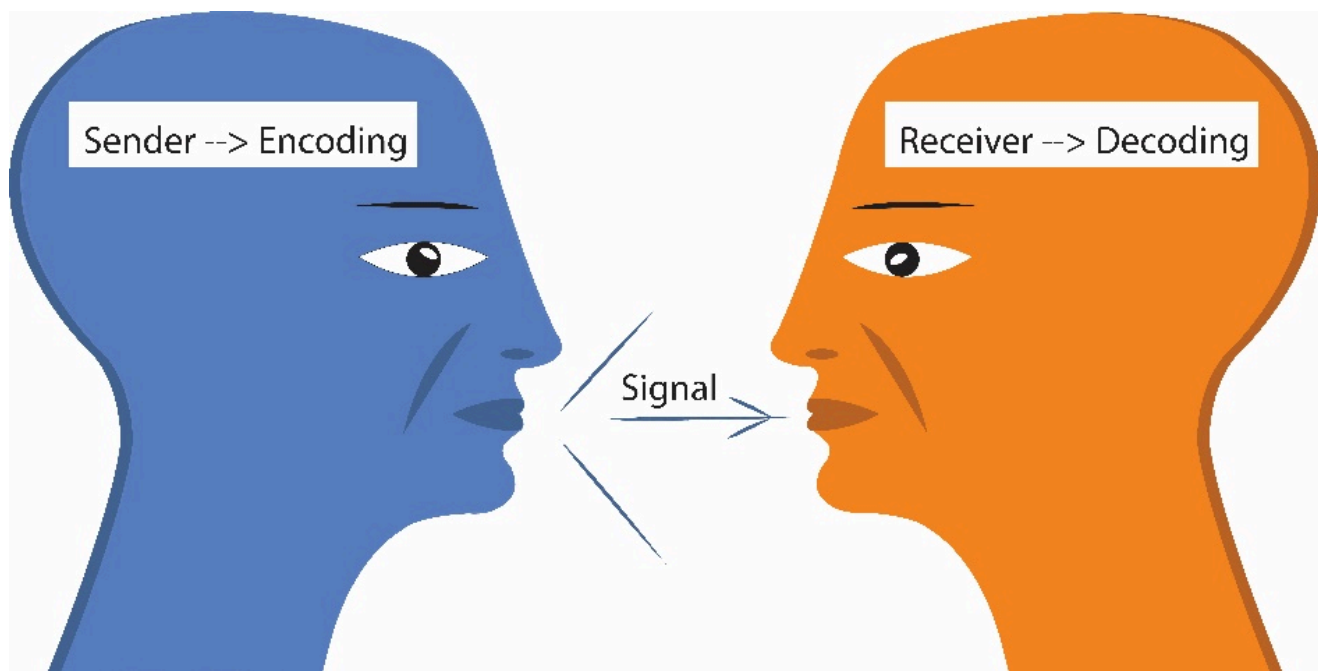


Figure 2.5 Scharmm Model

Berlo's SMCR Model

David K. Berlo (1960)²³ created the SMCR model of communication. SMCR stands for sender, message, channel, receiver. Berlo's model describes different components of the communication process. He argued that there are three main parts of all communication, which is the speaker, the subject, and the listener. He maintained that the listener determines the meaning of any message.

In regards to the source or sender of the message, Berlo identified factors that influence the source of the message. First, communication skills refer to the ability to speak or write. Second, attitude is the person's point-of-view, which may be influenced by the listener. The third is whether the source has requisite knowledge on a given topic to be effective. Fourth, social systems include the source's values, beliefs, and opinions, which may influence the message.

Next, we move on to the message portion of the model. The message can be sent in a variety of ways, such as text, video, speech. At the same time, there might be components that influence the message, such as content, which is the information being sent. Elements refer to the verbal and nonverbal behaviours of how the message is sent. Treatment refers to how the message was presented. The structure is how the message was organized. Code is the form in which the message was sent, such as text, gesture, or music.

The channel of the message relies on the basic five senses of sound, sight, touch, smell, and taste. Think of how your mother might express her love for you. She might hug you (touch) and say, "I love you" (sound), or make you your favourite dessert (taste). Each of these channels is a way to display affection.

The receiver is the person who decodes the message. Similar to the models discussed earlier, the receiver is at the end. However, Berlo argued that for the receiver to understand and comprehend the message, there must be similar factors to the sender. Hence, the source and the receiver have similar components. In the end, the receiver will have to decode the message and determine its meaning. Berlo tries to present the model of communication as simple as possible. His model accounts for variables that will obstruct the interpretation of the model.

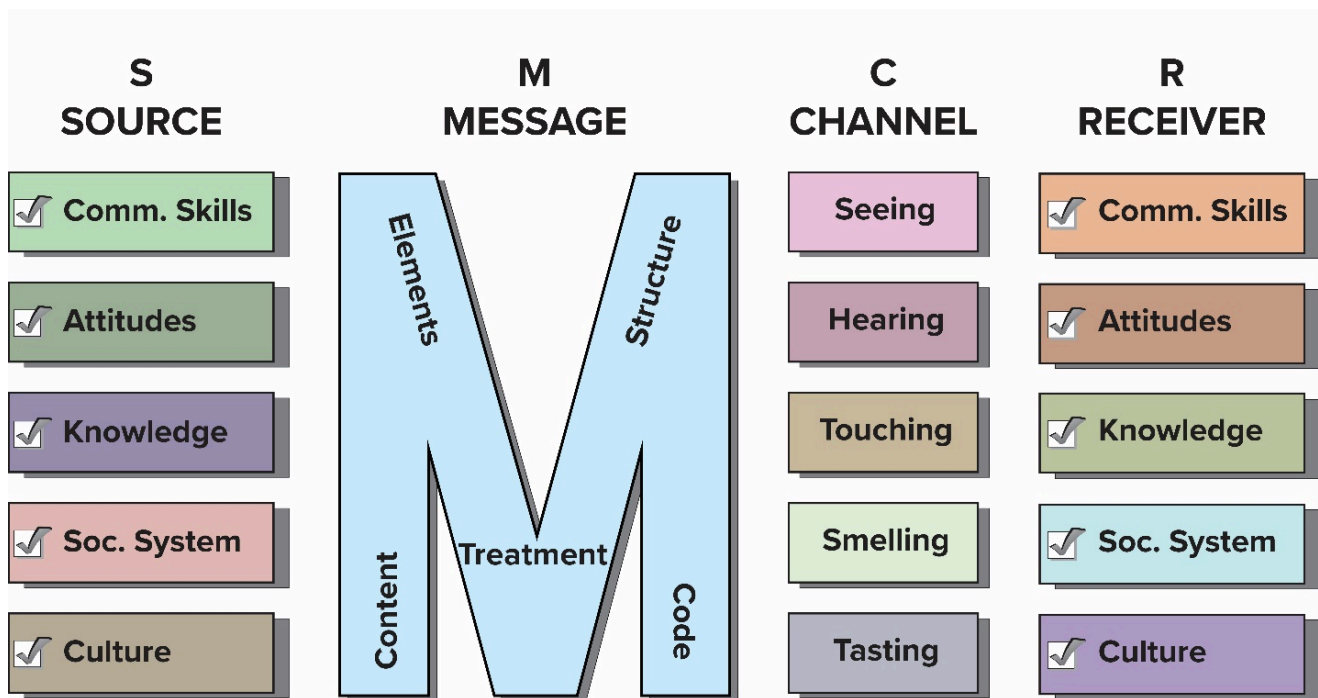


Figure 2.5 SMCR Model

Interaction Models

In this section, we're going to explore the next evolution of communication models, interaction models. **Interaction models** view the sender and the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication. One of the biggest differences between the action and interaction models is a heightened focus on feedback.

Osgood and Schramm Model

Osgood-Schramm's model of communication is known as a circular model because it indicates that messages can go in two directions.²⁴ Hence, once a person decodes a message, then they can encode it and send a message back to the sender. They could continue encoding and decoding into a continuous cycle. This revised model indicates that: 1) communication is not linear, but circular; 2) communication is reciprocal and equal; 3) messages are based on interpretation; 4) communication involves encoding, decoding, and interpreting. The benefit of this model is that the model illustrates that feedback is cyclical. It also shows that communication is complex because it accounts for interpretation. This model also showcases the fact that we are active communicators, and we are active in interpreting the messages that we receive.

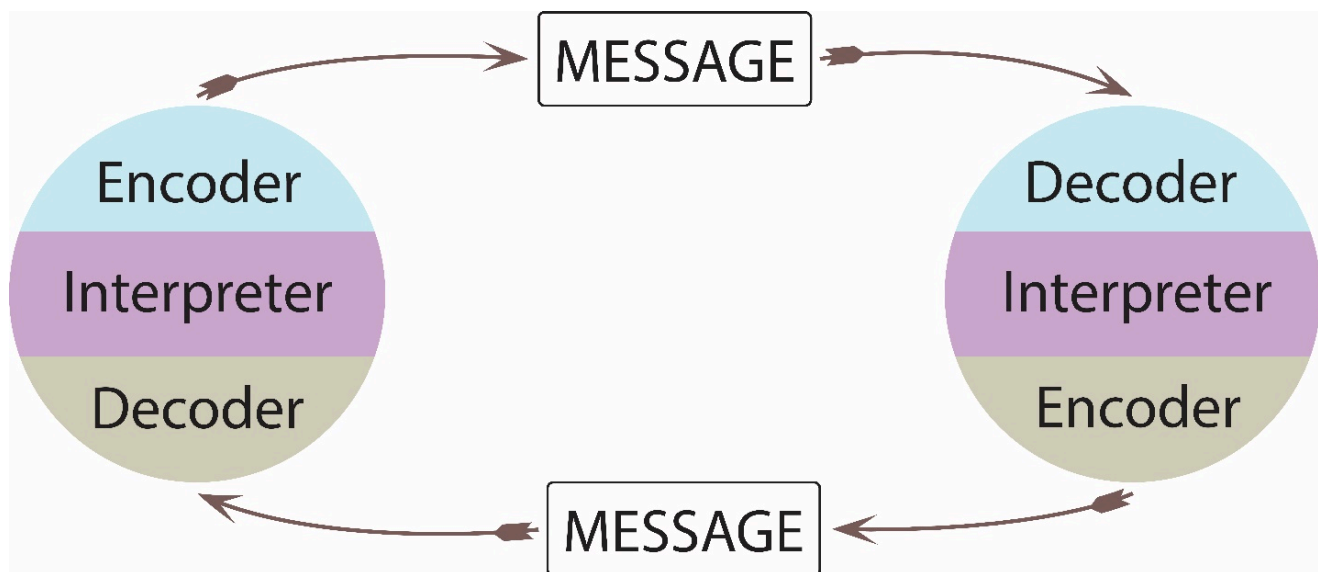


Figure 2.7 Osgood-Schramm Model

Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson Model

Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson argued that communication is continuous.²⁵ The researchers argued that communication happens all the time. Every time a message is sent, then a message is returned, and it continues from Person A to Person B until someone stops. Feedback is provided every time that Person A sends a message. With this model, there are five axioms.

First, one cannot, not communicate. This means that everything one does has communicative value. Even if people do not talk to each other, then it still communicates the idea that both parties do not want to talk to each other. The second axiom states that every message has a content and relationship dimension. Content is the informational part of the message or the subject of discussion. The relationship dimension refers to how the two communicators feel about each other. The third axiom is how the communicators in the system punctuate their communicative sequence. The scholars observed that every communication event has a stimulus, response, and reinforcement. Each communicator can be a stimulus or a response. Fourth, communication can be analog or digital. Digital refers to what the words mean. Analogical is how the words are said or the nonverbal behaviour that accompanies the message. The last axiom states that communication can be either symmetrical or complementary. This means that both communicators have similar power relations, or they do not. Conflict and misunderstandings can occur if the communicators have different power relations. For instance, your boss might have the right to fire you from your job if you do not professionally conduct yourself.

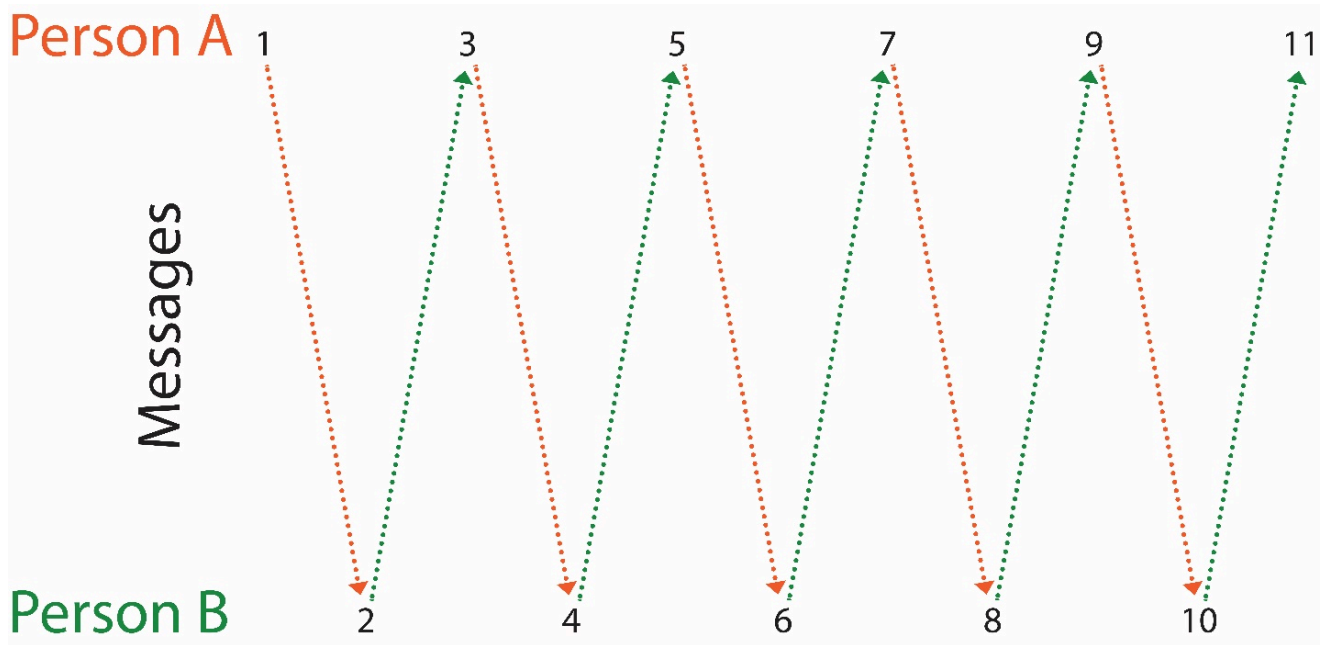


Figure 2.8 Watzlawick-Beavin-Jackson Model

Transaction Models

The transactional models differ from the interactional models in that the transactional models demonstrate that individuals are often acting as both the sender and receiver simultaneously. Basically, sending and receiving messages happen simultaneously.

Barnlund's Transactional Model

In 1970, Dean C. Barnlund created the **transactional model** of communication to understand basic interpersonal communication.²⁶ Barnlund argues that one of the problems with the more linear models of communication is that they resemble mediated messages. The message gets created, the message is sent, and the message is received. For example, we write an email, we send an email, and the email is read. Instead, Barnlund argues that during interpersonal interactions, we are both sending and receiving messages simultaneously. Out of all the other communication models, this one includes a multi-layered feedback system. We can provide oral feedback, but our nonverbal communication (e.g., tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, etc.) is equally important to how others interpret the messages we are sending we use others' nonverbal behaviours to interpret their messages. As such, in any interpersonal interaction, a ton of messages are sent and received simultaneously between the two people.

The Importance of Cues

The main components of the model include cues. There are three types of cues: public, private, and behavioural. Public cues are anything that is physical or environmental. Private cues are referred to as the private objects of the orientation, which include the senses of a person. Behavioural cues include nonverbal and verbal cues.

The Importance of Context

Furthermore, the transactional model of communication has also gone on to represent that three contexts coexist during an interaction:

1. **Social Context:** The rules and norms that govern how people communicate with one another.
2. **Cultural Context:** The cultural and co-cultural identities people have (e.g., ability, age, biological sex, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexual orientation, social class, etc.).
3. **Relational Context:** The nature of the bond or emotional attachment between two people (e.g., parent/

guardian-child, sibling-sibling, teacher-student, health care worker-client, best friends, acquaintances, etc.).

Through our interpersonal interactions, we create social reality, but all of these different contexts impact this reality.

The Importance of Noise

Another important factor to consider in Barnlund's Transactional Model is the issue of noise, which includes things that disturb or interrupt the flow of communication. Like the three contexts explored above, there are another four contexts that can impact our ability to interact with people effectively:²⁷

1. Physical Context: The physical space where interaction is occurring (office, school, home, doctor's office, is the space loud, is the furniture comfortable, etc.).
2. Physiological Context: The body's responses to what's happening in its environment.
 - a. Internal: Physiological responses that result because of our body's internal processes (e.g., hunger, a headache, physically tired, etc.).
 - b. External: Physiological responses that result because of external stimuli within the environment (e.g., are you cold, are you hot, the colour of the room, are you physically comfortable, etc.).
3. Psychological Context: How the human mind responds to what's occurring within its environment (e.g., emotional state, thoughts, perceptions, intentions, mindfulness, etc.).
4. Semantic Context: The possible understanding and interpretation of different messages sent (e.g., someone's language, size of vocabulary, effective use of grammar, etc.).

In each of these contexts, it's possible to have things that disturb or interrupts the flow of communication. For example, in the physical context, hard plastic chairs can make you uncomfortable and not want to sit for very long talking to someone. Physiologically, if you have a headache (internal) or if a room is very hot, it can make it hard to concentrate and listen effectively to another person. Psychologically, if we just broke up with our significant other, we may find it difficult to sit and have a casual conversation with someone while our brains are running a thousand miles a minute. Semantically, if we don't understand a word that someone uses, it can prevent us from accurately interpreting someone's messages. When you think about it, with all the possible interference of noise that exists within an interpersonal interaction, it's pretty impressive that we ever get anything accomplished.

More often than not, we are completely unaware of how these different contexts create noise and impact our interactions with one another during the moment itself. For example, think about the nature of the physical environments of fast-food restaurants versus fine dining establishments. In fast-food restaurants, the décor is bright, the lighting is bright, the seats are made of hard surfaces (often plastic), they tend to be louder, etc. This noise causes people to eat faster and increase turnover rates. Conversely, fine dining establishments have tablecloths, more comfortable chairs, dimmer lighting, quieter dining, etc. The physical space in a fast-food restaurant hurries interaction and increases turnover. The physical space in the fine dining restaurant slows our interactions, causes us to stay longer, and we spend more money as a result. However, most of us don't pay that much attention to how physical space is impacting us while we're having a conversation with another person.

Although we used the external environment here as an example of how noise impacts our interpersonal interactions, we could go through all of these contexts and discuss how they impact us in ways of which we're not consciously aware. We'll explore many of these contexts throughout the rest of this book.

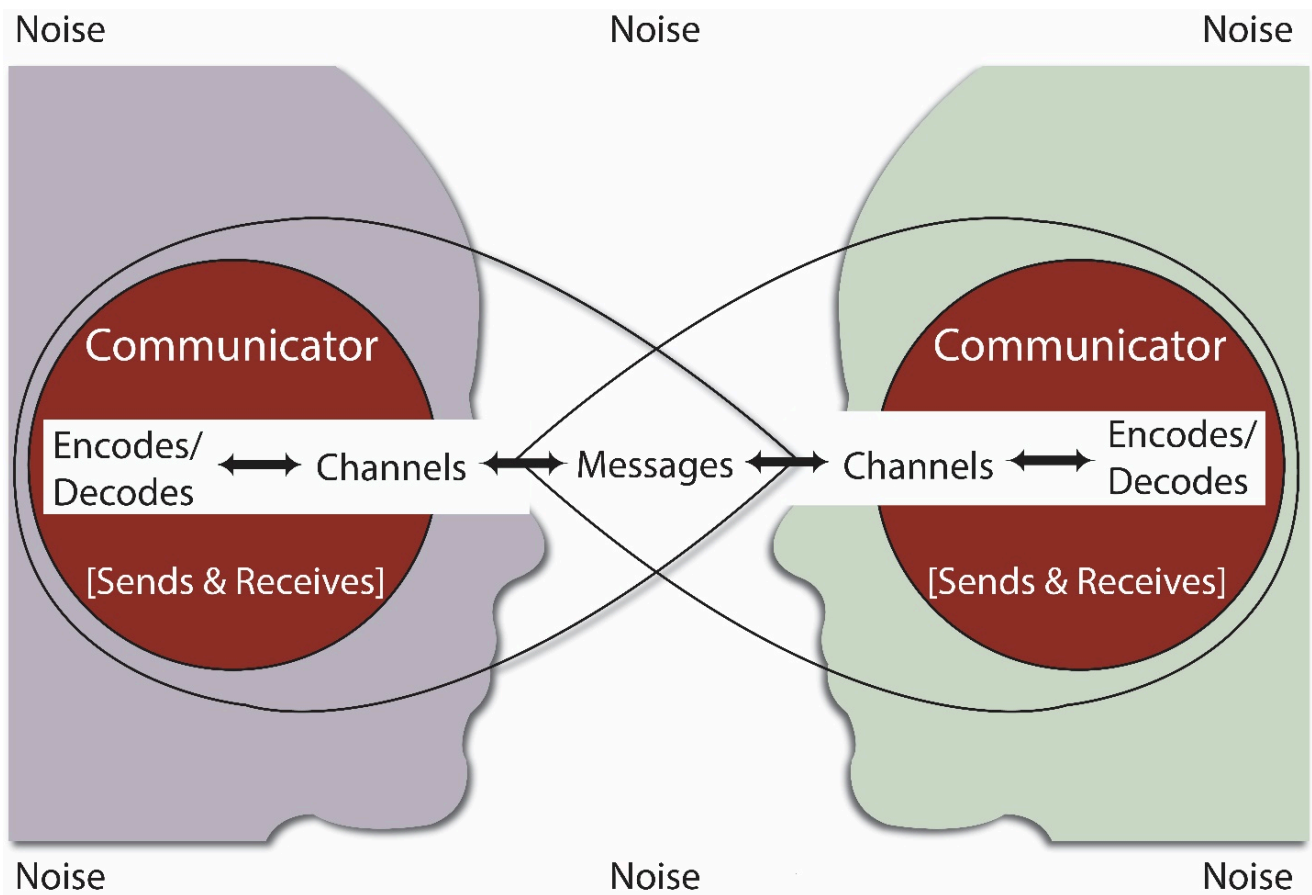


Figure 2.9 Transactional Model of Communication

Transaction Principles

As you can see, these models of communication are all very different. They have similar components, yet they are all conveyed very differently. Some have features that others do not. Nevertheless, there are transactional principles that are important to learn about interpersonal communication.

Communication is Complex

People might think that communication is easy. However, there are a lot of factors, such as power, language, and relationship differences, that can impact the conversation. Communication isn't easy, because not everyone will have the same interpretation of the message. You will see advertisements that some people will love and others will be offended by. The reason is that people do not identically receive a message.

Communication is Continuous

In many of the communication models, we learned that communication never stops. Every time a source sends a message, a receiver will decode it, and it goes back-and-forth. It is an endless cycle, because even if one person stops talking, then they have already sent a message that the communication needs to end. As a receiver, you can keep trying to send messages, or you can stop talking as well, which sends the message to the other person that you also want to stop talking.

Communication is Dynamic

With new technology and changing times, we see that communication is constantly changing. Before social media, people interacted very differently. Some people have suggested that social media has influenced how we talk to each other. The models have changed over time because people have also changed how they communicate. People

no longer use the phone to call other people; instead, they will text message others because they find it easier and less evasive.

Final Note

The advantage of this model is it shows that there is a shared field of experience between the sender and receiver. The transactional model shows that messages happen simultaneously with noise. However, the disadvantages of the model are that it is complex, and it suggests that the sender and receiver should understand the messages that are sent to each other.

Towards a Model of Mindful Communication

So, what ultimately does a model of mindful communication look like? Well, to start, we think mindful communication is very similar to the transactional model of human communication. All of the facets of transactional communication can be applied in this context as well. In Figure 2.9, we have combined the transactional model with Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson's three parts of mindful practice: attention, intention, and attitude.²⁸

We're not proposing a new model of communication in this text; we're proposing a new way of coupling interpersonal communication with mindfulness. So, how would mindful interpersonal communication work? According to Levine Tatkin, "Mindful communication is all about being more conscious about the way you interact with the other person daily. It is about being more present when the other person is communicating to you."²⁹ As such, we argue that mindful communication is learning to harness the power of mindfulness to focus our ability to communicate with other people interpersonally effectively.

Many of us engage in mindless communication every day. We don't pay attention to the conversation; we don't think about our intentions during the interaction; and we don't analyze our attitudes while we talk. Have you ever found yourself doing any of the following during an interpersonal interaction?

- Constantly checking your smartphone.
- Focusing on anything but the other person talking.
- Forming your responses before the other person stops talking.
- Cutting the other person off while they are talking.
- Constantly interrupting the other person while they are talking.
- Getting impatient when the other person doesn't "get to the point fast enough."
- Trying to come up with solutions the person never asked for.
- Getting bored.
- Having biases against the other person or their ideas without really listening to them.
- Starting arguments for no reason.
- Finding yourself yelling or screaming at someone else.
- Refusing to "give in" or "find the middle ground" when engaged in conflict.

These are just a few examples of what mindless interpersonal interactions can look like when we don't consider the attention, intention, and attitude. Mindful interpersonal communication, on the other hand, occurs when we engage in the following communication behaviours.³⁰

- Listening to your partner without being distracted.
- Holding a conversation without being too emotional.
- Being non-judgmental when you talk, argue, or even fight with your partner.
- Accepting your partner's perspective even if it is different from yours.
- Validating yourself and your partner.

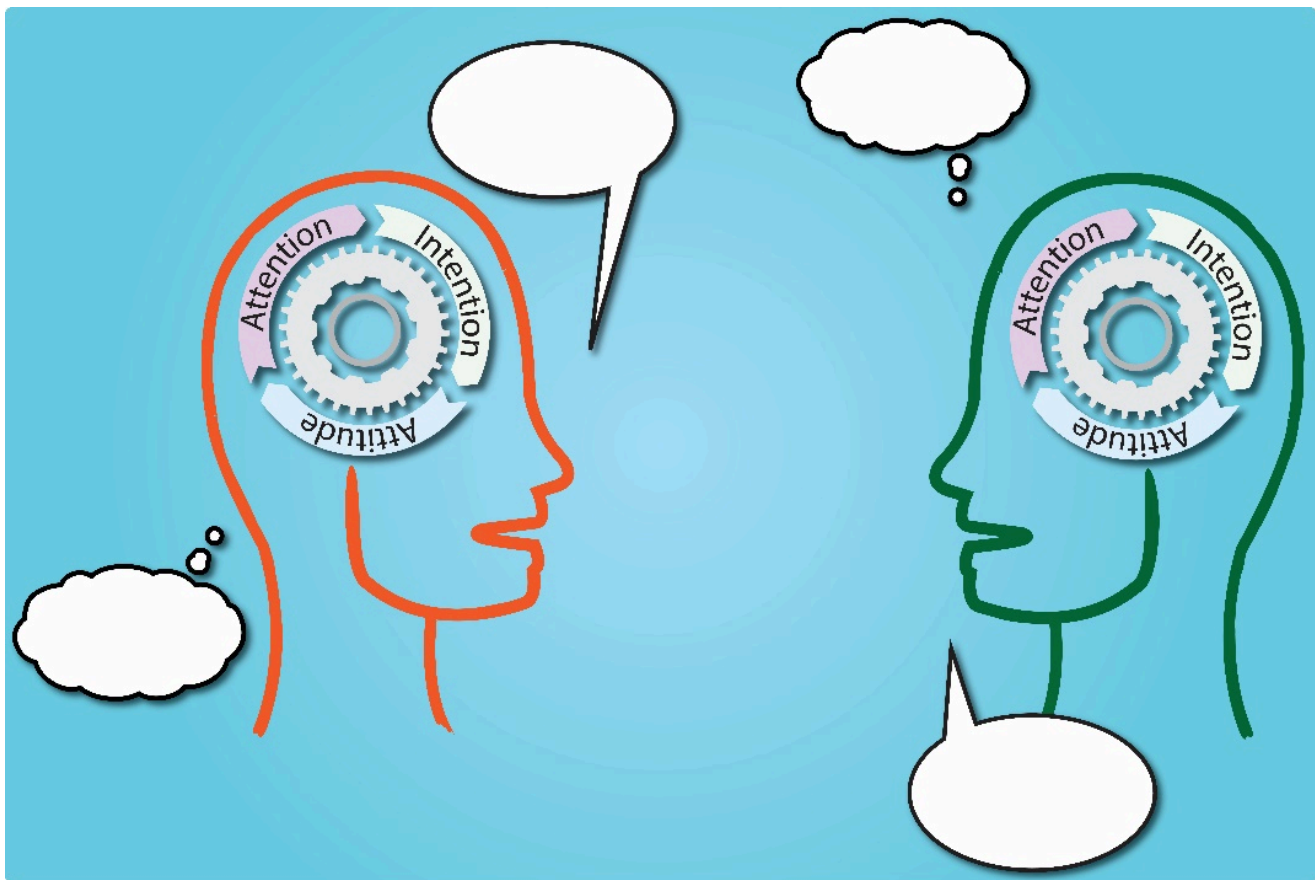


Figure 2.10 Model of Mindful Communication

The authors of this text truly believe that engaging in mindful interpersonal communicative relationships is very important in our day-to-day lives. All of us are bombarded by messages, and it's effortless to start treating all messages as if they were equal and must be attended to within a given moment. Let's look at that first mindless behaviour we talked about earlier, checking your cell phone while you're talking to people. As we discussed, our minds have a habit of wandering 47% of the time.³¹ Our monkey brains are constantly jumping from idea to idea before we add in technology. If you're continually checking your cell phone while you're talking to someone, you're allowing your brain to roam even more than it already does.

Effective interpersonal communication is hard. The goal of a mindful approach to interpersonal communication is to train ourselves to be in the moment with someone listening and talking. We'll talk more about listening and talking later in this text. For now, we're going to wrap-up this chapter by looking at some specific skills to enhance your interpersonal communication.

Key Takeaways

- In action models, communication was viewed as a one-directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver. These models include the Shannon and Weaver Model, the Schramm Model and Berlo's SMCR model.
- Interactional models viewed communication as a two-way process, in which both the sender and the receiver equally share the responsibility for communication effectiveness. Examples of the interactional model are Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson Model and Osgood and Schramm Model.
- The transactional models differ from the interactional models in that the transactional models demonstrate that individuals are often acting as both the sender and receiver simultaneously. An example of a transactional model is Barnlund's model.

Exercises

- Choose one action model, one interactional model, and Barnlund's transactional model. Use each model to explain one communication scenario that you create. What are the differences in the explanations of each model?
- Choose the communication model with which you most agree. Why is it better than the other models?

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the skills associated with effective interpersonal skills.
2. Explain how to improve interpersonal skills.
3. Describe the principles of ethical communication.

In this chapter, we have learned about different aspects of interpersonal communication. Overall, some skills can make you a better interpersonal communicator. We will discuss each one in more detail below.

Listening Skills

The most important part of communication is not the actual talking, but the listening part. If you are not a good listener, then you will not be a good communicator. One must engage in mindful listening. Mindful listening is when you give careful and thoughtful attention to the messages that you receive. People will often listen mindfully to important messages or to people that matter most. Think about how happy you get when you are talking to someone you really love or maybe how you pay more attention to what a professor says if they tell you it will be on the exam. In each of these scenarios, you are giving the speaker your undivided attention. Most of our listening isn't mindful, but there will be times where it will be important to listen to what others are telling us so that we can fulfill our personal and/or professional goals.

People Skills

People skills are a set of characteristics that will help you interact well with others.³² These skills are most important in group situations and where cooperation is needed. These skills can also relate to how you handle social situations. They can make a positive impact on career advancement but also in relationship development.³³ One of the most essential people skills to have is the ability to understand people. Being able to feel empathy or sympathy to another person's situation can go a long way. By putting yourself in other people's shoes and understanding their hardships or differences, you can put things into perspective. It can help you build a stronger and better interpersonal relationship.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to recognize your own emotions and the emotions of others.³⁴ Emotionally intelligent people can label their feelings appropriately and use this information to guide their behaviour. EQ is highly associated with the ability to empathize with others. Furthermore, EQ can help people connect interpersonally. Research has demonstrated that people with higher levels of EQ are more likely to succeed in the workplace and have better mental health. They are often better leaders and effective managers of conflict.

Appropriate Skill Selection

The best interpersonal communicators are the ones who can use the appropriate skill in certain contexts. For instance, if it is a sombre event, then they might not laugh. Or if it is a joyful occasion, they might not cry hysterically, unless they are tears of joy. The best politicians can sense the audience and determine what skills would be appropriate for which occasion. We know that humour can be beneficial in certain situations. However, humor can also be inappropriate for certain people. It is essential to know what skill is appropriate to use and when it is necessary to use it.

Communicating Ethically

The last interpersonal skill involves communication **ethics**. We have seen several people in the business world that have gotten in trouble for not communicating ethically. It is important to be mindful of what you say to others. You do not want people to think you are deceptive or that you are lying to them. Trust is a hard thing to build. Yet, trust can be taken away from you very quickly. It is essential that every time you communicate, you should consider the ethics behind your words. As we will see throughout this book, words matter! So, what does it mean to communicate ethically interpersonally? Thankfully, the National Communication Association has created a general credo for ethical communication.³⁵ The subheadings below represent the nine statements created by the National Communication Association to help guide conversations related to communication ethics.

We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.

The first statement in the credo for ethical communication is one that has taken on a lot more purpose in the past few years, being truthful. We live in a world where the blurring of fact and fiction, real-life and fantasy, truth and lies, real news and fake news, etc. has become increasingly blurry. The NCA credo argues that ethical communication should always strive towards truth and integrity. As such, it's important to consider our interpersonal communication and ensure that we are not spreading lies.

We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.

You don't have to agree with everyone. In fact, it's perfectly appropriate to disagree with people and do so in a civilized manner. So much of our interpersonal communication in the 21st Century seems to have become about shouting, "I'm right, you're wrong." As such, it's important to remember that it's possible for many different vantage points to have equal value. From an ethical perspective, it's very important to listen to others and not immediately start thinking about our comebacks or counter-arguments. When we're only focused on our comebacks and counter-arguments, then we're not listening effectively. Now, we are not arguing that people should have the right to their own set of facts. As we discussed in the previous statement, we believe in facts and think the idea of "alternative facts" is horrific. But often, people's experiences in life lead them to different positions that can be equally valid.

We strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.

Along with what was discussed in the previous statement, it's important to approach our interpersonal interactions from a position of understanding and respect. Part of the mindfulness approach to interpersonal communication that we've advocated for in this book involves understanding and respect. Too many people in our world today immediately shut down others with whom they disagree without ever giving the other person a chance. We know that it can be tough to listen to messages that you strongly disagree with, but we can still disagree and, at the end of the day, respect each other.

We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and society.

As communication scholars, we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to improve their communication. One of the reasons we've written this book is because we believe that all students should have access to an interpersonal communication textbook that is free. Furthermore, we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to develop their interpersonal communication skills, listening skills, presentation skills, and

social skills. Ultimately, developing communication skills helps people in their interpersonal relationships and makes them better people as a whole. According to Sherwyn Morreale, Joseph Valenzano, and Janessa Bauer:

Communication can help couples connect on a deeper level and feel more satisfied with their relationships. Additionally, competent communication strengthens bonds among family members and helps them cope with conflict and stressful situations. Communication gives family members the tools they need to express their feelings and address their concerns in a constructive way, which ultimately helps when conflicts and stressful situations arise... Better interpersonal communication can improve the social health of a community by strengthening relationships among various community members.³⁶

We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.

As communicators, we need to take a two-pronged approach to our interpersonal interactions. First, we need to care about the needs of others. We need to understand that our communication can either build people up or tear them down. We should strive to build people up through our interactions with them. This doesn't mean that there aren't times when you have to tell people that they're wrong, but there are ways of doing this that correct people without attacking their self-esteem.

Second, we need to strive for mutual understanding. As we've learned in this chapter, a lot of things can make communication with each other very difficult. However, we should strive to ensure that our messages are interpreted correctly by others and that we're interpreting others' messages correctly as well. We should avoid jumping to conclusions and assuming that someone's messages are always ill-intended.

We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.

We believe that any communication that degrades another person should be seen as reprehensible by everyone. For many of us, it's easy for us to clearly label obvious hate messages as disgusting (e.g., anti-immigrant signs, burning crosses, racist graffiti, etc.). However, many people engage in biased language without really realizing that it's happening.

We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.

We live in a world where injustices are still very prevalent. From anti-immigrant rhetoric to laws preventing medical treatment for transgender people, we believe that it's important for people to pursue fairness and justice in our world today. As such, all of us need to remember this when we are interacting with others. Whether it's remembering to call someone by their preferred pronouns or supporting individuals seeking equal rights and protection under the law, we should help those individuals.

We advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.

We live in a world where we faced with innumerable choices about the future. As I'm writing this, I'm currently in self-imposed quarantine during the coronavirus outbreak of Spring 2020. During this period, we've all become used to the term "social distancing," or avoiding large crowds of people and keeping at least six feet from others in public. During this period, there are a lot of strong opinions and feelings on this subject. When it comes to our interpersonal interactions, it's important for people to share information, opinions, and feelings and not have them immediately dismissed. Again, this is not to say that we believe that people should have the right to their own facts, but people should be allowed to express their own opinions and feelings.

In addition to sharing information, opinions, and feelings, it's important to remember to respect people's privacy and confidentiality. Not everything we hear from another person is meant to be broadcast openly to the world. It's important to remember not to tell other people's business.

We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.

Lastly, the National Communication Association's Credo for Ethical Communication advocates that people take responsibility for the consequences of their communication. If you say something that hurts someone else's

feelings, it's important to recognize that and apologize. If we accidentally spread false information, it's important to correct the facts when we learn them.

Rodrick Hart and Don Burks coined the term “rhetorical sensitivity” to help explain awareness of our own communicative behaviours. According to Hart and Burks,

The rhetorically sensitive person (a) tries to accept role-taking as part of the human condition, (b) attempts to avoid stylized verbal behaviour, (c) is characteristically willing to undergo the strain of adaptation, (d) seeks to distinguish between all information and that information acceptable for communication, and (e) tries to understand that an idea can be rendered in multi-form ways.³⁷

When it comes to the ethicality of our communicative choices, it's important to be rhetorically sensitive to more fully understand the short- and long-term consequences that arise from our communicative behaviours.

Key Takeaways

- Skills associated with effective interpersonal communication are listening skills, people skills, emotional intelligence, appropriate skill selection, and ethical communication.
- Improving interpersonal communication skills requires practice and deliberate effort. The ability to identify problems and select appropriate communication skills is key to effective interpersonal communication.
- A set of principles guides ethical communication. These principles teach us that we must respect others, attempt to see the viewpoint of others, take responsibility for our communication, and make an effort to continually improve upon our skills.

Exercises

- Recall a situation in which you experienced conflict. Now that you know some approaches to effective interpersonal communication evaluate the experience you recalled and write down what you could have done differently.
- Recall a situation in which your confidence has been broken. In other words, you asked someone to keep a secret and they didn't. How did this make you feel? In what situations is it acceptable to violate the confidence of another person?
- We all do something well in relation to communication. What are your best communication skills? In what areas would you like to improve?

Key Terms

action model

Communication model that views communication as a one-directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver.

attending

The act of focusing on specific objects or stimuli in the world around you.

channel

The pathways in which messages are conveyed.

emotional intelligence

People who are aware of their emotions and are sensitive to the emotions of others are better able to handle the ups and downs of life, to rebound from adversity, and to maintain fulfilling relationships with others.

environment

The context or situation in which communication occurs.

ethics

The set of moral values each person carries throughout life—concepts of what is right and wrong, good and bad, or just and unjust.

feedback

Information shared back to the source of communication that keeps the communication moving forward and thus making communication a process.

interaction model

Communication model that views the sender and the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication.

interpreting

Interpretation is the act of assigning meaning to a stimulus and then determining the worth of the object (evaluation).

model

A simplified representation of a system (often graphic) that highlights the important components and connections of concepts, which are used to help people understand an aspect of the real-world.

noise

Anything that can interfere with the message being sent or received.

organizing

Organizing is making sense of the stimuli or assigning meaning to it.

perception

The process of acquiring, interpreting, and organizing information that comes in through your five senses.

receiver

The receiver decodes the message in an environment that includes noise.

source

The person initiating communication and encoding the message and selecting the channel.

transactional model

Communication model that demonstrate that individuals are often acting as both the sender and receiver simultaneously.

uncertainty reduction theory

The tendency of human beings to eliminate unknown elements of individuals whom they have just met. Individuals wish to predict what another person thinks and how another person behaves. Strategies for reducing uncertainty include passive, active, and interactive.

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we have learned about various things that can impact interpersonal communication. We learned about the perception process and the three states of the perception process: attending, interpreting, and organizing. We also discussed the various communication models to understand how the process of communication looks in interpersonal situations. Lastly, we briefly overviewed interpersonal communication skills.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Addie and Patrick had been dating for 13 months. They discussed getting married and whether they might have children. One day, it came to light that Patrick had not been paying his credit card bill as he said he would. Addie approached him to ask about the situation. He became very angry with her and a huge fight ensued. They both called each other names and spoke to each other in ways they never expected. After the fight, Addie and Patrick apologized to one another and promised never to talk that way again to each other. Which principle of communication might Addie and Patrick consider as they move forward in their relationship?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Paul tells Jenna that her last name must be Campbell, because she is “Mmmm...good.” Paul is trying to _____ the message to Jenna.
 - a. encode
 - b. decode
 - c. provide feedback
 - d. provide noise
 - e. none of these
2. Larry is very hungry because he skipped breakfast. He can't pay attention to other people because he is focused on his hunger. This type of noise is:
 - a. physical
 - b. semantic
 - c. psychological
 - d. physiological
 - e. none of these
3. Which type of schema focuses on the social position?
 - a. physical
 - b. role
 - c. interaction
 - d. behaviour
 - e. psychological
4. Kara pays attention to advertisements about cars, because she is looking to buy a new car. The reason she is selecting these messages over others is because the ads:
 - a. are different
 - b. are intense
 - c. appeal to her emotional states
 - d. appeal to her motives
 - e. are repetitious
5. Mark just met a new student named Jenny. He is trying to learn more about her through her social media sites. According to uncertainty reduction theory, which strategy is Mark using to reduce uncertainty?
 - a. passive
 - b. active
 - c. interactive
 - d. non-active
 - e. dismissive

Notes

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[3]

Verbal Elements of Communication

Have you ever said something that someone else misinterpreted as something else? Some of the most common problems in interpersonal communication stem from the use of language. For instance, two students, Kelly and James, are texting each other. Kelly texts James about meeting for dinner, and James texts “K” instead of “okay.” Kelly is worried because she thinks James is mad. She wonders why he texted “K” instead of “k,” “ok,” “yes” or “okay.” James was in a hurry, and he just texted in caps because he was excited to see Kelly.

This example gives us an understanding of how language can influence our perceptions. Kelly and James had two different perceptions of the same event. One person was worried, and the other person was excited.

Language is a system of human communication using a particular form of spoken or written words or other symbols. Language consists of the use of words in a structured way. Language helps us understand others’ wants, needs, and desires. Language can help create connections, but it can also pull us apart. Language is so vital to communication. Imagine if you never learned a language; how would you be able to function? Without language, how could you develop meaningful connections with others? Language allows us to express ourselves and obtain our goals.

Language is the most important element in human communication. Language is made up of words, which are arbitrary symbols. In this chapter, we will learn about how words work, the functions of language, and how to improve verbal communication.

How Words Work

Learning Objectives

1. Discover how words have different rules.
2. Determine the level of abstraction.
3. Comprehend the concept of metamessages.

One person might call a shopping cart a buggy, and another person might call it a cart. There are several ways to say you would like a beverage, such as, “liquid refresher,” “soda,” “Coke,” “pop,” “refreshment,” or “drink.” A pacifier for a baby is sometimes called a “paci,” “binkie,” “sookie,” or “mute button.” Linguist Robin Tolmach Lakoff asks, “How can something that is physically just puffs of air, a mere stand-in for reality, have the power to change us and our world?”¹ This example illustrates that meanings are in people, and words don’t necessarily represent what they mean.

Words and Meaning

Words can have different rules to help us understand the meaning. There are three rules: semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic.²

Semantic Rules

First, semantic rules are the dictionary definition of the word. However, the meaning can change based on the context in which it is used. For instance, the word fly by itself does not mean anything. It makes more sense if we put the word into a context by saying things like, “There is a fly on the wall;” “I will fly to Dallas tomorrow;” “That girl is so fly;” or “The fly on your pants is open!” We would not be able to communicate with others if we did not have semantic rules.

A cute example of this is about a third-grade teacher who asked about a period. One male student in her class went on and on about how girls have monthly periods, but he did not realize that the teacher meant the use of periods for punctuation at the end of a sentence. Hence, semantic rules need to be understood to avoid embarrassment or misunderstandings.

Syntactic Rules

Second, syntactic rules govern how we help guide the words we use. Syntactic rules can refer to the use of grammar, structure, and punctuation to help effectively convey our ideas. For instance, we can say “Where are you” as opposed to “where you are,” which can convey a different meaning and have different perceptions. The same thing can happen when you don’t place a comma in the right place. The comma can make a big difference in how people understand a message.

A great example of how syntactic rules is the *Star Wars* character, Yoda, who often speaks with different rules. He has said, “Named must be your fear before banish it you can” and “Happens to every guy sometimes this does.” This example illustrates that syntactic rules can vary based on culture or background.

Another example is Figure 2.1. In this case, we learn the importance that a comma can make in written language. In the first instance, “Let’s eat grandma!” is quite different than the second one, “Let’s eat, grandma!” The first implies cannibalism and the second a family dinner. As the image says, punctuation saves lives.



Figure 2.1 Commas Matter

Pragmatic Rules

Third, pragmatic rules help us interpret messages by analyzing the interaction completely. We need to consider the words used, how they are stated, our relationship with the speaker, and the objectives of our communication. For instance, the words “I want to see you now” would mean different things if the speaker was your boss versus your lover. One could be a positive connotation, and another might be a negative one. The same holds true for

humour. If we know that the other person understands and appreciates sarcasm, we might be more likely to engage in that behaviour and perceive it differently from someone who takes every word literally.

Most pragmatic rules are based on culture and experience. For instance, the term “Netflix and chill” often means that two people will hook up. Imagine someone from a different country who did not know what this meant; they would be shocked if they thought they were going to watch Netflix with the other person and just relax. Another example would be “Want to have a drink?”, which usually infers an alcoholic beverage. Another way of saying this might be to say, “Would you like something to drink?” The second sentence does not imply that the drink has to contain alcohol.

It is common for people to text in capital letters when they are angry or excited. You would interpret the text differently if the text was not in capital letters. For instance, “I love you” might be perceived differently from “I LOVE YOU!!!” Thus, when communicating with others, you should also realize that pragmatic rules can impact the message.

Words Create Reality

Language helps to create reality. Often, humans will label their experiences. For instance, the word “success” has different interpretations depending on your perceptions. Success to you might be a certain type of car or a certain amount of income. However, for someone else, success might be the freedom to do what they love or to travel to exotic places. Success might mean something different based on your background or your culture.

Another example might be the word “intimacy.” Intimacy to one person might be something similar to love, but to another person, it might be the psychological connection that you feel to another person. Words can impact a person’s reality of what they believe and feel.

If a child complains that they don’t feel loved, but the parents/guardians argue that they continuously show affection by giving hugs and doing fun shared activities, who would you believe? The child might say that they never heard their parents/guardians say the word love, and hence, they don’t feel love. So, when we argue that words can create a person’s reality, that is what we mean. Specific words can make a difference in how a person will receive the message. That is why certain rhetoricians and politicians will spend hours looking for the right word to capture the true essence of a message. A personal trainer might be careful to use the word “overweight” as opposed to “fat,” because it just sounds drastically different. At Disney world, they call their employees “cast members” rather than workers, because it gives a perception that each person has a part in helping to run the show. Even on a resume, you might select words that set you apart from the other applicants. For instance, if you were a cook, you might say “culinary artist.” It gives the impression that you weren’t just cooking food, you were making masterpieces with food. Words matter, and how they are used will make a difference.

Words Reflect Attitudes

When we first fall in love with someone, we will use positive adjectives to describe that person. However, if you have fallen out of love with that person, you might use negative or neutral words to describe that same person. Words can reflect attitudes. Some people can label one experience as pleasant and another person can have the opposite experience. This difference is because words reflect our attitudes about things. If a person has positive emotions towards another, they might say that that person is funny, mature, and thrifty. However, if the person has negative feelings or attitudes towards that same person, they might describe them as childish, old, and cheap. These words can give a connotation about how the person perceives them.

Level of Abstraction

When we think of language, it can be pretty **abstract**. For example, when we say something is “interesting,” it can be positive or negative. That is what we mean when we say that language is abstract. Language can be very specific. You can tell someone specific things to help them better understand what you are trying to say by using specific and concrete examples. For instance, if you say, “You are a jerk!”, the person who receives that message might get pretty angry and wonder why you said that statement. To be clear, it might be better to say something like, “When you slammed that door in my face this morning, it really upset me, and I didn’t think that behaviour was appropriate.” The second statement is more descriptive.

In 1941, linguist S.I. Hayakawa created what is called the **abstraction ladder** (Figure 2.2).³ The abstraction ladder starts abstract at the top, while the bottom rung is very concrete. In Figure 2.2, we’ve shown how you can go

from abstract ideas (e.g., information) through various levels of more concrete ideas down to the most concrete idea (e.g., interpersonal communication). Ideally, you can see that as we move down the ladder, the topic becomes more fine-tuned and concrete.

In our daily lives, we tend to use high levels of abstraction all the time. For instance, growing up, your parents/guardians probably helped you with homework, cleaning, cooking, and transporting you from one event to another. Yet, we don't typically say thank you to everything; we might make a general comment, such as a thank you rather than saying, "Thank you so much for helping me with my math homework and helping me figure out how to solve for the volume of spheres." It takes too long to say that, so people tend to be abstract. However, abstraction can cause problems if you don't provide enough description.

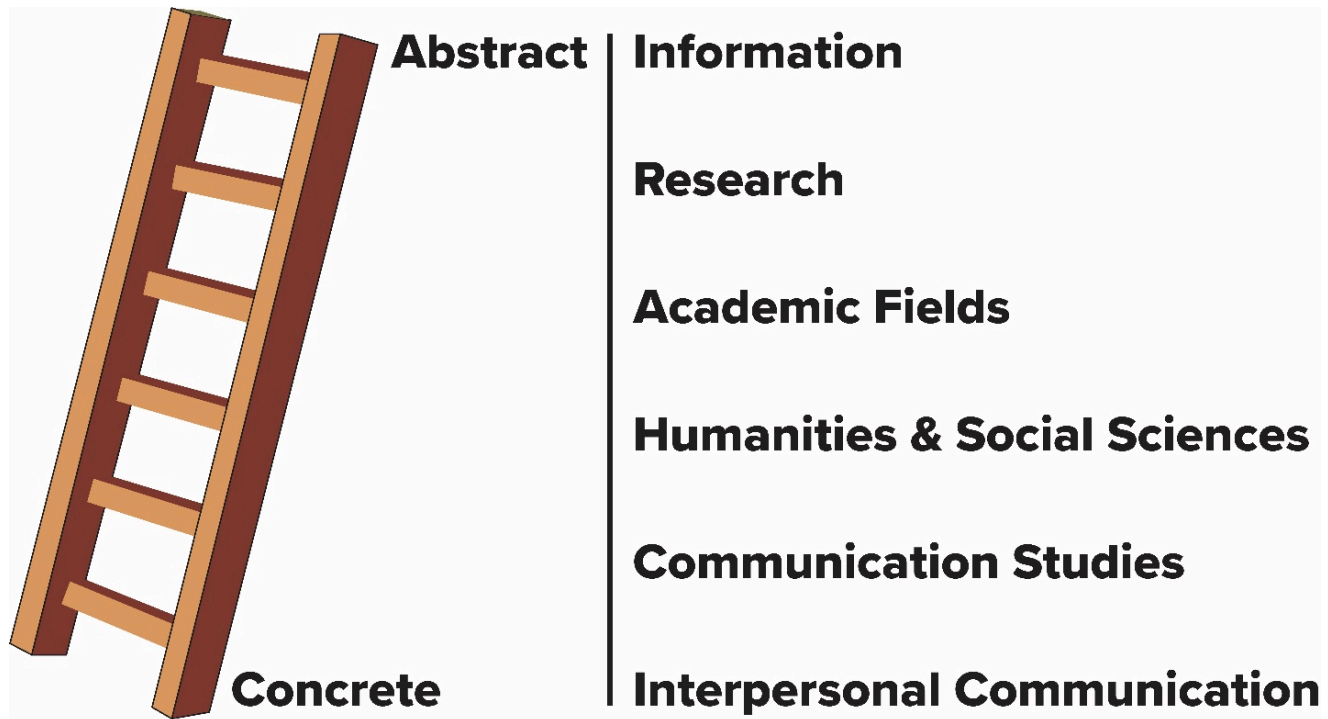


Figure 2.2 Abstraction Ladder

Metamessages

Metacommunication is known as communication about communication.⁴ Yet, **metamessages** are relationship messages that are sent among people with who they communicate. These messages can be verbal, nonverbal, direct, or indirect. For instance, if you see two friends just talking about what they did last weekend, they are also sending metamessages as they talk. Metamessages can convey affection, appreciation, disgust, ridicule, scorn, or contempt. Every time you send messages to others, notice the metamessages that they might be sending you. Do they seem upset or annoyed with certain things that you say? In this book, we want to stress the importance of mindfulness when speaking. You may not realize what metamessages you are sending out to others.



Figure 2.3 Perception is Key

Words and Meanings

Words can have denotative meanings or connotative meanings. In this section, we will learn about the differences and the triangle of meaning.⁵ Researchers by the names of Ogden and Richards noticed that misunderstandings occur when people associate different meanings with the same message. Their model (Figure 2.4) illustrates that there is an indirect association between a word and the actual referent or thing it represents.

As you can see, when you hear the word “dog,” it conjures up meaning for different people. The word “dog” itself is a symbol and signifier, or sound elements or other linguistic symbols that represents an underlying concept or meaning. When we hear the word “dog,” it is what we call the “signified,” or the meaning or idea expressed when someone hears the word. In this case, maybe you have a dog, and you really see that dog as your best friend, or, as in my case, you call him your little “cuddle monster” because he always wants to be connected to you at all times. Again, our meaning that we attach to the symbol is still separate from the physical entity itself. In this case, there is a real dog named Teddy, who is the referent, or the physical thing that a word or phrase denotes or stands for.

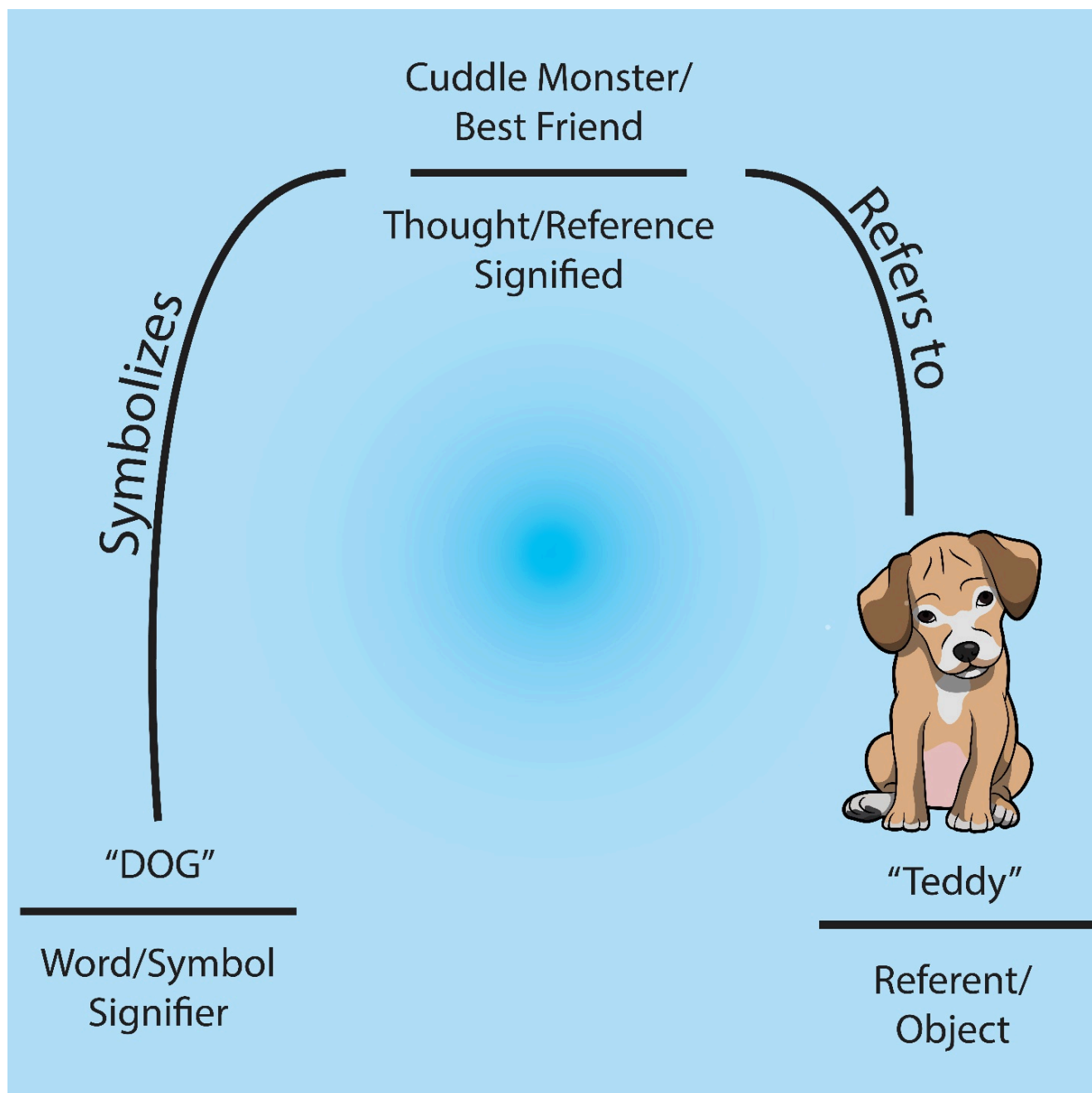


Figure 2.4 Signifier, Signified, and Referent

Words can have a **denotative** meaning, which is the dictionary definition. These are words that most people are familiar with, and they all can agree on the understanding of that word. If you asked a person what a car or a phone is, they would most likely know what you are talking about when you use those words.

Words can have a **connotative** meaning, which is a subjective definition of the word. The word might mean something different from what you meant. For example, you may hear someone referring to their baby. You could fairly safely assume that the person is referring to their infant, but just as easily they could be referring to a significant other.

Key Takeaways

- Words have denotative and connotative meanings. Denotations are the dictionary definition, and connotations are what the words imply.
- Sometimes confusion occurs because people are too abstract in their language. To be clear and concise in language, you need to be descriptive and specific as possible.
- Metamessages involves several meanings and can be conveyed nonverbally and verbally.

Exercises

- Create an example of an abstraction ladder of how communication can range from general to very specific.
- Denotative and Connotative Ability. In groups, find ten random words from the dictionary and ask everyone to write down at least five connotations of each of the words. Then, compare your lists. Discuss the similarities and differences between your word choices.
- Create a metamessages love board. As a class, make a list of all the ways you could tell someone you love them. Then, discuss how your metamessages might cause some misunderstandings or confusion.

Functions of Language

Learning Objectives

1. Distinguish the differences between instrumental and regulatory functions.
2. Appreciate the interactional and imaginative functions of language.
3. Examine the personal, ritual, and cultural functions of language.

Based on research examining how children learn language, it was found that children are trying to create “meaning potential.”⁶ In other words, children learn language so they can understand and be understood by others. As children age, language serves different functions.

Instrumental and Regulatory Functions

Children will typically communicate in a fashion that lets parents/guardians know what they want to do. When children are born, parents/guardians have to figure out if the child is hungry, thirsty, dirty, or sick. Later, when the child acquires language, the child can let the parent/guardian know what they want by using simple words like “eat” or “drink.”

Language can help us define what we can or cannot do. Often, you might see campaigns that say “Don’t drink and drive” or “Don’t text and drive” to help control behaviours while driving.

Regulatory functions of language are to influence the behaviours of others through requests, rules, or persuasion. These functions do not necessarily coincide with our needs. These might be advertisements that tell us to eat healthier or exercise more using specific products.

Interactional and Imaginative Functions

Interactional functions of language are used to help maintain or develop the relationship. Interactional functions also help to alleviate the interaction. Examples might include “Thank you,” “Please,” or “I care about you.”

Imaginative functions of language help to create imaginary constructs and tell stories. This use of fantasy usually occurs in play or leisure activities. People who roleplay in video games will sometimes engage in imaginative functions to help their character be more effective and persuasive.

Personal Functions

Next, we have **personal functions**, or the use of language to help you form your identity or sense of self. In job interviews, people are asked, “how do you describe yourself?” For some people, this is a challenging question because it showcases what makes you who you are. The words you pick, as opposed to others, can help define who you are.

Perhaps someone told you that you were funny. You never realized that you were funny until that person told you. Because they used the word “funny” as opposed to “silly” or “crazy,” it caused you to have perceptions about yourself. This example illustrates how words serve as a personal function for us. Personal functions of language are used to express identity, feelings, and options.

Heuristic and Representational Functions

The **heuristic function** of language is used to learn, discover, and explore. The heuristic function could include asking several questions during a lecture or adding commentary to a child’s behaviour. Another example might be “What is that tractor doing?” or “why is the cat sleeping?”

Representational functions of language are used to request or relay information. These statements are straightforward. They do not seek for an explanation. For instance, “my cat is asleep” or “the kitchen light isn’t working.”

Cultural Functions

We know a lot about a culture based on the language that the members of the group speak.⁷ Some words exist in other languages, but we do not have them in English. For instance, in China, there are five different words for shame, but in the English language, we only have one word for shame. Anthropologist Franz Boas studied the Inuit people of Baffin Island, Canada, in the late 1800s and noted that they had many different words for “snow.” In fact, it’s become a myth over the years that the Inuit have 50 different words for snow. In reality, as Laura Kelly points out, there are a number of Inuit languages, so this myth is problematic because it attempts to generalize to all of them.⁸ Instead, the Eskimo-Aleut language tends to have long, complicated words that describe ideas; whereas, in English, we’d have a sentence to say the same thing. As such, the Eskimo-Aleut language probably has 100s of different words that can describe snow.

Analyzing the Hopi Native American language, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf discovered that there is not a difference between nouns and verbs.⁹ To the Hopi people, their language showcases how their world and perceptions of the world are always in constant flux. The Hopi believe that everything is evolving and changing. Their conceptualization of the world is that there is continuous time. As Whorf wrote, “After a long and careful analysis the Hopi language is seen to contain no words, grammatical forms, construction or expressions that refer directly to what we call ‘time’, or to past, present or future.”¹⁰

A very popular theory that helps us understand how culture and language coexist is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.¹¹ Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf created this hypothesis to help us understand cultural differences in language use. The theory suggests that language impacts perceptions by showing a culture’s worldview. The hypothesis is also seen as linguistic determinism, which is the perspective that language influences our thoughts.

Sometimes, language has special rooted characteristics or linguistic relativity. Language can express not only our thoughts but our feelings as well. Language does not only represent things, but also how we feel about things. For instance, in the United States, most houses will have backyards. In Japan, due to limited space, most houses do not have backyards, and thus, it is not represented in their language. To the Japanese, they do not understand the concept of a backyard, and they don’t have a word for a backyard. All in all, language helps to describe our world and how we understand our world.

Key Takeaways

- Instrumental functions explain that language can help us accomplish tasks, and regulatory function explains that language can help us control behaviour.

- Interactional functions help us maintain information, and imaginative functions allow us to create worlds with others.
- When we talk with others, language can be personal, ritual, or cultural. Personal functions help us identify ourselves. Ritual functions of language involve words that we routinely say to others, such as “hello” or “goodbye.” Cultural functions of language help us describe the worldview or perspectives of culture.

Exercises

- Watch a clip of your favourite TV show and record how many statements are regulatory versus instrumental. Why do you think these differences exist? Do you think it would differ depending on the program? Why?
- Ask several classmates to describe themselves. Then, randomly read a set of descriptions to another classmate and ask them to identify who this person is. Discover if these personal characteristics are viewed by others or not. Determine why these differences might exist.
- Create a list of words that exist in English but are not found in other languages. Then, create a list of words that exist in other languages but not in English. Determine why those words might not exist in English or other cultures.

The Impact of Language

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how naming and identity can influence perceptions.
2. Comprehend how language can impact affiliation with others.
3. Identify the difference between sexist and racist language.

By now, you can see that language influences how we make sense of the world. In this section, we will understand some of the ways that language can impact our perceptions and possibly our behaviour. To be effective communicators, we need to realize the different ways that language can be significant and instrumental.

Naming and Identity

New parents/guardians typically spend a great deal of time trying to pick just the right name for their newborn. We know that names can impact other people’s perceptions.¹² Our names impact how we feel and how we behave. For instance, if you heard that someone was named Stacy, you might think that person was female, nice, and friendly, and you would be surprised if that person turned out to be male, mean, and aggressive.

People with unusual names tend to have more emotional distress than those with common names.¹³ Names impact our identity because others will typically have negative perceptions of unusual names or unique spellings of names. Names can change over time and can gain acceptance. For instance, the name Madison was not even considered a female first name until the movie “Splash” in the 1980s.¹⁴

Some names are very distinctive, which also makes them memorable and recognizable. Think about musical artists or celebrities with unique names. It helps you remember them, and it helps you distinguish that person from others.

Some of the names encompass some cultural or ethnic identity. In the popular book, *Freakonomics*, the authors showed a relationship between names and socioeconomic status.¹⁵ They discover that a popular name usually starts with high socioeconomic families, and then it becomes popular with lower socioeconomic families. Hence, it is very conceivable to determine the socioeconomic status of people you associate with based on their birth date

and name. Figure 4.5 shows some of the more popular baby names for girls and boys, along with names that are non-binary.



Figure 2.5 Popular Baby Names

Affiliation

When we want others to associate with us or have an **affiliation** with us, we might change the way we speak and the words we use. All of those things can impact how other people relate to us. Researchers found that when potential romantic partners employed the same word choices regarding pronouns and prepositions, then interest also increased. At the same time, couples that used similar word choices when texting each other significantly increased their relationship duration.¹⁶ This study implies that we often inadvertently mimic other people's use of language when we focus on what they say.

If you have been in a romantic relationship for a long period, you might create special expressions or jargon for the other person, and that specialized vocabulary can create greater closeness and understanding. The same line of thinking occurs for groups in a gang or persons in the military. If we adapt to the other person's communication style or **converge**, then we can also impact perceptions of affiliation. Research has shown that people who have similar speech also have more positive feelings for each other.¹⁷ However, speech can also work in the opposite direction when we **diverge**, or when we communicate in a very different fashion. For instance, a group from another culture might speak the same dialect, even though they can speak English, in order to create distance and privacy from others.

Sexism and Racism

Before discussing the concepts of sexism and racism, we must understand the term "bias." **Bias** is an attitude that is not objective or balanced, prejudiced, or the use of words that intentionally or unintentionally offend people or express an unfair attitude concerning a person's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or illness. We'll explore more on the issue of biased language later in this chapter.

Sexism or bias against others based on their sex can come across in language. **Sexist language** can be defined as

“words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either sex.”¹⁸ Language can impact how we feel about ourselves and others. For instance, there is a magazine called *Working Mother*, but there is not one called “Working Father.” Even though the reality is that many men who work also have families and are fathers, there are no words that tend to distinguish them from other working men. Whereas, women are distinguished when they both work and are mothers compared to other women who solely work and also compared to women who are solely mothers and/or wives.

Think about how language has changed over the years. We used to have occupations that were highly male-dominated in the workplace and had words to describe them. For instance, policemen, firemen, and chairmen are now police officers, firefighters, and chairpersons. The same can also be said for some female-dominated occupations. For instance, stewardess, secretary, and waitress have been changed to include males and are often called flight attendants, office assistants, and servers. Thus, to eliminate sexism, we need to be cautious of the word choices we use when talking with others. Sexist language will impact perceptions, and people might be swayed about a person’s capability based on the word choices.

Similarly, **racism** is the bias people have towards others of a different race. **Racist language** conveys that a racial group is superior or better than another race. Some words in English have racial connotations. Aaron Smith-McLallen, Blair T. Johnson, John Dovidio, and Adam Pearson wrote:

In the United States and many other cultures, the color white often carries more positive connotations than the color black... Terms such as “Black Monday,” “Black Plague,” “black cats” and the “black market” all have negative connotations, and literature, television, and movies have traditionally portrayed heroes in white and villains in black. The empirical work of John E. Williams and others throughout the 1960s demonstrated that these positive and negative associations with the colors black and white, independent of any explicit connection to race, were evident among Black and White children as young as 3 years old ... as well as adults.¹⁹

Currently, there is an ongoing debate in the United States about whether President Trump’s use of the phrase “Chinese Virus” when referring to the coronavirus is racially insensitive. The argument for its racial insensitivity is that the President is specifically using the term as an “other” technique to allow his followers to place blame on Chinese people for the coronavirus. Unsurprisingly, as a result of the use of the phrase “Chinese Virus,” there have been numerous violent attacks against individuals of Asian descent within the United States. Notice that we don’t say people of Chinese descent here. The people that are generally inflamed by this rhetoric don’t take the time to distinguish among people they label as “other.”

It is important to note that many words do not imply any type of sexual or racial connotations. However, some people might use it to make judgments or expectations of others. For example, when describing a bad learning experience, the student might say “Black professor” or “female student” as opposed to just saying the student and professor argued. These descriptors can be problematic and sometimes not even necessary in the conversation. When using those types of words, it can create slight factors of sexism/racism.

Muted Group Theory

Muted group theory was initially developed to explain the way humans, specifically men and women, communicate.²⁰ The theory claims that man-made communication is, just that, “man”-made. Similar to standpoint theory, muted group theory argues that the dominant members of society, typically men, create a language and system of communication that subverts or reduces other groups, specifically women. Muted group theory has been described as feminist theory, and even this nomenclature is a great example of the claims that the theory is making.²¹ The term “feminist” exists in a male-dominated culture and language and connotes a negative conception of that which it is used to describe. Even the fact that there is not a popular term used to describe those who fight for the rights and equal status of men, points to the fact that there is a problem. The word “feminist” exists because it deviates from what is perceived as the “norm.” Even the terminology we use to describe women, and a theory that calls attention to their subversion, we see as even more subversion.

Figure 2.6 represents the basic conceptualization of muted group theory. The blue circle represents the dominant group, and the solid arrow points to their perception of reality. Meanwhile, the pink circle represents the muted group, and the dashed line represents their perception of reality. Often what happens in society is that the dominant group’s perception of reality is just seen as reality. As such, the muted group’s perception of reality is seen as less than or more fanciful than the dominant group’s perception. In reality, the muted group often sees

things that really do exist in a society that the dominant group either cannot see or chooses not to see based on its position in society as the dominant group.

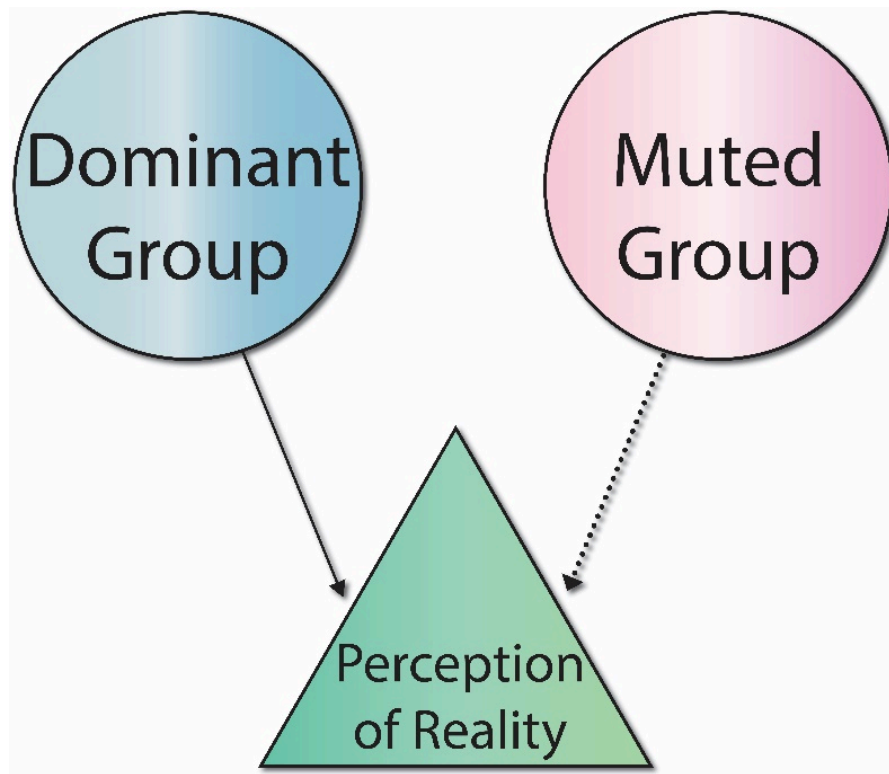


Figure 2.6 Muted Group Theory

One area in our society where we can examine muted group theory is about socioeconomic status. Here are just a few statements that wealthy people have made:

- When talking about a couple planning their wedding, “I feel sorry for them, because they have a budget.”
- “What do you mean, you don’t know if you should get them? Whenever I want new clothes, I just ask my daddy for the money card.”
- The guy was looking on a website for cars, when a rich coworker asks, “why don’t you just buy the car with cash so you don’t have to make payments?” When the guy told his coworker he couldn’t afford to pay for a car in cash, his rich coworker replied, “Why don’t you just have your parents buy it for you?”
- “If you’re making \$50,000 and your salary gets down to \$40,000 and you have to cut, it’s very severe to you. But it’s no less severe to these other people with these big numbers.”
- “People who don’t have money don’t understand the stress. Could you imagine what it’s like to say I got three kids in private school, I have to think about pulling them out? How do you do that?”
- “You don’t get the vote if you don’t pay a dollar in taxes. But what I really think is it should be like a corporation. You pay a million dollars, you get a million votes. How’s that?”

The perspectives illustrated in these statements are ones that most of us cannot easily relate to. The opposite is also true. People who live in the top 1% often have very flawed perceptions of what life is like for those who don’t have piles of money sitting around. Often those in the dominant group (in this case the top 1%) have no conceptualization of what life is like for those in muted groups (the bottom 99%). As such, those in muted groups often have a much clearer perception of reality.

Some research in this theory has been done on other subverted groups such as new kids at school.²² They found that it was normative patterns that created a system of subversion in the classroom. When a new student arrived, they inadvertently went against the popular normative habits of the class and, in doing so, ostracized themselves. Other students simultaneously asserted and solidified their dominance while lowering the status of

the new student. This same thing can be seen in our male-dominated society. As women seek to make themselves known and heard, they are continually reduced, and male-centric standards are reinforced.

Research Spotlight



Heather Kissack (2010) focused on the subversion and muting of women in email communication within businesses. She found that women are consistently marginalized and muted in organizational emails in the workplace. This is surprising because it would seem that without the nonverbal cues of face-to-face communication, there would be less muting of women in computer-mediated communication. Unfortunately, in this study, one can see that it is the male-centric verbiage that has created this divide in social and organization status. Even as women attempted to un-mute themselves, they were increasingly muted and subverted.

Kissack, H. (2010). Muted voices: a critical look at e-male in organizations. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 34(6), 539-551. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090591011061211>

Key Takeaways

- Names can impact how we perceive others. It can also impact how we feel about ourselves.
- We can increase affiliation with others through converging our language to others. We can decrease affiliation with others through diverging our language with others.
- Sexism and racism can be displayed through our language choices. It is important to be aware of the words we use so that we do not come across as sexist or racist.

Exercises

- Create a list of names that you have heard that are unique. What makes these names so unique and memorable? Ask friends to give you their perceptions of those names. Does that match with what you think? Why or why not?
- Engage in a normal conversation with a friend or family member. Without having them know what you are doing, slowly and subtly converge your communication style to theirs. Record your observations. Then, with the same person, try to diverge your communication style. Re-record your observations. Ask if the person noticed any communication changes. How did it make them feel? How did you feel? Why?
- Make a list of all the words in the English language that are sexist or racist. Try to research those words on the Internet and determine how these words are sexists or racists. Then, provide alternatives for these words to be more politically correct.

Types of Language

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between informal and formal language.
2. Determine the different types of informal language.
3. Understand improper language and biased language.

If you read or watch different types of programming, you will probably notice that there is a difference in language use based on the environment, who you are talking to, and the reason for communicating. In this section, we will

discuss the different types of language. The types of language used will impact how others view you and if they will view you positively or negatively.

Formal vs. Informal Language

You probably know by now that how we communicate in different contexts can vary greatly. For example, how you compose a text to your best friend is going to use different grammatical structures and words than when you compose an email to your professor. One of the main reasons for this difference is because of formal and informal language. Table 3.1 provides a general overview of the major differences between formal and informal language.

Formal Language	Informal Language
Used in carefully edited communication.	Used in impromptu, conversational communication.
Used in academic or official content.	Used in everyday communication.
The sentence structure is long and complicated.	The sentence structure is short, choppy, and improvised.
The emphasis is on grammatical correctness.	The emphasis is on easily understood messages using everyday phrases.
Uses the passive voice.	Uses the active voice.
Often communicated from a detached, third person perspective.	Perspective is less of a problem (1 st , 2 nd or 3 rd).
Speakers/writers avoid the use of contractions.	Speakers/writers can actively include contractions.
Avoid the inclusion of emotionally laden ideas and words.	It allows for the inclusion of emotions and empathy.
Language should be objective.	Language can be subjective.
Language should avoid the use of colloquialisms.	It's perfectly appropriate to use colloquialisms.
Only use an acronym after it has clearly been spelled out once.	People use acronyms without always clearly spelling out what it means.
All sentences should be complete (clear subjects and verbs).	Sentences may be incomplete (lacking a clear subject and/or verb).
The use of pronouns should be avoided.	The use of personal pronouns is common.
Avoids artistic languages as much as possible.	Includes a range of artistic language choices (e.g., alliteration, anaphora, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, etc.).
Arguments are supported by facts and documented research.	Arguments are supported by personal beliefs and opinions.
Language is gender neutral.	Language includes gender references.
Avoids the imperative voice.	Uses the imperative voice.

Table 2.1 Formal vs. Informal Language

Formal Language

When applying for a job, you will most likely use formal language in your cover letter and resume. **Formal language** is official and academic language. You want to appear intelligent and capable, so formal language helps you accomplish those goals. Formal language often occurs when we write. Formal language uses full sentences and is grammatically correct. Formal language is more objective and more complex. Most legal agreements are written in formal language.

Informal Language

Informal language is common, everyday language, which might include slang words. It is continuous and casual. We use informal language when we talk to other people. It is more simple. Informal language tends to use more contractions and abbreviations. If you look at your text messages, you will probably see several examples of informal language.

Jargon

Jargon is the specialized or technical language of a specific group or profession that may not be understood

by outsiders.²³ If you are really into cars or computers, you probably know a lot about the different parts and functions. Jargon is normally used in a specific context and may be understood outside that context. Jargon consists of a specific vocabulary that uses words that only certain people understand. The business world is full of jargon. Joanna Cutrara created a list of 14 commonly heard jargon phrases used in the business world.²⁴

- Low Hanging Fruit
- Leverage
- Open the Kimono
- Giving 110%
- Out of Pocket
- Drink the Kool-Aid
- Bio Break
- Blue Sky Training
- Tiger Team
- Idea Shower or Thought Shower
- Moving the Goal Post
- Drill Down
- Gain Traction

If you're like us, chances are you've heard a few of these jargon phrases in your workplace. Heck, you may have even found yourself using a few of them. Your workplace may even have some specific jargon only used in your organization. Take a minute and think through all of the jargon you hear on an average day.

Colloquialisms

Colloquialisms are the use of informal words in communication.²⁵ Colloquialism varies from region to region. Examples might be “wanna” instead of “want to” or “gonna” instead of “going to.” It shows us how a society uses language in their everyday lives. Here's a short list of some common colloquialisms you may have used yourself:

- Bamboozle – to deceive
- Be blue – to be sad
- Beat around the bush – to avoid a specific topic
- Buzz off – go away
- Fell through the cracks – to be neglected
- Go bananas, or go nuts – go insane or be very angry
- Gobsmacked – shocked
- Gonna – going to
- Hit a writer's block – unable to write
- Hit the hay – to go to sleep
- Pop into my head – to have a new thought
- Sticktoitiveness – to be persistent
- Threw me for a loop – to be surprised
- Throw someone under the bus – to throw the blame on another person
- Wanna – want to
- Y'all – you all

- Yinz – you all

Slang

Slang refers to words that are employed by certain groups, such as young adults and teens.²⁶ Slang is more common when speaking to others rather than written. Slang is often used with people who are similar and have experience with each other. Here is a list of some common slang terms you may use in your day-to-day life:

- BAE (baby / before all else)
- On Fleek (looking perfect)
- Bye Felica (saying goodbye to someone you don't like)
- The Tea (gossip)
- Bro (typically a male friend)
- Cash (money)
- Cheesy (cheap or tacky)
- Ship (wanting people to be in a relationship, whether real or fictional)
- Frenemy (someone who is both a friend and an enemy)
- Thirsty (being overly eager or desperate)
- Throw Shade (to insult another person)
- Woke (being acutely aware of social injustice within society)

How many of these slang words do you use? What other slang words do you find yourself using? When it comes to slang, it's important to understand that this list is constantly evolving. What is common slang today could be completely passé tomorrow. What's common slang in the United States is not universal in English speaking countries.

Idioms

Idioms are expressions or figures of speech whose meaning cannot be understood by looking at the individual words and interpreting them literally.²⁷ Idioms can help amplify messages. Idioms can be used to provide artistic expression. For instance, "knowledge is power!"

Idioms can be hard to grasp for non-native speakers. As such, many instructors in the English as a Second Language world spend a good deal of time trying to explain idioms to non-native speakers. Table 2.2 presents a wide array of different idioms.

IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
ish	About. I'll meet you at 4ish.
a basket case	A wreck. He was a basket case after he was thrown off the basketball team.
a breath of fresh air	Refreshing/fun. She's a breath of fresh air.
a change of heart	Change my mind. I've had a change of heart.
a blessing in disguise	Something bad that turns out good. Losing his job turned out to be a blessing in disguise.
a dead end	That's a dead end job—time to find a new one.
a gut feeling	Feeling in my stomach. I have a gut feeling that everything is going to turn out all right.
a matter of opinion	It's a matter of opinion whether eating fried tarantulas is a gourmet treat.
a piece of cake	That test was a snap—it was a piece of cake. (easy).
a ripoff	You spent \$500 for a watermelon! What a ripoff! You were cheated.
a pain in the neck	A pest. His little brother is a real pain in the neck.
be in hot water	Be in trouble. If you tell your boss off, you'll really be in hot water.
in the same boat	We're in the same situation. We're all in the same boat—so be cool.
on the same wavelength	We have the same ideas and opinions. We're on the same wavelength.
be on the ball	Very sharp. Very smart. He's really on the ball.
it's only a matter of time	Very soon. It's only a matter of time until his boss realizes that he is the one stealing money from the till.
be that as it may	As things stand. Be that as it may, I think you should reconsider your decision to move to Antarctica.
up in arms	Really angry. His father was up in arms when he learned that he had crashed his new car.
up in the air	Not sure. Plans are up in the air—we haven't decided what to do yet.
bend over backwards	Go out of your way. She really bent over backwards to make my stay enjoyable.
Big deal!	Not important (sarcastic). Losing an old sock is not a big deal.
cost an arm and a leg	Very expensive. His new Ferrari cost an arm and a leg.
cross your fingers	For good luck. Cross your fingers that I pass the English exam with flying colors.
draw a blank	I can't remember. I drew a blank when I tried to remember his brother's name.
Easier said than done	More difficult than it seems.
Am fed up with	Sick and tired of something. I'm fed up with whining friends who have everything!
from scratch	Make from basic ingredients. Her carrot cake was made from scratch.
for the time being	For now. For the time being, everything is fine at work.
get cold feet	Feel too scared to do something. John wanted to ask Maria out but he got cold feet and decided not to.
get out of the wrong side of the bed	In a bad mood. He must have gotten up out of the wrong side of the bed today.
get the picture	Understand. Do you get the picture?
get your act together	Get organized/stop wasting time. You better get your act together or you're going to fail all your classes.
give it a shot	Try. Why not try bungee jumping. Give it a shot.
give him a piece of your mind	Get angry and tell someone off. If I were you I would give him a piece of your mind.
give him the cold shoulder	Ignore someone. Brett walked right past me without saying a word. He gave me the cold shoulder.
go all out	Do your utmost for someone or something. His parents went all out for his graduation party.
go downhill	Get worse. After he got divorced, everything went downhill.
go up in smoke	Evaporate/disappear. His dreams of being a professional athlete went up in smoke when he broke his leg.
have a chip on your shoulder	I think you are great. He has such a chip on his shoulder that he hardly ever relates to anyone.

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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
had it up to here	Can't take any more. I've had it up to here with noisy students!
mixed feelings	Positive and negative feelings together. I have very mixed feelings about her marrying a fisherman.
second thoughts	Thinking again about a decision. I'm having second thoughts about trekking in Greenland this summer.
throw a fit	Get really angry. His mother threw a fit when she heard that he lost her iPhone.
I'm all ears	To listen intently. Tell me about your wedding plans—I'm all ears.
in the bag	Certain. His new job is in the bag. He signed the contract.
in the middle of nowhere	Way out in the country. Their ski chalet is in the middle of nowhere.
Just my luck!	Bad luck. Just my luck to lose the winning lottery ticket.
keep an eye on	Watch carefully. Will you keep an eye on my nephew while I walk the dog?
bear in mind	Keep it in mind. Bear in mind, learning a new language isn't as easy as it seems.
learn by heart	Memorize. You have to learn irregular verbs by heart.
let the cat out of the bag	Spill the beans. Tell a secret. Don't let the cat out of the bag. Keep his surprise birthday party a secret.
make my day	Make my day great. The guy I have a crush on finally called me. He made my day.
miss the point	Don't understand the basic meaning. You are missing the point entirely.-.
no way	Impossible. You got all A's on your exams and you never studied. No way!
don't have a clue	I have no idea. I don't have a clue what the professor was talking about.
don't have the faintest idea	Don't understand. I don't have the faintest idea of what that article was talking about.
off the top of my head	Without thinking. Off the top of my head, I think it's worth \$6 million.
on the dot	Ontime. He arrived at 6 o'clock on the dot.
out of sight, out of mind	You forget someone you don't see anymore.
out of the blue	Suddenly. Guess who called me out of the blue?
play it by ear	Make no plans—do things spontaneously. Let's just play it by ear tonight and see what comes up.
pull someone's leg	Kid someone. Stop pulling my leg. I know you are kidding!
red tape	Bureaucracy. It's almost impossible to set up a business in Greece because there is so much red tape.
read between the lines	Understand what is not stated. If you read between the lines, you'll realize that he is trying to dump you.
safe and sound	Fine. The Boy Scouts returned safe and sound from their camping adventure in Yellowstone National Park.
see eye to eye	Agree. He doesn't see eye to eye with his parents at all.
sour grapes	Pretend to not want something that you are desperate for. It's just sour grapes that he is criticizing George's villa in Italy.
slipped my mind	Forgot. I meant to call you last night, but it slipped my mind.
small talk	Chitchat. It's important to be able to make small talk when you meet new people for the first time.
talk shop	Talk about work. What a boring evening! Everyone talked shop- and they're all dog walkers!
the icing on the cake	Something that makes a good thing great. And the icing on the cake was that the movie for which he earned \$12 million, also won the Oscar for best picture.
the last straw	The thing that ruins everything. When my boss asked me to cancel my wedding to complete a project—I said that's the last straw and I quit!
time flies	Time goes fast. Time flies when you are having fun.
you can say that again	You agree emphatically. Kanye West is a great singer. You can say that again!
you name it	Everything you can think of. This camp has every activity you can think of—like swimming, canoeing, basketball and you name it.
wouldn't be caught dead	Not even dead would I do something. I wouldn't be caught dead wearing that dress to the ball.
she's a doll	Someone really great. Thanks for helping me out. You're a doll.
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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
full of beans	Lively—usually for a child. Little children are usually full of beans.
full of baloney	Not true. She's full of baloney—she doesn't know what she is talking about.
like two peas in a pod	Very similar. His two brothers are like peas in a pod.
a piece of cake	Very easy. My math test was so easy—a real piece of cake.
sounds fishy	Suspicious. Doubling your money in an hour sounds fishy to me.
a frog in my throat	I can't speak clearly. Ahem! Sorry I had a frog in my throat.
smell a rat	Something is suspicious. The policeman didn't believe the witness—in fact, he smelled a rat.
go to the dogs	Go downhill. Everything is going to the dogs in our town since the new mayor took office.
cat got your tongue	Silent for no reason. What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?
for the birds	Awful. How was the new Batman movie? Oh, it was for the birds.
pay through the nose	Pay lots of money. They paid through the nose to hold their wedding at Buckingham Palace.
tongue in cheek	Being ironic. I meant that tongue in cheek. I was kidding.
all thumbs	Clumsy. He couldn't put that simple table together—he's just all thumbs.
get off my back	Leave me alone. Bug off! Get off my back!
drive me up a wall	Drive me crazy. Rude people drive me up a wall.
spill the beans	Tell a secret. Hey, don't spill the beans. It's a secret.
hit the ceiling	Blow up. His dad hit the ceiling when he saw his dreadful report card.
go fly a kite	Get lost! Oh, leave me alone! Go fly a kite!
dressed to kill	Dressed in fancy clothes. Cinderella was dressed to kill when she arrived at the ball.
in stitches	Laughing a lot. We were all in stitches when we heard the latest joke.
feel like a million dollars	Feel great. I just slept for 15 hours—I feel like a million dollars.
at the end of my rope	Can't stand it anymore. The mother of four little children is at the end of her rope.
my head is killing me	Something hurts. My head is killing me—I should take an aspirin.
that's out of the question	Impossible. Me? Stand up and sing and dance in front of the whole school—out of the question!
I'm beat	Very tired.
It'll knock your socks off!	Thrills you. You'll love this summer's action movie. It'll knock your socks off.
beats me	Don't know. What's the capital of Outer Mongolia? Beats me!
hands down	No comparison. Hands down Mykonos is the world's most beautiful island.
goody-goody	Behaves perfectly. I can't stand Matilda—she's such a goody-goody and no fun at all.
pain in the neck	A big problem. Washing dishes is a pain in the neck.
like pulling teeth	Very difficult. Trying to get 2-year-olds to cooperate is like pulling teeth.
for crying out loud	Oh no! For crying out loud—let me finish this book—will you?
I'm at my wit's end	I'm desperate. I'm at my wit's end trying to deal with two impossible bosses.
like beating a dead horse	A waste of time. Trying to get my father to ever change his mind is like beating a dead horse.
out of this world	Fantastic! My vacation to Hawaii was out of this world!
cost an arm and a leg	Very expensive. A Rolls Royce costs an arm and a leg.
go figure	Try to guess why. Our English teacher gives us five tests a week and this week—no tests at all. Go figure.
in the nick of time	Just in time. The hero arrived in the nick of time to save the desperate damsel.
I'm up to my eyeballs in	Very busy. I'm up to my eyeballs in work this week.
I had a blast/a ball	A great time. I had a blast/ball at Sandy's slumber party.
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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
win-win situation	Both sides win. Selling their old stock of iPhones 10s was a win-win situation. They got rid of the useless phones, and we bought them really cheaply.
I'm swamped	Very busy. Let's get together next week--this week I'm swamped.
It's a steal	Fantastic bargain. Getting a new computer for \$300 dollars is a steal.
the sticks	Way out in the country. Who would want to live in the sticks--what would you do for excitement?
break the ice	Start a conversation. Talking about the weather is a good way to break the ice when you meet someone new.
give me a break	Leave me alone! Come on! Give me a break! I've been working all day long- and I just want to play a little bit of Angry Birds....
like talking to the wall	A waste of time. Dealing with many teenagers is like talking to a wall--they won't even respond to your questions.
see eye to eye	Agree. I hardly ever see eye to eye with my parents.
It's about time	It's time. It's about time you started your homework--it's midnight!
pays peanuts	Pays hardly anything. This job pays peanuts--\$1 an hour!.
sleep like a log	Sleep soundly. Last night I slept like a log and didn't hear the thunderstorm at all.
ace	Do great. I aced the math test. I got 100%.
easy as pie	Super easy. The English test was as easy as pie.
blabbermouth	Someone who tells secrets. Don't tell Sophie your secrets or the whole town will know them.
don't bug me	Don't bother me. Don't bug me--I'm busy.
by the skin of my teeth	Barely manage something. I passed the geography test by the skin of my teeth.
can't make head nor tail of	I can't understand. I can't make head nor tail of this math chapter.
cool as a cucumber	Very calm. The policeman was cool as a cucumber when he persuaded the man not to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge.
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Table 2.2 Common Idioms

Clichés

Cliché is an idea or expression that has been so overused that it has lost its original meaning.²⁸ Clichés are common and can often be heard. For instance, “light as a feather” or “happily ever after” are common clichés. They are important because they express ideas and thoughts that are popular in everyday use. They are prevalent in advertisements, television, and literature.

Improper Language

Improper language is not proper, correct, or applicable in certain situations.²⁹ There are two different types of improper language: vulgarity and cursing. First, vulgarity includes language that is offensive or lacks good taste. Often, vulgar is lewd or obscene. Second, cursing is language that includes evil, doom, misfortune on a person or group. It can also include curse or profane words. People might differ in their perceptions about improper language.

Biased Language

Biased language is language that shows preference in favour of or against a certain point-of-view, shows prejudice, or is demeaning to others.³⁰ Bias in language is uneven or unbalanced. Examples of this may include “mankind” as opposed to “humanity.”

Avoid	Consider Using
Black Attorney	Attorney
Businessman	Businessperson, Business Owner, Executive, Leader, Manager, etc.
Chairman	Chair or Chairperson
Cleaning Lady / Maid	Cleaner, Cleaning Person, Housecleaner, Housekeeper, Maintenance Worker, Office Cleaner, etc.
Male Nurse	Nurse
Male Flight Attendant or Stewardess	Flight Attendant
Female Doctor	Physician or Doctor
Manpower	Personnel or Staff
Congressman	Legislator, Member of Congress, or Member of the House of Representatives
Postman	Postal Employee or Letter carrier
Forefather	Ancestor
Policeman	Police Officer / Law Enforcement Officer
Fireman	Firefighter
Disabled	People with Disabilities
Schizophrenic	Person Diagnosed with Schizophrenia
Homosexual	Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexual Men or Women

Table 2.3 Biased Language

One specific type of biased language is called spin, or the manipulation of language to achieve the most positive interpretation of words, to gain political advantage, or to deceive others. In essence, people utilizing spin can make language choices that frame themselves or their clients in a positive way.

Ambiguous Language

Ambiguous language is language that can have various meanings. Google Jay Leno's headlines videos. Sometimes he uses advertisements that are very abstract. For instance, there is a restaurant ad that says, "People are our best ingredient!" What comes to mind when you hear that? Are they actually using people in their food? Or do they mean their customer service is what makes their restaurant notable? When we are trying to communicate with others, it is important that we are clear in our language. We need others to know exactly what we mean and not imply meaning. That is why you need to make sure that you don't use ambiguous language.

Euphemisms

Euphemisms also make language unclear. People use euphemisms as a means of saying something more politely or less bluntly. For instance, instead of telling your parents/guardians that you failed a test, you might say that you did sub-optimal. People use euphemisms because it sounds better, and it seems like a better way to express how they feel. People use euphemisms all the time. For instance, instead of saying this person died, they might say the person passed away. Instead of saying that someone farted, you might say someone passed gas.

Relative Language

Relative language depends on the person communicating. People's backgrounds vary. Hence, their perspectives will vary. I know a college professor that complains about her salary. However, other college professors would love to have a salary like hers. In other words, our language is based on our perception of our experiences. For instance, if someone asked you what would be your ideal salary, would it be based on your previous salary? Your parents? Your friends? Language is relative because of that reason. If I said, "Let's go eat at an expensive restaurant," what would be expensive for you? For some person, it would be \$50, for another, \$20, for someone else it might be \$10, and yet there might be someone who would say \$5 is expensive!

Static Evaluation

Often times, we think that people and things do not change, but they do change. If you ever watch afternoon talk shows, you might see people who go through amazing transformations, perhaps through weight loss, a makeover, or surgery or some sort. These people changed. **Static evaluation** states that things are not constant. Things vary over time, and our language should be representative of that change. For instance, Max is bad. It is important to note that Max might be bad at one time or may have displayed bad behaviour, but it may not represent how Max will be in the future.

Mindfulness Activity



For the entire day, we want you to take a minute to pause before you text or email someone. When we text or email someone, we typically just put our thoughts together in a quick fashion. Take a second to decide how you plan to use your words. Think about which words would be best to get our message across effectively. After you have typed your message, take another few minutes to reread the message. Be mindful of how others might interpret your message. Would they read it at face value, or would they misinterpret the message because there is a lack of nonverbal messages? Do you need to add emojis or GIFS to change how the message is conveyed?

Researchers have found that when college students can address their emotions and are mindful of their feelings, it can enhance written communication with others.³¹ After doing this activity, try to be more mindful of the things that you send to other people.

Key Takeaways

- Formal language is more careful and more mannered than everyday speech, whereas informal language is appropriate in casual conversation.
- Informal language includes (1) Jargon, or technical language; (2) Colloquialism, or informal expressions; (3) Slang, or nonstandard language; (4) Idioms, or expressions or figures of speech; (5) clichés, or sayings that are overused and predictable.

Exercises

- Create a list of jargon or slang words that you use and what they mean. Determine if there are differences between how words are used now compared to the past.
- Create a list of colloquialisms or idioms. Find an international student and see if these words make sense. What was confusing or unclear?
- Find clichés that are used in other cultures. Determine if you can find an American equivalent of each cliché.

Improving Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Examine ways to improve your vocabulary.
2. Increase your awareness and adaptation of language.
3. Realize the importance of checking for understanding.

In this chapter, you have learned the importance of language. In this last section, we will discuss ways to improve your verbal communication skills. To be a great interpersonal communicator, it is extremely important that you also know how to use language in the most effective way.

Improving Language Skills

From an early age, you probably had words that you used most frequently because you were familiar with those words. As you get older and become more educated, your vocabulary has probably expanded to help you become more successful. Language is used to help express our feelings, intentions, and comprehension of others.³² An extensive vocabulary is a keen predictor of someone's social status, education, and profession. Whether you like it or not, the words we use and the grammatical structure of how we use those words can impact our standing in school, work, and society. Here are some tips to help you improve your vocabulary.

Use Repetition

First, be sure to use repetition. To become familiar with a word, you need to see it over and over again. Besides, you need to use it in conversations over and over again. The more times you repeat the word, the more likely you will memorize it, and it will become part of your daily repertoire.

Group Similar Words Together

Second, group similar words together. You should never learn vocabulary by looking at a list of words. Think of words as different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It doesn't make sense to look at each piece of the puzzle individually. Rather, you need to fit them together to see the whole picture. The same thing should occur with words. You should memorize words that have similarities in some way. For instance, create a vocabulary around a theme, such as music, or an adjective, such as beautiful.

Build Your Vocabulary

Third, it is essential to make vocabulary that is personal to you. **Vocabulary** can be defined as all the words understood by a person or group of people. As early as four months, a baby can start to distinguish between language sounds and other sounds. According to David Crystal, language acquisition happens quite rapidly:

- By age 2, people can recognize and speak 200 words.
- By age 3, people can recognize and speak about 2000 words.
- By age 5, people can recognize and speak about 4,000 words.³³

That means your average infant to toddler is learning three to four new words every day. Infants are hardwired to learn a language. If you want to ensure your child can speak multiple languages, it's best to expose them to multiple languages during this crucial developmental cycle. Even though we start as infants, we continue to improve our vocabularies right through middle age:

- Most adult native test-takers range from 20,000–35,000 words
- Average native test-takers of age 8 already know 10,000 words
- Average native test-takers of age 4 already know 5,000 words
- Adult native test-takers learn almost 1 new word a day until middle age
- Adult test-taker vocabulary growth basically stops at middle age³⁴

As you can see, most native English-speaking adults have fairly substantial vocabularies, but we do see a drop in new language acquisition as people enter into their middle age. As such, it's important to keep learning.

One way to keep learning is to find words that have meaning for you. If you have ever heard a story about survival from someone who has gone through something life-changing, they probably used words that touched you and helped you to connect to the story. In the same fashion, you should find words that can relate to your story. When we find words that have personal meaning to us, we can use those words more effectively in our own vocabulary. Here are some essential tips for building your vocabulary:

1. Keep a journal of words you don't know.
2. If you don't know a word, look it up in a dictionary.
3. Learn to recognize both Latin and Greek roots of words.
4. Play vocabulary games (e.g., anagrams, Boggle, crossword puzzles, scrabble, etc.).
5. Make synonym and antonym word lists.
6. Take a writing and/or editing course.

Read

Lastly, you should read regularly. It doesn't matter what you read. As long as you are reading, you will probably come across words that you are unfamiliar with. When you do come across a word you don't know, take the time to look it up. This practice is especially important when reading academic works because they are often full of ten-thousand-dollar words. Next time you read and run across a word that you don't know, be sure to find the definition so that you can comprehend what is being said.

We would also recommend reading articles and books that stretch you. Don't just read books like the *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* because those are written on a junior high or middle-school reading level.

Increase Your Awareness and Adaptation of Language

After learning to improve your vocabulary, it's also important to increase language awareness and adaptation. When we talk about **language awareness**, we are referring to a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language.³⁵ For our purposes, we define **language adaptation** as the ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner. As such, it's not just about being aware of language that leads to effective interpersonal interactions, but our ability to adapt our linguistic choices with different people to maximize the effectiveness of our interpersonal communication.

There are a couple of ways that people can increase their language awareness and adaptation. The first way is to engage in meaningful interpersonal communication with someone different from you. This person can be from a different country or different region of the country from you. When you speak to someone very different from you, you might notice how they use language differently or how they prefer certain words over others.

Another way might be to watch a foreign film. Check out different international films that have been nominated for an Academy Award. Most of them will be dubbed in English or have English subtitles. Pay attention to how the characters communicate with each other to create meaning. Does it give you an appreciation for how you speak?

Lastly, spend some time with a small child, preferably under the age of five. Pay attention to how the child communicates with you versus others (e.g., their friends, parents/guardians, siblings). Children under five are still acquiring words and learning to talk. When you communicate with someone who has a very limited vocabulary, it might help you see how you can adapt your language so that they will understand you.

Check for Understanding

As a speaker, you want to know that the receiver of your message understood what you said. This concept is also known as checking for understanding or verifying what has been said is also understood.³⁶ Even if a person is smiling and nodding at you when you talk, it does not necessarily mean that they are paying attention to everything. They might be trying to be polite and/or friendly. The best way to check for understanding is to use the acronym: TAP. Think of communication like a tap dance; if you don't hear any tapping, would it really be a tap dance? The same thing can be applied to communication. Did you communicate if the other person didn't understand you or get what you were trying to say?

First, the T in TAP means to talk first. In other words, you explicitly present all the content. As you are talking, you are also trying to make sure that the other person is listening to you talk.

Second, the A in TAP stands for ask questions. After you talked to the person, try to ask specific questions. Rather than saying, "did you hear me?" or "were you listening, which are both yes/no questions, it would be more beneficial to ask, "what did I just say?" or "what did you hear me say?"

Third, the P in TAP means to be prepared to listen. Listen carefully to what the other person says. It is during this phase that you can see if they understood your message. Was the message correct? What emotions are they

displaying after you said the message and asked questions? If we don't ask questions, then we can't be sure that the message was received effectively.

Key Takeaways

- The first part of this section provided several different ways to help you improve vocabulary (e.g., use repetition, group like words together, build your vocabulary, and read).
- Further and increase awareness (a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language) and adaptation of language (the ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner).
- It's important to remember the three basic steps to ensure understanding: T (talk first), A (ask questions), and P (prepare to listen).

Exercises

- Go through the various key terms within this chapter. Did you know all of the definitions before reading this chapter? Which terms did you find difficult to understand? Why?
- Read a speech from either [Vital Speeches of the Day](#) or [American Rhetoric](#). After reading/watching a speech, find a video where the speaker was interviewed. Watch how the speaker sounds when both giving a speech and when answering questions. Analyze the speaker's use of both language awareness and adaptation.
- Find someone who does not speak English as their first language. During your interaction with that person, put into practice the TAP Method for understanding. How easy was it for you to understand this other person? Why? How did it feel to use the TAP method? Were you effective during your interpersonal interaction? Why?

Key Terms

abstract

Refers to words that relate to ideas or concepts that exist only in your mind and do not represent a tangible object.

abstraction ladder

A diagram that explains the process of abstraction.

affiliation

A connection or association with others.

ambiguous language

Language that has multiple meanings.

bias

An attitude that is not objective or balanced, prejudiced, or the use of words that intentionally or unintentionally offend people or express an unfair attitude concerning a person's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or illness.

biased language

Language that shows preference in favour of or against a certain point-of-view, shows prejudice, or is demeaning to others.

buzz word

Informal word or jargon used among a particular group of people.

cliché

Expression that has been so overused that it has lost its original meaning.

colloquialism

Informal expression used in casual conversation that is often specific to certain dialects or geographic regions of a country.

connotation

What a word suggests or implies; connotations give words their emotional impact.

converge

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be similar.

denotation

The dictionary definition or descriptive meaning of a word.

discourse

Spoken or written discussion of a subject.

diverge

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be drastically different.

euphemism

Replacing blunt words with more polite words.

formal language

Official or academic language.

heuristic function

The use of language to explore and investigate the world, solve problems, and learn from your discoveries and experiences.

idiom

Expression or figure of speech whose meaning cannot be understood by looking at the individual words and interpreting them literally.

imaginative function

The use of language to play with ideas that do not exist in the real-world.

informal language

Common, everyday language people use during most interpersonal interactions.

instrumental function

The use of language as a means for meeting your needs, manipulating and controlling your environment, and expressing your feelings.

interactional function

The use of language to help you form and maintain relationships.

jargon

The specialized or technical language of a specific group or profession that may not be understood by outsiders.

language

A system of human communication using a particular form of spoken or written words or other symbols.

language adaptation

The ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner

language awareness

a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language.

linguistic determinism

The perspective that language influences thoughts.

linguistic relativity

The view that language contains special characteristics.

metamessage

The meaning beyond the words themselves.

personal function

The use of language to help you form your identity or sense of self.

racism

bias against others on the basis of their race or ethnicity.

racist language

Language that demeans or insults people based on their race or ethnicity.

regulatory function

The use of language to control behaviour.

relative language

Language that gains understanding by comparison.

representational function

The use of language to represent objects and ideas and to express your thoughts.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

A theory that suggests that language impacts perceptions. Language is ascertained by the perceived reality of a culture.

sexism

Bias of others based on their biological sex.

sexist language

Language that excludes individuals on the basis of gender or shows a bias toward or against people due to their gender.

slang

The nonstandard language of a particular culture or subculture.

spin

The manipulation of language to achieve the most positive interpretation of words, to gain political advantage, or to deceive others.

static evaluation

Language shows that people and things change.

vocabulary

All the words understood by a person or group of people.

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we discussed the importance of verbal communication. To be an effective verbal communicator, it is necessary to understand that the words you use convey meanings that you might intentionally or unintentionally communicate to others. However, the meaning of language can vary from person to person.

This chapter also discusses the various rules of language. Verbal communication serves many purposes and works to clarify the meaning of nonverbal communication. The type of language that you use can impact how others will see you.

Finally, this chapter discusses the subcategories of verbal communication. The subcategories of verbal communication allow us to understand how misunderstandings might occur if language is not used effectively.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Kory was an introverted and timid sixth-grader who moved to a new school. One day, he was searching on the Internet and he came across a negative website about him posted by some of his classmates. On the webpage, many of the students called him horrible names and made some damaging and hurtful remarks about his looks and sexuality. Every day, the words would get worse. The language became unbearable, and he went through a lot of torment because all of the statements about him were untrue. Kory had endured cyberbullying. He had considered suicide.

Cyberbullying seems to be a growing problem these days. Think about the ways you would deal with this situation. Here are some questions to discuss:

1. As a student of this school, how can you stop this treatment?
2. As a teacher or staff member, what can you do to prevent this from happening to others? How can you fix the problem now?
3. What are some ways to help Kory?
4. What should Kory do?
5. How should he respond?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. The fact that the words "Come Here!" can have different interpretations based on the source of the message is related to:
 - a. semantic
 - b. verbal
 - c. syntactic
 - d. pragmatic
 - e. discourse
2. According to the abstraction ladder, which of the following statements is the most abstract?
 - a. You are lazy!
 - b. You need to tell me what I need to do to lose five pounds this month.
 - c. You should workout.
 - d. You need to eat healthier.
 - e. That dress is too small on you and does not fit.
3. Larry is madly in love with Sarah. You can tell this when he tells he brings her flowers or writes new songs to sing to her. Larry is using ____ to convey his feelings.
 - a. abstraction
 - b. connotation
 - c. denotation
 - d. discourse
 - e. metamessages
4. Saying "I love you" every time you see your grandmother is a _____ function.
 - a. regulatory
 - b. imaginative
 - c. interactional
 - d. personal
 - e. ritual
5. In this chapter, you learned all of the following except:
 - a. how naming affects perceptions
 - b. language can impact affiliations
 - c. there are three different rules to understanding language
 - d. language can be sexist or racist
 - e. language can influence perceptions of credibility

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[4]

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is defined as communication that is produced by some means other than words (eye contact, body language, or vocal cues, for example).¹ Over the past decade, Botox has been used to paralyze facial muscles for the purpose of reducing the appearance of wrinkles. However, the unintended consequence of this practice is reduced facial expression! The frozen facial expression was recently celebrated by Shape.com, who interviewed a noted plastic surgeon about Hollywood's most notable "frozen faces" (See Figure 5.1). The reality starlet pictured is only 40, but she is already a fan of Botox, "as you can tell by her taught forehead," Dr. Youn says. "Some stars start treatment early, hoping to prevent wrinkles, but risk robbing their face of natural emotions in the process!"

Imagine the lack of a variety of emotional facial expressions if everyone's face was frozen. The world would be a much less interesting place, and it would be more challenging to stimulate accurate meaning in the minds of others; thus, we will begin this chapter by discussing the importance of nonverbal communication.

Importance of Nonverbal Communication in Interaction



Figure 3.1 Celebrity Frozen Face. "Kim Kardashian at the 2009 Tribeca Film Festival for the premiere of 'Wonderful World.'" by David Shankbone. This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported](#) license.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the importance of nonverbal communication.
2. Differentiate between the functions of nonverbal communication.
3. Understand the functions of nonverbal communication in day-to-day interactions.
4. Understand and provide examples of the subcategories of nonverbal communication.

Earlier in this book, we introduced the concept of "you cannot, not communicate." The foundation for this idea is that even though we may not be sending verbal messages, we are continually sending nonverbal messages. As such, it's very important to understand how nonverbal messages impact our daily interpersonal interactions. In this section, we're going to discuss the role that nonverbal communication plays in our daily lives and the six functions of nonverbal communication.

The Role of Nonverbal in Everyday Life

We communicate nonverbally constantly. It's the primary way that we communicate with other people. In this section, we're going to explore the role that nonverbal communication plays in our day-to-day lives.

Nonverbal has Communicative Value

The meaning associated with nonverbal communication in any given interaction cannot be underestimated. In this chapter, you will learn about the many types of nonverbal communication present in the interaction. For example, if you are having a conversation with your friend who just broke up with her girlfriend, you will use more than the words, "I just broke up with my girlfriend" to understand how to communicate with your friend. Your friend's facial expression, way of standing, rate of speech, tone of voice, and general appearance, just to name a few, will indicate to you how you should respond. If she is sobbing, gasping for air, hunched over, and appears emotionally pained, you might attempt to comfort her. If she says, "I just broke up with my girlfriend" and sighs while placing her hand over her heart, she might appear relieved. Your response might be, "it seems like you may be a little relieved. Were things not going well?"

Thus, nonverbal communication plays a tremendous role in successfully engaging in interactions. The successful use of nonverbal communication requires an awareness of the value of nonverbal communication and the belief that it is valuable. When individuals are unaware of the importance of nonverbal communication, they may be overlooking crucial interactional information. For example, one of the authors of this textbook was once meeting with a colleague who was repeatedly sighing during a meeting. Later, when she and her colleague were discussing the meeting, he said, "Didn't you notice that I was sighing?" She told him she did notice that he was sighing, but she was unsure why. We will discuss this further in the ambiguity of nonverbal communication. In this example, the author's colleague was aware of the importance of nonverbal communication and attempted to use it deliberately.

In addition to awareness, individuals must believe that nonverbal communication is valuable. If your parent/guardian ever said to you, "it wasn't what you said, it was how you said it," then your parent/guardian was demonstrating a belief that nonverbal communication is essential. An individual may acknowledge that nonverbal communication exists but may discount its value. For example, one of the authors had a recurring argument with the author's spouse, who would sigh or roll her eyes as a response in interaction. The author would ask the spouse what it meant, and the spouse would inevitably say, "I can sigh or roll my eyes without it meaning anything." This is not an uncommon response, but the authors of this text hope to dispel this perception.

For a better understanding of the value of communication, Google "value of communication." Your search will return over a billion links. While it is not possible to review all of the search results, read through a few of the articles. For this exercise we found titles like "The Value of Effective Communication in the Workplace"^a and "Why Communication Is Today's Most Important Skill."² In fact, we found almost 300,000 articles with the phrase "value of communication." These news articles tell readers that effective communication secures customer, creates bonds between employees, and increases revenues.

Nonverbal Used for Relational Purposes

Nonverbal communication is an essential element in relating to others. Nonverbal communication is often the very first way in which we invite a relationship with another, or, at the very least, invite communication. To communicate with another, we must make eye contact with a few exceptions. Thus, relationships begin with nonverbal communication. Also, consider how humans relate to others through touch, scent, hand gestures, physical appearance, and more.

Humans often use nonverbal communication to relay to others an interest in continuing a conversation or leaving a conversation. For example, you may run into a colleague and strike up a spontaneous conversation in the hall. The conversation is enjoyable, and you each relate to the other that you are enjoying conversing about work. Your colleague may recognize that he needs to get to a meeting and relates this information to you by looking at his watch, beginning to back away, or looking at the door he needs to enter.

Another way in which we relate to others via nonverbal communication is through the communication of emotion. Through a myriad of nonverbal behaviours, we can communicate emotions such as joy, happiness, and sadness. The nonverbal expression of emotion allows others to know how to communicate with us.

Nonverbal is Ambiguous

A particularly challenging aspect of nonverbal communication is the fact that it is ambiguous. In the seventies, nonverbal communication as a topic was trendy. Some were under the impression that we could use nonverbal communication to “read others like a book.” One of the authors remembers her cousin’s wife telling her that she shouldn’t cross her arms because it signalled to others that she was closed off. It would be wonderful if crossing one’s arms signalled one meaning, but think about the many meanings of crossing one’s arms. An individual may have crossed arms because the individual is cold, upset, sad, or angry. It is impossible to know unless a conversation is paired with nonverbal behaviour.

Another great example of ambiguous nonverbal behaviour is flirting! Consider some very stereotypical behaviour of flirting (e.g., smiling, laughing, a light touch on the arm, or prolonged eye contact). Each of these behaviours signals interest to others. The question is whether an individual engaging in these behaviours is indicating romantic interest or a desire for platonic friendship...have you ever walked away from a situation and explained a person’s behaviour to another friend to determine whether you were being flirted with? If so, you have undoubtedly experienced the ambiguity of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal is Culturally Based

Just as we have discussed that it is beneficial to recognize the value of nonverbal communication, we must also acknowledge that nonverbal communication is culturally based. Successful interactions with individuals from other cultures are partially based on the ability to adapt to or understand the nonverbal behaviours associated with different cultures. There are two aspects to understanding that nonverbal communication is culturally based. The first aspect is recognizing that even if we do not know the appropriate nonverbal communication with someone from another culture, then we must at least acknowledge that there is a need to be flexible, not react, and ask questions. The second aspect is recognizing that there are specific aspects of nonverbal communication that differ depending on the culture. When entering a new culture, we must learn the rules of the culture.

Regarding recognizing differences, you may encounter someone from a culture that communicates very differently from you and perhaps in an unexpected way. For example, one of the author’s brothers, Patrick, was working in Afghanistan as a contractor on a military base. He was working with a man from Africa. During their first conversation, he held Patrick’s hand. Patrick later told his sister, the author, this story and said he wasn’t sure how to respond, so he “just rolled with it.” Patrick’s response allowed for the most flexibility in the situation and the best chance of moving forward productively. Imagine if he had withdrawn his hand quickly with a surprised look on his face. The outcome of the interaction would have been very different.

Patrick’s response also exemplifies the second aspect of understanding that nonverbal communication is culturally based. Patrick was hired by a contractor to work on the military base in Afghanistan. The contracting firm could have trained Patrick and his coworkers about communicating with the various cultures they would encounter on the base. For example, many people from the Philippines were working on the base. It would have been helpful for the contractors to explain that there may be differences in spatial distance and touch when communicating with other males from the Philippines. Researching and understanding the nonverbal communication of different countries before entering the country can often mean a smoother entry phase, whether conducting business or simply visiting.

Attribution Error

A final area to address before examining specific aspects of nonverbal communication is “attribution error.” **Attribution error** is defined as the tendency to explain another individual’s behaviour in relation to the individual’s internal tendencies rather than an external factor.³ For example, if a friend is late, we might attribute this failure to be on time as the friend being irresponsible rather than running through a list of external factors that may have influenced the friend’s ability to be on time such as an emergency, traffic, read the time wrong, etc. It is easy to make an error when trying to attribute meaning to the behaviours of others, and nonverbal communication is particularly vulnerable to attribution error.

On Saturday, September 8, 2018, Serena Williams may have been a victim of an umpire’s attribution error on the part of the judge. Let’s just say Serena did suffer as a result of attribution error. The judge spotted Serena Williams’ coach gesturing in the audience and assumed that the gesture was explicitly directed toward Serena as a means to coach her. Her coach later acknowledged that he was “coaching” via nonverbal signals, but Serena was not

looking at him, nor was she intended to be a recipient. Her coach indicated that all coaches gesture while sitting in the stands as though they are coaching a practice and that it's a habit and not an other-oriented communication behaviour. This is a perfect example of attribution error. The judge attributed the coaches' gesture to the coach intending to communicate rather than the gesture merely being due to habit. The judge's attribution error may have cost Serena Williams' comeback match. While the stakes may not be so high in day-to-day interaction, attribution error can create relational strife and general misunderstandings that can be avoided if we recognize that it is necessary to understand the intention behind a specific nonverbal behaviour.

Omnipresent

According to Dictionary.com, omnipresent is indicative of being everywhere at the same time. Nonverbal communication is always present. Silence is an excellent example of nonverbal communication being omnipresent. Have you ever given someone the "silent treatment?" If so, you understand that by remaining silent, you are trying to convey some meaning, such as "You hurt me" or "I'm really upset with you." Thus, silence makes nonverbal communication omnipresent.

Another way of considering the omnipresence of nonverbal communication is to consider the way we walk, posture, engage in facial expression, eye contact, lack of eye contact, gestures, etc. When sitting alone in the library working, your posture may be communicating something to others. If you need to focus and don't want to invite communication, you may keep your head down and avoid eye contact. Suppose you are walking across campus at a brisk pace. What might your pace be communicating?

When discussing the omnipresence of nonverbal communication, it is necessary to discuss Paul Watzlawick's assertion that humans cannot, not communicate. This assertion is the first axiom of his interactional view of communication. According to Watzlawick, humans are always communicating. As discussed in the "silent treatment" example and the posture and walking example, communication is found in everyday behaviours that are common to all humans. We might conclude that humans cannot escape communicating meaning.

Can Form Universal Language

When discussing whether nonverbal communication is a universal language, caution must be used. We must remember that understanding the context in which nonverbal communication is used is almost always necessary to understand the meaning of nonverbal communication. However, there are exceptions concerning what Paul Ekman calls "basic emotions." These will be discussed a bit later in the chapter.

Can Lead to Misunderstandings

Comedian Samuel J. Comroe has tremendous expertise in explaining how nonverbal communication can be misunderstood. Comroe's comedic routines focus on how Tourette's syndrome affects his daily living. Tourette's syndrome can change individual behaviour, from uncontrolled body movements to uncontrolled vocalizations. Comroe often appears to be winking when he is not. He explains how his "wink" can cause others to believe he is joking when he isn't. He also tells the story of how he met his wife in high school. During a skit, he played a criminal and she played a police officer. She told him to "freeze," and he continued to move (due to Tourette's). She misunderstood his movement to mean he was being defiant and thus "took him down." [You can watch Comroe's routine here.](#)

Although nonverbal misunderstandings can be humorous, these misunderstandings can affect interpersonal as well as professional relationships. One of the authors once went on an important job interview for a job she was not offered. She asked the interviewer for feedback, and he said, "your answers sounded canned." The author did not think to do so in the moment, but what she should have said is that she may have sounded canned because she frequently thinks about work, her work philosophy, and how she approaches work. Thus, her tone may have been more indicative of simply knowing how she feels rather than "canned."

As you continue to learn about nonverbal communication, consider how you come to understand nonverbal communication in interactions. Sometimes, the meaning of nonverbal communication can be fairly obvious. Most of the time a head nod in conversation means something positive such as agreement, "yes," keep talking, etc. At other times, the meaning of nonverbal communication isn't clear. Have you ever asked a friend, "did she sound rude to you" about a customer service representative? If so, you are familiar with the ambiguity of nonverbal communication.

Usually Trusted

Despite the pitfalls of nonverbal communication, individuals typically rely on nonverbal communication to understand the meaning in interactions. Communication scholars agree that the majority of meaning in any interaction is attributable to nonverbal communication. It isn't necessarily true, but we are taught from a very early age that lack of eye contact is indicative of lying. We have learned through research that this "myth" is not necessarily true; this myth does tell a story about how our culture views nonverbal communication. That view is simply that nonverbal communication is important and that it has meaning.

Another excellent example of nonverbal communication being trusted may be related to a scenario many have experienced. At times, children, adolescents, and teenagers will be required by their parents/guardians to say, "I'm sorry" to a sibling or the parent/guardian. Alternatively, you may have said "yes" to your parents/guardians, but your parent/guardian doesn't believe you. A parent/guardian might say in either of these scenarios, "it wasn't what you said, it was how you said it." Thus, we find yet another example of nonverbal communication being the "go-to" for meaning in an interaction.

According to research, as much as 93% of meaning in any interaction is attributable to nonverbal communication. Albert Mehrabian asserts that this 93% of meaning can be broken into three parts (Figure 3.2).⁴

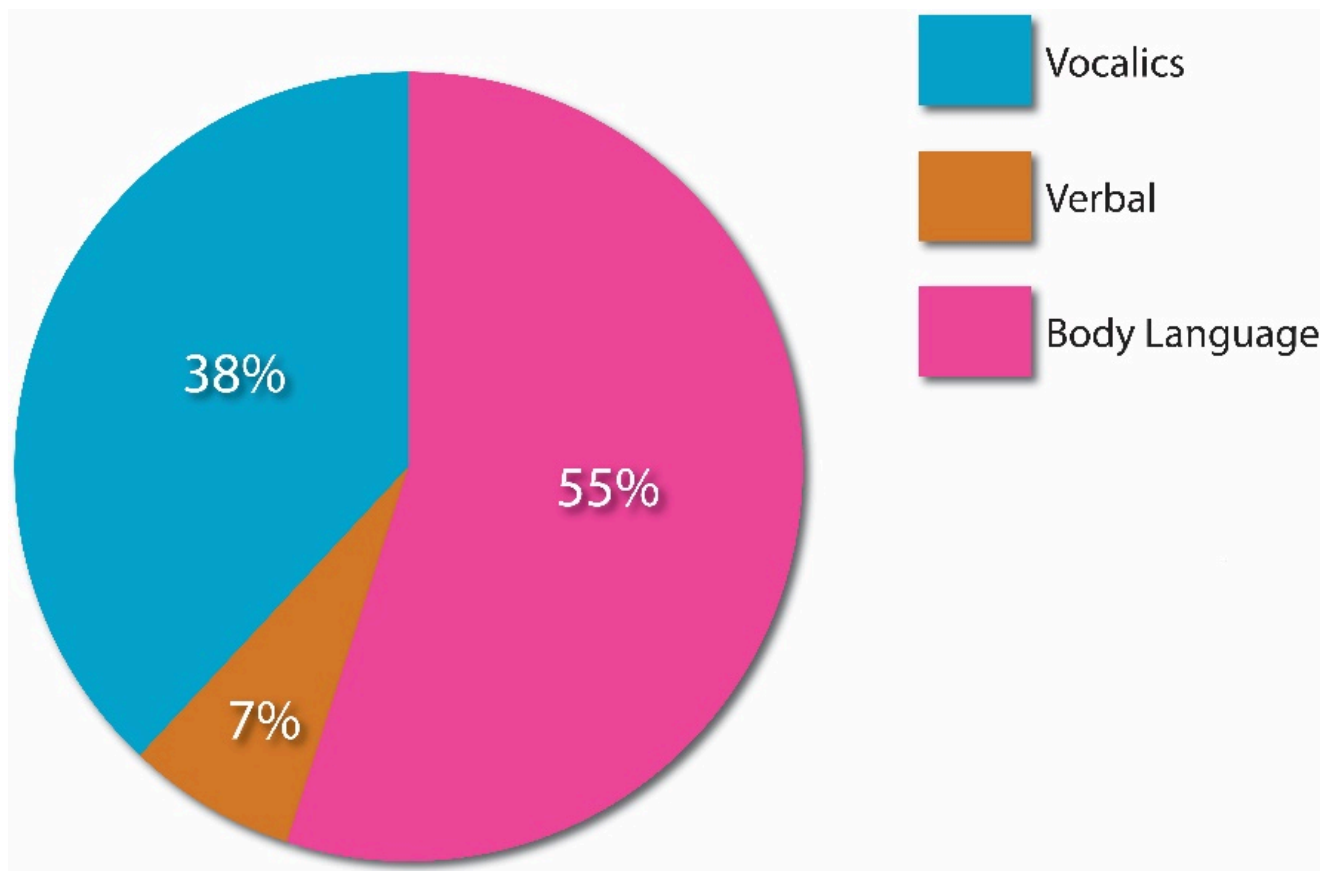


Figure 3.2 Mehrabian's Explanation of Message Meaning

Mehrabian's work is widely reported and accepted. Other researchers Birdwhistell and Philpott say that meaning attributed to nonverbal communication in interactions ranges from 60 to 70%.^{5,6} Regardless of the actual percentage, it is worth noting that the majority of meaning in interaction is deduced from nonverbal communication.

The Six Functions of Nonverbal Communication

As we have established, nonverbal communication plays an important role in communicating successfully and effectively. Because nonverbal communication plays a significant role in interactions, nonverbal communication

was studied heavily in the early days of studying communication. These studies resulted in the discovery of multiple utilitarian functions of nonverbal communication (Figure 3.3)

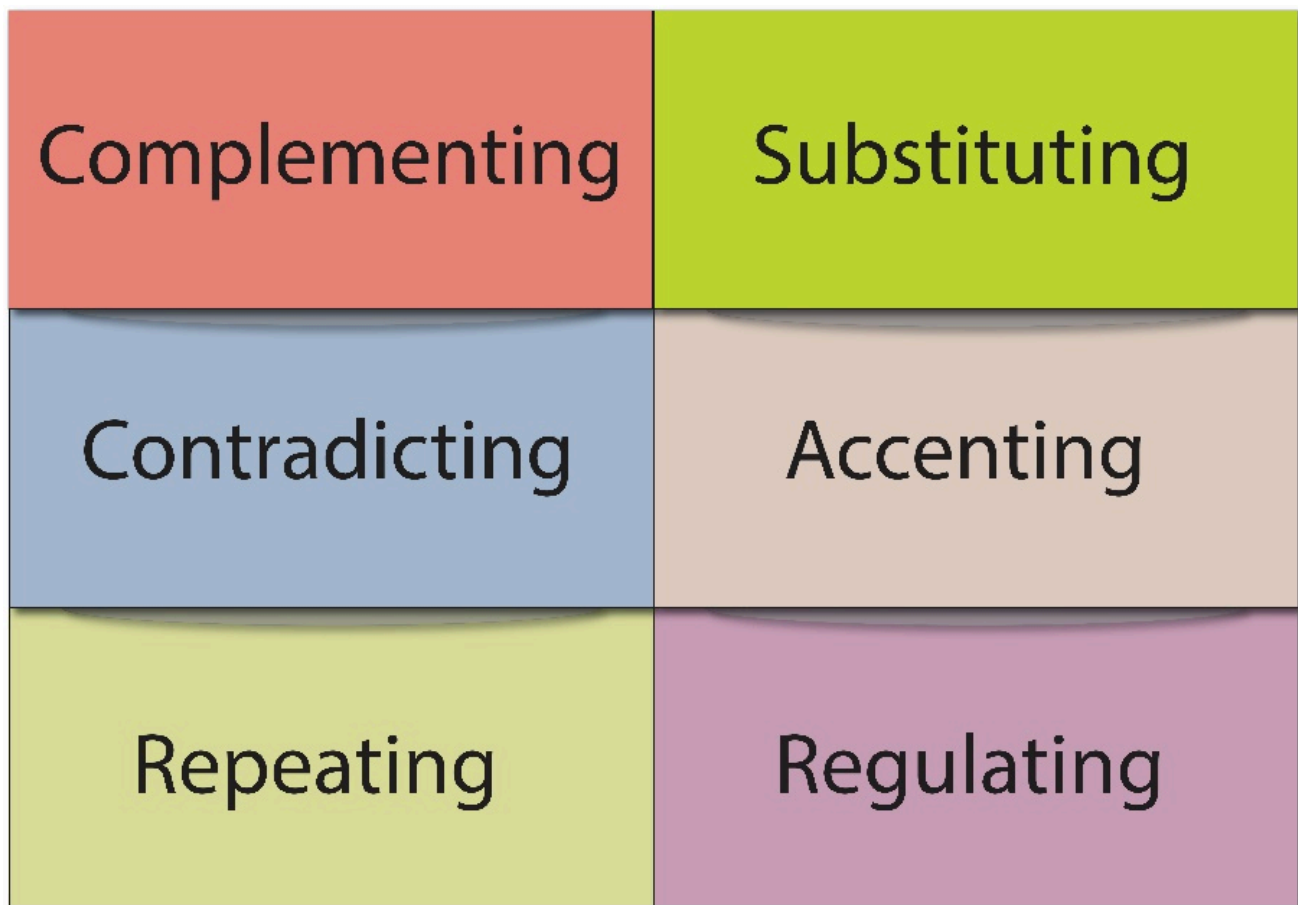


Figure 3.3 Six Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Complementing

Complementing is defined as nonverbal behaviour that is used in combination with the verbal portion of the message to emphasize the meaning of the entire message. An excellent example of complementing behaviour is when a child is exclaiming, “I’m so excited” while jumping up and down. The child’s body is further emphasizing the meaning of “I’m so excited.”

Contradicting

At times, an individual’s nonverbal communication contradicts verbal communication. Recently, when visiting an aunt’s house, one of the author’s folded her arms. She asked the author if she was cold and if she needed to turn up the air conditioning. The author said no because she was trying to be polite, but her aunt did not believe her. The author’s nonverbal communication gave away her actual discomfort! In this case, the nonverbal communication was truly more meaningful than verbal communication.

Consider a situation where a friend says, “The concert was amazing,” but the friend’s voice is monotone. A response might be, “oh, you sound real enthused.” Communication scholars refer to this as “contradicting” verbal and nonverbal behaviour. When contradicting occurs, the verbal and nonverbal messages are incongruent. This incongruence heightens our awareness, and we tend to believe the nonverbal communication over verbal communication.

Accenting

Accenting is a form of nonverbal communication that emphasizes a word or a part of a message. The word or

part of the message accented might change the meaning of the message. Accenting can be accomplished through multiple types of nonverbal behaviours. Gestures paired with a word can provide emphasis, such as when an individual says, “no (slams hand on table), you don’t understand me.” By slamming the hand on a table while saying “no,” the source draws attention to the word. Words or phrases can also be emphasized via pauses. Speakers will often pause before saying something important. Your professors likely pause just before relaying information that is important to the course content.

Repeating

Nonverbal communication that repeats the meaning of verbal communication assists the receiver by reinforcing the words of the sender. Nonverbal communication that repeats verbal communication may stand alone, but when paired with verbal communication, it serves to repeat the message. For example, nodding one’s head while saying “yes” serves to reinforce the meaning of the word “yes,” and the word “yes” reinforces the head nod.

Regulating

Regulating the flow of communication is often accomplished through nonverbal behaviour communication. Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen state that regulators are “acts which maintain and regulate the back-and-forth nature of speaking and listening between two or more interactions” (1969, p. 82). You may notice your friends nodding their heads when you are speaking. Nodding one’s head is a primary means of regulating communication. Other behaviours that regulate conversational flow are eye contact, moving or leaning forward, changing posture, and eyebrow raises, to name a few. You may also have noticed several nonverbal behaviours people engage in when trying to exit a conversation. These behaviours include stepping away from the speaker, checking one’s watch/phone for the time, or packing up belongings. These are referred to as leave-taking behaviours. Without the regulating function of nonverbal behaviours, it would be necessary to interrupt conversational content to insert phrases such as “I have to leave.” However, when interactants fail to recognize regulating behaviour, verbal communication will be used instead.

Substituting

At times, nonverbal behaviour serves to replace verbal communication altogether. Substituting nonverbal behaviours must be understood within a context more often than not. For example, a friend may ask you what time it is, and you may shrug your shoulders to indicate you don’t know. At other times, your friend may ask whether you want pizza or sushi for dinner, and you may shrug your shoulders to indicate you don’t care or have no preference.

Emblems are a specific type of substituting nonverbal behaviour that have direct verbal translation. Emblems may generally be understood outside of the context in which they are used. Some highly recognizable emblems in the U.S. culture are the peace sign and the okay sign. Emblems are a generally understood concept and have made their way into popular culture. The term “emblem” may not be applied within popular culture. In the popular television show, *Friends*, the main characters Ross and Monica are siblings. Ross and Monica are forbidden to “flip the bird” to each other, so they make up their own “emblem,” which involves holding one’s palms upward in a fist and bumping the outside of the palm’s together. Whether flipping the bird in the traditional manner or doing so Ross and Monica style, each of these represents an emblem that does not require context for accurate interpretation. Emblems will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter.

Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal cues help the receiver decode verbal messages.
- Each function of nonverbal communication is distinct.
- The functions of nonverbal communication are evident in everyday interactions.

Exercises

- Create a list of five situations in which nonverbal communication helped you to accurately interpret verbal communication. Use the functions of nonverbal communication in your description.
- Reflect upon the functions of nonverbal communication and provide an example from your own life for each function.
- Experiment with nonverbal communication. Use an unexpected nonverbal cue when having conversations with friends throughout the day. For example, use a contradictory nonverbal cue such as shaking your head while saying yes. Note your friend's reaction and be ready to provide an explanation to your friend.

Categories of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Know the subcategories of nonverbal communication influencing interpersonal communication.
2. Understand how the categories of nonverbal communication influence perception.
3. Understand research findings associated with the categories of nonverbal communication.

In addition to the functions of nonverbal communication, there are categories of nonverbal communication. This chapter will address several categories of nonverbal communication that are of particular importance in interpersonal relationships. These categories include haptics (touch), vocalics (voice), kinesics (body movement and gestures), oculosics/facial expressions (eye and face behaviour), and physical appearance. Each of these categories influences interpersonal communication and may have an impact on the success of interpersonal interactions.

Haptics

Haptics is the study of touch as a form of nonverbal communication. Touch is used in many ways in our daily lives, such as greeting, comfort, affection, task accomplishment, and control. You may have engaged in a few or all of these behaviours today. If you shook hands with someone, hugged a friend, kissed your romantic partner, then you used touch to greet and give affection. If you visited a salon to have your hair cut, then you were touched with the purpose of task accomplishment. You may have encountered a friend who was upset and patted the friend to ease the pain and provide comfort. Finally, you may recall your parents or guardians putting an arm around your shoulder to help you walk faster if there was a need to hurry you along. In this case, your parent/guardian was using touch for control.

Several factors impact how touch is perceived. These factors are duration, frequency, and intensity. Duration is how long touch endures. Frequency is how often touch is used, and intensity is the amount of pressure applied. These factors influence how individuals are evaluated in social interactions. For example, researchers state, "a handshake preceding social interactions positively influenced the way individuals evaluated the social interaction partners and their interest in further interactions while reversing the impact of negative impressions."⁷ This research demonstrates that individuals must understand when it is appropriate to shake hands and that there are negative consequences for failing to do so. Importantly, an appropriately timed handshake can erase the negative effects of any mistakes one might make in an initial interaction!

Touch is a form of communication that can be used to initiate, regulate, and maintain relationships. It is a very powerful form of communication that can be used to communicate messages ranging from comfort to power. Duration, frequency, and intensity of touch can be used to convey liking, attraction, or dominance. Touch can be helpful or harmful and must be used appropriately to have effective relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. Consider that inappropriate touch can convey romantic intentions where no romance exists.

Conversely, fear can be instilled through touch. Touch is a powerful interpersonal tool along with voice and body movement.

It's also essential to understand the importance of touch on someone's psychological wellbeing. Narissra Punyanunt-Carter and Jason Wrench created the touch deprivation scale to examine the lack of haptic communication in an individual's life (Table 3.1).⁸

Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with how you perceive physical contact with other people. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- _____1. I do not receive as much touch in my life as normal people.
 _____2. I receive a normal, healthy amount of touch from people.
 _____3. Human touch is not a daily occurrence in my life.
 _____4. Touch from other people is a very common and natural part of my daily life.
 _____5. I often go for days without being touched by someone.
 _____6. I often feel like I'm untouchable because of the lack of touch from others in my life.
 _____7. I receive a variety of forms of touch from a variety of different people.
 _____8. I can go long periods of time without being touched by another person.
 _____9. There are days when I would do anything just to be touched by someone.
 _____10. I have longed for the touch of another person, any person.
 _____11. Some days I long to be held, but have no one to hold me.
 _____12. I often wish I could get more hugs from others.
 _____13. I've engaged in sexual behaviours for the pure purpose of being touched by someone.
 _____14. I would never engage in sex with someone, just to be touched.

SCORING: To compute your scores follow the instructions below:

Absence of Touch

Step One: Add scores for items 1, 3, 5, 6, & 8_____

Step Two: Add scores for items 2, 4, & 7_____

Step Three: Add 18 to Step One._____

Step Four: Subtract the score for Step two from the score for Step Three._____

Longing for Touch

Step One: Add scores for items 9, 10, 11, & 12_____

Sex for Touch

Step One: Add scores for item 13_____

Step Two: Add scores for item 14_____

Step Three: Add 6 to Step One._____

Step Four: Subtract the score for Step Two from the score for Step Three._____

Interpreting Your Score:

For absence of touch, scores should be between 7 and 35. If your score is above 17, you are considered to have an absence of touch. If your score is below 16, then touch is a normal part of your daily life.

For longing for touch, scores should be between 4 and 20. If your score is above 10, you are considered to have a longing for touch in your life. If your score is below 9, then touch is a normal part of your daily life.

For sex for touch, scores should be between 2 and 10. If your score is above 5, you have probably engaged in

sexual intimacy as a way of receiving touch in your life. If your score is below 5, then you probably have not in sexual intimacy as a way of receiving touch in your life.

Source:

Punyanunt-Carter, N. M., & Wrench, J. S. (2009). Development and validity testing of a measure of touch deprivation. *Human Communication, 12*, 67-76.

Table 3.1 Touch Deprivation Scale

As you can see, Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench found that there are three different factors related to touch deprivation: the absence of touch, longing for touch, and sexual intimacy for touch. First, the absence of touch is the degree to which an individual perceives that touch is not a normal part of their day-to-day interactions. Many people can go days or even weeks without physically having contact with another person. People may surround them on a day-to-day basis at work, but this doesn't mean that they can engage in physical contact with other people.

Second, there is the longing for touch. It's one thing to realize that touch is not a normal part of your day-to-day interactions, but it's something completely different not to have that touch and desire that touch. For some people, the lack of touch can be psychologically straining because humans inherently have a desire for physical contact. For some people, this lack of physical contact with other humans can be satisfied by having a pet.

Lastly, some people desire touch so much that they'll engage in sexual activity just as a way to get touched by another human being. Obviously, these types of situations can be risky because they involve sexual contact outside of an intimate relationship. In fact, "hooking up" can be detrimental to someone's psychological wellbeing.⁹

In the Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench study, the researchers found that there was a positive relationship between touch deprivation and depression and a negative relationship between touch deprivation and self-esteem. The study also found that those individuals who felt that they did not receive enough touch growing up (tactile nurturance) also reported higher levels of touch deprivation as adults. This is just a further indication of how important touch is for children and adolescents.

Vocalics

In this section, we are going to discuss vocalics, that is, vocal utterances, other than words, that serve as a form of communication. Our discussion will begin with vocal characteristics, including timbre, pitch, tempo, rhythm, and intensity.

Timbre

According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary, **timbre** refers to the "quality given to a sound by its overtones: such as the resonance by which the ear recognizes and identifies a voiced speech sound." (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/timbre> accessed on November 25, 2018.) Pitch refers to the frequency range between high and low. Pitch is not generally thought of much unless an individual's pitch stands out. For example, if a female's vocal pitch is low, meaning might be assigned to the low pitch, just as meaning might be attached to a male voice with a high pitch. Also, pitch that is at a higher or lower end of a range will be noticed if there is a momentary or situational change to an individual's pitch that will trigger an assignment of meaning. For example, when children become excited or scared, they may be described as "squealing." The situation will determine whether squealing children are thought to be excited or scared.

Tempo

Tempo refers to the rate at which one speaks. Changes in tempo can reflect emotions such as excitement or anger, physical well-being, or energy level. One of the author's aunts is a brittle diabetic. When talking to her aunt, the author can detect whether the aunt's blood sugar is too low if her aunt is speaking extremely slow. Rhythm refers to the pattern used when speaking. Unusual speaking rhythms are often imitated. Consider the speaking rhythm of a "surfer dude" or a "valley girl." One of the most well-known forms of rhythm used in a speech was Martin

Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech. More recently, the speaking rhythm of President's Obama and Trump are easily identifiable and often imitated by comedians.

Intensity

Finally, **intensity** refers to how loudly or softly an individual speaks. Intensity can be tied to emotion. When individuals speak loudly, the increased volume may be used to convey anger, emotional distress, happiness, or heightened excitement. When individuals speak at a lower volume, the decreased volume may be an effort to diffuse an emotionally intense conversation. Lower volume could also be the result of sharing bad news, discussing taboo or sensitive topics (i.e., when people whisper "sex" or "she died"), or conveying private information.

Other Vocal Features

Paralanguage

Paralanguage is another term for vocalics and refers to "extra-linguistic" features involved in speaking, such as the characteristics of speech just discussed, pauses and silences, and nonverbal vocalizations.

Pauses and Silences

Pauses and silences are an important part of creating meaning during an interaction. Pauses draw attention to important parts of messages. The "pregnant pause" is an extra-long pause that precedes particularly weighty information. Pauses are a type of silence that are brief in nature, but prolonged silence such as minutes, hours, or even days can be used to convey meaning as well. Consider a conversation in which the other person does not respond to you. What meaning is conveyed? Is the individual thinking? Is the individual hurt, angry, or too shocked to speak? Myriad meanings of silence help emphasize the significance of silence and that it is as impactful as verbal communication, if not more so.

Dysfluencies, Vocal Fillers, or Verbal Surrogates

Dysfluencies, vocal fillers, or verbal surrogates are sounds that we make as we attempt to fill dead air while we are thinking of what to say next. In the United States, "um" or "uh" are the most commonly used dysfluencies. In conversation, these dysfluencies may pass unnoticed by both the sender or receiver, but consider how the recognition of dysfluencies increases when listening to a speaker who says "uh" or "um" during a speech. When giving a presentation, the speaker may even call attention to dysfluencies by speaking of them directly, and audience members may become distracted by dysfluencies. One of the author's classmates used to count the number of "ums" used by a particular professor who was known to frequently use "um" when teaching. Though focusing on dysfluencies may be common, it is best for the speaker to attempt to reduce an excessive amount of dysfluencies and for listeners to focus on the meaning rather than the "ums" and "uhs."

Kinesics

Kinesics, first coined by Ray Birdwhistell, is the study of how gestures, facial expression, and eye behaviour communicate. Gestures can generally be considered any visible movement of the body. These movements "stimulate meaning" in the minds of others.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions are another form of kinesics. Paul Eckman and Wallace V. Friesen asserted that facial expressions are likely to communicate "affect" or liking.¹⁰ Eckman and Friesen present seven emotions that are recognized throughout the world. These emotions are often referred to by the acronym S.A.D.F.I.S.H. and include surprise, anger, disgust, fear, interest, sadness, and happiness. Facial expressions are especially useful in communicating emotion. Although not all facial expression is "universally" recognized, people are generally able to interpret facial expressions within a context. We generally consider happiness is indicated by a smile. Smiling might, however, also communicate politeness, a desire to be pleasing, and even fear. If an individual attempts to use a smile to diffuse a volatile interaction where the individual fears being attacked verbally or physically, then the smile may be an indication of fear. In this case, the smile cannot be accurately interpreted outside of the context.

In a study investigating preferences for facial expressions in relation to the Big Five personality traits, it was found that most participants showed the strongest preferences for faces communicating high levels of agreeableness and extraversion. Individuals who are high in openness preferred a display of all facially-communicated Big Five personality traits. In relation to females who report being highly neurotic, they preferred male faces displaying agreeableness and female faces communicating disagreeableness. Male faces communicating openness were preferred by males who were higher in neuroticism. Interestingly, males reporting higher levels of neuroticism had a lower preference for female faces communicating openness.¹¹ This study underscores the importance of facial expressions in determining who we prefer.

Oculesics

Oculesics is the study of how individuals communicate through eye behaviour. Eye contact is generally the first form of communication for interactants. Consider when a stranger speaks to you in a grocery store from behind you with a question such as, “Can you reach the Frosted Flakes for me?” When a general question such as this is asked with no eye contact, you may not be aware that the question was meant for you.

Often when discussing eye behaviour, researchers refer to “gaze.” Research consistently demonstrates that females gaze at interaction partners more frequently than males.^{12,13,14} Also, gaze has been studied concerning deception. Early research determined the significance of eye contact in the interpretation behaviour. When people gaze too long or for too little, there is likely to be a negative interpretation of this behaviour.¹⁵ However, later researchers acknowledge that there is a much greater range of acceptable “gazing” as influenced by verbal communication.

Gestures

Kinesics serve multiple functions when communicating—such as emblems, illustrators, affect displays, and regulators.

Emblems

Many gestures are **emblems**. You may recall from earlier in the chapter that gestures are clear and unambiguous and have a verbal equivalent in a given culture.¹⁶ Only a handful of emblematic gestures seem to be universal, for example, a shrug of the shoulders to indicate “I don’t know.” Most emblems are culturally determined, and they can get you into difficulty if you use them in other countries. In the United States, some emblematic gestures are the thumb-up-and-out hitchhiking sign, the circled thumb and index finger Ok sign, and the “V” for victory sign. However, be careful of using these gestures outside the United States. The thumb-up sign in Iran, for example, is an obscene gesture, and our Ok sign has sexual connotations in Ethiopia and Mexico.¹⁷

Illustrators

While emblems can be used as direct substitutions for words, **illustrators** help emphasize or explain a word. Recall the Smashmouth lyric in All Star: “She was looking kind of dumb with her finger and her thumb in the shape of an L on her forehead.” The “L” gesture is often used to illustrate “loser.”

Affect Displays

Affect displays show feelings and emotions. Consider how music and sports fans show enthusiasm. It is not uncommon to see grown men and women jumping up and down at sports events during a particularly exciting moment in a game. However, there are different norms depending on the sport. It would simply be inappropriate to demonstrate the same nonverbal gestures at a golf or tennis game as a football game.

Regulators

Regulators, as discussed earlier, are gestures that help coordinate the flow of conversation, such as when you shrug your shoulders or wink. Head nods, eye contact/aversion, hand movements, and changes in posture are considered to be turn-taking cues in conversation. Individuals may sit back when listening but shift forward to indicate a desire to speak. Eye contact shifts frequently during a conversation to indicate listening or a desire to speak. Head nods are used as a sign of listening and often indicate that the speaker should continue speaking.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of communication through space. Space as communication was heavily studied by Edward T. Hall,¹⁸ and he famously categorized space into four “distances. These distances represent how space is used and by whom (Figure 4.4).

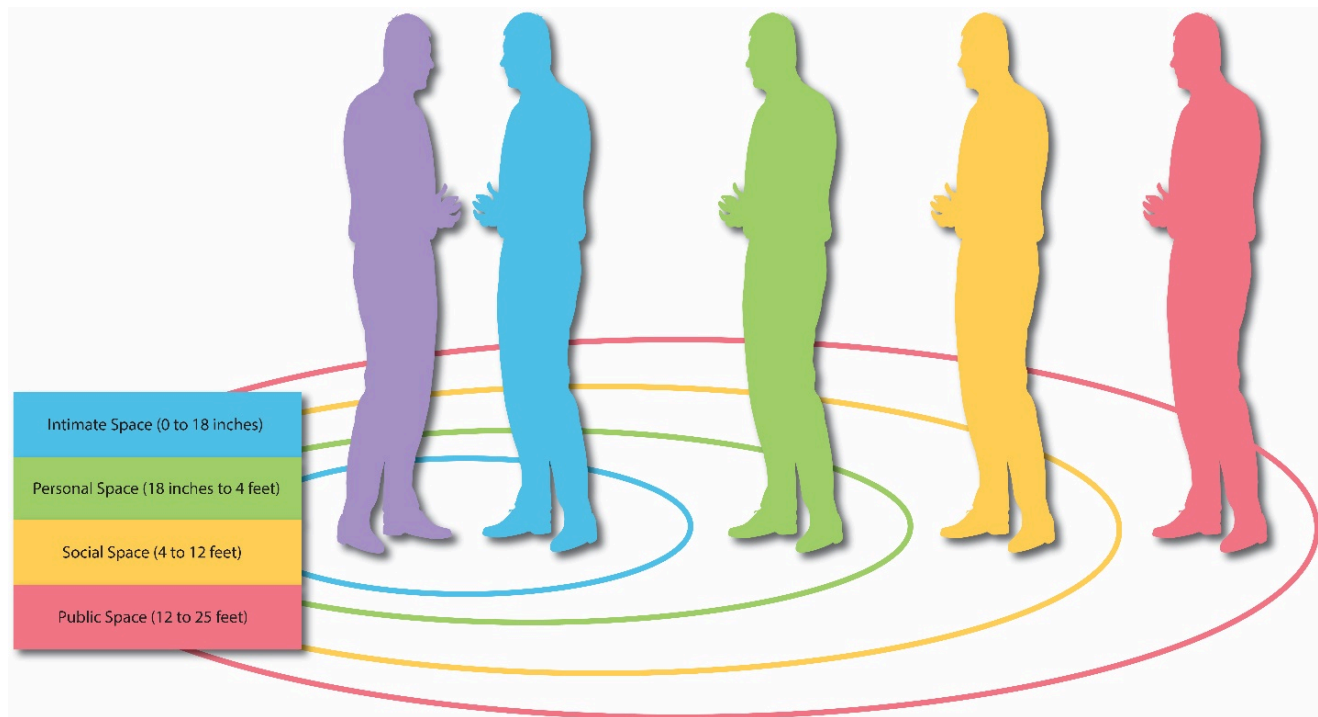


Figure 3.4 Edward T. Hall's Four Spaces

Hall's first distance is referred to as intimate space and is often referred to as our “personal bubble.” This bubble ranges from 0 to 18 inches from the body. This space is reserved for those with whom we have close personal relationships.

The next distance is referred to as personal space and ranges from 18 inches to 4 feet. You will notice that, as the distances move further away from the body, the intimacy of interactions decreases. Personal space is used for conversations with friends or family. If you meet a friend at the local coffee shop to catch up on life, it is likely that you will sit between 18 inches and four feet from your friend.

The next distance is “social” distance, ranging from 4 feet to 12 feet. This space is meant for acquaintances.

Finally, the greatest distance is referred to as “public” distance, ranging from 12 feet to 25 feet. In an uncrowded public space, we would not likely approach a stranger any closer than 12 feet. Consider an empty movie theatre. If you enter a theatre with only one other customer, you will not likely sit in the seat directly behind, beside, or in front of this individual. In all likelihood, you would sit further than 12 feet from this individual. However, as the theatre begins to fill, individuals will be forced to sit in Hall's distances that represent more intimate relationships. How awkward do you feel if you have to sit directly next to a stranger in a theatre?

Artifacts

Artifacts are items with which we adorn our bodies or which we carry with us. Artifacts include glasses, jewelry, canes, shoes, clothing, or any object associated with our body that communicates meaning. One very famous artifact that most everyone can recognize is the glasses of Harry Potter. Harry Potter's style of glasses has taken on their own meaning. What does his style of eyewear communicate when donned by others? Clothing also stimulates meaning. Do you recall Barney Stinson's famous line “suit up” in *How I Met Your Mother*? Why was it necessary to suit up? Recently, Snoop Dogg was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Snoop Dogg was wearing a beautiful, classic camel hair overcoat. In contrast, he was wearing large bulky jewelry. What do these two types of artifacts communicate? One of the authors is a big fan. The author interpreted the classic overcoat

as Snoop having excellent taste and the jewelry as strength and wealth. Together the artifacts were interpreted as power.

Chronemics

Chronemics, as explained by Thomas J. Bruneau,¹⁹ is the use of time to communicate. The use of time is considered to be culturally bound, with some cultures using monochronic time and others using polychronic time. Cultures using monochronic time engage in one task at a time. Cultures using polychronic time engage in multiple tasks at the same time. This use of time involves fluidity with individuals feeling free to work on multiple tasks simultaneously rather than completing a task before moving to the next task, as in the monochronic use of time. When considering how time is used, it is necessary to consider individual preferences as well as cultural preferences. Traditionally, the U.S. is a monochronic culture along with Canada or Northern Europe. Korea is an example of a polychronic culture along with Latin America, the Arab part of the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, one can live in each of these cultures and express the opposite orientation toward time. One of the authors is admittedly uptight when it comes to time. She is highly monochronic. This author went to a conference in Puerto Rico, which represents a polychronic orientation toward time. Buses usually run 30 minutes late, if not longer. Time is a bit more fluid rather than incremental in polychronic cultures. Unfortunately, the author failed to take this into account and nearly missed a presentation. This resulted in stress that could have been avoided had she remembered to pay more attention to the time orientation of those around her.

Olfactics

Finally, **olfactics** generally refers to the influence of scent on perceptions. Scent can draw others in or repel them, and the same scent can have different impacts on different people. According to statistica.com, the global estimated sales value of the fragrances worldwide in 2016 was \$47 billion U.S. dollars. This is in addition to \$39 billion U.S. dollars in shower and bath products and another \$20.5 billion in deodorants. The total spending in these categories was \$106.5 billion U.S. dollars. These figures underscore the importance of “smelling good” across the globe. Consider the impact of failing to manage one’s natural scent in the workplace. Countless articles in the popular media address how to deal with a “smelly coworker.” Thus, it is crucial to be aware of one’s scent, including the ones we wear in an effort not to offend those around us. Although smelling “bad” may end a relationship or at least create distance, an attractive scent may help individuals begin a new relationship. Have you ever purchased a new scent before a first date? If so, you are aware of the power of scent to attract a mate. Although we regularly try to cover our scent, we also attempt to control the scent of our environments. The air freshener market in 2016 was valued at \$1.62 billion U.S. dollars. Go to your local grocery store and investigate the number of products available to enhance environmental scents. Be prepared to spend a significant amount of time to take in the many products to keep our environments “fresh.”²⁰

The amount of money spent on fragrances for the body and home highlights the meaning of scent to humans. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What meaning do you associate with a floral scent vs. a spicy scent?
2. When comparing men’s fragrances to women’s fragrances, what differences do you notice?
3. Are there scents that immediately transport you back in time, such as the smell of honeysuckle or freshly baked cookies?

Regardless of the scent you prefer, when using scent to communicate positively with others, do not make the mistake of believing the scent you like is loved by those around you!

Physical Appearance

Although not one of the traditional categories of nonverbal communication, we really should discuss physical appearance as a nonverbal message. Whether we like it or not, our physical appearance has an impact on how people relate to us and view us. Someone’s physical appearance is often one of the first reasons people decide to interact with each other in the first place.

Dany Ivy and Sean Wahl argue that physical appearance is a very important factor in nonverbal communication:

The connection between physical appearance and nonverbal communication needs to be made for two important reasons: (1) The decisions we make to maintain or alter our physical appearance reveal a great deal about who we are, and (2) the physical appearance of other people impacts our perception of them, how we communicate with them, how approachable they are, how attractive or unattractive they are, and so on.²¹

In fact, people ascribe all kinds of meanings based on their perceptions of how we physically appear to them. Everything from your height, skin tone, smile, weight, and hair (color, style, lack of, etc.) can communicate meanings to other people. To start our discussion, we're going to look at the three somatotypes.

Somatotypes

In the 1940s, psychologist and physician William Herbert Sheldon introduced the idea of somatotypes.²² In Sheldon's theory, there were three overarching body types: the ectomorph, the endomorph, and the mesomorph. To figure out where you probably fit within Sheldon's theory, complete Table 3.2, the Somatotyping Scale.

Instructions: For each statement, you will have three possible answers; choose the answer that most resembles who you are.

_____1. If you attempt to encircle your right wrist with your left thumb and forefinger:

- a. the two fingers do not touch
- b. the two fingers meet
- c. the two fingers overlap

_____2. My body:

- a. carries too much fat
- b. is lean and muscular
- c. is very skinny

_____3. I would say that I am:

- a. chubby
- b. average
- c. very thin

_____4. I tend to be:

- a. very inactive (sedentary)
- b. fairly active
- c. hyperactive

_____5. I tend to:

- a. overeat
- b. eat a normal amount
- c. eat anything I want and no gain weight

_____6. When I go to a gym:

- a. I am heavier than the people there
- b. I look like the people there
- c. I am much smaller than the people there

_____7. With regards to gaining weight:

- a. I am always trying to lose weight

b. I can gain and lose weight, but tend to stay around the same weight

c. I can't gain weight

_____ 8. Strangers have told me that I should:

a. lose weight

b. stay the same, I look good

c. gain weight

_____ 9. I think my metabolism is:

a. too slow

b. just right

c. too fast

_____ 10. My bone structure is:

a. very large

b. large to medium

c. small to frail

(A) Endomorphy	(B) Mesomorphy	(C) Ectomorphy

Table 3.2 Somatotyping Scale

Now, the Somatotyping Scale is based on the general traits that the three different somatotypes possess. Most people are more familiar with their physical looks (Figure 3.5).

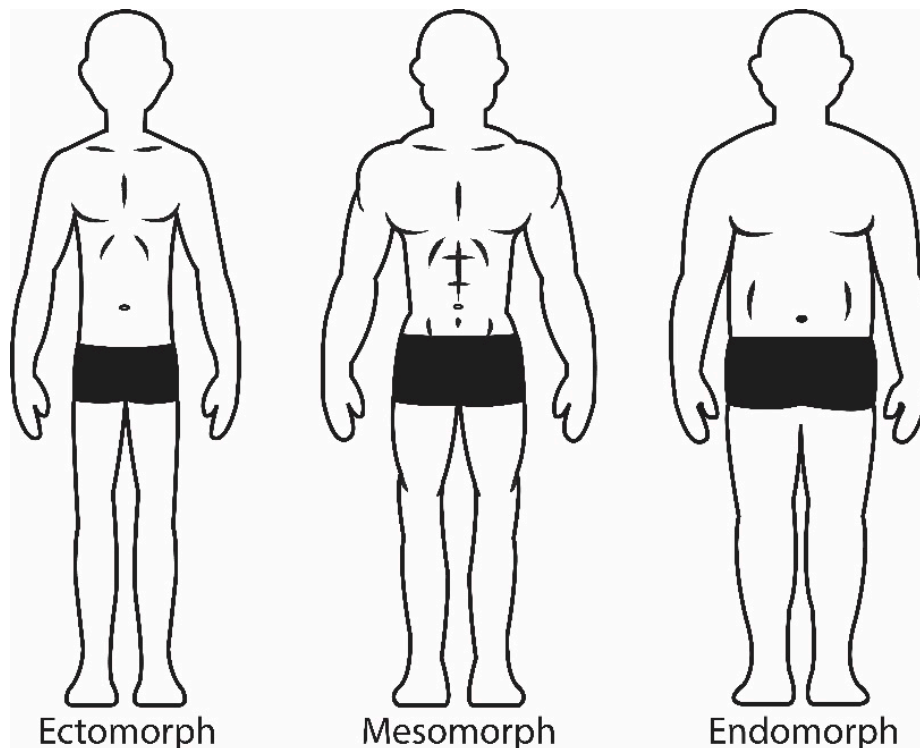


Figure 3.5 Sheldon's Somatotypes

Now, you may be wondering to yourself, where did these three terms come from in the first place? Well, Sheldon created these terms from the three germ layers (three primary cell layers) of embryonic development:

- Endoderm (inner layer) – develops into the gastrointestinal tract
- Mesoderm (middle layer) – develops into the cardiovascular and muscular systems
- Ectoderm (outer layer) – develops into the skin and the nervous systems

In Sheldon's original theory, the different somatotypes also possessed unique personality traits. Table 3.3 contains the Somatotype Perception Scale. Take a second to complete the measure.

Instructions: For each row of personality descriptors, select the adjective that you think most represents you as a person.			
1.	Quiet	Strong	Best friend
2.	Worrisome	Fights	Kind
3.	Lonely	Cheats	Happy
4.	Sneaky	Argues	Helps others
5.	Afraid	Gets teased	Polite
6.	Sad	Sick	Brave
7.	Tired	Lazy	Good looking
8.	Weak	Sloppy	Extraverted
9.	Kind	Naughty	Brave
10.	Nervous	Mean	Assumes leadership
11.	Low pain tolerance	Dirty	Aggressive
12.	Introverted	Tired	Athletic
13.	Intelligent	Lies	High pain threshold
14.	Caring	Poor athlete	Immodest
15.	Tense	Humorous	Energetic
Add the number of personality descriptors circled in each column separately.			
Ectomorphy	Endomorphy	Mesomorphy	

Table 3.3 Somatotype Perception Scale

The Somatotype Perception Scale is just that, stereotypes that some people have associated with the three different body types.²³ However, the media often still portrays these stereotypes in television and movies. As such, many people still have these stereotypes.

Physical Appearance and Society

Unfortunately, someone's physical appearance has been shown to impact their lives in a number of different ways:

- Physically attractive students are viewed as more popular by their peers.
- Physically attractive people are seen as smarter.
- Physically attractive job applicants are more likely to get hired.
- Physically attractive people make more money.
- Physically attractive journalists are seen as more likable and credible.
- Physically attractive defendants in a court case were less likely to be convicted, and if they were convicted, the juries recommended less harsh sentences.
- Taller people are perceived as more credible.

- People who are overweight are less likely to get job interviews or promotions.

Now, this list is far from perfect and doesn't necessarily take every possible scenario into account. Furthermore, there are some differences between females and males in how they perceive attraction and how they are influenced by attraction. Moreover, culture can play a large part in how physical attractiveness impacts peoples' perceptions. For example, the classic example of how culture determines what is considered physically attractive stems from the paintings of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), who is famous for his use of full-figured women as a depiction of physical ideals (see Figure 3.6).

In the United States today, most females and males that are portrayed in leading roles fall into the mesomorphic somatotype. There are examples of ectomorphic and endomorphic leading players, but the majority of people on television shows and in films are played by people who are mesomorphic body types. In fact, these trends tend to be seen in all of our major media in the United States (e.g., news, magazines, comic books, live theatre, etc.).

Body Positivity

There are groups in the United States that are attempting to help break down these walls within our society. For example, in the past few years, there has been a movement known as body positivity. In reality, the idea of body positivity isn't that new. In 1996, Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott founded [The Body Positive](#). In her 2014 book, *embody: Learning to Love Your Unique Body (And Quiet that Critical Voice)*, Connie Sobczak defined body positive as "a way of living that gives you permission to love, care for, and take pleasure in your body throughout your lifespan. Struggles will inevitably occur, especially during times of transition or imbalance."²⁴ Sobczak goes on to note that practicing body positivity "allows you to find what you need to live with as much self-love and balanced self-care as possible.

Experiences of conflict and suffering become opportunities to learn what is required to further your growth so you can find greater contentment and peace."²⁵ The Body Positive has created a basic model for body positivity that consists of five basic competencies: reclaim health, practice intuitive self-care, cultivate self-love, declare your authentic beauty, and build community (Figure 3.7).

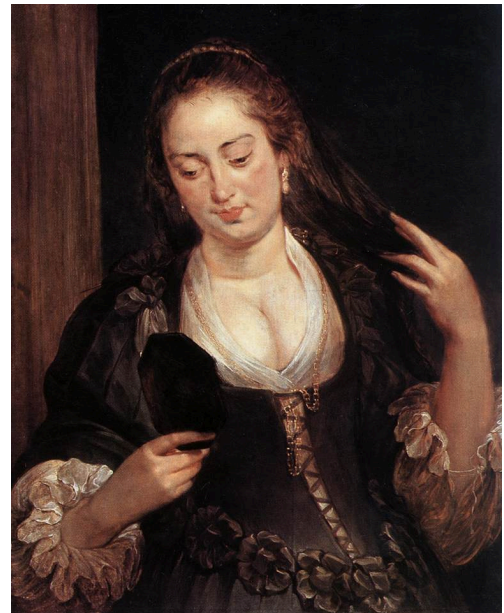


Figure 3.6. The Rubenesque Woman. [Woman with a Mirror by Peter Paul Rubens](#)



Figure 3.7 Five Competencies of the Be Body Positive Model

Reclaim Health

The first competency of the Be Body Positive Model is reclaiming one's health. For too long, the health care industry has consistently used someone's body mass index as an indication of someone's physical health. However, there is ample research that "measurements of physical activity and metabolic fitness, such as blood pressure, blood lipids, and blood sugar levels, are far better indicators of physical health than body size."²⁶ As such, reclaiming one's health is realizing that the weight loss and diet industry is a profit-making machine that isn't very effective. The weight loss and diet industry is estimated to be worth \$245.51 billion by 2022.²⁷ People spend a ton of money here even though the long-term effects of dieting are abysmal, with most people gaining back the weight they lost and adding some.^{28,29}

Now, this is not to say that people who are unhealthy should relish their ill-health. Instead, body positivity is about understanding that health isn't a number. One number that is often used to declare someone's "health" is their body mass index. You can calculate your own BMI using this [calculator from the National Institute of Health](#). Here are the general categories associated with explaining someone's BMI:

- Underweight = <18.5
- Normal weight = 18.5–24.9
- Overweight = 25–29.9
- Obesity = 30–39
- Morbid Obesity = 40+

In reality, BMI doesn't distinguish between fat and muscle, so many elite bodybuilders have BMIs that say they're obese when they have little to no body fat. It's even possible to have metabolically healthy obesity. According to Patrick J. Skerrett, Former Executive Editor of *Harvard Health*, metabolically healthy obesity includes the following factors:

- a waist size of no more than 40 inches for a man or 35 inches for a woman

- normal blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar
- normal sensitivity to insulin
- good physical fitness [30](#)

As such, the focus of reclaiming health isn't about a number on a scale, but about being healthy. Unfortunately, many people still have the stereotype in society associating fatness with sickness, which modern medicine knows isn't the case.

Practice Intuitive Self-Care

Intuitive care is learning to trust our bodies regarding both eating and exercise. It's about being attuned to our body and realizing what our body needs. It's not about limiting yourself to 800 calories a day or exercising for nine hours every day. Instead, it's about learning to listen to our bodies mindfully. Intuitive self-care is realizing that our bodies need food and exercise, so we need to listen to them and provide them what they need. At the same time, intuitive self-care realizes that this is going to look different for everyone. In other words, there is no perfect diet or exercise routine that will be beneficial for everyone. Some people get a "runners high," and others will never experience that euphoric feeling runners discuss. Other people can easily pack on muscle, while others can spend hours and hours in the gym and simply not see the type of growth they desire. Basically, our bodies are different and have inherent limitations on what they achieve. When people have unrealistic expectations for their body can (and should) look like and what their body can achieve, they are considered to have body dysmorphia. Before progressing further, take a moment and complete Table 3.4 (The Body Dysmorphia Short Form).

Directions: Please read each sentence carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- _____ 1. I often avoid having all or part of my body seen by others.
- _____ 2. My sex life has not been affected by concerns related to my physical appearance.
- _____ 3. I have avoided being seen by others because of my concerns related to my physical appearance.
- _____ 4. I do not worry that my body isn't sufficiently lean or muscular.
- _____ 5. I am comfortable showing my body in public situations.
- _____ 6. I often eat alone because I don't want people to know how much or how little I am eating.
- _____ 7. My self-esteem is not influenced by my weight.
- _____ 8. I worry a lot about how I look.
- _____ 9. I am generally not self-conscious of how I look when I am around others.
- _____ 10. When people tell me that I look good, I generally think they are lying.

SCORING: To compute your scores follow the instructions below:

Step One: Add scores for items 1, 3, 6, 8, & 10 _____

Step Two: Add scores for items 2, 4, 5, 7, & 9 _____

Step Three: Add 30 to Step 1. _____

Step Four: Subtract the score for Step two from the score for Step Three. _____

Interpreting Your Score:

The average score for females on this measure is 27.64, so scores above 27.64 (25.66 for males) are high and indicate a higher degree of body dysmorphia, while those below 27.64 (25.66 for males) are lower degrees of body dysmorphia. This is a research measure and not a diagnostic one. If you think you may be someone

suffering from body dysmorphia, we would highly encourage you to seek out help from a mental health professional who specializes in the care and treatment of body dysmorphia.

Reference:

Wrench, J. S. (2001). *Intercultural communication: Power in context*. Tapestry Press.

Table 3.4 Body Dysmorphia Short Form

Cultivate Self-Love

As we've discussed with mindfulness throughout this text, one of the problems many people face is an overly critical brain that seems to run non-stop. Cultivating self-love is about learning to make life-affirming choices and not listening to the non-stop vulture sitting on our shoulders. A lot of the practices we've discussed with mindfulness are in line with this idea of cultivating self-love.

Declare Your Own Authentic Beauty

Everyone is beautiful. Yet, we live in a society that places premiums on certain types of physical attributes that get labeled "physically attractive" or "beautiful." Declaring your own authentic beauty is about:

choosing to see and express ourselves just as we are—internal and external qualities combined. Exploring beauty through a body positive lens teaches us to have a dynamic, engaged relationship with the world around us. We honor our bodies as we pass through each developmental stage of life, which leads to true self-care because we don't confuse it with a desire to transform our physical selves to meet someone else's definition of beauty. ³¹

Now, we do not deny that we are bombarded by messages in our society that dictate beauty standards, and it's hard to avoid these images and not let them impact how we evaluate our physical appearance. Learning to declare your authentic beauty is a process and not a process that's going to happen overnight. Instead, it's important to point out those vulture statements when we see them and label them for what they are. The more we start recognizing these vulture statements, the easier it will be to acknowledge our beauty.

Build Community

The last competency in the Be Body Positive Model is building a community of likeminded people who seek to build each other up instead of taking each other down. Many colleges and universities even have Be Body Positive groups on campus to help support each other as we all learn to be more body positive.

Mindfulness Activity

For this activity, we want you to think through the Be Body Positive Model within your own life. Answer the following questions:

1. How has the health care system failed you with regards to reclaiming your health? How can you take control and reclaim your health? What obstacles do you have in front of you? How can you overcome them?
2. How can you approach food and exercise from a position of self-care? Do you think you do this now? Why? If not, what is preventing you from thinking about food and exercise from this approach?
3. When was the last time you had a critical thought about your physical appearance? How did you respond to that thought? Was it from a position of self-love? If not, how could you have cultivated self-love in that moment?
4. What are five things that make you beautiful?



5. Do you have a group of people in your life that celebrate being body positive? If not, how could you go about creating this circle for yourself?

The Matching Hypothesis

One obvious area where physical appearance plays a huge part in our day-to-day lives is in our romantic relationships. Elaine Walster and her colleagues coined the “matching hypothesis” back in the 1960s.^{32,33} The basic premise of the matching hypothesis is that the idea of “opposites attracting” really doesn’t pertain to physical attraction. When all else is equal, people are more likely to find themselves in romantic relationships with people who are perceived as similarly physically attractive.

In a classic study conducted by Shepherd and Ellis, the researchers took pictures of married couples and mixed up the images of the husbands and wives.³⁴ The researchers then had groups of female and male college students sort the images based on physical attraction. Not surprisingly, there was a positive relationship between the physical attractiveness of the husbands and the physical attractiveness of the wives.

Other physical appearance variables beyond just basic physical attractiveness have also been examined with regards to the matching hypothesis. A group of researchers led by Julie Carmalt found that matching also explained the dating habits of young people.³⁵ In their study, Carmalt et al. found that individuals who were overweight were less likely to date someone who was physically attractive.

Overall, research generally supports the matching hypothesis, but physical attractiveness is not the only variable that can impact romantic partners (e.g., socioeconomic status, education, career prospects, etc.). However, the matching hypothesis is a factor that impacts many people’s ultimate dating selection ability.

Research Spotlight



In a series of different studies, Shaw Taylor et al. tested the matching hypothesis. In one of the studies, the researchers collected the data for 60 females and 60 males on online dating platforms (we’ll refer to these 120 people as the initiators). They then used the site activity logs to collect information about who the initiators matched with on the dating website and whether those people responded. Based on this contact information, the researchers also collected the pictures of those people who were contacted, so the researchers collected 966 photos (527 female, 439 male). The physical attractiveness of the group of photos was evaluated on a scale of very unattractive (-3) to very attractive (+3) by people within the authors’ department.

Matching behaviour (or swiping right) was not based on the initiator’s physical appearance. So, people often matched with others who were physically more attractive than them. However, people only tended to respond to initiators when their physical attractiveness was similar.

Shaw Taylor, L., Fiore, A. T., Mendelsohn, G. A., & Cheshire, C. (2011). “Out of my league”: A real-world test of the matching hypothesis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(7), 942–954. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167211409947>

Key Takeaways

- Communication is multifaceted with the combination of verbal and nonverbal cues culminating in a richer communication experience.
- Vocal cues such as rate, pitch, and volume have an impact on whether communication is effective.
- Facial expressions and body movements enhance communication, but may detract from the effectiveness of communication.

Exercises

- List and define the categories of nonverbal communication. For each category, make a list of corresponding nonverbal behaviours that are discussed in this chapter and add to this list from your own experiences.
- Recall a situation in which you interacted with someone whose nonverbal behaviours stood out for positive reasons. Describe the situation and nonverbal behaviours. Why do you consider nonverbal behaviours to be positive?
- Recall a situation in which you interacted with an individual whose nonverbal behaviours detracted from the individual's ability to communicate effectively. Describe these nonverbal behaviours and suggest what the individual could do differently.

Improving your Nonverbal Skills

Learning Objectives

- Explain the areas of nonverbal communication that can be assessed and improved.
- Discuss the importance of observation when it comes to improving nonverbal behaviours.
- Understand that nonverbal communication is a skill that requires practice.

In this chapter, we've examined a wide range of issues related to nonverbal communication. But it's one thing to understand nonverbal communication and something completely different to communicate using nonverbal behaviours effectively. In this section, we're going to explore some ways that you can start to improve your nonverbal skills.

The Nonverbal Mindset

When it comes to effective communication, you need to develop an appropriate mindset towards nonverbal communication. First, individuals must be aware that nonverbal communication plays a significant role in creating meaning.

Second, individuals must believe nonverbal communication is important and impactful. Awareness of nonverbal communication without the belief that it is important can result in negative outcomes. For example, students in nonverbal communication begin to learn about the importance of clothing and general appearance in creating impressions. Some students "rebel" against the idea that appearance and clothing matter stating, "people should accept me no matter what I am wearing." While this would be ideal, the fact of the matter is that humans size up other humans using visual cues in initial interactions.

Lastly, individuals can analyze their nonverbal communication. This can be accomplished in several ways. Individuals might observe the behaviour of individuals who seem to be liked by others and to whom others are socially attracted. The individual should then compare the behaviours of the "popular" person to their own behaviours. What differences exist? Does the other individual smile more, make more or less eye contact, engage in more or less touch, etc.? Based on this comparison, individuals can devise a plan for improvement or perhaps no improvement is needed!

Nonverbal Immediacy

In addition to awareness of nonverbal communication, believing that nonverbal communication is important and analyzing one's own behaviour, individuals should be aware of nonverbal immediacy. **Immediacy** is defined as physical and psychological closeness. More specifically, Mehrabian defines immediacy as behaviours increasing the sensory stimulation between individuals.³⁶ Immediacy behaviours include being physically oriented toward another, eye contact, some touch, gesturing, vocal variety, and talking louder. Immediacy behaviours are known to be impactful in a variety of contexts.

In instructional, organizational, and social contexts, research has revealed powerful positive impacts attributable to immediacy behaviours, including influence and compliance, liking, relationship satisfaction, job satisfaction,

and learning, etc. In the health care setting, the positive outcomes of nonverbally immediate interaction are well documented: patient satisfaction,^{37,38} understanding of medical information,^{39,40} patient perceptions of provider credibility,⁴¹ patient perceptions of confidentiality,⁴² parent recall of medical directives given by pediatricians and associated cognitive learning,⁴³ affect for the provider,^{44,45} and decreased apprehension when communicating with a physician.⁴⁶ Individuals can increase their immediacy behaviours through practice!

Key Takeaways

- Voice, body movement, eye contact, and facial expression can be assessed and improved upon to become a more effective communicator.
- Successful communicators can be observed and modeled.
- Practicing nonverbal communication is no different from practicing other skills, such as playing an instrument or cooking.

Exercises

- Record your voice and listen to the recording several times. Use the questions included in the “analyze your voice” section of this chapter. Make a note of areas where you believe you are doing well and areas where you may need improvement. Ask a friend to listen to your voice and respond to the question for additional feedback.
- Video record a conversation between you and a friend/s. (Make sure everyone approves of being recorded.) As a group, review your facial expressions, body movements, and gestures. Discuss your nonverbal behaviour as a group being certain to compliment areas of success and ask for constructive feedback if you are comfortable doing so.
- Select a nonverbal specific behaviour such as greeting through a wave or eye contact. Use this nonverbal behaviour in a manner that is inconsistent with the accepted use of this nonverbal behaviour. For example, avoid eye contact completely with a friend or kiss a friend on the cheek instead of simply saying hello. Make a note of your reaction as well as the reaction of your friend. (Be prepared to explain your behaviour to your friend.)
- Take an inventory of your nonverbal communication skills by answering the following questions. Do you believe nonverbal communication is important? Why or why not? Which subcategories of nonverbal communication are your strengths and weaknesses? How can you improve on these weaknesses?

Key Terms

accent

Nonverbal communication that emphasizes a portion of a message or word rather than the message as a whole.

affect displays

Kinesics that show feelings and emotions.

attribution error

The tendency to explain another individual's behaviour in relation to the individual's internal tendencies rather than an external factor.

complement

Nonverbal communication that reinforces verbal communication.

contradict

Nonverbal communication conveying the opposite meaning of verbal communication.

dysfluencies

Speech problems that keep your speech from being as smooth and flowing as it could be.

emblems

Kinesics that are clear and unambiguous and have a verbal equivalent in a given culture.

eye gaze

The act of fixing your eyes on someone.

haptics

The study of touch as a form of communication.

illustrators

Kinesics that emphasize or explain a word.

inflection

Changes in vocal pitch.

intensity

The volume of your speech; how loudly or softly you express yourself.

kinesics

The study of visible means of communicating using body language such as eye behaviour, facial expression, body posture and movement, and hand gestures.

nonverbal vocalization

A type of paralanguage that consists of sounds, noises, and behaviours that are often accompanied by body language.

oculesics

Communication involving eye behaviour such as eye contact, gaze, and avoidance.

olfactics

The use of scent to communicate.

paralanguage

Voice characteristics and nonverbal vocalizations that communicate feelings, intentions, and meanings.

pitch

The placement of your voice on the musical scale; the basis on which singing voices are classified as soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, or bass voices.

proxemics

The use of space to communicate.

regulate

Nonverbal communication which controls the flow of conversation.

regulators

Kinesics that help coordinate the flow of conversation.

repeat

Nonverbal communication that repeats verbal communication, but could stand alone.

rhythm

Variation in the flow of your voice created by differences in the pitch, intensity, tempo, and length of word syllables.

substitute

Nonverbal communication that has a direct verbal translation.

tempo

The rate of your speech; how slowly or quickly you talk.

timbre

The overall quality and tone, which is often called the “color” of your voice; the primary vocal quality that makes your voice either pleasant or disturbing to listen to.

verbal surrogates

The sounds humans make as they attempt to fill dead air while they are thinking of what to say next (e.g., uhh, umm, etc.).

vocalics

Vocal utterances, other than words, that serve as a form of communication.

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we discussed the importance of nonverbal communication. To be an effective nonverbal communicator, it is necessary to understand that nonverbal communication conveys a tremendous amount of information. However, the meaning of nonverbal communication most often must be understood within the context of the interaction. There are very few nonverbal behaviours that can be understood outside of context.

This chapter also discusses the functions of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication serves many purposes and works to clarify the meaning of verbal communication. Verbal communication and nonverbal communication, in combination, increase the chances of stimulating accurate meaning in the minds of others. One without the other dilutes the effectiveness of each.

Finally, this chapter discusses the subcategories of nonverbal communication. The subcategories of nonverbal communication allow us to account for the multitude of cues sent between the sender and receiver. The human brain must account for cues resulting from eye contact, facial expressions, distance between sender and receiver, touch, sound, movement, and scent. Amazingly, the human brain processes all of these cues very quickly and with a high degree of accuracy.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Addie was assigned a roommate for her freshman year in college. Addie noticed that her roommate didn't make much eye contact, avoided touch, and didn't smile very often. After a few weeks, Addie noticed that her roommate began to look at her more when talking and smiled when she came into the room. Meanwhile, Addie made friends in some of her classes and invited them to her room to study. Addie's roommate didn't look at anyone and didn't smile. Addie's friends complained that her roommate didn't like them and that she was a little strange.

What information might Addie provide to her friends to give them insight into Addie's behaviour?

The roommate's nonverbal behaviour may have consequences for her in social settings. Is it her responsibility to adapt her nonverbal communication or the responsibility of those around her to try to understand that she is simply different?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. If Mary stomps her foot while saying, "No, I won't go with you." Which function of nonverbal communication is she using?
 - a. Complementing
 - b. Accenting
 - c. Repeating
 - d. Contradicting
 - e. Substituting
2. Ronnie says "ummm" frequently when speaking. This aspect of vocalics is referred to as _____.
 - a. Pitch
 - b. Rate
 - c. Disfluency
 - d. Disconnection
 - e. Pause

3. Choose the best example of an emblem.
 - a. Using two fingers in the shape of a V to sign "Peace"
 - b. Shaking of the head to say no
 - c. Pointing in the air while saying up
 - d. Rubbing your stomach while saying yum
 - e. Making a cradle with the arms when saying baby
4. What is the difference in the repeating function of nonverbal communication and the complementing function of nonverbal communication?
 - a. Complementing nonverbal behaviour can stand alone, whereas repeating cannot.
 - b. Repeating nonverbal communication can stand alone, whereas complementing cannot.
 - c. Repeating behaviours are more useful than complementing nonverbal communication.
 - d. There is no difference between complementing and repeating nonverbal behaviour.
 - e. Repeating behaviours are more culturally appropriate in the U.S.
5. Which function of nonverbal communication is best represented when the nonverbal behaviour is the opposite of verbal communication?
 - a. Complementing
 - b. Repeating
 - c. Accenting
 - d. Substituting
 - e. Contradicting
6. _____ is the study of how use of space communicates.
 - a. Haptics
 - b. Oculistics
 - c. Chronemics
 - d. Proxemics
 - e. Kinesics
7. _____ is the study of how touch communicates.
 - a. Haptics
 - b. Oculistics
 - c. Chronemics
 - d. Proxemics
 - e. Kinesics
8. If Lacey is standing within 18 inches of her friend, she is standing in which of Hall's distances?
 - a. Personal
 - b. Intimate
 - c. Social
 - d. Public
 - e. Parallel

Notes

¹ Eckman, P and Friesen, W.V. (1969). Head and body cues in the judgement of emotion: A reformulation.

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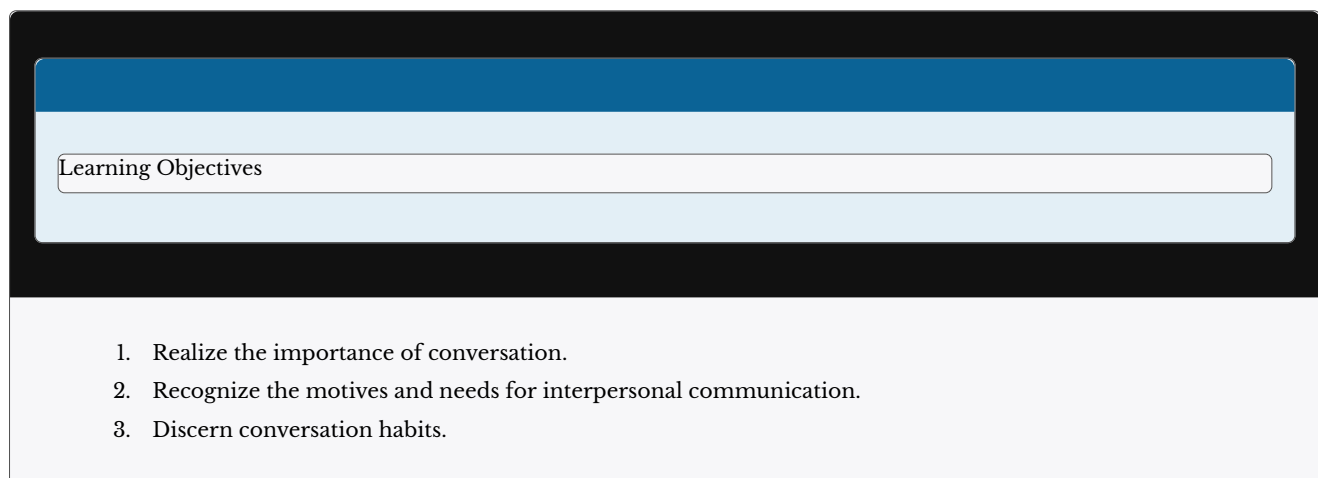
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[5]

Talking and Listening

We are constantly interacting with people. We interact with our family and friends. We interact with our teachers and peers at school. We interact with customer service representatives, office coworkers, physicians/therapists, and so many other different people in average day. Humans are inherently social beings, so talking and listening to each other is a huge part of what we all do day-to-day.

The Importance of Everyday Conversations



Learning Objectives

1. Realize the importance of conversation.
2. Recognize the motives and needs for interpersonal communication.
3. Discern conversation habits.

Most of us spend a great deal of our day interacting with other people through what is known as a conversation. According to Judy Apps, the word “conversation” is comprised of the words *con* (with) and *versare* (turn): “conversation is turn and turnabout – you alternate.”¹ As such, a conversation isn’t a monologue or singular speech act; it’s a dyadic process where two people engage with one another in interaction that has multiple turns. Philosophers have been writing about the notion of the term “conversation” and its importance in society since the written word began.² For our purposes, we will leave the philosophizing to the philosophers and start with the underlying assumption that conversation is an important part of the interpersonal experience. Through conversations with others, we can build, maintain, and terminate relationships.

Coming up with an academic definition for the term “conversation” is not an easy task. Instead, Donald Allen and Rebecca Guy offer the following explanation: “Conversation is the primary basis of direct social relations between persons. As a process occurring in real-time, conversation constitutes a reciprocal and rhythmic interchange of verbal emissions. It is a sharing process which develops a common social experience.”³ From this explanation, a conversation is how people engage in social interaction in their day-to-day lives. From this perspective, a conversation is purely a verbal process. For our purposes, we prefer Susan Brennan’s definition: “Conversation is a joint activity in which two or more participants use linguistic forms and nonverbal signals to communicate interactively.”⁴ Brennan does differentiate conversations, which can involve two or more people,

from dialogues, which only involve two people. For our purposes, this distinction isn't critical. What is essential is that conversations are one of the most common forms of interpersonal communication.

There is growing concern that in today's highly mediated world, the simple conversation is becoming a thing of the past. Sherry Turkle is one of the foremost researchers on how humans communicate using technology. She tells the story of an 18-year-old boy who uses texting for most of his fundamental interactions. The boy wistfully told Turkle, "Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation."⁵ When she asks Millennials across the nation what's wrong with holding a simple conversation:

"I'll tell you what's wrong with having a conversation. It takes place in real-time and you can't control what you're going to say." So that's the bottom line. Texting, email, posting, all of these things let us present the self as we want to be. We get to edit, and that means we get to delete, and that means we get to retouch, the face, the voice, the flesh, the body—not too little, not too much, just right.⁶

Is this the world we now live in? Have people become so addicted to their technology that holding a simple conversation is becoming passé?

You should not take communication for granted. Reading this book, you will notice how much communication can be critical in our personal and professional lives. Communication is a vital component of our life. A few years ago, a prison decided to lessen the amount of communication inmates could have with each other. The prison administrators decided that they did not want inmates to share information. Yet, over time, the prisoners developed a way to communicate with each other using codes on walls and tapping out messages through pipes. Even when inmates were not allowed to talk to each other via face-to-face, they were still able to find other ways to communicate.⁷

Types of Conversations

David Angle argues that conversations can be categorized based on directionality (one-way or two-way) and tone/purpose (cooperative or competitive).⁸ One-way conversations are conversations where an individual is talking *at* the other person and not *with* the other person. Although these exchanges are technically conversations because of the inclusion of nonverbal feedback, one of the conversational partners tends to monopolize the bulk of the conversation while the other partner is more of a passive receiver. Two-way conversations, on the other hand, are conversations where there is mutual involvement and interaction. In two-way conversations, people are actively talking, providing nonverbal feedback, and listening.

In addition to one vs. two-way interactions, Angle also believes that conversations can be broken down on whether they are cooperative or competitive. Cooperative conversations are marked by a mutual interest in what all parties within the conversation have to contribute. Conversely, individuals in competitive conversations are more concerned with their points of view than others within the conversation. Angle further breaks down his typology of conversations into four distinct types of conversation (Figure 5.1).

Discourse

The first type of conversation is one-way cooperative, which Angle labeled discourse. The purpose of a discourse conversation is for the sender to transmit information to the receiver. For example, a professor delivering a lecture or a speaker giving a speech.

Dialogue

The second type is what most people consider to be a traditional conversation: the dialogue (two-way, cooperative). According to Angle, "The goal is for participants to exchange information and build relationships with one another."⁹ When you go on a first date, the general purpose of most of our conversations in this context is dialogue. If conversations take on one of the other three types, you could find yourself not getting a second date.

Debate

The third type of conversation is the two-way, competitive conversation, which Angle labels "debate." The debate conversation is less about information giving and more about persuading. From this perspective, debate conversations occur when the ultimate goal of the conversation is to win an argument or persuade someone to change their thoughts, values, beliefs, and behaviours. Imagine you're sitting in a study group and you're trying to

advocate for a specific approach to your group's project. In this case, your goal is to persuade the others within the conversation to your point-of-view.

Diatribes

Lastly, Angle discusses the diatribe (one-way, competitive). The goal of the diatribe conversation is "to express emotions, browbeat those that disagree with you, and/or inspire those that share the same perspective."¹⁰ For example, imagine that your best friend has come over to your dorm room, apartment, or house to vent about the grade they received on a test.

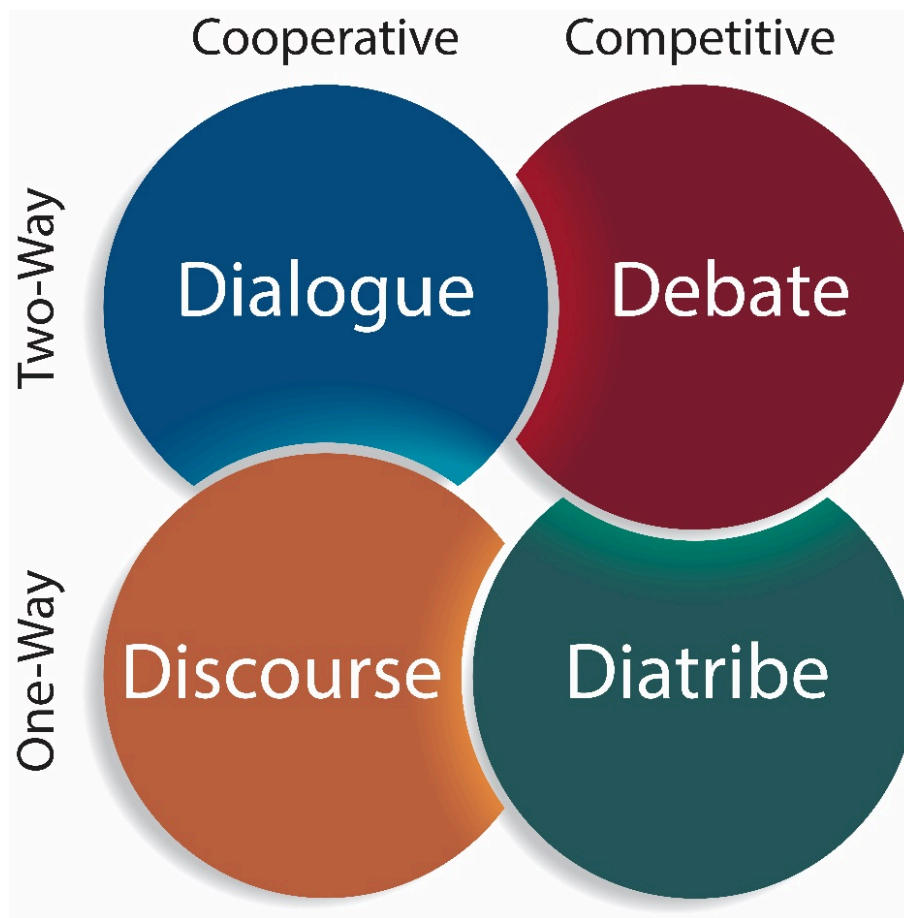


Figure 5.1 Four Types of Conversations

Communication Needs

There are many reasons why we communicate with each other, but what are our basic **communication needs**? The first reason why we communicate is for physical needs. Research has shown that we need to communicate with others because it keeps us healthier. There has been a direct link to mental and physical health. For instance, it has been shown that people who have cancer, depression, and even the common cold, can alleviate their symptoms simply by communicating with others. People who communicate their problems, feelings, and thoughts with others are less likely to hold grudges, anger, hostility, which in turn causes less stress on their minds and their bodies.

Another reason why we communicate with others is that it shapes who we are or identity needs. Perhaps you never realized that you were funny until your friends told you that you were quite humorous. Sometimes, we become who we are based on what others say to us and about us. For instance, maybe your mother told you that you are a gifted writer. You believe that information because you were told that by someone you respected. Thus, communication can influence the way that we perceive ourselves.

The third reason we communicate is for social needs. We communicate with others to initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships with others. These relationships may be personal or professional. In either case, we have

motives or objectives for communicating with other people. The concept of **communication motives** was created by Rebecca Rubin. She found that there are six main reasons why individuals communicate with each other: control, relaxation, escape, inclusion, affection, and pleasure.

Control motives are means to gain compliance. Relaxation motives are ways to rest or relax. Escape motives are reasons for diversion or avoidance of other activities. Inclusion motives are ways to express emotion and to feel a link to the other person. Affection motives are ways to express one's love and caring for another person. Pleasure motives are ways to communicate for enjoyment and excitement.

To maintain our daily routine, we need to communicate with others. The last reason we communicate is for practical needs. To exchange information or solve problems, we need to talk to others. Communication can prevent disasters from occurring. To create and/or sustain a daily balance in our lives, we need to communicate with other people. Hence, there is no escaping communication. We do it all the time.

Key Takeaways

- Communication is very important, and we should not take it for granted.
- There are six communication motives: control, affection, relaxation, pleasure, inclusion, and escape. There are four communication needs: physical, identity, social, and practical.
- Communication habits are hard to change.

Exercises

- Imagine if you were unable to talk to others verbally in a face-to-face situation. How would you adapt your communication so that you could still communicate with others? Why would you pick this method? Name a situation this may happen as a Social Service Worker.
- Create a list of all the reasons you communicate and categorize your list based on communication motives and needs. Why do you think you communicate in the way that you do?
- Reflect on how you introduce yourself in a new situation at your place of work. Write down what you typically say to a stranger/new coworker/new manager. You can role-play with a friend and then switch roles. What did you notice? How many of those statements are habitual? Why?

Listening

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between hearing and listening.
2. Understand how to listen effectively.
3. Recognize the different types of listening.

When it comes to daily communication, we spend about 45% of our listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and 9% writing.³⁶ However, most people are not entirely sure what the word “listening” is or how to do it effectively.

Hearing Is Not Listening

Hearing refers to a passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through an ear. Hearing is a physiological process that is continuously happening. We are bombarded by sounds all the time. Unless you are in a sound-proof room or are 100% deaf, we are constantly hearing sounds. Even in a sound-proof

room, other sounds that are normally not heard like a beating heart or breathing will become more apparent as a result of the blocked background noise.

Unfortunately, plenty can go wrong on the receiver's end in listening effectively and making the right inferences. We've already looked at the possibility that they may just lack knowledge about both the job and the broader context to understand fully the content of workplace messages and their underlying meanings.

Other receiver errors could include:

- A poor reader of nonverbal social cues due to a lack of experience in developing conversational skills
- Distracted by their cell phone or device
- Experiencing too much internal "semantic noise" interference from their minds wandering off topic with distracting thoughts about non-work-related things even during work communication
- Too preoccupied rehearsing what they're going to say on a topic because they would rather speak than listen
- They listen only to reply rather than to understand
- Trying to multitask by reading or browsing while listening (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2013)

Many students struggle with this. Some have difficulty being patient enough to listen and would rather speak, otherwise known as grandstanding. In all such cases, the problem is that they are engaging in **passive listening**—when you merely hear noises and barely register the meaning of the message because you have preoccupying internal agenda that is more compelling. Once again, however, communication requires that you do your fair share to ensure that the sender's meaning is understood.

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Listening, on the other hand, is generally seen as an active process. Listening is "focused, concentrated attention for the purpose of understanding the meanings expressed by a [source]." ³⁷ From this perspective, hearing is more of an automatic response when your ear perceives information; whereas, listening is what happens when we purposefully attend to different messages.

We can even take this a step further and differentiate normal listening from critical listening. **Critical listening** is the "careful, systematic thinking and reasoning to see whether a message makes sense in light of factual evidence." ³⁸ From this perspective, it's one thing to attend to someone's message, but something very different to analyze what the person is saying based on known facts and evidence.

1. Sanbonmatsu, D. M., Strayer, D.L., Medeiros-Ward, N., Watson, J.M. (2013). Who multi-tasks and why? Multi-tasking ability, perceived multi-tasking ability, impulsivity, and sensation seeking. PLoS ONE 8(1): e54402. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0054402>

Let's apply these ideas to a typical interpersonal situation. Let's say that you and your best friend are having dinner at a crowded restaurant. Your ear is going to be attending to a lot of different messages all the time in that environment, but most of those messages get filtered out as "background noise," or information we don't listen to at all. Maybe then your favourite song comes on the speaker system the restaurant is playing, and you and your best friend both attend to the song because you both like it. A minute earlier, another song could have been playing, but you tuned it out (hearing) instead of taking a moment to enjoy and attend to the song itself (listen). Next, let's say you and your friend get into a discussion about the issues of campus parking. Your friend states, "There's never any parking on campus. What gives?" Now, if you're critically listening to what your friend says, you'll question the basis of this argument. For example, the word "never" in this statement is problematic because it would mean that the campus has zero available parking, which is probably not the case. Now, it may be difficult for your friend to find a parking spot on campus, but that doesn't mean that there's "never any parking." In this case, you've gone from just listening to critically evaluating the argument your friend is making.

Model of Listening

Judi Brownell created one of the most commonly used models for listening.³⁹ Although not the only model of listening that exists, we like this model because it breaks the process of hearing down into clearly differentiated stages: hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding (Figure 7.4).

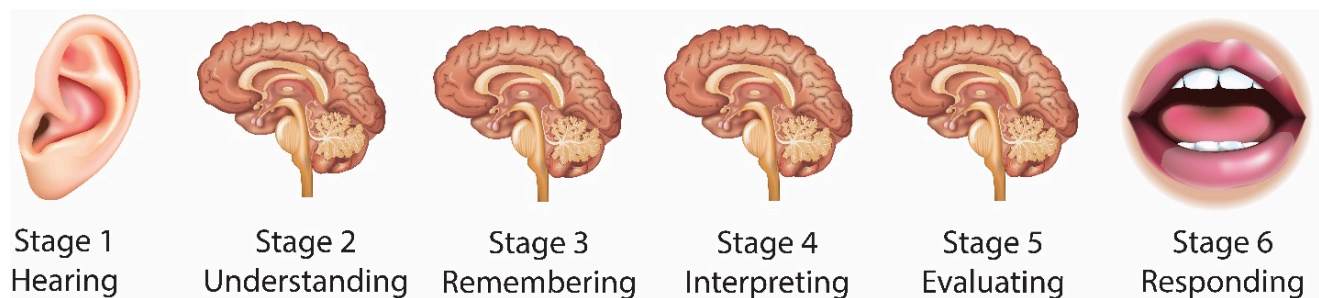


Figure 5. 4 HURIER Model of Listening

Hearing

From a fundamental perspective, for listening to occur, an individual must attend to some kind of communicated message. Now, one can argue that hearing should not be equated with listening (as we did above), but it is the first step in the model of listening. Simply, if we don't attend to the message at all, then communication never occurred from the receiver's perspective.

Imagine you're standing in a crowded bar with your friends on a Friday night. You see your friend Darry and yell her name. In that instant, you, as a source of a message, have attempted to send a message. If Darry is too far away, or if the bar is too loud and she doesn't hear you call her name, then Darry has not engaged in stage one of the listening model. You may have tried to initiate communication, but the receiver, Darry, did not know that you initiated communication.

Now, to engage in mindful listening, it's important to take hearing seriously because of the issue of intention. If we go into an interaction with another person without really intending to listening to what they have to say, we may end up being a passive listener who does nothing more than hear and nod our heads. Remember, mindful communication starts with the premise that we must think about our intentions and be aware of them.

Understanding

The second stage of the listening model is understanding, or the ability to comprehend or decode the source's message. Simply, decoding is when we attempt to break down the message we've heard into comprehensible meanings. For example, imagine someone coming up to you asking if you know, "Tintinnabulation of vacillating pendulums in inverted, metallic resonant cups." Even if you recognize all of the words, you may not completely comprehend what the person is even trying to say. In this case, you cannot decode the message. Just as an FYI, that means "jingle bells."

Remembering

Once we've decoded a message, we have to actually remember the message itself, or the ability to recall a message that was sent. We are bombarded by messages throughout our day, so it's completely possible to attend to a message and decode it and then forget it about two seconds later.

For example, I always warn my students that my brain is like a sieve. If you tell me something when I'm leaving the class, I could easily have forgotten what you told me three seconds later because my brain switches gear to what I'm doing next: I run into another student in the hallway; another thought pops into my head; etc. As such, I always recommend emailing me important things, so I don't forget them. In this case, it's not that I don't understand the message; I just get distracted, and my remembering process fails me. This problem plagues all of us.

Interpreting

The next stage in the HURIER Model of Listening is interpreting. "Interpreting messages involves attention to all of the various speaker and contextual variables that provide a background for accurately perceived messages."⁴⁰ So, what do we mean by contextual variables? A lot of the interpreting process is being aware of the nonverbal cues (both oral and physical) that accompany a message to accurately assign meaning to the message.

Imagine you're having a conversation with one of your peers, and he says, "I love math." Well, the text itself is demonstrating an overwhelming joy and calculating mathematical problems. However, if the message is accompanied by an eye roll or is said in a manner that makes it sound sarcastic, then the meaning of the oral phrase changes. Part of interpreting a message then is being sensitive to nonverbal cues.

Evaluating

The next stage is the evaluating stage or judging the message itself. One of the biggest hurdles many people have with listening is the evaluative stage. Our personal biases, values, and beliefs can prevent us from effectively listening to someone else's message.

Let's imagine that you despise a specific politician. It's gotten to the point where if you hear this politician's voice, you immediately change the television channel. Even hearing other people talk about this politician causes you to tune out completely. In this case, your own bias against this politician prevents you from effectively listening to their message or even others' messages involving this politician. Overcoming our own biases against the source of a message or the content of a message in an effort to truly listen to a message is not easy. One of the reasons listening is a difficult process is because of our inherent desire to evaluate people and ideas.

Responding

In Figure 5.4, hearing is represented by an ear, the brain represents the next four stages, and a person's mouth represents the final stage. It's important to realize that effective listening starts with the ear and centers in the brain, and only then should someone provide feedback to the message itself. Often, people jump from hearing and understanding to responding, which can cause problems as they jump to conclusions that have arisen by truncated interpretation and evaluation.

Ultimately, how we respond to a source's message will dictate how the rest of that interaction will progress. If we outright dismiss what someone is saying, we put up a roadblock that says, "I don't want to hear anything else." On the other hand, if we nod our heads and say, "tell me more," then we are encouraging the speaker to continue the interaction. For effective communication to occur, it's essential to consider how our responses will impact the other person and our relationship with that other person.

Overall, when it comes to being a mindful listener, it's vital to remember COAL: curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love.⁴¹ We need to go into our interactions with others and try to see things from their points of view. When we engage in COAL, we can listen mindfully and be in the moment.

Taxonomy of Listening

Now that we've introduced the basic concepts of listening, let's examine a simple taxonomy of listening that was created by Andrew Wolvin and Carolyn Coakley.⁴² The basic premise of the Wolvin and Coakley taxonomy of

listening is that there are fundamental parts to listening and then higher-order aspects of listening (Figure 5.5). Let's look at each of these parts separately.

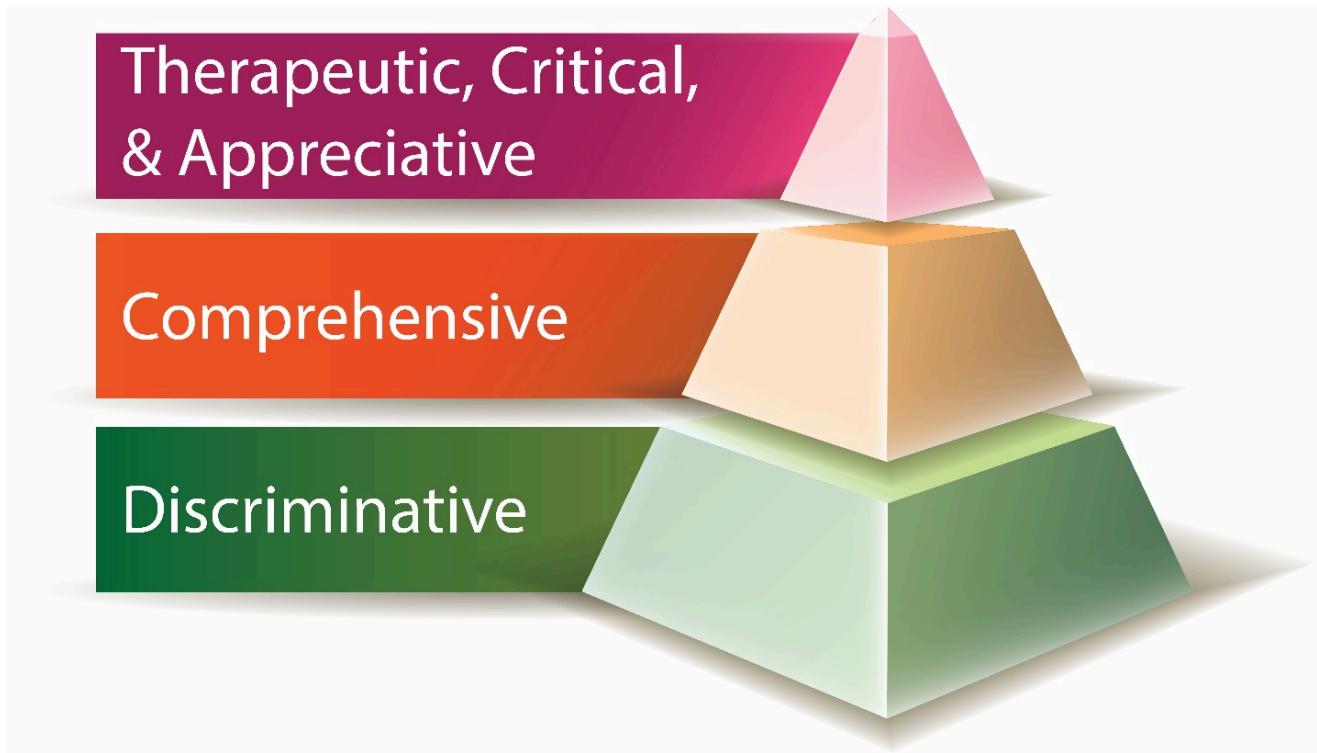


Figure 5.5 Taxonomy of Listening

Discriminative

The base level of listening is what Wolvin and Coakley called discriminative listening, or distinguishing between auditory and visual stimuli and determining which to actually pay attention to. In many ways, discriminative listening focuses on how hearing and seeing a wide range of different stimuli can be filtered and used.

We're constantly bombarded by a variety of messages in our day-to-day lives. We have to discriminate between which messages we want to pay attention to and which ones we won't. As a metaphor, think of discrimination as your email inbox. Every day you have to filter out messages (aka spam) to find the messages you want to actually read. In the same way, our brains are constantly bombarded by messages, and we have to filter some in and most of them out.

Comprehensive

If we achieve discriminative listening, then we can progress to comprehensive listening. "Comprehensive listening requires the listener to use the discriminative skills while functioning to understand and recall the speaker's information."⁴³ If we go back and look at Figure 5.4, we can see that comprehensive listening essentially aligns with understanding and remembering.

Wolvin and Coakley argued that discriminative and comprehensive listening are foundational levels of listening. If these foundational levels of listening are met, then they can progress to the other three, higher-order levels of listening: therapeutic, critical, and appreciative.

Therapeutic

Therapeutic listening occurs when an individual is a sounding board for another person during an interaction. For example, your best friend just fought with their significant other and they've come to you to talk through the situation.

Critical

The next aspect of listening is critical listening, or really analyzing the message that is being sent. Instead of just being a passive receiver of information, the essential goal of listening is to determine the acceptability or validity of the message(s) someone is sending.

Appreciative

Lastly, we have appreciative listening, which is when someone simply enjoys the act of listening or the message being sent. For example, let's say you're watching a Broadway musical or play or even a new movie at the cinema. While you may be engaged critically, you also may be simply appreciative and enjoying the act of listening to the message.

Listening Styles

Now that we have a better understanding of how listening works, let's talk about four different styles of listening researchers have identified. Kittie Watson, Larry Barker, and James Weaver defined listening styles as "attitudes, beliefs, and predispositions about the how, where, when, who, and what of the information reception and encoding process."⁴⁴ Watson et al. identified four distinct listening styles: people, content, action, and time. Before progressing to learning about the different listening styles, take a minute to complete the measure in Table 7.1, The Listening Style Questionnaire. The Listening Style Questionnaire is based on the original work of Watson, Barker, and Weaver.⁴⁵

Instructions: Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with how you tend to listen to public speeches. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- _____ 1. I am very attuned to public speaker's emotions while listening to them.
- _____ 2. I keep my attention on a public speaker's feelings why they speak.
- _____ 3. I listen for areas of similarity and difference between me and a public speaker.
- _____ 4. I generally don't pay attention to a speaker's emotions.
- _____ 5. When listening to a speaker's problems, I find myself very attentive.
- _____ 6. I prefer to listen to people's arguments while they are speaking.
- _____ 7. I tend to tune out technical information when a speaker is speaking.
- _____ 8. I wait until all of the arguments and evidence is presented before judging a speaker's message.
- _____ 9. I always fact check a speaker before forming an opinion about their message.
- _____ 10. When it comes to public speaking, I want a speaker to keep their opinions to themselves and just give me the facts.
- _____ 11. A speaker needs to get to the point and tell me why I should care.
- _____ 12. Unorganized speakers drive me crazy.
- _____ 13. Speakers need to stand up, say what they need to say, and sit down.
- _____ 14. If a speaker wants me to do something, they should just say it directly.
- _____ 15. When a speaker starts to ramble on, I really start to get irritated.
- _____ 16. I have a problem listening to someone give a speech when I have other things to do, places to be, or people to see.
- _____ 17. When I don't have time to listen to a speech, I have no problem telling someone.
- _____ 18. When someone is giving a speech, I'm constantly looking at my watch or clocks in the room.

_____19. I avoid speeches when I don't have the time to listen to them.

_____20. I have no problem listening to a speech even when I'm in a hurry.

Scoring:

People-Oriented Listener

A: Add scores for items 1, 2, 3, 5 and place total on line. _____

B: Place score for item 4 on the line. _____

C: Take the total from A and add 6 to the score. Place the new number on the line. _____

Final Score: Now subtract B from C. Place your final score on the line. _____

Content-Oriented Listener

A: Add scores for items 6, 8, 9, 10 and place total on line. _____

B: Place score for item 7 on the line. _____

C: Take the total from A and add 6 to the score. Place the new number on the line. _____

Final Score: Now subtract B from C. Place your final score on the line. _____

Action-Oriented Listener

Final Score: Add items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 _____

Time-Oriented Listener

A: Add scores for items 16, 17, 19 and place total on line. _____

B: Add scores for items 18 & 20 and place total on line. _____

C: Take the total from A and add 12 to the score. Place the new number on the line. _____

Final Score: Now subtract B from C. Place your final score on the line. _____

Interpreting Your Score

For each of the four subscales, scores should be between 5 and 25. If your score is above 18, you are considered to have high levels of that specific listening style. If your score is below 12, you're considered to have low levels of that specific listening style.

Based on:

Watson, K. W., Barker, L. L., & Weaver, J. B., III. (1992, March). *Development and validation of the Listener Preference Profile*. Paper presented at the International Listening Association in Seattle, WA.

Table 5.1 Listening Style Questionnaire

The Four Listening Styles

People

The first listening style is the people-oriented listening style. People-oriented listeners tend to be more focused on the person sending the message than the content of the message. As such, people-oriented listeners focus on the emotional states of senders of information. One way to think about people-oriented listeners is to see them as highly compassionate, empathic, and sensitive, which allows them to put themselves in the shoes of the person sending the message.

People-oriented listeners often work well in helping professions where listening to the person and understanding their feelings is very important (e.g., therapist, counsellor, social worker, etc.). People-oriented listeners are also very focused on maintaining relationships, so they are good at casual conversation where they can focus on the person.

Action

The second listening style is the action-oriented listener. Action-oriented listeners are focused on what the source

wants. The action-oriented listener wants a source to get to the point quickly. Instead of long, drawn-out lectures, the action-oriented speaker would prefer quick bullet points that get to what the source desires. Action-oriented listeners “tend to preference speakers that construct organized, direct, and logical presentations.”⁴⁶

When dealing with an action-oriented listener, it’s important to realize that they want you to be logical and get to the point. One of the things action-oriented listeners commonly do is search for errors and inconsistencies in someone’s message, so it’s important to be organized and have your facts straight.

Content

The third type of listener is the content-oriented listener, or a listener who focuses on the content of the message and process that message in a systematic way. Of the four different listening styles, content-oriented listeners are more adept at listening to complex information. Content-oriented listeners “believe it is important to listen fully to a speaker’s message prior to forming an opinion about it (while action listeners tend to become frustrated if the speaker is ‘wasting time’).”⁴⁷

When it comes to analyzing messages, content-oriented listeners really want to dig into the message itself. They want as much information as possible in order to make the best evaluation of the message. As such, “they want to look at the time, the place, the people, the who, the what, the where, the when, the how ... all of that. They don’t want to leave anything out.”⁴⁸

Time

The final listening style is the time-oriented listening style. Time-oriented listeners are sometimes referred to as “clock watchers” because they’re always in a hurry and want a source of a message to speed things up a bit. Time-oriented listeners “tend to verbalize the limited amount of time they are willing or able to devote to listening and are likely to interrupt others and openly signal disinterest.”⁴⁹

They often feel that they are overwhelmed by so many different tasks that need to be completed (whether real or not), so they usually try to accomplish multiple tasks while they are listening to a source. Of course, multitasking often leads to someone’s attention being divided, and information being missed.

Thinking About the Four Listening Types

Kina Mallard broke down the four listening styles and examined some of the common positive characteristics, negative characteristics, and strategies for communicating with the different listening styles (Table 5.2).⁵⁰

People-Oriented Listeners		
<i>Positive Characteristics</i>	<i>Negative Characteristics</i>	<i>Strategies for Communicating with People-Oriented Listeners</i>
Show care and concern for others	Over involved in feelings of others	Use stories and illustrations to make points
Are nonjudgmental	Avoid seeing faults in others	Use “we” rather than “I” in conversations
Provide clear verbal and nonverbal feedback signals	Internalize/adopt emotional states of others	Use emotional examples and appeals
Are interested in building relationships	Are overly expressive when giving feedback	Show some vulnerability when possible
Notice others’ moods quickly	Are nondiscriminating in building relationships	Use self-effacing humour or illustrations

Action-Oriented Listeners		
<i>Positive Characteristics</i>	<i>Negative Characteristics</i>	<i>Strategies for Communicating with Action-Oriented Listeners</i>
Get to the point quickly	Tend to be impatient with rambling speakers	Keep main points to three or fewer
Give clear feedback concerning expectations	Jump ahead and reach conclusions quickly	Keep presentations short and concise
Concentrate on understanding task	Jump ahead or finishes thoughts of speakers	Have a step-by-step plan and label each step
Help others focus on what's important	Minimize relationship issues and concerns	Watch for cues of disinterest and pick up vocal pace at those points or change subjects
Encourage others to be organized and concise	Ask blunt questions and appear overly critical	Speak at a rapid but controlled rate

Content-Oriented Listeners		
<i>Positive Characteristics</i>	<i>Negative Characteristics</i>	<i>Strategies for Communicating with Content-Oriented Listeners</i>
Value technical information	Are overly detail oriented	Use two-side arguments when possible
Test for clarity and understanding	May intimidate others by asking pointed questions	Provide hard data when available
Encourage others to provide support for their ideas	Minimize the value of nontechnical information	Quote credible experts
Welcome complex and challenging information	Discount information from nonexperts	Suggest logical sequences and plan
Look at all sides of an issue	Take a long time to make decisions	Use charts and graphs

Time-Oriented Listeners		
<i>Positive Characteristics</i>	<i>Negative Characteristics</i>	<i>Strategies for Communicating with Time-Oriented Listeners</i>
Manage and save time	Tend to be impatient with time wasters	Ask how much time the person has to listen
Set time guidelines for meeting and conversations	Interrupt others	Try to go under time limits when possible
Let others know listening-time requirements	Let time affect their ability to concentrate	Be ready to cut out necessary examples and information
Discourage wordy speakers	Rush speakers by frequently looking at watches/clock	Be sensitive to nonverbal cues indicating impatience or a desire to leave
Give cues to others when time is being wasted	Limit creativity in others by imposing time pressures	Get to the bottom line quickly
Original Source: Mallard, K. S. (1999). Lending an ear: The chair's role as listener. <i>The Department Chair</i> , 9(3), 1-13. Used with Permission from the Author		

Table 5.2 Understanding the Four Listening Styles

Hopefully, this section has helped you further understand the complexity of listening. We should mention that many people are not just one listening style or another. It's possible to be a combination of different listening styles. However, some of the listening style combinations are more common. For example, someone who is action-oriented and time-oriented will want the bare-bones information so they can make a decision. On the other hand, it's hard to be a people-oriented listener and time-oriented listener because being empathic and attending to someone's feelings takes time and effort.

Mindfulness Activity

One of the hardest skills to master when it comes to mindfulness is mindful listening. To engage in mindful listening, Elaine Smookler recommends using the HEAR method:



1. **HALT** — Halt whatever you are doing and offer your full attention.
2. **ENJOY** — Enjoy a breath as you choose to receive whatever is being communicated to you—wanted or unwanted.
3. **ASK** — Ask yourself if you really know what they mean, and if you don't, ask for clarification. Instead of making assumptions, bring openness and curiosity to the interaction. You might be surprised at what you discover.
4. **REFLECT** — Reflect back to them what you heard. This tells them that you were really listening.⁵¹

For this mindfulness activity, we want you to engage in mindful listening. Start by having a conversation with a friend, romantic partner, or family member. Before beginning the conversation, find a location that has minimal distractions, so try not to engage in this activity in a public space. Also, turn off the television and radio. The goal is to focus your attention on the other person. Start by employing the HEAR method for listening during your conversation. After you have finished this conversation, try to answer the following questions:

1. How easy was it for you to provide your conversational partner your full attention? When stray thoughts entered your head, how did you refocus yourself?
2. Were you able to pay attention to your breathing while engaged in this conversation? Were you breathing lightly or heavily? Did your breathing get in the way of you listening mindfully? If yes, what happened?
3. Did you attempt to empathize with your conversational partner? How easy was it to understand where they were coming from? Was it still easy to empathize if you didn't agree with something they said or didn't like something they said?
4. How did your listening style impact your ability to stay mindful while listening? Do you think all four listening styles are suited for mindful listening? Why?

Key Takeaways

- Hearing happens when sound waves hit our eardrums. Listening involves processing these sounds into something meaningful.
- The listening process includes: having the motivation to listen, clearly hearing the message, paying attention, interpreting the message, evaluating the message, remembering and responding appropriately.
- There are many types of listening styles: comprehension, evaluative, empathetic, and appreciative.

Exercises

- Take the online hearing test. Go to: [Hearing Test](#) or the [Audiogram](#) on the MED-EL website. These are online tests. You should always consult a licensed audiologist if you have concerns about hearing loss.
- For the next week, do a listening diary. Take notes of all the things you listen to and analyze to see if you are truly a good listener. Do you ask people to repeat things? Do you paraphrase?
- After completing the Listening Styles Questionnaire, think about your own listening style and how it impacts how you interact with others. What should you think about when communicating with people who have a different listening style?

Listening Responses

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss different types of listening responses.
2. Discern different types of questioning.
3. Analyze perception checking.

Who do you think is a great listener? Why did you name that particular person? How can you tell that person is a good listener? You probably recognize a good listener based on the nonverbal and verbal cues that they display. In this section, we will discuss different types of listening responses. We all don't listen in the same way. Also, each situation is different and requires a distinct style that is appropriate for that situation.

Types of Listening Responses

Ronald Adler, Lawrence Rosenfeld, and Russell Proctor are three interpersonal scholars who have done quite a bit with listening.⁵² Based on their research, they have found different types of listening responses: silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising.⁵³

Silent Listening

Silent listening occurs when you say nothing. It is ideal in certain situations and awful in other situations. However, when used correctly, it can be very powerful. If misused, you could give the wrong impression to someone. It is appropriate to use when you don't want to encourage more talking. It also shows that you are open to the speaker's ideas.

Sometimes people get angry when someone doesn't respond. They might think that this person is not listening or trying to avoid the situation. But it might be due to the fact that the person is just trying to gather their thoughts, or perhaps it would be inappropriate to respond. There are certain situations such as in counselling, where silent listening can be beneficial because it can help that person figure out their feelings and emotions.

Questioning

In situations where you want to get answers, it might be beneficial to use questioning. You can do this in a variety of ways. There are several ways to **question** in a sincere, nondirective way (see Table 5.3):

Reason	Example
To clarify meanings	A young child might mumble something and you want to make sure you understand what they said.
To learn about others' thoughts, feelings, and wants (open/closed questions)	When you ask your partner where they see your relationship going in the next few years.
To encourage elaboration	Nathan says "That's interesting!" Jonna has to ask him further if he means interesting in a positive or negative way.
To encourage discovery	Ask your parents how they met because you never knew.
To gather more facts and details	Police officers at the scene of the crime will question any witnesses to get a better understanding of what happened.

Table 5.3 Types of Nondirective Questioning

You might have different types of questions. Sincere questions are ones that are created to find a genuine answer. Counterfeit questions are disguised attempts to send a message, not to receive one. Sometimes, counterfeit questions can cause the listener to be defensive. For instance, if someone asks you, "Tell me how often you used crystal meth." The speaker implies that you have used meth, even though that has not been established. A speaker can use questions that make statements by emphasizing specific words or phrases, stating an opinion or feeling on the subject. They can ask questions that carry hidden agendas, like "Do you have \$5?" because the person would

like to borrow that money. Some questions seek “correct” answers. For instance, when a friend says, “Do I look fat?” You probably have a correct or ideal answer. There are questions that are based on unchecked assumptions. An example would be, “Why aren’t you listening?” This example implies that the person wasn’t listening, when in fact they are listening.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is defined as restating in your own words, the message you think the speaker just sent. There are three types of paraphrasing. First, you can change the speaker’s wording to indicate what you think they meant. Second, you can offer an example of what you think the speaker is talking about. Third, you can reflect on the underlying theme of a speaker’s remarks. Paraphrasing represents mindful listening in the way that you are trying to analyze and understand the speaker’s information. Paraphrasing can be used to summarize facts and to gain consensus in essential discussions. This could be used in a business meeting to make sure that all details were discussed and agreed upon. Paraphrasing can also be used to understand personal information more accurately. Think about being in a counsellor’s office. Counsellors often paraphrase information to understand better exactly how you are feeling and to be able to analyze the information better.

Empathizing

Empathizing is used to show that you identify with a speaker’s information. You are not empathizing when you deny others the rights to their feelings. Examples of this are statements such as, “It’s really not a big deal” or “Who cares?” This indicates that the listener is trying to make the speaker feel a different way. In minimizing the significance of the situation, you are interpreting the situation in your perspective and passing judgment.

Supporting

Sometimes, in a discussion, people want to know how you feel about them instead of a reflection on the content. Several types of supportive responses are: agreement, offers to help, praise, reassurance, and diversion. The value of receiving support when faced with personal problems is very important. This has been shown to enhance psychological, physical, and relational health. To effectively support others, you must meet certain criteria. You have to make sure that your expression of support is sincere, be sure that other person can accept your support, and focus on “here and now” rather than “then and there.”

Analyzing

Analyzing is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker’s message. However, this can be problematic at times. Sometimes the speaker might not be able to understand your perspective or may become more confused by accepting it. To avoid this, steps must be taken in advance. These include tentatively offering your interpretation instead of as an absolute fact. By being more sensitive about it, it might be more comfortable for the speaker to accept. You can also make sure that your analysis has a reasonable chance of being correct. If it were inaccurate, it would leave the person more confused than before. Also, you must make sure the person will be receptive to your analysis and that your motive for offering is to truly help the other person. An analysis offered under any other circumstances is useless.

Evaluating

Evaluating appraises the speaker’s thoughts or behaviours. The evaluation can be favourable (“That makes sense”) or negative (passing judgment). Negative evaluations can be critical or non-critical (constructive criticism). Two conditions offer the best chance for evaluations to be received: if the person with the problem requested an evaluation, and if it is genuinely constructive and not designed as a putdown.

Advising in Non-Counselling situations

Advising differs from evaluations. It is not always the best solution and can sometimes be harmful. In order to avoid this, you must make sure four conditions are present: be sure the person is receptive to your suggestions, make sure they are truly ready to accept it, be confident in the correctness of your advice, and be sure the receiver won’t blame you if it doesn’t work out.

Perception Checking

Perceptions change in a relationship. Initially, people can view others positively (for example, confident, thrifty, funny), then later in the relationship that person changes (arrogant, cheap, childish). The person hasn't changed. Only our perceptions of them have changed. That is why we focus on perception in a communication book because often, our perception affects how we communicate. It also has an impact on what we listen to and how we listen. For instance, when people get married, one person might say, "I love you! I would die for you," then a couple of years later, that same person might say, "I hate you! I am going to kill you!" Their perceptions about the other person will change.⁵⁴

Even when people break up, men typically will think about the physical aspects of the relationship (I gave her a watch, she wasn't that hot) and women will think about the emotional aspects of the relationship (I gave him my heart, I really cared about him.). Perception is an interesting thing because sometimes we think other people have a similar perspective, but as we will see, that is not always the case.

Selection

What we pay attention to varies from one person to another. The first step in the perception process is selection. It determines what things we focus on compared to what things we ignore. What we select to focus on depends on:

1. Intensity – if it is bigger, brighter, louder in some way. Think about all the advertisements that you view. If the words are bigger or if the sound is louder, you are more likely to pay attention to it. Advertisers know that intensity is very important to get people to pay attention.
2. Repetition–It has been said that to get someone to do something, they have to be told three different ways and three different times. People pay attention to things that repeat because you can remember it easier. In school, we learn to do things over and over again, because it teaches us mastery of a skill.
3. Differences – We will pay attention to differences, especially if it is a disparity or dissimilarity to what commonly occurs. Think about changes or adjustments that you had to deal with in life. These transformations made you notice the comparisons. For instance, children who go through a divorce will talk about the differences that they encountered. Children will focus on how things are different and how it is not the same.
4. Motives/Goals. We tend to pay attention to things for which have a strong interest or desire. If you love cars, you will probably notice cars more closely than someone else who has no interest in cars. Another example might be if you are single, then you might notice who is married and who is not more than someone in a committed relationship.
5. Emotions. Our emotional state has a strong impact on how we view life in general. If we are sad, we will probably notice other sad faces. The same thing happens when we are happy; we will tend to notice other happy people. Our emotions can impact how we feel. If we are angry, we might say things we don't mean and not perceive how we come across to other people.

Organization

The second phase in the perception process is organization, or how we arrange information in our minds. So, once we have selected what information we pay attention to, our minds try to process it. Sometimes when this occurs, we engage in stereotyping or attribute certain characteristics to a certain set of individuals. In other words, we classify or label others based on certain qualities.

Also, when people organize information in their mind, they can also engage in punctuation, or establishing the effects and causes in communication behaviour. It is more useful to realize that a conflict situation can be perceived differently by each person, and it is important to focus on "What we can do to make this situation better?"

Interpretation

The third phase of the perception process is interpretation. In this phase, we try to understand the information or make sense of it. This depends on a few factors:

1. Degree of involvement–If we were in the middle of an accident, we would probably have more information regarding what event occurred compared to a bystander. The more involved we are with something, the more we can make sense of what is actually happening. For instance, in cults, the members understand the rules and rituals, but an outsider would not understand, because they are not exposed to the rules and rituals.
2. Relational satisfaction – If we are happy in a relationship, we tend to think that everything is wonderful. However, if you are dissatisfied in the relationship, you might second guess the behaviours and actions of your partner.
3. Past experiences – If you had a good past experience with a certain company, you might think that everything they do is wonderful. However, if your first experience was horrible, you may think that they are always horrible. In turn, you will interpret that company's actions as justified because you already encountered a horrible experience.
4. Assumptions about human behaviour – If you believed that most people do not lie, then you would probably be very hurt if someone important to you lied to you. Our assumptions about others help us understand their behaviours and actions. If you had a significant other cheats on you, you would probably be suspicious of future interactions with other significant others.
5. Expectations – Our behaviours are also influenced by our expectations of others. If we expect a party to be fun and it isn't, then we will be let down. However, if we have no expectations about a party, it may not affect how we feel about it.
6. Knowledge of others – If you know that someone close to you has a health problem, then it will not be a shock if they need medical attention. However, if you had no clue that this person was unhealthy, it would come as a complete surprise. How you interpret a given situation is oftentimes based on what you know about a certain situation. ⁵⁵

Negotiation

The last phase of the perception process is called negotiation. In this phase, people are trying to understand what is happening. People often use narratives or stories to explain and depict their life. For instance, a disagreement between a teacher and student might look very different depending on which perspective you take. The student might perceive that they are hard-working and very studious. The student thinks they deserve a high grade. However, the teacher might feel that their job is to challenge all students to their highest levels and be fair to all students. By listening to both sides, we can better understand what is going on and what needs to be done in certain situations. Think about car accidents and how police officers have to listen to both sides. Police officers have to determine what happened and who is at fault. Sometimes it is not an easy task.

Influences on Perception

All of us don't perceive the same things. One person might find something beautiful, but another person might think it is horrible. When it comes to our perception, there are four primary influences we should understand: physiological, psychological, social, and cultural.

Physiological Influences

Some of the reasons why we don't interpret things, in the same way are due to physiology. Hence, biology has an impact on what we do and do not perceive. In this section, we will discuss the various physiological influences.

1. Senses – Our senses can have an impact on what and where we focus our attention. For instance, if you have a strong sense of smell, you might be more sensitive to a foul-smelling odor compared to someone who cannot smell anything due to sinus problems. Our senses give us a different perception of the world.
2. Age – Age can impact what we perceive. Have you ever noticed that children have so much energy, and the elderly do not? Children may perceive that there is so much to do in a day, and the elderly may perceive that there is nothing to do. Our age influences how we think about things.

3. **Health** – when we are healthy, we have the stamina and endurance to do many things. However, when we are sick, our bodies may be more inclined to rest. Thus, we will perceive a lot of information differently. For instance, when you are healthy, some of your favourite meals will taste really good, but when you are sick, it might not taste so good, because you cannot smell things due to a stuffy nose.
4. **Hunger** – When you are hungry, it is tough to concentrate on anything except food. Studies have shown that when people are hungry, all they focus on is something to eat.
5. **Biological cycles** – Some people are “morning larks” and some are “night owls.” In other words, there are peaks where people perform at their highest level. For some individuals, it is late at night, and for others, it is early in the morning. When people perform at their peak times, they are likely to be more perceptive of information. If you are a person who loves getting up early, you would probably hate night classes, because you are not able to absorb as much information as you could if the class was in the morning.

Psychological Influences

Sometimes the influences on perception are not physiological but psychological. These influences include mood and self-concept. These influences are based in our mind, and we can't detect them in others.

1. **Mood** – Whether we are happy or sad can affect how we view the world. For instance, if we are happy, then anything that happens, we might view it more positively.
2. **Self-concept** – If we have a healthy self-concept of ourselves, we may not be offended if someone makes a negative remark. Yet, if we have a poor self-concept of ourselves, then we are probably going to be more influenced by negative remarks. The stronger our self-concept is, the more likely it will affect how we view perceive other people's communication behaviours toward us.

Social Influences

Social influences include sex and gender roles, as well as occupational roles. These roles can impact our perceptions. Because we are in these roles, we might be likely to think differently than others in different roles.

1. **Sex and gender roles** – We have certain expectations in our culture regarding how men and women should behave in public. Women are expected to be more nurturing than men. Moreover, men and women are viewed differently concerning their marital status and age.
2. **Occupational roles** – Our jobs have an influence on how we perceive the world. If you were a lawyer, you might be more inclined to take action on civil cases than your average member of the public, because you know how to handle these kinds of situations. Moreover, if you are a nurse or medical specialist, you are more likely to perceive the health of other individuals. You would be able to tell if someone needed urgent medical care or not.

Research Spotlight



In 2015, Karina J. Lloyd, Diana Boer, Avraham N. Kluger, and Sven C. Voelpel conducted an experiment to examine the relationship between perceived listening trust and wellbeing. In this study, the researchers recruited pairs of strangers. They had one of the participants tell the other about a positive experience in their life for seven minutes (the talker) and one who sat and listened to the story without comment (the listener).

The researchers found that talkers who perceived the listener to be listening intently to be very important for effective communication. First, perceived listening led to a greater sense of social attraction towards the listener, which in turn, led to a greater sense of trust for the listener. Second, talkers who perceived the listener as listening intently felt their messages were clearer, which in turn, led to a greater sense of the talker's overall wellbeing

(positive affect).

As you can see, simply perceiving that the other person is listening intently to you is very important on a

number of fronts. For this reason, it's very important to remember to focus your attention when you're listening to someone.

Lloyd, K. J., Boer, D., Kluger, A. N., & Voelpel, S. C. (2015). Building trust and feeling well: Examining intraindividual and interpersonal outcomes and underlying mechanisms of listening. *International Journal of Listening*, 29(1), 12–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2014.928211>

Cultural Influences

In a recent meeting, the boss said, “Remember the Golden Rule,” and a coworker from India asked the staff about the meaning of that phrase. He wondered if there was a silver rule or a bronze rule. The reason he didn't understand this concept is due to cultural influences. We know that everyone doesn't perceive things in the same fashion.

In some countries, the elderly are highly respected individuals, whom the youth go to for advice and wisdom. Yet, in other countries, the elderly are seen as lazy and worthless. Hence, our culture has an impact on how we perceive the world and others. Communication is different across cultures. Western cultures, like the United States, value talk and view it as very important to function and conduct business. Thus, they do not like silence because it can be perceived as shyness, frustration, and intimidation.⁵⁶ Western culture dislikes silence because it is uncomfortable and problematic. Asian cultures have different perceptions of communication. Silence is seen as valuable to reflect on one's thinking. Asians might view someone who is talkative very negatively. Based on this example, we can see that cultural perceptions can lead to problems, because, to an American, silence is considered rude and to an Asian, silence is good. To effectively communicate, we need to understand cultural perceptions.

Perception Checking

To judge others more accurately, we need to engage in perception checking.

Perception checking involves three steps:

1. Describe your perception of the event
2. Offer three different interpretations of that behaviour
3. Seek clarification about the interpretations

That's it! I know this sounds easy, but it's definitely much harder than it looks.

Key Takeaways

- The different types of listening responses are silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising.
- Questioning can be to clarify meanings, encourage elaboration, learn about others, increase discovery, or obtain more information.
- Perception checking involves describing the situation, offering three possible interpretations, and then seeking information.

Exercises

- Write down an example of each of the listening responses and why it is appropriate for that situation. Why did you write down what you did?
- Create a chart with the different types of questions and give at least two examples for each type. Compare with a friend in class.
- Watch a movie or television show with your friends, then ask them to write down the three most notable moments. Compare what you wrote to others. Was it similar or different? Why or why not? Did you all have

the same perceptions? Why?

Key Terms

analyzing

This is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker's message.

appreciative listening

The type of listening you engage in for pleasure or enjoyment.

communication motives

Reasons why we communicate with others.

communication needs

Shows us how communication fulfills our needs.

comprehension listening

Listening for facts, information, or ideas that may be of use to you.

conversations

Interpersonal interactions through which you share facts and information as well as your ideas, thoughts, and feelings with other people.

emotional blackmail

Trying to influence someone's behaviour or persuade them to do something by making them feel guilty or exploiting their emotions.

empathic listening

Attempting to put yourself in another person's shoes or to provide a supportive listening environment.

empathizing

This is used to show that you identify with the speaker's information.

evaluative listening

Listening for a speaker's main points and determining the strengths and weaknesses to formulate a rebuttal or present important points that may not have been covered.

hearing

A passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through an ear.

listening

A complex psychological process that can be defined as the process of physically hearing, interpreting that sound, and understanding the significance of it.

paraphrase

To restate what another person said using different words.

self-disclosure

The act of verbally or nonverbally revealing information about yourself to other people.

silent listening

This occurs when you say nothing and is appropriate for certain situations.

Chapter Wrap-Up

We spend most of our lives engaged in talking and listening behaviour. As such, understanding the functions of talking and listening in interpersonal communication is very important. In this chapter, we started by discussing the importance of everyday conversations. We next discussed a specific type of talk: disclosing information about ourselves (self-disclosure). We then switched gears and focused on the listening component. Overall, talking and

listening are extremely important to interpersonal communication, so understanding how they function can help improve our communication skills.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Mictrotela is the new leader in telecommunications. However, many customers are having problems with their new cell phones. They have tried calling customer service to solve their problems. However, many of the customers get frustrated and wind up terminating their cell phone contracts. Mictrotela does some research and discovers that many of their customer service representatives do not know how to listen effectively. Many of the customers who call the company have complained that no one is listening to their problems.

1. If you were hired as a consultant for this business, how would you fix this problem?
2. How can you teach customer service representatives better listening skills?
3. What are some strategies to help customers feel like they are being listened to?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Kara couldn't wait to talk to her best friend Jose. She's had a truly horrible, no good, very bad day. As soon as Jose enters her apartment, she just starts venting. What type of conversation is Kara having with Jose?
 - a. discourse
 - b. debate
 - c. dialogue
 - d. deviant
 - e. diatribe
 2. All of the following are types of listening except:
 - a. silent listening
 - b. questioning
 - c. empathizing
 - d. imagining
 - e. advising
 3. In this chapter, we discuss all of the following types of listening except:
 - a. comprehension
 - b. evaluative
 - c. empathetic
 - d. appreciative
 - e. interpretive
 4. Meno's girlfriend has been seen with other male friends. His friends try and tell him that she is cheating on him, but he refuses to believe what they say. Even when they have pictures and proof, he doesn't listen to their words. He is displaying:
 - a. interrupting
 - b. daydreaming
 - c. pseudo-listening
 - d. emotional listening
 - e. insulated listening
-

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[6]

Understanding Conflict

Conflict is a normal and natural part of life. However, learning how to manage conflict in our interpersonal relationships is very important for long-term success in those relationships. This chapter is going to look at how conflict functions and provide several strategies for managing interpersonal conflict.

Understanding Conflict

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between the terms conflict, disagreement, and argument.
2. Explain two perspectives about the existence of conflict.
3. Define and explain the term “interpersonal conflict.”

For our purposes, it is necessary to differentiate a conflict from a disagreement.¹ A **disagreement** is a difference of opinion and often occurs during an **argument**, or a verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects. It’s important to realize that arguments are not conflicts, but if they become verbally aggressive, they can quickly turn into conflicts. One factor that ultimately can help determine if an argument will escalate into a conflict is an individual’s tolerance for disagreement. James McCroskey, along with his colleagues, initially defined **tolerance for disagreement** as whether an individual can openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted.^{2,3} People that have a high tolerance for disagreement can easily discuss opinions with pretty much anyone and realize that arguing is perfectly normal and, for some, even entertaining. People that have a low tolerance for disagreement feel personally attacked any time someone is perceived as devaluing their opinion. From an interpersonal perspective, understanding someone’s tolerance for disagreement can help in deciding if arguments will be perceived as the other as attacks that could lead to verbally aggressive conflicts. However, not all conflict is necessarily verbally aggressive nor destructive.

The term “conflict” is actually very difficult to pin down. We could have an entire chapter where we just examined various definitions of the term. Simplistically, **conflict** is an interactive process occurring when conscious beings (individuals or groups) have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations resources and/or values. First, conflict is interactive and inherently communicative. Second, two or more people or even groups of people who can think must be involved. Lastly, there are a whole range of different areas where people can have opposing or incompatible opinions. For this generic definition, we provided a laundry list of different types of incompatibility that can exist between two or more individuals or groups. Is this list completely exhaustive? No. But we provided this list as a way of thinking about the more common types of issues that are raised when people engage in conflict. From this perspective, everything from a minor disagreement to a knock-down, drag-out fight would classify as a conflict.

The rest of this section is going to explore the nature of conflict and its importance in communication. To do

this, we'll discuss two different perspectives on conflict (disruption vs. normalcy). Then we'll explore interpersonal conflict more closely. Lastly, we'll discuss the positive and negative functions of conflict.

Two Perspectives on Conflict

As with most areas of interpersonal communication, no single perspective exists in the field related to interpersonal conflict. There are generally two very different perspectives that one can take. Herbert W. Simmons was one of the first to realize that there were two very different perspectives on conflict.⁴ On the one hand, you had scholars who see conflict as a disruption in a normal working system, which should be avoided. On the other hand, some scholars view conflict as a normal part of human relationships. Let's look at each of these in this section.

Disruptions in Normal Workings of a System

The first major perspective of conflict was proposed by James C. McCroskey and Lawrence R. Wheeless.⁵ McCroskey and Wheeless described conflict as a negative phenomenon in interpersonal relationships:

Conflict between people can be viewed as the opposite or antithesis of affinity. In this sense, interpersonal conflict is the breaking down of attraction and the development of repulsion, the dissolution of perceived homophily (similarity) and the increased perception of incompatible differences, the loss of perceptions of credibility and the development of disrespect.⁶

From this perspective, conflict is something inherently destructive. McCroskey and Virginia P. Richmond went further and argued that conflict is characterized by antagonism, distrust, hostility, and suspicion.⁷

This more negative view of conflict differentiates itself from a separate term, disagreement, which is simply a difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people. Richmond and McCroskey note that there are two types of disagreements: substantive and procedural.⁸ A **substantive disagreement** is a disagreement that people have about a specific topic or issue. Basically, if you and your best friend want to go eat at two different restaurants for dinner, then you're engaging in a substantive disagreement. On the other hand, **procedural disagreements** are "concerned with procedure, how a decision should be reached or how a policy should be implemented."⁹ So, if your disagreement about restaurant choice switches to a disagreement on how to make a choice (flipping a coin vs. rock-paper-scissors), then you've switched into a procedural disagreement.

A conflict then is a disagreement plus negative affect, or when you disagree with someone else and you don't like the other person. It's the combination of a disagreement and dislike that causes a mere disagreement to turn into a conflict. Ultimately, conflict is a product of how one communicates this dislike of another person during the disagreement. People in some relationships end up saying very nasty things to one another during a disagreement because their affinity for the other person has diminished. When conflict is allowed to continue and escalate, it "can be likened to an ugly, putrid, decaying, pus-filled sore."¹⁰

From this perspective, conflicts are ultimately only manageable; whereas, disagreements can be solved. Although a disagreement is the cornerstone of all conflicts, most disagreements don't turn into conflicts because there is an affinity between the two people engaged in the disagreement.

Normal Part of Human Communication

The second perspective of the concept of conflict is very different from the first one. As described by Dudley D. Cahn and Ruth Anna Abigail, conflict is a normal, inevitable part of life.¹¹ Cahn and Abigail argue that conflict is one of the foundational building blocks of interpersonal relationships. One can even ask if it's possible to grow in a relationship without conflict. Managing and overcoming conflict makes a relationship stronger and healthier. Ideally, when interpersonal couples engage in conflict management (or conflict resolution), they will reach a solution that is mutually beneficial for both parties. In this manner, conflict can help people seek better, healthier outcomes within their interactions.

Ultimately, conflict is neither good nor bad, but it's a tool that can be used for constructive or destructive purposes. Conflict can be very beneficial and healthy for a relationship. Let's look at how conflict is beneficial for individuals and relationships:

- Conflict helps people find common ground.
- Conflict helps people learn how to manage conflict more effectively for the future.

- Conflict provides the opportunity to learn about the other person(s).
- Conflict can lead to creative solutions to problems.
- Confronting conflict allows people to engage in an open and honest discussion, which can build relationship trust.
- Conflict encourages people to grow both as humans and in their communication skills.
- Conflict can help people become more assertive and less aggressive.
- Conflict can strengthen individuals' ability to manage their emotions.
- Conflict lets individuals set limits in relationships.
- Conflict lets us practice our communication skills.

When one approaches conflict from this vantage point, conflict can be seen as an amazing resource in interpersonal relationships. However, both parties must agree to engage in prosocial conflict management strategies for this to work effectively (more on that later in this chapter).

Now that we've examined the basic idea of conflict, let's switch gears and examine conflict in a more interpersonal manner.

Interpersonal Conflict

According to Cahn and Abigail, interpersonal conflict requires four factors to be present:

1. the conflict parties are interdependent,
2. they have the perception that they seek incompatible goals or outcomes or they favor incompatible means to the same ends,
3. the perceived incompatibility has the potential to adversely affect the relationship leaving emotional residues if not addressed, and
4. there is a sense of urgency about the need to resolve the difference. ¹²

Let's look at each of these parts of interpersonal conflict separately.

People are Interdependent

According to Cahn and Abigail, "**interdependence** occurs when those involved in a relationship characterize it as continuous and important, making it worth the effort to maintain."¹³ From this perspective, interpersonal conflict occurs when we are in some kind of relationship with another person. For example, it could be a relationship with a parent/guardian, a child, a coworker, a boss, a spouse, etc. In each of these interpersonal relationships, we generally see ourselves as having long-term relationships with these people that we want to succeed. Notice, though, that if you're arguing with a random person on a subway, that will not fall into this definition because of the interdependence factor. We may have disagreements and arguments with all kinds of strangers, but those don't rise to the level of interpersonal conflicts.

People Perceive Differing Goals/Outcomes of Means to the Same Ends

An incompatible goal occurs when two people want different things. For example, imagine you and your best friend are thinking about going to the movies. They want to see a big-budget superhero film, and you're more in the mood for an independent artsy film. In this case, you have pretty incompatible goals (movie choices). You can also have incompatible means to reach the same end. Incompatible means, in this case, "occur when we want to achieve the same goal but differ in how we should do so."¹⁴ For example, you and your best friend agree on going to the same movie, but not about at which theatre you should see the film.

Conflict Can Negatively Affect the Relationship if Not Addressed

Next, interpersonal conflicts can lead to very negative outcomes if the conflicts are not managed effectively. Here are some examples of conflicts that are not managed effectively:

- One partner dominates the conflict, and the other partner caves-in.
- One partner yells or belittles the other partner.
- One partner uses half-truths or lies to get her/his/their way during the conflict.
- Both partners only want to get their way at all costs.
- One partner refuses to engage in conflict.
- Etc.

Again, this is a sample laundry list of some of the ways where conflict can be mismanaged. When conflict is mismanaged, one or both partners can start to have less affinity for the other partner, which can lead to a decreasing in liking, decreased caring about the relational partner, increased desire to exit the relationship, increased relational apathy, increased revenge-seeking behavior, etc. All of these negative outcomes could ultimately lead to conflicts becoming increasingly more aggressive (both active and passive) or just outright conflict avoidance. We'll look at both of these later in the chapter.

Some Sense of Urgency to Resolve Conflict

Lastly, there must be some sense of urgency to resolve the conflict within the relationship. The conflict gets to the point where it must receive attention, and a decision must be made or an outcome decided upon, or else. If a conflict reaches the point where it's not solved, then the conflict could become more problematic and negative if it's not dealt with urgently.

Now, some people let conflicts stir and rise over many years that can eventually boil over, but these types of conflicts when they arise generally have some other kind of underlying conflict that is causing the sudden explosion. For example, imagine your spouse has a particularly quirky habit. For the most part, you ignore this habit and may even make a joke about the habit. Finally, one day you just explode and demand the habit must change. Now, it's possible that you let this conflict build for so long that it finally explodes. It's kind of like a geyser. According to Yellowstone National Park, here's how a geyser works:

The looping chambers trap steam from the hot water. Escaped bubbles from trapped steam heat the water column to the boiling point. When the pressure from the trapped steam builds enough, it blasts, releasing the pressure. As the entire water column boils out of the ground, more than half the volume is this steam. The eruption stops when the water cools below the boiling point.¹⁵

In the same way, sometimes people let irritations or underlying conflict percolate inside of them until they reach a boiling point, which leads to the eventual release of pressure in the form of a sudden, out of nowhere conflict. In this case, even though the conflict has been building for some time, the eventual desire to make this conflict known to the other person does cause an immediate sense of urgency for the conflict to be solved.

Key Takeaways

- The terms disagreement and argument are often confused with one another. For our purposes, the terms refer to unique concepts. A disagreement is a difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people; whereas, an argument is a verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects.
- There are two general perspectives regarding the nature of conflict. The first perspective sees conflict as a disruption to normal working systems, so conflict is inherently something that is dangerous to relationships and should be avoided. The second perspective sees conflict as a normal, inevitable part of any relationship. From this perspective, conflict is a tool that can either be used constructively or destructively in relationships.
- According to Cahn and Abigail, interpersonal conflict consists of four unique parts: 1) interdependence between or among the conflict parties, (2) incompatible goals/means, (3) conflict can adversely affect a relationship if not handled effectively, and (4) there is a sense of urgency to resolve the conflict.

Exercises

- On a sheet of paper, write out what you believe are the pros and cons of both major perspectives about conflict. Which one do you think describes your own understanding of conflict? Do you think they are both applicable to interpersonal conflict?
- Think of a time when you've engaged in conflict with a relational partner of some kind (parent/guardian, child, sibling, spouse, friend, romantic partner, etc.). Using Cahn and Abigail's four parts of interpersonal conflict, dissect the conflict and explain why it would qualify as an interpersonal conflict.
- We know that different people have different levels of tolerance for disagreement in life. How do you think an individual's tolerance for disagreement impacts her/his/their ability to interact with others interpersonally?

Emotions and Feelings

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the interrelationships among emotions and feelings.
2. Describe emotional awareness and its importance to interpersonal communication.
3. Differentiate between "I" and "You" statements.
4. Explain the concept of emotional intelligence.

To start our examination of the idea of emotions and feelings and how they relate to harmony and discord in a relationship, it's important to differentiate between emotions and feelings. **Emotions** are our reactions to stimuli in the outside environment. Emotions, therefore, can be objectively measured by blood flow, brain activity, and nonverbal reactions to things. **Feelings**, on the other hand, are the responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality. So, there is an inherent relationship between emotions and feelings, but we do differentiate between them. Table 8.1 breaks down the differences between the two concepts.

Feelings:	Emotions:
Feelings tell us "how to live."	Emotions tell us what we "like" and "dislike."
Feelings state: "There is a right and wrong way to be."	Emotions state: "There are good and bad actions."
Feelings state: " your emotions matter ."	Emotions state: " The external world matters ."
Feelings establish our long-term attitude toward reality.	Emotions establish our initial attitude toward reality.
Feelings alert us to anticipated dangers and prepares us for action.	Emotions alert us to immediate dangers and prepare us for action.
Feelings ensure long-term survival of self (body and mind).	Emotions ensure immediate survival of self (body and mind).
Feelings are Low-key but Sustainable.	Emotions are Intense but Temporary.
Happiness: is a feeling.	Joy: is an emotion.
Worry: is a feeling.	Fear: is an emotion.
Contentment: is a feeling.	Enthusiasm: is an emotion.
Bitterness: is a feeling.	Anger: is an emotion.
Love: is a feeling.	Lust: is an emotion.
Depression: is a feeling.	Sadness: is an emotion.
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Table 8.1 The Differences of Emotions and Feelings

It's important to understand that we are all allowed to be emotional beings. Being emotional is an inherent part of being a human. For this reason, it's important to avoid phrases like "don't feel that way" or "they have no right to feel that way." Again, our emotions are our emotions, and, when we negate someone else's emotions, we are negating that person as an individual and taking away their right to emotional responses. At the same time, though, no one else can make you "feel" a specific way. Our emotions are our emotions. They are how we interpret and cope with life. A person may set up a context where you experience an emotion, but you are the one who is still experiencing that emotion and allowing yourself to experience that emotion. If you don't like "feeling" a specific way, then change it. We all have the ability to alter our emotions. Altering our emotional states (in a proactive way) is how we get through life. Maybe you just broke up with someone, and listening to music helps you work through the grief you are experiencing to get to a better place. For others, they need to openly communicate about how they are feeling in an effort to process and work through emotions. The worst thing a person can do is attempt to deny that the emotion exists.

Think of this like a balloon. With each breath of air you blow into the balloon, you are bottling up more and more emotions. Eventually, that balloon will get to a point where it cannot handle any more air in it before it explodes. Humans can be the same way with emotions when we bottle them up inside. The final breath of air in our emotional balloon doesn't have to be big or intense. However, it can still cause tremendous emotional outpouring that is often very damaging to the person and their interpersonal relationships with others.

Other research has demonstrated that handling negative emotions during conflicts within a marriage (especially on the part of the wife) can lead to faster de-escalations of conflicts and faster conflict mediation between spouses.¹⁶

Emotional Awareness

Sadly, many people are just completely unaware of their own emotions. **Emotional awareness**, or an individual's ability to clearly express, in words, what they are feeling and why, is an extremely important factor in effective interpersonal communication. Unfortunately, our emotional vocabulary is often quite limited. One extreme version of not having an emotional vocabulary is called **alexithymia**, "a general deficit in emotional vocabulary—the ability to identify emotional feelings, differentiate emotional states from physical sensations, communicate feelings to others, and process emotion in a meaningful way."¹⁷ Furthermore, there are many people who can accurately differentiate emotional states but lack the actual vocabulary for a wide range of different emotions. For some people, their emotional vocabulary may consist of good, bad, angry, and fine. Learning how to communicate one's emotions is very important for effective interpersonal relationships.¹⁸ First, it's important to distinguish between our emotional states and how we interpret an emotional state. For example, you can feel sad or depressed, but you really cannot feel alienated. Your sadness and depression may lead you to perceive yourself as alienated, but alienation is a perception of one's self and not an actual emotional state. There are several evaluative terms that people ascribe themselves (usually in the process of blaming others for their feelings) that they label emotions, but which are in actuality evaluations and not emotions. Table 8.2 presents a list of common evaluative words that people confuse for emotional states.

Abandoned
 Cornered
 Mistreated
 Scorned
 Abused
 Devalued
 Misunderstood
 Taken for granted
 Affronted
 Diminished
 Neglected
 Threatened
 Alienated

Distrusted
 Overworked
 Thwarted
 Attacked
 Humiliated
 Patronized
 Tortured
 Belittled
 Injured
 Pressured
 Unappreciated
 Betrayed
 Interrupted
 Provoked
 Unheard
 Boxed-in
 Intimidated
 Put away
 Unseen
 Bullied
 Let down
 Putdown
 Unsupported
 Cheated
 Maligned
 Rejected
 Unwanted
 Coerced
 Manipulated
 Ridiculed
 Used
 Co-opted
 Mocked
 Ruined
 Wounded

Table 8.2 Evaluative Words Confused for Emotions

Instead, people need to avoid these evaluative words and learn how to communicate effectively using a wide range of emotions. Tables 8.3 and 8.4 provide a list of both positive and negative feelings that people can express. Go through the list considering the power of each emotion. Do you associate light, medium, or strong emotions with the words provided on these lists? Why? There is no right or wrong way to answer this question. Still, it is important to understand that people can differ in their interpretations of the strength of different emotionally laden words. If you don't know what a word means, you should look it up and add another word to your list of feelings that you can express to others.

Absorbed
 Eager
 Happy
 Rapturous
 Adventurous
 Ebullient

Helpful
Refreshed
Affectionate
Ecstatic
Hopeful
Relaxed
Aglow
Effervescent
Inquisitive
Relieved
Alert
Elated
Inspired
Sanguine
Alive
Enchanted
Intense
Satisfied
Amazed
Encouraged
Interested
Secure
Amused
Energetic
Intrigued
Sensitive
Animated
Engrossed
Invigorated
Serene
Appreciative
Enlivened
Involved
Spellbound
Ardent
Enthusiastic
Jovial
Splendid
Aroused
Euphoric
Joyous
Stimulated
Astonished
Excited
Jubilant
Sunny
Blissful
Exhilarated
Keyed-up
Surprised
Breathless
Expansive
Lively
Tender
Buoyant
Expectant
Loving
Thankful

Calm
 Exultant
 Mellow
 Thrilled
 Carefree
 Fascinated
 Merry
 Tickled Pink
 Cheerful
 Free
 Mirthful
 Touched
 Comfortable
 Friendly
 Moved
 Tranquil
 Complacent
 Fulfilled
 Optimistic
 Trusting
 Composed
 Genial
 Overwhelmed
 Upbeat
 Concerned
 Glad
 Peaceful
 Vibrant
 Confident
 Gleeful
 Perky
 Warm
 Content
 Glorious
 Pleasant
 Wonderful
 Cool
 Glowing
 Pleased
 Zippy
 Curious
 Good-humored
 Proud
 Dazzled
 Grateful
 Quiet
 Delighted
 Gratified
 Radiant

Table 8.3 Positive Emotions

Afraid

Disgusted
Impatient
Sensitive
Aggravated
Disheartened
Indifferent
Shaky
Agitated
Dismayed
Intense
Shameful
Alarmed
Displeased
Irate
Shocked
Angry
Disquieted
Irk
Skeptical
Anguished
Disturbed
Irritated
Sleepy
Annoyed
Distressed
Jealous
Sorrowful
Antagonistic
Downcast
Jittery
Sorry
Anxious
Downhearted
Keyed-up
Spiritless
Apathetic
Dull
Lazy
Spiteful
Appalled
Edgy
Leery
Startled
Apprehensive
Embarrassed
Lethargic
Sullen
Aroused
Embittered
Listless
Surprised
Ashamed
Exasperated
Lonely
Suspicious
Beat
Exhausted
Mad

Tearful
Bewildered
Fatigued
Mean
Tepid
Bitter
Fearful
Melancholy
Terrified
Blah
Fidgety
Miserable
Ticked off
Blue
Forlorn
Moody
Tired
Bored
Frightened
Morose
Troubled
Brokenhearted
Frustrated
Mournful
Uncomfortable
Chagrined
Furious
Nervous
Unconcerned
Cold
Galled
Nettled
Uneasy
Concerned
Gloomy
Numb
Unglued
Confused
Grim
Overwhelmed
Unhappy
Cool
Grouchy
Panicky
Unnerved
Crabby
Guilty
Passive
Unsteady
Cranky
Harried
Perplexed
Upset
Cross
Heavy
Pessimistic
Uptight
Dejected

Helpless
 Petulant
 Vexed
 Depressed
 Hesitant
 Puzzled
 Weary
 Despairing
 Hopeless
 Rancorous
 Weepy
 Despondent
 Horrified
 Reluctant
 Wistful
 Detached
 Horrible
 Repelled
 Withdrawn
 Disaffected
 Hostile
 Resentful
 Woeful
 Disenchanted
 Hot
 Restless
 Worried
 Disappointed
 Humdrum
 Sad
 Wretched
 Discouraged
 Hurt
 Scared
 Sensitive
 Disgruntled
 Ill-Tempered
 Seething
 Shaky

Table 8.4 Negative Emotions

The Problem of You Statements

According to Marshall Rosenberg, the father of nonviolent communication, “You” statements ultimately are moralistic judgments where we imply the wrongness or badness of another person and the way they have behaved.¹⁹ When we make moralistic judgments about others, we tend to deny responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Remember, when it comes to feelings, no one can “make” you feel a specific way. We choose the feelings we inhabit; we do not inhabit the feelings that choose us. When we make moralistic judgments and deny responsibility, we end up in a constant cycle of defensiveness where your individual needs are not going to be met by your relational partner. Behind every negative emotion is a need not being fulfilled, and when we start blaming others, those needs will keep getting unfilled in the process. Often this lack of need fulfillment will result in us demanding someone fulfill our need or face blame or punishment. For example, “if you go hang out with your friends tonight, I’m going to hurt myself and it will your fault.” In this simple sentence, we see someone who disapproves of another’s behaviors and threatens to blame their relational partner for the

individual's behavior. In highly volatile relationships, this constant blame cycle can become very detrimental, and no one's needs are getting met.

However, just observing behavior and stating how you feel only gets you part of the way there because you're still not describing your need. Now, when we talk about the idea of "needing" something, we are not talking about this strictly in terms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, though those are all entirely appropriate needs. At the same time, relational needs are generally not rewards like tangible items or money. Instead, Marshall Rosenberg categorizes basic needs that we all have falling into the categories: autonomy, celebration, play, spiritual communion, physical nurturance, integrity, and interdependence (Table 8.5). As you can imagine, any time these needs are not being met, you will reach out to get them fulfilled. As such, when we communicate about our feelings, they are generally tied to an unmet or fulfilled need. For example, you could say, "I feel dejected when you yell at me because I need to be respected." In this sentence, you are identifying your need, observing the behavior, and labeling the need. Notice that there isn't judgment associated with identifying one's needs.

Area	Need
Autonomy	to choose one's dreams, goals, values
	to choose one's plan for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values
Celebration	to celebrate the creation of life and dreams fulfilled
	to celebrate losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)
Play	fun
	laughter
Spiritual Communion	beauty
	harmony
	inspiration
	order
	peace
Physical Nurturance	air
	food
	movement, exercise
	protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals
	rest
	sexual expression
	shelter
	touch
	water
Integrity	authenticity
	creativity
	meaning
	self-worth
Interdependence	acceptance
	appreciation
	closeness
	community
	consideration
	contribution to the enrichment of life (to exercise one's power by giving that which contributes to life)
	emotional safety
	empathy
	honesty (the empowering honest that enables us to learn from our limitations)
	love
	reassurance
	respect
	support
	trust
	understanding
	warmth

Area	Need
Source: Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life 2nd Ed by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg, 2003—published by PuddleDancer Press and Used with Permission. For more information visit www.CNVC.org and www.NonviolentCommunication.com	

Table 8.5 Needs

Research Spotlight



In 2020, researchers Anna Wollny, Ingo Jacobs, and Luise Pabel set out to examine the impact that trait EQ has on both relationship satisfaction and dyadic coping. Dyadic coping is based on Guy Bodenmann's Systemic Transactional Model (STM), which predicts that stress in dyadic relationships is felt by both partners.²¹ So, if one partner experiences the stress of a job loss, that stress really impacts both partners. As a result, both partners can engage in mutual shared problem-solving or joint emotion-regulation.²² According to Bodenmann, there are three different common forms of dyadic coping:

- Positive dyadic coping involves the provision of problem- and emotion-focused support and reducing the partner's stress by a new division of responsibilities and contributions to the coping process.
- Common dyadic coping (i.e., joint dyadic coping) includes strategies in which both partners jointly engage to reduce stress (e.g., exchange tenderness, joint problem-solving).
- Negative dyadic coping comprises insufficient support and ambivalent or hostile intervention attempts (e.g., reluctant provision of support while believing that the partner should solve the problem alone).²³

In the Wollny et al. (2000) study, the researchers studied 136 heterosexual couples. Trait EQ was positively related to relationship satisfaction. Trait EQ was positively related to positive dyadic coping and common dyadic coping but not related to negative dyadic coping.

Wollny, A., Jacobs, I., & Pabel, L. (2020, 2020/01/02). Trait emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction: The mediating role of dyadic coping. *The Journal of Psychology*, 154(1), 75-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2019.1661343>

Letting Go of Negative Thoughts

We often refer to these negative thoughts as vulture statements.²⁴ Some of us have huge, gigantic vultures sitting on our shoulders every day, and we keep feeding them with all of our negative thoughts. Right when that thought enters your head, you have started to feed that vulture sitting on your shoulders.

Unfortunately, many of us will focus on that negative thought and keep that negative thought in our heads for a long period. It's like have a bag full of carrion, and we just keep lifting it to the vulture, who just keeps getting fatter and fatter, weighing you down more and more.

Every time we point out a negative thought instead of harping on that thought, we take a pause and stop feeding the vulture. Do this long enough, and you will see the benefits to your self-concept. Furthermore, when we have a healthy self-concept, we also have stronger interpersonal relationships.²⁵

Positive Emotions During Conflict

Researchers have found that serious relationship problems arise when those in the relationship are unable to reach beyond the immediate conflict and include positive as well as negative emotions in their discussions. In a landmark study of newlywed couples, for example, researchers attempted to predict who would have a happy marriage versus an unhappy marriage or a divorce, based on how the newlyweds communicated with each other. Specifically, they created a stressful conflict situation for couples. The researchers then evaluated how many times the newlyweds expressed positive emotions and how many times they expressed negative emotions in talking with each other about the situation.

When the marital status and happiness of each couple were evaluated over the next six years, the study found

that the strongest predictor of a marriage that stayed together and was happy was the degree of positive emotions expressed during the conflict situation in the initial interview.²⁶

In happy marriages, instead of always responding to anger with anger, the couples found a way to lighten the tension and to de-escalate the conflict. In long-lasting marriages, during stressful times or in the middle of conflict, couples were able to interject some positive comments and positive regard for each other. When this finding is generalized to other types of interpersonal relationships, it makes a strong case for having some positive interactions, interjecting some humor, some light-hearted fun, or some playfulness into your conversation while you are trying to resolve conflicts.

Key Takeaways

- Emotions are our physical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment; whereas, feelings are the responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality.
- Emotional awareness involves an individual's ability to recognize their feelings and communicate about them effectively. One of the common problems that some people have with regards to emotional awareness is a lack of a concrete emotional vocabulary for both positive and negative feelings. When people cannot adequately communicate about their feelings, they will never get what they need out of a relationship.
- One common problem in interpersonal communication is the overuse of "You" statements. "I" statements are statements that take responsibility for how one is feeling. "You" statements are statements that place the blame of one's feelings on another person. Remember, another person cannot make you feel a specific way. Furthermore, when we communicate "you" statements, people tend to become more defensive, which could escalate into conflict.
- Emotional intelligence is the degree to which an individual has the ability to perceive (recognizing emotions when they occur), understand (the ability to understand why emotions and feelings arise), communicate (articulating one's emotions and feelings to another person), and manage emotions and feelings (being able to use emotions effectively during interpersonal relationships).

Exercises

- Think of an extreme emotion you've felt recently. Explain the interrelationships between that emotion, your thoughts, and your feelings when you experienced that extreme emotion.
- Complete the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. What areas are your strengths with regard to EQ? What areas are your weaknesses? How can you go about improving your strengths while alleviating your weaknesses?
- Think of a conflict you've had with a significant other in your relationship. How many of the statements that were made during that conflict were "You" statements as compared to "I" statements? How could you have more clearly expressed your feelings and link them to your needs?

Power and Influence

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term "influence" and explain the three levels of influence.
2. Define the word "power" and explain the six bases of power.

One of the primary reasons we engage in a variety of interpersonal relationships over our lifetimes is to influence others. We live in a world where we constantly need to accomplish a variety of goals, so being able to get

others to jump on board with our goals is a very important part of social survival. As such, we define **influence** when an individual or group of people alters another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors through accidental, expressive, or rhetorical communication.²⁷ Notice this definition of influence is one that focuses on the importance of communication within the interaction. Within this definition, we discuss three specific types of communication: accidental, expressive, or rhetorical.

First, we have accidental communication, or when we send messages to another person without realizing those messages are being sent. Imagine you are walking through your campus' food court and notice a table set up for a specific charity. A person who we really respect is hanging out at the table laughing and smiling, so you decide to donate a dollar to the charity. The person who was just hanging out at the table influenced your decision to donate. They could have just been talking to another friend and may not have even really been a supporter of the charity, but their presence was enough to influence your donation. At the same time, we often influence others to think, feel, and behave in ways they wouldn't have unconsciously. A smile, a frown, a head nod, or eye eversion can all be nonverbal indicators to other people, which could influence them. There's a great commercial on television that demonstrates this. The commercial starts with someone holding the door for another person, then this person turns around and does something kind to another person, and this "paying it forward" continues through the entire commercial. In each incident, no one said to the person they were helping to "pay it forward," they just did.

The second type of communication we can have is **expressive** or **emotionally-based communication**. Our emotional states can often influence other people. If we are happy, others can become happy, and if we are sad, others may avoid us altogether. Maybe you've walked into a room and seen someone crying, so you ask, "Are you OK?" Instead of responding, the person just turns and glowers at you, so you turn around and leave. With just one look, this person influenced your behavior.

The final type of communication, **rhetorical communication**, involves purposefully creating and sending messages to another person in the hopes of altering another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors. Accidental communication is not planned. Expressive communication is often not conscious at all. However, rhetorical communication is purposeful. When we are using rhetorical communication to influence another person(s), we know that we are trying to influence that person(s).

Levels of Influence

In 1958 social psychologist Herbert Kelman first noted that there are three basic levels of influence: compliance, identification, and internalization.²⁸ Kelman's basic theory was that changes in a person's thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors occur at different levels, which results in different processes an individual uses to achieve conformity with an influencer. Let's look at each of these three levels separately.

Compliance

The first, and weakest, form of influence is compliance. **Compliance** implies that an individual accepts influence and alters their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. However, this change in thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors is transitory and only lasts as long as the individual sees compliance as beneficial.²⁹ Generally, people accept influence at this level because they perceive the rewards or punishments for influence to be in their best interest. As such, this form of influence is very superficial.³⁰

Identification

The second form of influence discussed by Kelman is **identification**, which is based purely in the realm of relationships. Identification occurs when an individual accepts influence because they want to have a satisfying relationship with the influencer or influencing group. "The individual actually believes in the responses which he [or she] adopts through identification, but their specific content is more or less irrelevant. He [or she] adopts the induced behavior because it is associated with the desired relationship. Thus the satisfaction derived from identification due to the act of conforming as such."³¹ Notice that Kelman is arguing that the actual change to thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors is less of an issue than the relationship and the act of conforming. However, if an individual ever decides that the relationship and identification with the influencing individual or group are not beneficial, then the influencing attempts will disappear, and the individual will naturally go back to their original thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

Internalization

The final level of influence proposed by Kelman is **internalization**, which occurs when an individual adopts influence and alters their thinking, feeling, and/or behaviors because doing so is intrinsically rewarding. Ultimately, changing one's thinking, feelings, and/or behavior happens at the internalization level because an individual sees this change as either coinciding with their value system, considers the change useful, or fulfills a need the individual has. Influence that happens at this level becomes highly intertwined with the individual's perception of self, so this type of influence tends to be long-lasting.

French & Raven's Five Bases of Power

When you hear the word “power,” what comes to mind? Maybe you think of a powerful person like a Superhero or the President of the United States. For social scientists, we use the word “power” in a very specific way. **Power** is the degree that a social agent (A) has the ability to get another person(s) (P) to alter their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. First, you have a social agent (A), which can come in a variety of different forms: another person, a role someone embodies, a group rule or norm, or a group or part of a group.³² Next, we have the person(s) who is being influenced by the goal to be a specific change in thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. When we discussed influence above, we talked about it in terms of communication: accidental, expressive, and rhetorical. When we deal with power, we are only dealing in the realm of rhetorical communication because the person exerting power over another person is consciously goal-directed.

Probably the most important people in the realm of power have been John French and Bertram Raven. In 1959, French and Raven identified five unique bases of power that people can use to influence others (coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent).³³ At the time of their original publication, there was a sixth base of power that Raven attempted to argue for, informational. Although he lost the battle in the initial publication, subsequent research by Raven on the subject of the bases of power have all included informational power.³⁴ Let's examine each of these five bases of power.



Figure 8.1 French & Raven's Five Bases of Power

Informational

The first basis of power is the last one originally proposed by Raven.³⁵ **Informational power** refers to a social agent's ability to bring about a change in thought, feeling, and/or behavior through information. For example, since you initially started school, teachers have had informational power over you. They have provided you with

a range of information on history, science, grammar, art, etc. that shape how you think (what constitutes history?), feel (what does it mean to be aesthetically pleasing?), and behave (how do you properly mix chemicals in a lab?). In some ways, informational power is very strong, because it's often the first form of power with which we come into contact. In fact, when you are taught how to think, feel, and/or behave, this change "now continues without the target necessarily referring to, or even remembering, the [influencer] as being the agent of change."³⁶

Coercive and Reward

The second base of power is **coercive power**, which is the ability to punish an individual who does not comply with one's influencing attempts. On the other end of the spectrum, we have **reward power** (3rd base of power), which is the ability to offer an individual rewards for complying with one's influencing attempts. We talk about these two bases of power together because they are two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, the same problems with this type of power apply equally to both. Influence can happen if you punish or reward someone; however, as soon as you take away that punishment or reward, the thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior will reverse back to its initial state. Hence, we refer to both coercive and reward power as attempts to get someone to comply with influence, because this is the highest level of influence one can hope to achieve with these two forms of power.

Legitimate

The fourth base of power is **legitimate power**, or influence that occurs because a person (P) believes that the social agent (A) has a valid right to influence P, and P has an obligation to accept A's attempt to influence P's thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. French and Raven argued that there were two common forms of legitimate power: cultural and structural. Cultural legitimate power occurs when a change agent is viewed as having the right to influence others because of their role in the culture. For example, in some cultures, the elderly may have a stronger right to influence than younger members of that culture. Structural legitimate power, on the other hand, occurs because someone fulfills a specific position within the social hierarchy. For example, your boss may have the legitimate right to influence your thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors in the workplace because they are above you in the organizational hierarchy.³⁷

Expert

The fifth base of power is **expert power**, or the power we give an individual to influence us because of their perceived knowledge. For example, we often give our physicians the ability to influence our behavior (e.g., eat right, exercise, take medication, etc.) because we view these individuals as having specialized knowledge. However, this type of influence only is effective if P believes A is an expert, P trusts A, and P believes that A is telling the truth.

One problem we often face in the 21st Century involves the conceptualization of the word "expert." Many people in today's world can be perceived as "experts" just because they write a book, have a talk show, were on a reality TV show, or are seen on news programs.³⁸ Many of these so-called "experts" may have no reasonable skill or knowledge but they can be trumpeted as experts. One of the problems with the Internet is the fundamental flaw that anyone can put information online with only an opinion and no actual facts. Additionally, we often engage in debates about "facts" because we have different talking heads telling us different information. Historically, expert power was always a very strong form of power, but there is growing concern that we are losing expertise and knowledge to unsubstantiated opinions and rumor mongering.

At the same time, there is quite a bit of research demonstrating that many people are either unskilled or unknowledgeable and completely unaware of their lack of expertise. This problem has been called the **Dunning-Kruger effect**, or the tendency of some people to inflate their expertise when they really have nothing to back up that perception.³⁹ As you can imagine, having a lot of people who think they are experts spouting off information that is untrue can be highly problematic in society. For example, do you really want to take medical advice from a TV star? Many people do. While we have some people who inflate their expertise, on the other end of the spectrum, some people suffer from imposter syndrome, which occurs when people devalue or simply do not recognize their knowledge and skills. Imposter syndrome is generally a problem with highly educated people like doctors, lawyers, professors, business executives, etc. The fear is that someone will find out that they are a fraud.

Referent

The final base of power originally discussed by French and Raven is **referent power**, or a social agent's ability to influence another person because P wants to be associated with A. Ultimately, referent power is about relationship building and the desire for a relationship. If A is a person P finds attractive, then P will do whatever they need to do to become associated with A. If A belongs to a group, then P will want to join that group. Ultimately, this relationship exists because P wants to think, feel, and behave as A does. For example, if A decides that he likes modern art, then P will also decide to like modern art. If A has a very strong work ethic in the workplace, then P will adopt a strong work ethic in the workplace as well. Often A has no idea of the influence they are having over P. Ultimately, the stronger P desires to be associated with A, the more referent power A has over P.

Influence and Power

By now, you may be wondering about the relationship between influence and power. Research has examined the relationship between the three levels of influence and the six bases of power. Coercive, reward, and legitimate power only influence people at the compliance level. Whereas, informational, expert, and referent power have been shown to influence people at all three levels of influence: compliance, identification, and internalization.⁴⁰ When you think about your own interpersonal influencing goals, you really need to consider what level of influence you desire a person's change in thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors to be. If your goal is just to get the change quickly, then using coercive, reward, and legitimate power may be the best route. If, however, you want to ensure long-term influence, then using informational, expert, and referent power are probably the best routes to use.

Research Spotlight



In 2013, Shireen Abuhatoum and Nina Howe set out to explore how siblings use French and Raven's bases of power in their relationships. Specifically, they examined how older siblings (average age of 7 years old) interacted with their younger siblings (average age was 4 ½ years old). Sibling pairs were recorded playing at home with a wooden farm set that was provided for the observational study. Each recorded video lasted for 15-minutes. The researchers then coded the children's verbal and nonverbal behaviors. The goal was to see what types of power strategies the siblings employed while playing.

Unsurprisingly, older siblings were more likely to engage in power displays with their younger siblings to get what they wanted. However, younger siblings were more likely to appeal to a third party (usually an adult) to get their way.

The researchers also noted that when it came to getting a desired piece of the farm to play with, older siblings were more likely to use coercive power. Younger siblings were more likely to employ legitimate power as an attempt to achieve a compromise.

Abuhatoum, S., & Howe, N. (2013). Power in sibling conflict during early and middle childhood. *Social Development*, 22(4), 738–754. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12021>

Key Takeaways

- Herbert Kelman noted that there are three basic levels of influence: compliance (getting someone to alter behavior), identification (altering someone's behavior because they want to be identified with a person or group), and internalization (influence that occurs because someone wants to be in a relationship with an influencer).
- French and Raven have devised six basic bases of power: informational, coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent. First, we have informational power, or the power we have over others as we provide them knowledge. Second, we have coercive power, or the ability to punish someone for noncompliance. Third, we have reward power, or the ability to reward someone for compliance. Fourth we have legitimate power, or power someone has because of their position within a culture or a hierarchical structure. Fifth, we have expert power, or power that someone exerts because they are perceived as having specific knowledge or skills. Lastly, we have referent power, or power that occurs because an individual wants to be associated with another

person.

Exercises

- Think of a time when you've been influenced at all three of Kelman's levels of influence. How were each of these situations of influence different from each other? How were the different levels of influence achieved?
- Think of each of the following situations and which form of power would best be used and why:
 - A mother wants her child to eat his vegetables.
 - A police officer wants to influence people to slow down in residential neighborhoods.
 - The Surgeon General of the United States wants people to become more aware of the problems of transsaturated fats in their diets.
 - A friend wants to influence his best friend to stop doing drugs.

Conflict Management Strategies

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between conflict and disagreement.
2. Explain the three common styles of conflict management.
3. Summarize the STLC Model of Conflict.

Many researchers have attempted to understand how humans handle conflict with one another. The first researchers to create a taxonomy for understanding conflict management strategies were Richard E. Walton and Robert B. McKersie.⁴¹ Walton and McKersie were primarily interested in how individuals handle conflict during labor negotiations. The Walton and McKersie model consisted of only two methods for managing conflict: integrative and distributive. **Integrative conflict** is a win-win approach to conflict; whereby, both parties attempt to come to a settled agreement that is mutually beneficial. **Distributive conflict** is a win-lose approach; whereby, conflicting parties see their job as to win and make sure the other person or group loses. Most professional schools teach that integrative negotiation tactics are generally the best ones.

ABC's of Conflict

Over the years, a number of different patterns for handling conflict have arisen in the literature, but most of them agree with the first two proposed by Walton and McKersie, but they generally add a third dimension of conflict: **avoidance**. Go ahead and take a moment to complete the questionnaire in Table 8.7.

Instructions: Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with how you typically behave when engaged in conflict with another person. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

When I start to engage in a conflict, I _____

- _____1. Keep the conflict to myself to avoid rocking the boat.
- _____2. Do my best to win.
- _____3. Try to find a solution that works for everyone.
- _____4. Do my best to stay away from disagreements that arise.
- _____5. Create a strategy to ensure my successful outcome.
- _____6. Try to find a solution that is beneficial for those involved.
- _____7. Avoid the individual with whom I'm having the conflict.
- _____8. Won't back down unless I get what I want.
- _____9. Collaborate with others to find an outcome OK for everyone.
- _____10. Leave the room to avoid dealing with the issue.
- _____11. Take no prisoners.
- _____12. Find solutions that satisfy everyone's expectations.
- _____13. Shut down and shut up in order to get it over with as quickly as possible.
- _____14. See it as an opportunity to get what I want.
- _____15. Try to integrate everyone's ideas to come up with the best solution for everyone.
- _____16. Keep my disagreements to myself.
- _____17. Don't let up until I win.
- _____18. Openly raise everyone's concerns to ensure the best outcome possible.

Scoring:

Avoiders

Add Items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16_____

Battlers

Add Items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17_____

Collaborators

Add Items 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18_____

Interpretation: Scores for each subscale should range from 6 to 30. Scores under 14 are considered low, scores 15 to 23 are considered moderate, and scores over 24 are considered high.

Table 8.7 ABC's of Conflict Management



Figure 8.2 Conflict Management Styles

Avoiders

Alan Sillars, Stephen, Coletti, Doug Parry, and Mark Rogers created a taxonomy of different types of strategies that people can use when avoiding conflict. Table 8.8 provides a list of these common tactics. [42](#)

Conflict Management Tactic	Definition	Example
Simple Denial	Statements that deny the conflict.	"No, I'm perfectly fine."
Extended Denial	Statements that deny conflict with a short justification.	"No, I'm perfectly fine. I just had a long night."
Underresponsiveness	Statements that deny the conflict and then pose a question to the conflict partner.	"I don't know why you are upset, did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed this morning?"
Topic Shifting	Statements that shift the interaction away from the conflict.	"Sorry to hear that. Did you hear about the mall opening?"
Topic Avoidance	Statements designed to clearly stop the conflict.	"I don't want to deal with this right now."
Abstractness	Statements designed to shift a conflict from concrete factors to more abstract ones.	"Yes, I know I'm late. But what is time really except a construction of humans to force conformity?"
Semantic Focus	Statements focused on the denotative and connotative definitions of words.	"So, what do you mean by the word 'sex'?"
Process Focus	Statements focused on the "appropriate" procedures for handling conflict.	"I refuse to talk to you when you are angry."
Joking	Humorous statements designed to derail conflict.	"That's about as useless as a football bat."
Ambivalence	Statements designed to indicate a lack of caring.	"Whatever!" "Just do what you want."
Pessimism	Statements that devalue the purpose of conflict.	"What's the point of fighting over this? Neither of us are changing our minds."
Evasion	Statements designed to shift the focus of the conflict.	"I hear the Joneses down the street have that problem, not us."
Stalling	Statements designed to shift the conflict to another time.	"I don't have time to talk about this right now."
Irrelevant Remark	Statements that have nothing to do with the conflict.	"I never knew the wallpaper in here had flowers on it."

Table 8.8 Avoidant Conflict Management Strategies

Battlers

For our purposes, we have opted to describe those who engage in distributive conflict as battlers because they often see going into a conflict as heading off to war, which is most appropriately aligned with the distributive conflict

management strategies. Battlers believe that conflict should take on an approach where the battler must win the conflict at all costs without regard to the damage they might cause along the way. Furthermore, battlers tend to be very personalistic in their goals and are often highly antagonistic towards those individuals with whom they are engaging in conflict.⁴³

Alan Sillars, Stephen, Coletti, Doug Parry, and Mark Rogers created a taxonomy of different types of strategies that people can use when using distributive conflict management strategies. Table 8.9 provides a list of these common tactics.⁴⁴

Conflict Management Tactic	Definition	Example
Faulting	Statements that verbally criticize a partner.	"Wow, I can't believe you are so dense at times."
Rejection	Statements that express antagonistic disagreement.	"That is such a dumb idea."
Hostile Questioning	Questions designed to fault a partner.	"Who died and made you king?"
Hostile Joking	Humorous statements designed to attack a partner.	"I do believe a village has lost its idiot."
Presumptive Attribution	Statements designed to point the meaning or origin of the conflict to another source.	"You just think that because your father keeps telling you that."
Avoiding Responsibility	Statements that deny fault.	"Not my fault, not my problem."
Prescription	Statements that describe a specific change to another's behavior.	"You know, if you'd just stop yelling, maybe people would take you seriously."
Threat	Statements designed to inform a partner of a future punishment.	"You either tell your mother we're not coming, or I'm getting a divorce attorney."
Blame	Statements that lay culpability for a problem on a partner.	"It's your fault we got ourselves in this mess in the first place."
Shouting	Statements delivered in a manner with an increased volume.	"DAMMIT! GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER!"
Sarcasm	Statements involving the use of irony to convey contempt, mock, insult, or wound another person.	"The trouble with you is that you lack the power of conversation but not the power of speech."

Table 8.9 Distributive Conflict Management Strategies

Collaborators

The last type of conflicting partners are collaborators. There are a range of collaborating choices, from being completely collaborative in an attempt to find a mutually agreed upon solution, to being compromising when you realize that both sides will need to win and lose a little to come to a satisfactory solution. In both cases, the goal is to use prosocial communicative behaviors in an attempt to reach a solution everyone is happy with. Admittedly, this is often easier said than done. Furthermore, it's entirely possible that one side says they want to collaborate, and the other side refuses to collaborate at all. When this happens, collaborative conflict management strategies may not be as effective, because it's hard to collaborate with someone who truly believes you need to lose the conflict.

Alan Sillars, Stephen, Coletti, Doug Parry, and Mark Rogers created a taxonomy of different types of strategies that people can use when collaborating during a conflict. Table 8.10 provides a list of these common tactics.⁴⁵

Conflict Management Tactic	Definition	Example
Descriptive Acts	Statements that describe obvious events or factors.	"Last time your sister babysat our kids, she yelled at them."
Qualification	Statements that explicitly explain the conflict.	"I am upset because you didn't come home last night."
Disclosure	Statements that disclose one's thoughts and feelings in a non-judgmental way.	"I get really worried when you don't call and let me know where you are."
Soliciting Disclosure	Questions that ask another person to disclose their thoughts and feelings.	"How do you feel about what I just said?"
Negative Inquiry	Statements allowing for the other person to identify your negative behaviours.	"What is it that I do that makes you yell at me?"
Empathy	Statements that indicate you understand and relate to the other person's emotions and experiences.	"I know this isn't easy for you."
Emphasize Commonalities	Statements that highlight shared goals, aims, and values.	"We both want what's best for our son."
Accepting Responsibility	Statements acknowledging the part you play within a conflict.	"You're right. I sometimes let my anger get the best of me."
Initiating Problem-Solving	Statements designed to help the conflict come to a mutually agreed upon solution.	"So let's brainstorm some ways that will help us solve this."
Concession	Statements designed to give in or yield to a partner's goals, aims, or values.	"I promise, I will make sure my homework is complete before I watch television."

Table 8.10 Integrative Conflict Management Strategies

Before we conclude this section, we do want to point out that conflict management strategies are often reciprocated by others. If you start a conflict in a highly competitive way, do not be surprised when your conflicting partner mirrors you and starts using distributive conflict management strategies in return. The same is also true for integrative conflict management strategies. When you start using integrative conflict management strategies, you can often deescalate a problematic conflict by using integrative conflict management strategies.⁴⁶

STLC Conflict Model

Ruth Anna Abigail and Dudley Cahn created a very simple model when thinking about how we communicate during conflict.⁴⁷ They called the model the STLC Conflict Model because it stands for stop, think, listen, and then communicate.



Figure 8.3 STLC Conflict Model

Stop

The first thing an individual needs to do when interacting with another person during conflict is to take the time to be present within the conflict itself. Too often, people engaged in a conflict say whatever enters their mind before they've really had a chance to process the message and think of the best strategies to use to send that message. Others end up talking past one another during a conflict because they simply are not paying attention to each other and the competing needs within the conflict. Communication problems often occur during conflict because people tend to react to conflict situations when they arise instead of being mindful and present during the conflict itself. For this reason, it's always important to take a breath during a conflict and first stop.

Sometimes these "time outs" need to be physical. Maybe you need to leave the room and go for a brief walk to calm down, or maybe you just need to get a glass of water. Whatever you need to do, it's important to take this break. This break takes you out of a "reactive stance into a proactive one."⁴⁸

Think

Once you've stopped, you now have the ability to really think about what you are communicating. You want to think through the conflict itself. What is the conflict really about? Often people engage in conflicts about superficial items when there are truly much deeper issues that are being avoided. You also want to consider what possible causes led to the conflict and what possible courses of action you think are possible to conclude the conflict. Cahn and Abigail argue that there are four possible outcomes that can occur: do nothing, change yourself, change the other person, or change the situation.

First, you can simply sit back and avoid the conflict. Maybe you're engaging in a conflict about politics with a family member, and this conflict is actually just going to make everyone mad. For this reason, you opt just to stop the conflict and change topics to avoid making people upset. One of our coauthors was at a funeral when an uncle asked our coauthor about our coauthor's impression of the current President. Our coauthor's immediate response was, "Do you really want me to answer that question?" Our coauthor knew that everyone else in the room would completely disagree, so our coauthor knew this was probably a can of worms that just didn't need to be opened.

Second, we can change ourselves. Often, we are at fault and start conflicts. We may not even realize how our behavior caused the conflict until we take a step back and really analyze what is happening. When it comes to being at fault, it's very important to admit that you've done wrong. Nothing is worse (and can stoke a conflict more) than when someone refuses to see their part in the conflict.

Third, we can attempt to change the other person. Let's face it, changing someone else is easier said than done. Just ask your parents/guardians! All of our parents/guardians have attempted to change our behaviors at one point or another, and changing people is very hard. Even with the powers of punishment and reward, a lot of time change only lasts as long as the punishment or the reward. One of our coauthors was in a constant battle with our coauthors' parents about thumb sucking as a child. Our coauthor's parents tried everything to get the thumb sucking to stop. They finally came up with an ingenious plan. They agreed to buy a toy electric saw if their child didn't engage in thumb sucking for the entire month. Well, for a whole month, no thumb sucking occurred at all. The child got the toy saw, and immediately inserted the thumb back into our coauthor's mouth. This short story is a great illustration of the problems that can be posed by rewards. Punishment works the same way. As long as people are being punished, they will behave in a specific way. If that punishment is ever taken away, so will the behavior.

Lastly, we can just change the situation. Having a conflict with your roommates? Move out. Having a conflict with your boss? Find a new job. Having a conflict with a professor? Drop the course. Admittedly, changing the situation is not necessarily the first choice people should take when thinking about possibilities, but often it's the best decision for long-term happiness. In essence, some conflicts will not be settled between people. When these conflicts arise, you can try and change yourself, hope the other person will change (they probably won't, though), or just get out of it altogether.

Listen

The third step in the STLC model is listen. Humans are not always the best listeners. Unfortunately, during a conflict situation, this is a skill that is desperately needed and often forgotten. When we feel defensive during a conflict, our listening becomes spotty at best because we start to focus on ourselves and protecting ourselves instead of trying to be empathic and seeing the conflict through the other person's eyes.

One mistake some people make is to think they're listening, but in reality, they're listening for flaws in the other person's argument. We often use this type of selective listening as a way to devalue the other person's stance. In essence, we will hear one small flaw with what the other person is saying and then use that flaw to demonstrate that obviously everything else must be wrong as well.

The goal of listening must be to suspend your judgment and really attempt to be present enough to accurately interpret the message being sent by the other person. When we listen in this highly empathic way, we are often able to see things from the other person's point-of-view, which could help us come to a better-negotiated outcome in the long run.

Communicate

Lastly, but certainly not least, we communicate with the other person. Notice that Cahn and Abigail put communication as the last part of the STLC model because it's the hardest one to do effectively during a conflict if the first three are not done correctly. When we communicate during a conflict, we must be hyper-aware of our nonverbal behavior (eye movement, gestures, posture, etc.). Nothing will kill a message faster than when it's accompanied by bad nonverbal behavior. For example, rolling one's eyes while another person is speaking is not an effective way to engage in conflict. One of our coauthors used to work with two women who clearly despised one another. They would never openly say something negative about the other person publicly, but in meetings, one would roll her eyes and make these non-word sounds of disagreement. The other one would just smile, slow her speech, and look in the other woman's direction. Everyone around the conference table knew exactly what was transpiring, yet no words needed to be uttered at all.

During a conflict, it's important to be assertive and stand up for your ideas without becoming verbally aggressive. Conversely, you have to be open to someone else's use of assertiveness as well without having to tolerate verbal aggression. We often end up using mediators to help call people on the carpet when they communicate in a fashion that is verbally aggressive or does not further the conflict itself. As Cahn and Abigail note, "People who are assertive with one another have the greatest chance of achieving mutual satisfaction and growth in their relationship." ⁴⁹

Mindfulness Activity

The STLC Model for Conflict is definitely one that is highly aligned with our discussion of mindful interpersonal relationships within this book. Taylor Rush, a clinical psychologist working for the Cleveland Clinic's Center for Neuro-Restoration, recommends seven considerations for ensuring mindfulness while engaged in conflict:

1. **Set intentions.** What do you want to be discussed during this interaction? What do you want to learn from the other person? What do you want to happen as a result of this conversation? Set your intentions early and check-in along the way to keep the conversation on point.
2. **Stay present to the situation.** Try to keep assumptions at bay and ask open-ended questions to better understand the other person's perspective and experiences.
3. **Stay aware of your inner reactions.** Disrupt the automatic feedback loop between your body and your thoughts. Acknowledge distressing or judgmental thoughts and feelings without reacting to them. Then check them against the facts of the situation.
4. **Take one good breath before responding.** A brief pause can mean all the difference between opting for a thoughtful response or knee-jerk reaction.
5. **Use reflective statements.** This is a tried and true strategy for staying present. It allows you to fully concentrate on what the other person is saying (rather than form your rebuttal) and shows the other person you have an interest in what they are actually saying. This will make them more likely to reciprocate!
6. **Remember, it's not all about you.** The ultimate objective is that both parties are heard and find the conversation beneficial. Try to actively take the other person's perspective and cultivate compassion (even if you fundamentally do not agree with their position). This makes conflict escalation much less



likely.

7. **Investigate afterward.** What do you feel now that the conversation is over? What was the overall tone of the conversation? Do you feel like you understand the other person's perspective? Do they understand yours? Will this require further conversation or has the issue been resolved? Asking these questions will help you to hone your practice for the future.⁵⁰

For this activity, we want you to think back to a recent conflict that you had with another person (e.g., coworker, friend, family member, romantic partner, etc.). Answer the following questions:

1. If you used the STLC Model for Conflict, how effective was it for you? Why?
2. If you did not use the STLC Model for Conflict, do you think you could have benefited from this approach? Why?
3. Looking at Rush's seven strategies for engaging in mindful conflict, did you engage in all of them? If you didn't engage in them all, which ones did you engage in, and which ones didn't you engage in? How could engaging in all seven of them helped your conflict management with this person?
4. If you haven't already, take a moment to think about the questions posed in #7 of Rush's list. What can you learn from this conflict that will help prepare you for future conflicts with this person or future conflicts more broadly?

Key Takeaways

- A conflict occurs when two people perceive differing goals or values, and if the two parties do not reach a solution, the interpersonal relationship could be seriously fractured. An argument, on the other hand, is a difference of opinion that occurs between two people during an argument. The primary difference between a conflict and an argument involves the emotional volatility of the situation. However, individuals with a low tolerance for disagreement may perceive any form of argument as interpersonal conflict.
- In this section, we discussed three basic forms of conflict management: integrative (collaborators), distributive (battlers), and avoidance (avoiders). Integrative conflict occurs when two people attempt a win-win situation where the conflict parties strive to find a mutually beneficial solution to a problem. Distributive conflict occurs when one or both conflict parties desire a win-lose orientation where they will win and the other person will lose. Lastly, we have avoidance, which occurs when an individual either tries to avoid a conflict altogether or leaves the conflict field.
- Dudley Cahn and Ruth Anna Abigail's STLC method for communication is very helpful when working through conflict with others. STLC stands for stop, think, listening, and communicate. Stop and time to be present within the conflict itself and prepare. Think through the real reasons for the conflict and what you want as an outcome for the conflict. Listen to what the other person says and try to understand the conflict from their point-of-view. Communicate in a manner that is assertive, constructive, and aware of your overall message.

Exercises

- Think of a time when a simple disagreement escalated to a conflict. What happened? Why did this escalation occur?
- During conflict, do you think it's appropriate to use all three forms of conflict management? Why?
- Think of a recent interpersonal conflict that you had that went badly. How could you have implemented the STLC Model of Conflict to improve what happened during that conflict?

Key Terms

accidental communication

When an individual sends messages to another person without realizing those messages are being sent.

alexithymia

A general deficit in emotional vocabulary—the ability to identify emotional feelings, differentiate emotional states from physical sensations, communicate feelings to others, and process emotion in a meaningful way.

argument

A verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects.

avoidance

Conflict management style where an individual attempts to either prevent a conflict from occurring or leaves a conflict when initiated.

coercive power

The ability to punish an individual who does not comply with one's influencing attempts.

compliance

When an individual accepts an influencer's influence and alters their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

conflict

An interactive process occurring when conscious beings (individuals or groups) have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations, resources, and/or values.

disagreement

A difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people.

distributive conflict

A win-lose approach, whereby conflicting parties see their job as to win and make sure the other person or group loses.

Dunning–Kruger effect

The tendency of some people to inflate their expertise when they really have nothing to back up that perception.

emotional awareness

An individual's ability to clearly express, in words, what they are feeling and why.

emotions

The physical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment.

emotional intelligence

An individual's appraisal and expression of their emotions and the emotions of others in a manner that enhances thought, living, and communicative interactions.

expert power

The ability of an individual to influence another because of their level of perceived knowledge or skill.

expressive communication

Messages that are sent either verbally or nonverbally related to an individual's emotions and feelings.

feelings

The responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality.

identification

When an individual accepts influence because they want to have a satisfying relationship with the influencer or influencing group.

influence

When an individual or group of people alters another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors through accidental, expressive, or rhetorical communication.

informational power

A social agent's ability to bring about a change in thought, feeling, and/or behavior through information.

integrative conflict

A win-win approach to conflict, whereby both parties attempt to come to a settled agreement that is mutually beneficial.

interdependence

When individuals involved in a relationship characterize it as continuous and important.

internalization

When an individual adopts influence and alters their thinking, feeling, and/or behaviors because doing so is intrinsically rewarding.

legitimate power

Influence that occurs because a person (P) believes that the social agent (A) has a valid right (generally based on cultural or hierarchical standing) to influence P, and P has an obligation to accept A's attempt to influence P's thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

power

The degree that a social agent (A) has the ability to get another person(s) (P) to alter their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

procedural disagreements

Disagreements concerned with procedure, how a decision should be reached or how a policy should be implemented.

referent power

A social agent's (A) ability to influence another person (P) because P wants to be associated with A.

reward power

The ability to offer an individual rewards for complying with one's influencing attempts.

rhetorical communication

Purposefully creating and sending messages to another person in the hopes of altering another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors.

substantive disagreement

A disagreement that people have about a specific topic or issue.

tolerance for disagreement

The degree to which an individual can openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted.

"you" statements

Moralistic judgments where we imply the wrongness or badness of another person and the way they have behaved.

Chapter Wrap-Up

As we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, conflict in interpersonal relationships is inevitable. The only way relationships can truly grow is through conflict, so learning how to manage conflict effectively is essential for successful interpersonal relationships.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Paul has been in a yearlong relationship with his boyfriend Bill. Paul really loves the idea of being in love, but he's just not in love with Bill at all. Unfortunately, on Valentine's Day, he made the mistake of telling Bill that he loved him even though he just doesn't. As far as Paul is concerned, he could end the relationship today.

Bill, on the other hand, fell madly in love with Paul almost immediately after they started hanging out and going to the gym together. One day when Bill and Paul were hanging out watching TV, he looked at Paul and told him that he loved him. Bill immediately noticed that Paul looked like a deer in headlights and let him off easy saying, "There's no need to say it back if you're not ready to do so."

Ultimately, the relationship became more like a really good friendship than a romantic relationship. The two hung out and went to dinner and saw movies, but were never really intimate with one another at all. Paul kept up the charade because he kind of liked some of the perks of being in a relationship. He liked having someone to hang out with all the time. He liked having someone who cleaned his house and cooked for him. He liked having someone who would look after his cats when he went on vacation.

Over time, Bill started to realize that something was wrong with the relationship. One day when he and Paul were talking about the future, he told Paul, "I want to be everything for you." He immediately saw that once again Paul looked like a deer trapped in headlights. Over time, Bill started noticing that Paul was getting more and more distant. He really loved Paul, but he started to realize that it really wasn't being reciprocated the same way. Instead of saying something, he just shook the thoughts out of his mind and kept going.

1. Would you classify this as a healthy relationship?
2. Why do you think Paul has such a hard time being honest with Bill?
3. Why do you think Bill was so determined to make the relationship work when it was clearly not being reciprocated?
4. How would you describe the emotional quality of this relationship?
5. How do you think this couple would engage in conflict?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Jonathan loves to debate a wide range of ideas. In fact, he has no problems arguing for or against something just to engage in a healthy debate with another person. Which personality trait does Jonathan exhibit?
 - a. need for cognition
 - b. argumentativeness proneness
 - c. conflict avoidance
 - d. high tolerance for disagreement
2. Which of the following represents a nonviolent communicative message?
 - a. silence
 - b. placating
 - c. playing games
 - d. aggressive behaviour
 - e. violence
3. Which of the following is not an effective statement when communicating about one's feelings?
 - a. "If you flirt with one more person, I'm going to hurt myself, and it will be your fault."
 - b. "I hate it when you flirt with other people."
 - c. "I feel lonely when you flirt with other people because I need emotional safety."
 - d. "You make me feel like a piece of trash when you flirt with other people."
4. Viivi is a Norwegian language instructor. As she teaches about Norwegian, she also peppers in a variety of culture factors into her teachings. One of her students, Jim, really wants to spend a summer abroad in Norway, so Jim listens attentively to everything Viivi has to offer. Because of Viivi's knowledge of Norway, Jim hangs on every word. What type of power best represents Viivi's?
 - a. coercive
 - b. reward
 - c. legitimate
 - d. expert
 - e. referent
5. Hodoya is a Canadian union leader. She's currently involved in negotiations with a large uranium production company. Hodoya sees her job as the lead negotiator to get the best possible deal for her union members. As such, she goes into negotiations with a win-lose orientation. What type of conflict

management strategies will Hodoya employ?

- a. avoidance
- b. distributive
- c. competitive
- d. collaborative
- e. integrative

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[7]

Cultural and Environmental Factors in Interpersonal Communication

One of the most important factors in our understanding of communication is culture. Every one of us has grown up in a unique cultural environment, and this culture has impacted how we communicate. Culture is such an ingrained part of who we are that we often don't even recognize our own culture. In this chapter, we're going to explore culture and its impact on interpersonal communication.



Figure 4.1 Traditional costumes and contemporary style of dress are elements of culture. [Traditional Dresses of Kashmir.](#) By Azad888. This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported](#) license.

What is Culture?

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term “culture” as it is used within this book.
2. Understand a dominant culture.
3. Differentiate between a co-culture and a microculture.

When people hear the word “culture,” many different images often come to mind. Maybe you immediately think of going to the ballet, an opera, or an art museum. Other people think of traditional dress like that seen from Kashmir in Figure 4.1. However, the word “culture” has a wide range of different meanings to a lot of different people. For example, when you travel to a new country (or even a state within your own country), you expect to encounter different clothing, languages, foods, rituals, etc.... The word “culture” is a hotly debated term among academics. In 1952, A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn compiled a list of 164 definitions for the word “culture.” Culture is often described as “the way we do things.”¹ In their book, the authors noted, “Considering that concept

[of culture] has had a name for less than 80 years, it is not surprising that full agreement and precision has not yet been attained.”² Kroeber and Kluckhohn predicted that eventually, science would land on a singular definition of culture as it was refined through the scientific process over time. Unfortunately, the idea of a single definition of culture is no closer to becoming a reality today than it was in 1952.³

For our purposes, we are going to talk about **culture** as “a group of people who through a process of learning are able to share perceptions of the world which influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behaviour.”⁴ Let’s break down this definition. First, when we talk about “culture,” we are starting off with a group of people. One of the biggest misunderstandings new people studying culture have is that an individual can have their own personalized culture. Culture is something that is formed by the groups that we grow up in and are involved with through our lifetimes.

Second, we learn about our culture. In fact, culture becomes such an ingrained part of who we are that we often do not even recognize our own culture and how our own culture affects us daily. Just like language, everyone is hardwired to learn culture. What culture we pick up is ultimately a matter of the group(s) we are born into and raised. Just like a baby born to an English-speaking family isn’t going to magically start speaking French out of nowhere, neither will a person from one culture adopt another culture accidentally.

Third, what we learn ultimately leads to a shared perception of the world. All cultures have stories that are taught to children that impact how they view the world. If you are raised by Jewish or Christian parents/guardians, you will learn the creation story in the Bible. However, this is only one of many different creation myths that have abounded over time in different cultures:

- The Akamba in Kenya say that the first two people were lowered to earth by God on a cloud.
- In ancient Babylon and Sumeria, the gods slaughtered another god named We-ila, and out of his blood and clay, they formed humans.
- One myth among the Tibetan people is that they owe their existence to the union of an ogress, not of this world, and a monkey on Gangpo Ri Mountain at Tsetang.
- And the Aboriginal tribes in Australia believe that humans are just the decedents of gods.⁵

Ultimately, which creation story we grew up with was a matter of the culture in which we were raised. These different myths lead to very different views of the individual’s relationship with both the world and with their God, gods, or goddesses.

Fourth, the culture we are raised in will teach us our beliefs, values, norms, and rules. **Beliefs** are assumptions and convictions held by an individual, group, or culture about the truth or existence of something. For example, in all of the creation myths discussed in the previous paragraph, these are beliefs that were held by many people at various times in human history. Next, we have **values**, or important and lasting principles or standards held by a culture about desirable and appropriate courses of action or outcomes. This definition is a bit complex, so let’s break it down. When looking at this definition, it’s important first to highlight that different cultures have different perceptions related to both courses of action or outcomes. For example, in many cultures throughout history, martyrdom (dying for one’s cause) has been something deeply valued. As such, in those cultures, putting one’s self in harm’s way (course of action) or dying (outcome) would be seen as both desirable and appropriate. Within a given culture, there are generally guiding principles and standards that help determine what is desirable and appropriate. In fact, many religious texts describe martyrdom as a holy calling. So, within these cultures, martyrdom is something that is valued. Next, within the definition of culture are the concepts of norms and rules. **Norms** are informal guidelines about what is acceptable or proper social behaviour within a specific culture. **Rules**, on the other hand, are the explicit guidelines (generally written down) that govern acceptable or proper social behaviour within a specific culture. With rules, we have clearly concrete and explicitly communicated ways of behaving, whereas norms are generally not concrete, nor are they explicitly communicated. We generally do not know a norm exists within a given culture unless we violate the norm or watch someone else violating the norm. The final part of the definition of culture, and probably the most important for our purposes, looking at interpersonal communication, is that these beliefs, values, norms, and rules will govern how people behave.

Co-cultures

In addition to a dominant culture, most societies have various **co-cultures**—regional, economic, social, religious,

ethnic, and other cultural groups that exert influence in society. Other co-cultures develop among people who share specific beliefs, ideologies, or life experiences. For example, within the United States we commonly refer to a wide variety of different cultures: Amish culture, African American culture, Buddhist Culture, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexed, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) culture. With all of these different cultural groups, we must realize that just because individuals belong to a cultural group, that does not mean that they are all identical. For example, African Americans in New York City are culturally distinct from those living in Birmingham, Alabama, because they also belong to different geographical co-cultures. Within the LGBTQIA culture, the members who make up the different letters can have a wide range of differing cultural experiences within the larger co-culture itself. As such, we must always be careful to avoid generalizing about individuals because of the co-cultures they belong to.

Co-cultures bring their unique sense of history and purpose within a larger culture. Co-cultures will also have their holidays and traditions. For example, one popular co-cultural holiday celebrated in the United States is Cinco de Mayo. Many U.S. citizens think that Cinco de Mayo is a Mexican holiday. However, this is not a Mexican holiday. Outside of Puebla, Mexico, it's considered a relatively minor holiday even though children do get the day off from school. One big mistake many U.S. citizens make is assuming *Cinco de Mayo* is Mexican Independence Day, which it is not. Instead, *El Grito de la Independencia* (The Cry of Independence) is held annually on September 16 in honor of Mexican Independence from Spain in 1810. Sadly, *Cinco de Mayo* has become more of an American holiday than it is a Mexican one. Just as an FYI, *Cinco de Mayo* is the date (May 5, 1862) observed to commemorate the Mexican Army's victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla that conclude the Franco-Mexican War (also referred to as the Battle of Puebla Day). We raise this example because often the larger culture coopts parts of a co-culture and tries to adapt it into the mainstream. During this process, the meaning associated with the co-culture is often twisted or forgotten. If you need another example, just think of St. Patrick's Day, which evolved from a religious celebration marking the death of St. Patrick on March 17, 461 CE, to a day when "everyone's Irish" and drinks green beer.

Microcultures

The last major term we need to explain with regards to culture is what is known as a microculture. A **microculture**, sometimes called a local culture, refers to cultural patterns of behaviour influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization. "Members of a microculture will usually share much of what they know with everyone in the greater society but will possess a special cultural knowledge that is unique to the subgroup."⁶ If you're a college student and you've ever lived in a dorm, you may have experienced what we mean by a microculture. It's not uncommon for different dorms on campus to develop their own unique cultures that are distinct from other dorms. They may have their own exclusive stories, histories, mascots, and specializations. Maybe you live in a dorm that specializes in honor's students or pairs U.S. students with international students. Perhaps you live in a dorm that is allegedly haunted. Maybe you live in a dorm that values competition against other dorms on campus, or one that doesn't care about the competition at all. All of these examples help individual dorms develop unique cultural identities.

We often refer to microcultures as "local cultures" because they do tend to exist among a small segment of people within a specific geographical location. There's quite a bit of research on the topic of classrooms as microcultures. Depending on the students and the teacher, you could end up with radically different classroom environments, even if the content is the same. The importance of microcultures goes back to Abraham Maslow's need for belonging. We all feel the need to belong, and these microcultures give us that sense of belonging on a more localized level.

For this reason, we often also examine microcultures that can exist in organizational settings. One common microculture that has been discussed and researched is the Disney microculture. Employees (oops! We mean cast members) who work for the Disney company quickly realize that there is more to working at Disney than a uniform and a name badge. Disney cast members do not wear uniforms; everyone is in costume. When a Disney cast member is interacting with the public, then they are "on stage;" when a cast member is on a break away from the public eye, then they are "backstage." From the moment a Disney cast member is hired, they are required to take Traditions One and probably Traditions Two at Disney University, which is run by the Disney Institute (<http://disneyinstitute.com/>). Here is how Disney explains the purpose of Traditions: "Disney Traditions is your first day of work filled with the History & Heritage of The Walt Disney Company, and a sprinkle of pixie dust!"⁷

As you can tell, from the very beginning of the Disney cast member experience, Disney attempts to create a very specific microculture that is based on all things Disney.

Key Takeaways

- Over the years, there have been numerous definitions of the word culture. As such, narrowing down to only one definition of the term is problematic, no matter how you define “culture.” For our purposes, we define culture as a group of people who, through a process of learning, can share perceptions of the world, which influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behaviour.
- In the realm of cultural studies, we discuss three different culturally related terms. First, we have a dominant culture, or the established language, religion, behaviour, values, rituals, and social customs of a specific society. Within that dominant culture will exist numerous co-cultures and microcultures. A co-culture is a regional, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or other cultural groups that exerts influence in society. Lastly, we have microcultures or cultural patterns of behaviour influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization.

Exercises

- Think about your own dominant culture. What does it mean to be a member of your national culture? What are the established language, religion, behaviour, values, rituals, and social customs within your society?
- Make a list of five co-cultural groups that you currently belong to. How does each of these different co-cultural groups influence who you are as a person?
- Many organizations are known for creating, or attempting to create, very specific microcultures. Thinking about your college or university, how would you explain your microculture to someone unfamiliar with your culture?

The Function of Culture

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the concept of collective self-esteem.
2. Define the term “stereotype” and explain its implications for interpersonal communication.
3. Summarize the implications of ethnocentrism in interpersonal communication.

Collective Self-Esteem

Henri Tajfel originally coined the term “collective self” as “that aspect of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.”⁸ Jennifer Crocker and Riia Luhtanen took Tajfel’s ideas one step further and discussed them as an individual’s **collective self-esteem**, or the aspect of an individual’s self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups.⁹ Based on their research, Crocker and Luhtanen found four different factors related to an individual’s collective self-esteem: private collective esteem, membership esteem, public collective esteem, and importance to identity.

The first factor of collective self-esteem is the individual’s **private collective esteem**, or the degree to which an individual positively evaluates their group. Every individual belongs to a wide range of groups, and we can evaluate these groups as either positive or negative. Imagine you’ve been brought up in a community where gang membership is a very common practice. You may have been forced into gang life at a very early age. Over time,

you may start to see a wide array of problems with gangs, so you may start to devalue the group. In this case, you would have low private collective esteem.

The second factor of collective self-esteem is **membership esteem**, which is the degree to which an individual sees themselves as a “good” member of a group. Maybe you’ve belonged to a religious organization your entire life. Over time, you start to find yourself wondering about the organization and your place within the organization. Maybe you see yourself as having ideas and opinions that are contrary to the organization, or maybe your behaviour when not attending religious services is not what the organization would advocate. In this case, you may start to see yourself as a “bad” member of this organization, so your membership esteem would be lower than someone who sees themselves as a “good” member of this organization.

The third factor of collective self-esteem is **public collective self-esteem**, or the degree to which nonmembers of a group evaluate a group and its members either positively or negatively. Maybe you’re a lesbian college student at a very progressive institution where students overwhelmingly support LGBTQIA rights. In this case, the collective views the group that you belong to positively.

The final factor of collective self-esteem is **importance to identity**, or the degree to which group membership is important to an individual. As mentioned earlier, we all belong to a wide range of cultural groups. Some of these groups are near and dear to us, while others are ones we don’t think about very often, so they just aren’t very important to us. For example, if you’re someone who has always lived in Charleston, South Carolina, then being a member of the Southerner cultural group may be a very important part of your identity. If you ended up leaving the south and moving to Oregon, this “southerner” label may take on even more meaning for you and become an even stronger identity marker because your immediate cultural group no longer surrounds you.

There has been a wealth of research conducted on the importance of collective self-esteem on individuals. For example, if you compare your cultural groups as being better than other cultural groups, then you will experience more positive emotions and self-evaluations.¹⁰ However, the opposite is also true. Individuals who compare their cultural groups to those cultural groups that are perceived as “better-off,” tend to experience more negative emotions and lower self-evaluations. As you can imagine, an individual who is a member of a group that is generally looked down upon by society will have a constant battle internally as they battle these negative emotions and subsequent lower self-evaluations because of membership within a cultural group.

You may be wondering how this ultimately impacts interpersonal communication. Research has examined how an individual’s collective self-esteem impacts their interpersonal interactions.¹¹ The researchers found that “during interactions in which multicultural persons felt that their heritage culture was being positively evaluated, they were more likely to perceive the interaction as intimate, they disclosed more and perceived their interaction partner as more disclosing, they enjoyed the interaction more, and they were more likely to indicate that they felt personally accepted.”¹² Furthermore, individuals with high collective self-esteem generally had more favourable interactions with people of differing cultures. On the other hand, individuals who had low levels of public collective self-esteem tended to recall less intimate social interactions with people from different cultures. As you can see, cultural self-esteem is an essential factor in our intercultural interactions with other people. For this reason, understanding how we view our cultural identities becomes very important because it can predict the types of intercultural interactions we will ultimately have.

Stereotyping

Stereotypes are “a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group.”¹³ Many people immediately hear the word “stereotype” and cringe because it’s often filled with negative connotations. However, not all stereotypes are necessarily wrong or bad. Some stereotypes exist because they are accurate.¹⁴ Often groups have real differences, and these differences are not bad or wrong; they just are. Let’s look at a real stereotype that plays out. When people hear the words “flight attendant,” they generally associate females with the term. In fact, in the 1980s only 19% of flight attendants were male, and today 26% of flight attendants are male.¹⁵ Are all flight attendants female? Obviously, not; however, the majority of flight attendants are female. We call these types of jobs sex-segregated because the jobs are held overwhelmingly by one biological sex or the other when there is no real reason why either sex cannot be effective within the job. However, many also hold the stereotype that flight attendants are all young. Although this was historically true, the ages of flight attendants has changed: 16-24 year olds (4.9%), 25-34 year olds (16.8%), 35-44 year olds (29.7%), 45-54 year olds (28.2%), and 55+ year olds (21.4%).

As you can see, the overwhelming majority of flight attendants are 35 years of age or older. Almost half of flight

attendants today are over 45 years of age. In this case, the stereotype of the young flight attendant simply doesn't meet up with reality.

Furthermore, there can be two distinctly different types of stereotypes that people hold: cultural and personal. Cultural stereotypes are beliefs possessed by a larger cultural group about another social group, whereas personal stereotypes are those held by an individual and do not reflect a shared belief with their cultural group(s). In the case of cultural stereotypes, cultural members share a belief (or set of beliefs) about another cultural group. For example, maybe you belong to the Yellow culture and perceive all members of the Purple culture as lazy. Often these stereotypes that we have of those other groups (e.g., Purple People) occur because we are taught them since we are very young. On the other hand, maybe you had a bad experience with a Purple Person being lazy at work and in your mind decide all Purple People must behave like that. In either case, we have a negative stereotype about a cultural group, but how we learn these stereotypes is very different.

Now, even though some stereotypes are accurate and others are inaccurate, it does not mitigate the problem that stereotypes cause. Stereotypes cause problems because people use them to categorize people in snap judgments based on only group membership. Going back to our previous example, if you run across a Purple person in your next job, you'll immediately see that person as lazy without having any other information about that person. When we use blanket stereotypes to make *a priori* (before the fact) judgments about someone, we distance ourselves from making accurate, informed decisions about that person (and their cultural group). Stereotypes prejudice us to look at all members of a group as similar and to ignore the unique differences among individuals. Additionally, many stereotypes are based on ignorance about another person's culture.

Try this exercise: picture someone named Mel. OK, now picture someone named Hillary. What did the people you pictured look like? The immediate impressions we get in our minds occur because of stereotypes we associate with these words. One of our authors has a cousin named Melanie, who is often called Mel by the family, and our coauthor had a close friend in college, who was a male, named Hillary. This simple exercise demonstrates how often and easy it is for stereotypes to enter into our heads.

Culture as Normative

Another function of culture is that it helps us establish norms. Essentially, one's culture is normative,¹⁶ or we assume that our culture's rules, regulations, and norms are correct and those of other cultures are deviant, which is highly ethnocentric. The term **ethnocentrism** can be defined as the degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating other cultures according to their own culture's preconceptions, often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior. All of us live in a world where we are raised in a dominant culture. As a result of being raised in a specific dominant culture, we tend to judge other cultures based on what we've been taught within our own cultures. We also tend to think our own culture is generally right, moral, ethical, legal, etc. When a culture appears to waiver from what our culture has taught is right, moral, ethical, legal, etc., we tend to judge those cultures as inferior.

One of our coauthor's favourite examples of the problem of ethnocentrism comes from the MTV television show *Road Rules: The Quest*. In one episode, one of the contestants, Ellen, is walking around in Marrakech, Morocco, wearing very short shorts. In an Islamic country where a woman wearing revealing clothing is a violation of Islamic law, Ellen was violating the culture's dress code. To this end, some of the villagers in Marrakech took it upon themselves to correct Ellen's nonverbal behaviour by throwing rocks at her. Of course, Ellen just couldn't understand why these male villagers were throwing rocks at her. Although throwing rocks at another person should be viewed as universally inappropriate, Ellen's ethnocentric behaviour and complete lack of understanding of Muslim countries were also inappropriate. Ellen was walking around in a foreign country and was completely unaware that she presented herself in public was seen as an insult to Allah and society. Admittedly, this episode aired in July 2001, so we were just a few short months before 9-11 and the public awakening to a whole range of issues occurring in the Middle East.

At the same time, ethnocentrism isn't 100% a horrible thing either. Shortly after 9-11, a flag shortage occurred in the United States because people wanted to display our unity and pride during those horrible days after the atrocities that occurred on U.S. soil. Patriotism is a more mild form of ethnocentrism. The fact that we view ourselves as "American" is even somewhat ethnocentric because technically there are three rather large countries that are all in North America and 13 in South America. By definition, we're all Americans. However, U.S. citizens have clung to the title "American" without ever giving thought to those other countries that exist on these two continents. Here's another interesting fact. I was recently surfing the Internet looking for uses of the

word “American” for this chapter. Here is one I found from a protestor in Alabama, “We live in America. We speak American.” I’ll give the speaker the benefit of the doubt and believe she meant we speak English, which is true for the majority of citizens in the United States (78.1% according to U.S. Census data from 2021, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>). However, more people in North and South America do not speak English when compared to those who do.

Why “America”

The term “America” is thought to have been a mistake made by a cartographer in 1507 named Martin Waldseemüller, a cleric in the cathedral village of St.-Dié, France. Martin created what is considered to be the “birth certificate of America” by creating a map charting what was the known world at the time. You can view this map on the U.S. Library of Congress’ website (<http://www.loc.gov/resource/g3200.ct000725/>).

When looking at this map, look to the bottom left-hand side of the map; you will see the inscription “America.” This label was assigning credit for finding South America to Amerigo Vespucci instead of Christopher Columbus.

Key Takeaways

- Collective self-esteem is an individual’s self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups. Some groups we hold tightly to, while we only see ourselves as peripherally associated with others. Research has shown that there are four significant parts to collective self-esteem: private collective esteem (positive or negative evaluation you have a group), membership esteem (the degree to which you see yourself as a “good” member of a group), public collective esteem (how the public views the group you belong to), and importance to identity (importance of group membership to you).
- Stereotypes are beliefs that we hold about a person because of their membership in a specific cultural group. Although some stereotypes are accurate, many stereotypes that we may possess are based on faulty information or overgeneralizations of entire groups of people. Interpersonally, stereotypes become problematic because we often filter how we approach and communicate with people from different cultures because of the stereotypes we possess.

Exercises

- Think about a group that you currently belong to and consider the collective self-esteem you have for that group. How do you view this group in all four types of esteem: private collective, membership, public collective, and importance to identity?
- List the various stereotypes that you can think of for the following different groups: Gay Male, Transgendered Male, African American Male, Hispanic Female, White Male, and Pakistani Female. How do you think these stereotypes would impact your interpersonal interactions with people from these different groups?
- Think about ethnocentrism in your own life. When do you think ethnocentrism helps you have collective self-esteem, and when do you think it leads to prejudice?

Cultural Characteristics and Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between Edward T. Hall's low-context and high-context cultures.
2. Explain the importance of Geert Hofstede's research in cultural studies.
3. Summarize the importance of Stella Ting-Toomey's face and facework in interpersonal relationships.

In any major area of academic study, there are luminaries that one should understand. A luminary is an expert who sheds light on a subject and inspires and influences others' work in that area. In this section, we're going to examine three important luminaries that have helped shape our understanding of culture and intercultural communication: Edward T. Hall, Geert Hofstede, and Stella Ting-Toomey.

Edward T. Hall

One of the earliest researchers in the area of cultural differences and their importance to communication was a researcher by the name of Edward T. Hall. His book *Beyond Culture* is still considered one of the most influential books for the field of intercultural communication.^{17,18} According to Hall, all cultures incorporate both verbal and nonverbal elements into communication. In his 1959 book, *The Silent Language*, Hall states, "culture is communication and communication is culture."¹⁹ We talked about the importance of nonverbal communication. We also mentioned that nonverbal communication isn't exactly universal. Some gestures can mean wildly different things in different parts of the world. President George H. Bush once held up his hand in a "V" for Victory salute to an Australian audience only to find out later that this was the equivalent of the middle finger in the United States. President Nixon did the same thing existing an airplane in Brazil flashing his famous OK sign with his thumb and forefinger forming a circle, but this is the "middle finger" in that culture. Obviously, these two incidents have gone down in the annals of presidential history as cultural faux pas. Still, they illustrate the importance of knowing and understanding gestures in differing cultures because we do not all interpret nonverbal behaviour the same way.

One of Halls most essential contributions to the field of intercultural communication is the idea of low-context and high-context cultures. The terms "low-context culture" (LCC) and "high-context culture" (HCC) were created by Hall to describe how communication styles differ across cultures. In essence, "in LCC, meaning is expressed through explicit verbal messages, both written and oral. In HCC, on the other hand, intention or meaning can best be conveyed through implicit contexts, including gestures, social customs, silence, nuance, or tone of voice."²⁰ Table 4.1 further explores the differences between low-context and high-context cultures. In Table 4.1, we broke down issues of context into three general categories: communication, cultural orientation, and business.

		Low-Context	High-Context
Communication	Type of Communication	Explicit Communication	Implicit Communication
	Communication Focus	Focus on Verbal Communication	Focus on Nonverbal Communication
	Context of Message	Less Meaningful	Very Meaningful
	Politeness	Not Important	Very Important
	Approach to People	Direct and Confrontational	Indirect and Polite
Cultural Orientation	Emotions	No Room for Emotions	Emotions Have Importance
	Approach to Time	Monochromatic	Polychromatic
	Time Orientation	Present-Future	Past
	In/Out-Groups	Flexible and Transient Grouping Patterns	Strong Distinctions Between In and Out-Groups
	Identity	Based on Individual	Based on Social System
	Values	Independence and Freedom	Tradition and Social Rules/Norms
Business	Work Style	Individualistic	Team-Oriented
	Work Approach	Task-Oriented	Relationship-Oriented
	Business Approach	Competitive	Cooperative
	Learning	Knowledge is Transferable	Knowledge is Situational
	Sales Orientation	Hard Sell	Soft Sell
	View of Change	Change over Tradition	Tradition over Change

Table 4.1 Low-Context vs. High-Context Cultures

You may be wondering, by this point, how low-context and high-context cultures differ across different countries. Figure 5.2 illustrates some of the patterns of context that exist in today's world.²¹

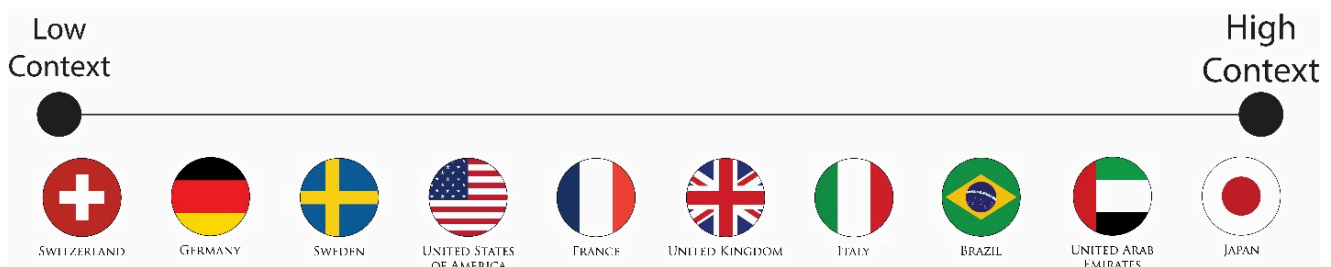


Figure 4.2 Low- and High-Context Nations

Geert Hofstede

Another very important researcher in the area of culture is a man by the name of Geert Hofstede. Starting in the 1970s, Geert became interested in how people from different cultures approach work. His interests ultimately culminated in his 1980 publication *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* where he explained some basic cultural differences.²² Over the years, Geert has fine-tuned his theory of culture, and the most recent update to his theory occurred in 2010.²³ In Geert's research examining thousands of workers from around the globe, he has noticed a series of six cultural differences: low vs. high power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, low vs. high uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint. Let's briefly look at each of these.

Low vs. High Power Distance

The first of Geert Hofstede's original dimensions of national cultures was power distance, or the degree to which those people and organizations with less power within a culture accept and expect that power is unequally distributed within their culture. To determine power differences within a culture, Hofstede originally was able

to examine cultural value survey data that had been collected by IBM. Over the years, Hofstede and his fellow researchers have regularly collected additional data from around the world to make his conceptualization of six cultural differences one of the most widely studied concepts of culture. When it comes to power distances, these differences often manifest themselves in many ways within a singular culture: class, education, occupations, and health care. With class, many cultures have three clear segments low, middle, and upper. However, the concepts of what is low, middle, and upper can have very large differences. For example, the median income for the average U.S. household is \$51,100.²⁴ When discussing household incomes, we use the median (middlemost number) because it's the most accurate representation of income. According to a 2013 report from the U.S. Census department (using income data from 2012), here is how income inequality in the U.S. looks:

Households in the lowest quintile had incomes of \$20,599 or less in 2012. Households in the second quintile had incomes between \$20,600 and \$39,764, those in the third quintile had incomes between \$39,765 and \$64,582, and those in the fourth quintile had incomes between \$64,583 and \$104,096. Households in the highest quintile had incomes of \$104,097 or more. The top 5 percent had incomes of \$191,157 or more.²⁵

However, income is just one indicator of power distance within a culture. Others are who gets educated and what type of education they receive, who gets health care and what type, and what types of occupations do those with power have versus those who do not have power. According to Hofstede's most recent data, the five countries with the highest power distances are: Malaysia, Slovakia, Guatemala, Panama, and the Philippines.²⁶ The five countries with the lowest power distances are Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, and Switzerland (German-speaking part). Notice that the U.S. does not make it into the top five or the bottom five. According to Hofstede's data, the U.S. is 16th from the bottom of power distance, so we are in the bottom third with regards to power distance. When it comes down to it, despite the issues we have in our country, the power disparity is not nearly as significant as it is in many other parts of our world.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

The United States is number one on individualism, according to Hofstede's data.²⁷ Americans are considered individualistic. In other words, we think about ourselves as individuals rather than the collective group. Most Asian countries are considered collectivistic cultures because these cultures tend to be group-focused. Collectivistic cultures tend to think about actions that might affect the entire group rather than specific members of the group.

In an individualistic culture, there is a belief that you can do what you want and follow your passions. In an individualistic culture, if someone asked what you do for a living, they would answer by saying their profession or occupation. However, in collectivistic cultures, a person would answer in terms of the group, organization, and/or corporation that they serve. Moreover, in a collectivistic culture, there is a belief that you should do what benefits the group. In other words, collectivistic cultures focus on how the group can grow and be productive.

Masculinity vs. Femininity

The notion of masculinity and femininity are often misconstrued to be tied to their biological sex counterparts, female and male. For understanding culture, Hofstede acknowledges that this distinction ultimately has a lot to do with work goals.²⁸ On the masculine end of the spectrum, individuals tend to be focused on items like earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge. Hofstede also refers to these tendencies as being more assertive. Femininity, on the other hand, involves characteristics like having a good working relationship with one's manager and coworkers, cooperating with people at work, and security (both job and familial). Hofstede refers to this as being more relationally oriented. Admittedly, in Hofstede's research, there does tend to be a difference between females and males on these characteristics (females tend to be more relationally oriented and males more assertive), which is why Hofstede went with the terms masculinity and femininity in the first place. Ultimately, we can define these types of cultures in the following way:

A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life.

A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life [emphasis in original].²⁹

The top five most masculine countries are Slovakia, Japan, Hungary, Austria, and Venezuela (the U.S. is number 19 out of 76); whereas, feminine countries are represented by Sweden, Norway, Latvia, Netherlands, and Denmark.

As you can imagine, depending on the type of culture you live in, you will have wildly different social interactions with other people. There's also a massive difference in the approach to marriage. In masculine cultures, women are the caretakers of the home, while men are to be healthy and wealthy. As such, women are placed in a subservient position to their husbands and are often identified socially by their husbands. For example, an invitation to a party would be addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith." In feminine cultures, men and women are upheld to the same standards, and their relationships should be based on mutual friendship.

Low vs. High Uncertainty Avoidance

The next category identified by Hofstede involves the concept of uncertainty avoidance.³⁰ Life is full of uncertainty. We cannot escape it; however, some people are more prone to becoming fearful in situations that are ambiguous or unknown. Uncertainty avoidance then involves the extent to which cultures as a whole are fearful of ambiguous and unknown situations. People in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance can view this ambiguity and lack of knowledge as threatening, which is one reason why people in these cultures tend to have higher levels of anxiety and neuroticism as a whole. In fact, within the latest edition of the book examining these characteristics, Hofstede and his colleagues title the chapter on uncertainty avoidance as "What is Different is Dangerous," calling out the threat factor people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures feel.³¹ Cultures at the high end of uncertainty avoidance include Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, Uruguay, and Belgium Flemish; whereas, cultures at the low end of uncertainty avoidance include Singapore, Jamaica, Denmark, Sweden, and Hong Kong. The United States ranks 64th out of 76 countries analyzed (Singapore was number 76). From an interpersonal perspective, people from high uncertainty avoidant cultures are going to have a lot more anxiety associated with interactions involving people from other cultures. Furthermore, there tend to be higher levels of prejudice and higher levels of ideological, political, and religious fundamentalism, which does not allow for any kind of debate.

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

In addition to the previous characteristics, Hofstede noticed a fifth characteristic of cultures that he deemed long-term and short-term orientation. Long-term orientation focuses on the future and not the present or the past. As such, there is a focus on both persistence and thrift. The emphasis on endurance is vital because being persistent today will help you in the future. The goal is to work hard now, so you can have the payoff later. The same is true of thrift. We want to conserve our resources and under-spend to build that financial cushion for the future. Short-term oriented cultures, on the other hand, tend to focus on both the past and the present. In these cultures, there tends to be high respect for the past and the various traditions that have made that culture great. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on "saving face," which we will discuss more in the next section, fulfilling one's obligations today, and enjoying one's leisure time. At the long-term end of the spectrum are countries like China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan; whereas, countries like Pakistan, Czech Republic, Nigeria, Spain, and the Philippines are examples of short-term. The United States ranked 31 out of 39, with Pakistan being number 39. Interpersonally, long-term oriented countries were more satisfied with their contributions to "Being attentive to daily human relations, deepening human bonds in family, neighborhood and friends or acquaintances" when compared to their short-term counterparts.³²

Indulgence vs. Restraint

The final characteristic of cultures is a new one first reported on in the 2010 edition of *Cultures and Organizations*.³³ The sixth cultural characteristic is called indulgence vs. restraint, which examines issues of happiness and wellbeing. According to Hofstede and his coauthors, "Indulgence stands for a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Its opposite pole, restraint, reflects a conviction that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms."³⁴ The top five on the Indulgence end are Venezuela, Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, and Nigeria, whereas those on the restraint end are Pakistan, Egypt, Latvia, Ukraine, and Albania. The U.S. is towards the indulgence end of the spectrum and ranks at #15 along with Canada and the Netherlands. Some interesting findings associated with indulgence include experiencing higher levels of positive emotions and remembering those emotions for more extended periods. Furthermore, individuals from more indulgent cultures tend to be more optimistic, while their restrained counterparts tend to be more cynical. People in more indulgent countries are going to be happier than their restrained counterparts, and people within indulgent cultures show lower rates of

cardiovascular problems commonly associated with stress. Finally, individuals from indulgent cultures tend to be more extraverted and outgoing as a whole, whereas individuals from restrained cultures tend to be more neurotic. From years of research examining both extraversion and neuroticism, we know that extraverted individuals have more successful interpersonal relationships than those who are highly neurotic. Ultimately, research examining these differences have shown that people from indulgent countries are more open to other cultures, more satisfied with their lives, and are more likely to communicate with friends and family members via the Internet while interacting with more people from other cultures via the Internet as well.

Research Spotlight



In 2017, Daniel H. Mansson and Aldís G. Sigurðardóttir set out to examine the concept of trait affection in relation to Hofstede's theoretical framework. "Affectionate communication is conceptualized as a person's use of intentional and overt communicative behaviours to convey feelings of closeness, care, and fondness in the form of verbal statements, nonverbal behaviours, and social support."³⁵

For this study, the researchers studied 606 participants in four different countries: Denmark, Iceland, Poland, and the United States.

When it came to trait affection given, the United States participants reported giving more affection than any of the three other countries. The other countries did not differ from each other with regard to trait affection given.

When it came to trait affection received, all four groups differed from one another. The order of affection received was (in order of the most trait affection received) United States, Denmark, Poland, and Iceland.

Finally, the researchers examined affection given and received with regards to Hofstede's work. "The results also indicated that trait affection given was significantly associated with the individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and uncertainty avoidance dimensions of cultures. Similarly, trait affection received was significantly associated with the individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions of cultures."³⁶

Mansson, D. H., & Sigurðardóttir, A. G. (2017). Trait affection given and received: A test of Hofstede's theoretical framework. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 46(2), 161-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2017.1292944>

Stella Ting-Toomey

In 1988, intercultural communication research Stella Ting-Toomey developed face-negotiation theory to help explain the importance of face within interpersonal interactions.³⁷ The basic idea behind face-negotiation theory is that face-saving, conflict, and culture are all intertwined. In the most recent version of her theory, Stella Ting-Toomey outlines seven basic factors of face-negotiation theory:

1. People in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations.
2. The concept of face is especially problematic in emotionally vulnerable situations (such as embarrassment, request, or conflict situations) when the situation identities of the communicators are called into question.
3. The cultural variability dimensions of individualism-collectivism and small/large power distance shape the orientations, movements, contents, and styles of facework.
4. Individualism-collectivism shapes members' preferences for self-oriented facework versus other-oriented facework.
5. Small/large power distance shapes members' preferences for horizontal-based facework versus vertical-based facework.
6. The cultural variability dimensions, in conjunction with individual, relational, and situational factors influence the use of particular facework behaviours in particular cultural scenes.
7. Intercultural facework competence refers to the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing vulnerable identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively.³⁸

First and foremost, communication and face are highly intertwined concepts, so when coming to an intercultural encounter, it is important to remember the interrelationship between the two. As far as Ting-Toomey's theory goes, she takes this idea one step further to understanding how face and communication ultimately enable successful intercultural conflict management. Face-negotiation theory ultimately concerned with three different types of face: self-face (concern for our face), other-face (concern for another person's face), and mutual-face (concern for both interactants and the relationship).³⁹ As you can see from Ting-Toomey's last assumption in her theory above, individuals who are competent in facework can recognize when facework is necessary and then handle those situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively. As such, facework should be viewed as a necessary component for understanding any form of interpersonal interaction but is especially important when examining interpersonal interactions that occur between people from differing cultural backgrounds.

What is Face?

The concept of **face** is one that is not the easiest to define nor completely understand. Originally, the concept of face is not a Western even though the idea of "saving face" is pretty common in every day talk today. According to Hsien Chin Hu, the concept of face stems from two distinct Chinese words, *lien* and *mien-tzu*.⁴⁰ *Lien* "represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community. Lien is both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction."⁴¹ On the other hand, *mien-tzu* "stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country [America]: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation."⁴² However, David Yau-fai Ho argues that face is more complicated than just *lien* and *mien-tzu*, so he provided the following definition:

Face is the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct; the face extended to a person by others is a function of the degree of congruence between judgments of his total condition in life, including his actions as well as those of people closely associated with him, and the social expectations that others have placed upon him. In terms of two interacting parties, face is the reciprocated compliance, respect, and/or deference that each party expects from, and extends to, the other party.⁴³

More simplistically, face is essentially "a person's reputation and feelings of prestige within multiple spheres, including the workplace, the family, personal friends, and society at large."⁴⁴ For our purposes, we can generally break face down into general categories: face gaining and face losing. Face gaining refers to the strategies a person might use to build their reputation and feelings of prestige (e.g., talking about accomplishments, active social media presence, etc.), whereas face losing refers to those behaviours someone engages in that can harm their reputation or feelings of prestige (e.g., getting caught in a lie, failing, etc.).

Key Takeaways

- Low-context cultures are cultures where the emphasis is placed on the words that come out of an individual's mouth. High-context cultures, on the other hand, are cultures where understanding a message is dependent on the cultural context and a communicator's nonverbal behaviour.
- Geert Hofstede's research created a taxonomy for understanding and differentiating cultures. Geert's taxonomy was originally based on data collected by IBM, and he found that cultures could be differentiated by power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint.
- Face is the standing or position a person has in the eyes of others. During an interpersonal interaction, individuals strive to create a positive version of their face for the other person.

Exercises

- Compare and contrast two countries and their levels of context. Why do you think context is such an important cultural characteristic?
- Think about a co-cultural group that you belong to. Think through Geert Hofstede's six categories used to evaluate differing cultures and apply Hofstede's ideas to your co-culture. Does your co-culture differ from the dominant culture?
- Imagine you're having an interaction with an individual from India. During the middle of the conversation, you have a feeling that your interactional partner is losing face. What could you do at that point to help rebuild that person's face? Why would you want to do this at all?

Improving Intercultural Communication Skills

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the importance of cultural intelligence.
2. Learn about metacognitive CQ.
3. Identify several different ways to create better intercultural interactions.

Become Culturally Intelligent

One of the latest buzz-words in the business world is “cultural intelligence,” which was initially introduced to the scholarly community in 2003 by P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang.⁴⁵ In the past decade, a wealth of research has been conducted examining the importance of cultural intelligence during interpersonal interactions with people from other cultures. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is defined as an “individual's capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity.”⁴⁶

Four Factors of Cultural Intelligence

In their original study on the topic, Earley and Ang argued that cultural intelligence is based on four distinct factors: cognitive, motivational, metacognitive, and behavioural dimensions. Before continuing, take a minute and complete the Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire in Table 4.2

Instructions: Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with your perception. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

_____1. When I'm interacting with someone from a differing culture, I know when I use my knowledge of that person's culture during my interactions.

_____2. When I interact with someone from a culture I know nothing about, I have no problem adjusting my perspective of their culture while we talk.

_____3. During intercultural interactions, I am well aware of the cultural knowledge I utilize.

_____4. I always check my knowledge of someone from another culture to ensure that my understanding of their culture is accurate.

_____5. During my intercultural interactions, I try to be mindful of how my perceptions of someone's culture are either consistent with or differ from reality.

_____6. I pride myself on knowing a lot about other people's cultures.

_____7. I understand the social, economic, and political systems of other cultures.

_____8. I know about other cultures' religious beliefs and values.

_____9. I understand how daily life is enacted in other cultures.

_____10. I know the importance of paintings, literature, and other forms of art in other cultures.

_____11. I enjoy reaching out and engaging in an intercultural encounter.

_____12. I would have no problem socializing with people from a new culture.

_____13. Although intercultural encounters often involve stress, I don't mind the stress because meeting people from new cultures makes it worth it.

_____14. I would have no problems accustoming myself to the routines of another culture.

_____15. I enjoy being with people from other cultures and getting to know them.

_____16. I know how to interact verbally with people from different cultures.

_____17. I know how to interact nonverbally with people from different cultures.

_____18. I can vary my rate of speech if an intercultural encounter requires it.

_____19. I can easily alter my behaviours to suit the needs of an intercultural encounter.

_____20. I can alter my facial expressions if an intercultural encounter requires it.

Scoring:

Add items 1-5 (Intercultural Understanding) = _____

Add items 6-10 (Intercultural Knowledge) = _____

Add items 7-15 (Intercultural Motivation) = _____

Add items 16-20 (Intercultural Behaviour) = _____

Interpreting Your Scores:

Scores for each of the four factors (intercultural understanding, intercultural knowledge, intercultural motivation, and intercultural behaviour) can be added together to get a composite score. Each of the four factors exists on a continuum from 5 (not culturally intelligent) to 25 (highly culturally intelligent). An average person would score between 12-18.

Based on:

Van Dyne, L., Ang, S., & Koh, C. (2008). Development and validation of the CQS: The Cultural Intelligence Scale. In S. Ang & L. Van Dyne (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural intelligence: Theory, measurement, and application* (pp. 16-38). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Table 4.2 Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire

Cognitive CQ

First, cognitive CQ involves knowing about different cultures (intercultural knowledge). Many types of knowledge about a culture can be relevant during an intercultural interaction: rules and norms, economic and legal systems, cultural values and beliefs, the importance of art within a society, etc.... All of these different areas of knowledge involve facts that can help you understand people from different cultures. For example, in most of the United States, when you are talking to someone, eye contact is very important. You may have even been told by someone to "look at me when I'm talking to you" if you've ever gotten in trouble. However, this isn't consistent across different cultures at all. Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures often view direct contact when talking to someone superior as a sign of disrespect. Knowing how eye contact functions across cultures can

help you know more about how to interact with people from various cultures. Probably one of the best books you can read to know more about how to communicate in another culture is Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway's book *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: The Bestselling Guide to Doing Business in More than 60 Countries*.⁴⁷

Motivational CQ

Second, we have motivational CQ, or the degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to different cultural environments. Motivation is the key to effective intercultural interactions. You can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you are not motivated to have successful intercultural interactions, you will not have them.

Metacognitive CQ

Third, metacognitive CQ involves being consciously aware of your intercultural interactions in a manner that helps you have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures (intercultural understanding). All of the knowledge about cultural differences in the world will not be beneficial if you cannot use that information to understand and adapt your behaviour during an interpersonal interaction with someone from a differing culture. As such, we must always be learning about cultures but also be ready to adjust our knowledge about people and their cultures through our interactions with them.

Behavioural CQ

Lastly, behavioural CQ is the next step following metacognitive CQ, which is behaving in a manner that is consistent with what you know about other cultures.⁴⁸ We should never expect others to adjust to us culturally. Instead, culturally intelligent people realize that it's best to adapt our behaviours (verbally and nonverbally) to bridge the gap between people culturally. When we go out of our way to be culturally intelligent, we will encourage others to do so as well.

As you can see, becoming a truly culturally intelligent person involves a lot of work. As such, it's important to spend time and build your cultural intelligence if you are going to be an effective communicator in today's world.

Engaging Culturally Mindful Interactions

Admittedly, being culturally competent takes a lot of work and a lot of practice. Even if you're not completely culturally competent, you can engage with people from other cultures in a mindful way.

First, when it comes to engaging with people from other cultures, we need to be fully in the moment and not think about previous interactions with people from a culture or possible future interactions with people from a culture. Instead, it's essential to focus on the person you are interacting with. You also need to be aware of your stereotypes and prejudices that you may have of people from a different culture. Don't try to find evidence to support or negate these stereotypes or prejudices. If you focus on evidence-finding, you're just trying to satisfy your thoughts and feelings and not mindfully engaging with this other person. Also, if you find that your mind is shifting, recognize the shift and allow yourself to re-center on your interaction with the other person.

Second, go into an intercultural interaction knowing your intention. If your goal is to learn more about that person's culture, that's a great intention. However, that may not be the only intention we have when interacting with someone from another culture. For example, you may be interacting with someone from another culture because you're trying to sell them a product you represent. If your main intention is sales, then be aware of your intention and don't try to deceive yourself into thinking it's something more altruistic.

Lastly, go into all intercultural interactions with the right attitude. Remember, the goal of being mindful is to be open, kind, and curious. Although we often discuss mindful in terms of how we can be open, kind, and curious with ourselves, it's also important to extend that same framework when we are interacting with people from other cultures. So much of mindful relationships is embodying the right attitude during our interactions with others.

Overall, the goal of mindful intercultural interactions is to be present in the moment in a nonjudgmental way. When you face judgments, recognize them, and ask yourself where they have come from. Interrogate those judgments. At the same time, don't judge yourself for having these ideas. If we have stereotypes about another a specific culture, it's important to recognize those stereotypes, call them out, understand where they came from in the first place, and examine them for factualness.

For example, imagine you're talking to someone from the Republic of Kiribati. Chances are, you've probably never heard of the Republic of Kiribati, but it's a real country in Oceania. But let's say all you know about the people from the Republic of Kiribati is that they like European-style football. During your interaction, you say, "So, what's your favourite football team?" In this moment, you've taken the one stereotype you had and used it to help engage in an interaction. However, if the person comes back and says, "I really don't care. Sports just aren't my thing." How do you respond? First, recognize that you attempted to use a stereotype that you had and call it out for what it was. That doesn't make you a bad person, but we must learn from these encounters and broaden our world views. Second, call out the stereotype in your mind. Before that moment, you may not have even realized that you had a stereotype of people from the Republic of Kiribati. Labeling our stereotypes of other people is important because it helps us recognize them faster, the more we engage in this type of mindful behaviour. Third, figure out where that stereotype came from. Maybe you had been in New Zealand and saw a match on the television and saw the Kiribati national football team. In that one moment, you learned a tiny bit about an entire country and pocketed it away for future use. Sometimes it's easy to figure out where our stereotypes evolved from, but sometimes these stereotypes are so ingrained in us through our own culture that it's hard to really figure out their origin. Lastly, it's time to realize that your stereotype may not be that factual. At the same time, you may have found the one resident of the Republic of Kiribati who doesn't like football. We can often make these determinations by talking to the other person.

At the same time, it's important also to be mindfully open to the other person's stereotypes of people within your own culture. For example, someone from the Republic of Kiribati may have a stereotype that Americans know nothing about football (other than American football). If you're a fan of what we in the U.S. call soccer, then you correct that stereotype or at least provide that person a more nuanced understanding of your own culture. Sure, American football still is the king of sports in the U.S., but media trends for watching football (soccer) are growing, and more and more Americans are becoming fans.

Key Takeaways

- Cultural intelligence involves the degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations. Cultural intelligence consists of four distinct parts: knowledge, motivation, understanding, and behaviour.
- Having strong intercultural relationships can be very rewarding. When thinking about your own intercultural relationships, some ways to have more rewarding intercultural relationships can include: understanding your own culture better, being interested in other people and their cultures, respecting other people's cultures, becoming culturally intelligent, tolerating ambiguity during interactions, being aware of and overcoming your own ethnocentrism, and being a good example of your own culture.

Exercises

- The Cultural Intelligence Center has created a widely used 20-item measure for cultural intelligence. Please take a second and complete their measure: [Cultural Intelligence Scale](#) (see page 366 in the article). What were your CQ strengths and CQ weaknesses? Where would you most want to improve your CQ?
- Visit the [National Center for Cultural Competence](#). Read some of the material on their website. Look for their ideas and compare to what you've learned in this section.
- James L. Mason created a cultural competence tool for service agencies (<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED399684.pdf>). Take a look at their tool, which is freely available online. What do you think of their tools for evaluating cultural competence? Do you think cultural competence and cultural intelligence are similar, different, or identical? Why?

Key Terms

behavioural CQ

The degree to which an individual behaves in a manner that is consistent with what they know about other cultures.

belief

Assumptions and convictions held by an individual, group, or culture about the truth or existence of something.

co-culture

Regional, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or other cultural groups that exerts influence in society.

cognitive CQ

The degree to which an individual has cultural knowledge.

collective self-esteem

The aspect of an individual's self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups.

collectivism

Characteristics of a culture that values cooperation and harmony and considers the needs of the group to be more important than the needs of the individual.

cultural intelligence

The degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations.

culture

A group of people who, through a process of learning, can share perceptions of the world, which influence their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behaviour.

culture as normative

The basic idea that one's culture provides the rules, regulations, and norms that govern a culture and how people act with other members of that society.

dominant culture

The established language, religion, behaviour, values, rituals, and social customs of a society.

ethnocentrism

The degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating different cultures according to their own culture's preconceptions often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior.

face

The standing or position a person has in the eyes of others.

feminine

Cultures focused on having a good working relationship with one's manager and coworkers, cooperating with people at work, and security (both job and familial).

high-context cultures

Cultures that interpret meaning by relying more on nonverbal context or behaviour than on verbal symbols in communication.

importance to identity

The degree to which group membership is important to an individual.

indigenous peoples

Populations that originated in a particular place rather than moved there.

individualism

Characteristics of a culture that values being self-reliant and self-motivated, believes in personal freedom and privacy, and celebrates personal achievement.

indulgence

Cultural orientation marked by immediate gratification for individual desires.

long-term orientation

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the future and not the present or past.

low-context cultures

Cultures that interpret meaning by placing a great deal of emphasis on the words someone uses.

masculine

Cultures focused on items like earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge.

membership esteem

The degree to which an individual sees themselves as a “good” member of a group.

metacognitive CQ

The degree to which an individual is consciously aware of their intercultural interactions in a manner that helps them have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures.

microculture

Cultural patterns of behaviour influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization.

motivational CQ

The degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to differing cultural environments.

norms

Informal guidelines about what is acceptable or proper social behaviour within a specific culture.

ostracized

Excluded or removed from a group by others in that group.

power distance

The degree to which those people and organizations with less power within a culture accept and expect that power is unequally distributed within their culture.

private collective esteem

The degree to which an individual positively evaluates their group.

public collective self-esteem

The degree to which nonmembers of a group evaluate a group and its members either positively or negatively.

restraint

Cultural orientation marked by the belief that gratification should not be instantaneous and should be regulated by cultural rules and norms.

rules

Explicit guidelines (generally written down) that govern acceptable or proper social behaviour within a specific culture.

short-term orientation

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the past or present and not in the future.

stereotype

A set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group.

uncertainty avoidance

The extent to which cultures as a whole are fearful of ambiguous and unknown situations.

values

Important and lasting principles or standards held by a culture about desirable and appropriate courses of action or outcomes.

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we started by discussing what the word “culture” means while also considering the concepts of co-culture and microcultures. We then looked at the critical functions that culture performs in our daily lives. Next, we discussed the intersection of culture and communication. Lastly, we ended this chapter discussing how you can improve your intercultural communication skills.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Roy and Jalissa originally met in graduate school. On the first day that Jalissa walked into grad school, she was glad to see someone else near her age, which was older than the average student in the class. Even though Roy was White and Jalissa was African American, the two immediately felt drawn to each other. Before they knew it, Jalissa and Roy were inseparable. Jalissa's husband started to get jealous of Roy until he met Roy and realized that Roy was gay.

Over the years, the two graduated and went to different jobs that were close to each other. Roy and Jalissa still would get together regularly and go shopping, go to the movies, have dinner, etc. The two of them considered themselves as highly culturally intelligent people. Jalissa was a Dean of Diversity at a liberal arts college, and Roy taught cultural studies at a large research university. The two often had pet names for each other that people outside of their relationship could view as racist or homophobic, but they knew the spirit behind their pet names was meant in jest and not ignorance, ethnocentrism, or fear.

One day Roy and Jalissa were hanging out in a store when Roy found an African Mask. Roy grabbed the mask, walked up behind Jalissa, and shouted, "Abugga bugga!" Jalissa turned around and laughingly slapped Roy on the arm responding, "You White racist cracker!" Jalissa looked at an older White woman standing in the row completely startled, and she just busted out laughing and Roy joined right in.

1. In this case, was Roy culturally intelligent? Why?
2. In this case, was Jalissa culturally intelligent? Why?
3. Was this interpersonal interaction appropriate? Why?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Milagros belongs to a very distinct South American tribe. Bravery is very important in her tribe. From an early age, all boys and girls are taught that bravery is akin to being a member of the tribe. Furthermore, people who are not brave are often banished from the tribe. For this tribe, what does bravery represent?
 - a. a rule
 - b. a norm
 - c. a value
 - d. a belief
 - e. a worth
2. African Americans; Bisexuals, Gays, and Lesbians; Irish Americans, Southerners are all examples of what?
 - a. dominant cultures
 - b. co-cultures
 - c. subcultures
 - d. microcultures
 - e. collaborative cultures
3. As a transgendered individual, Melanie realizes that many people in her dominant culture do not understand, agree with, nor support transgendered individuals and causes. Which facet of collective self-esteem does this represent?
 - a. private collective esteem
 - b. membership esteem
 - c. public collective esteem

- d. importance to identity
 - e. other esteem
4. The degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating other cultures according to their culture's preconceptions often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior?
- a. ethnocentrism
 - b. stereotypes
 - c. prejudice
 - d. discrimination
 - e. cultural annoyance
5. Juan's culture is marked by expensive houses, fast cars, rich food, and all the luxuries one could desire. Which of Hofstede's cultural differences does Juan's culture represent?
- a. individualism
 - b. high power distance
 - c. masculinity
 - d. short-term orientation
 - e. indulgence

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[8]

Communication and the Digital Age

In today's world, we all spend a lot of time on various devices designed to make our lives easier. From smartphones to social media, we are all in constant contact with family, friends, coworkers, etc. Since the earliest days of communication technologies, we have always used these technologies to interact with one another. This chapter is going to examine how technology helps mediated our interpersonal relationships.

Technology and Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the history of computer-mediated communication.
2. Recognize some of the important figures in the creation of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and computer-mediated communication.

Since the Internet's creation in 1969, public access to the Internet and the creation of the World Wide Web (www) in 1991, and the proliferation of internet service providers through the late 1990s, the technology that shapes your life today and tomorrow is still relatively new. Here are some relatively recent landmarks in social media sites, technology, and apps: LinkedIn (2003), iTunes (2003), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), iPhone (2007), Drop Box (2008), Google Docs (2009), Kickstarter (2010), Google+ (2011), Google Glass (2012), Oculus Rift (2013), iWatch (2014). As you can imagine, just limiting this list is hard. Some of these products you're probably very familiar with while others may be new to you altogether.

From Math to Punch Cards

Before we get started, it's essential to understand the evolution of what we call computer-mediated communication or CMC. Now some scholars have adopted the broader term "communication and technology" in recent years. Still, we don't think this is necessary because a computer of some kind is always at the center of these communicative interactions.

So, our first question should be, what is a computer. In its earliest use, "computers" were people who performed massive amounts of calculations by hand or using a tool like an abacus or slide rule (Figure 12.1). As you can imagine, this process wasn't exactly efficient and took a lot of human resources. The 2016 movie *Hidden Figures* shows the true story of a group of African American computers who created the calculations to land the first Astronaut on the Moon



Figure 12.1 Abacus and Slide Rule

The first mechanical ancestor of the computer we have today was created in 1801 by a Frenchman named Joseph Marie Jacquard, who created a loom that used punched wooden cards to weave fabric (Figure 12.2). The idea of “punch cards” would be the basis of many generations of computers until the 1960s. Of course, the punch cards went from being wood cards to cardboard or cardstock throughout its history. Some of the earliest statistical research in the field of communication was conducted using punchcards. As you can imagine, a lot of very important people worked from the early 1800s to the 1960s to advance the modern computer. Many wonderful books can introduce you to the full history of how we came to the modern personal computer.¹

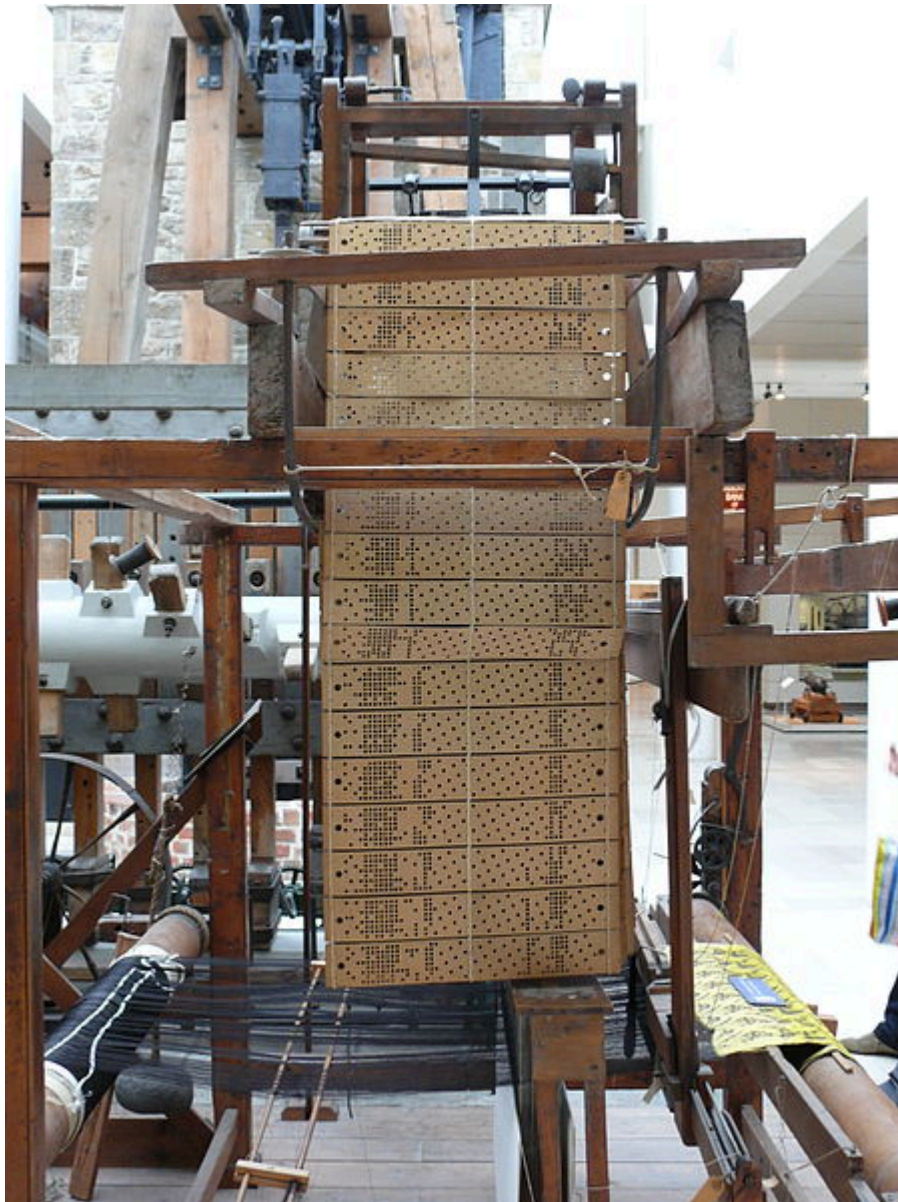


Figure 12.2 Jacquard Loom. [“NMS jacquard loom 2.JPG.” by Ad Meskens](#). This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.

The 1970s saw the start of the explosion of the personal computer. In 1981, IBM released the Acorn, which runs on Microsoft DOS, which is followed up by Apple’s Lisa in 1983, which had a graphic user interface. From that point until now, Microsoft and Apple (Macintosh) have cornered the market on personal computers.

Getting Computers to Interact

One thing that we have seen is that with each new computer development, we’ve seen new technologies emerge that have helped us communicate and interact. One significant development in 1969 changed the direction of humanity forever. Starting in 1965, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology were able to get two computers to “talk” to each other. Of course, it’s one thing to get two computers side-by-side to talk to each other, but could they get computers at a distance to talk to each other (in a manner similar to how people use telephones to communicate at a distance)?

Researchers at both the UCLA and Stanford, with grant funding from the U.S. Defense Department’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), set out to get computers at a distance to talk to each other. In 1969, UCLA student Charley Kline attempted the first computer-to-computer communication over a distance from his terminal in Los Angeles to a terminal at Stanford. The first message to be sent was to be a simple one, “login.” The

letter “l” was sent, then the letter “o,” and then the system crashed. So, the first message ever sent over what would become the Internet was “lo.” An hour later, Kline got the system up and running again, and the full word “login” was sent.

In the earliest years of the Internet, most people didn’t know it existed. The Internet was primarily a tool for the Department of Defense to allow researchers at multiple sites across the country to work on defense projects. It was called the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (**ARPANET**). In 1973, the University College of London (England) and the Royal Radar Establishment (Norway) connected to ARPANET, and the term “Internet” was born. A year later, in 1974, a commercialized version of ARPANET called Telenet became the first internet service provider (ISP).

Allowing People to Communicate

The early Internet was not exactly designed for your regular user, so it took quite a bit of skill and “know how” to use it and find things. Of course, while the Internet was developing, so was its capability for allowing people to communicate and interact with one another. In 1971, Ray Tomlinson was working on two programs that could be used over ARPANET: SNDMSG and READMAIL. From his lab at MIT, Tomlinson sent a message from one computer to another computer sitting right next to it, but he sent the message through ARPANET, creating the first electronic email. Tomlinson also forever changed our lives by introducing the “@” symbol as the tool the Internet uses when handling sending and receiving of messages.

In addition to email, another breakthrough in computer-mediated communication was the development of Internet forums or **message/bulletin boards**, which were online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages. Steve Walker created an early message system for ARPANET. The primary message list for professionals was MsgGroup. The number one unofficial message list was SF-Lovers, a science fiction list. As you can see, from the earliest days of the Internet, people were using the Internet as a tool to communicate and interact with people who had similar interests.

One early realization about email and message boards is that people relied solely on text to interpret a message with no form of nonverbal communication attached. On September 19, 1982, Scott Fahlman, a research professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon, came up with an idea. You see, at Carnegie Mellon in the early 1980s (like most research universities at the time), they had their own Bulletin Board System, which discussed everything from campus politics to science fiction. As Fahlman noted, “Given the nature of the community, a good many of the posts were humorous, or at least attempted humour,” explained Fahlman. “The problem was that if someone made a sarcastic remark, a few readers would fail to get the joke and each of them would post a lengthy diatribe in response.”² After giving some thought to the problem, he posted the following message seen in Figure 12.3.

Thus, the **emoticon** (emotion icon) was born. An emoticon was a series of characters and/or letters designed to help readers interpret a writer's intended feelings and/or tone. Over the years, many different emoticons were created some useful like the smiley and sad faces, lol (laughing out loud), ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing), :-O (surprise), :-* (kiss), 🙄 (sticking your tongue out), :-/ (quizzical), :-X (sealed lips), 0:-) (angel), *\0/* (cheerleader), and so many others. As we've discussed previously in this text, so much of how we understand each other is based on our nonverbal behaviours, so these emoticons were an attempt to bring a lost part of the human communicative experience to a text-based communicative experience.

Asynchronous Communication

For our part, these technologies are what we call **asynchronous**, or a mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are not concurrently engaged in communication. When Person A sends a message, Person B did not need to be on the computer at the same time to receive the message. There could be a delay of hours or even days before that message received and Person B responded. In this case, asynchronous messages were akin to letter writing. As the Internet grew and speed and infrastructure became more established, the development of synchronous CMC does develop, or a mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are concurrently engaged in communication. When Person A sends a message, Person B is receiving that message in real-time like they would in a face-to-face (FtF) interaction. In this case, synchronous messages are akin to talking to someone on the telephone.

Synchronous Communication

Let's switch gears for a bit and talk about the history of **synchronous** communication on the Internet. The first synchronous mode of communication was the chatroom. In 1988, Jarkko "WiZ" Oikarinen wrote the first Internet Relay Chat (IRC) client and server at the University of Oulu, Finland. IRC was initially started as a program to replace an existing BBS, but WiZ realized that he had something completely different. With IRC, individuals from around the world could login using an IRC Chat Client (software on their computer), which would allow them to access a server elsewhere in the world to interact with people in real-time. The invention of IRC led to the proliferation of chatrooms throughout the 1980s and 90s.

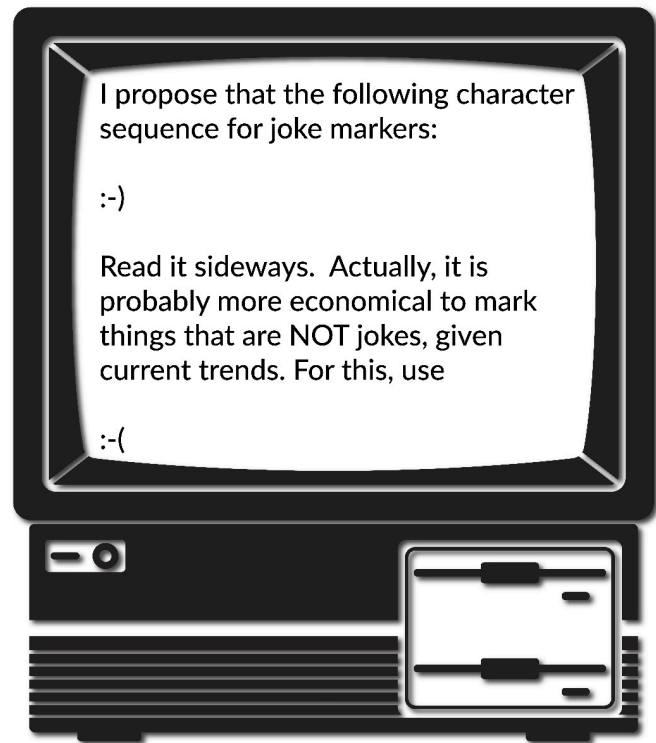


Figure 12.3 Emoticon Email

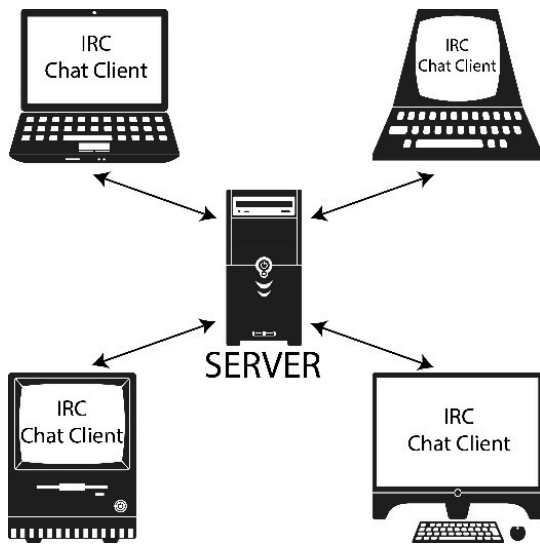


Figure 12.4 Internet Relay Chat

often used in a manner for people to communicate with one another in real-time.

In addition to IRC, another technology developed through Germany and France cooperation on Groupe Speciale Mobile (GSM) came out in February 1985 in Oslo, Norway. The goal of the GSM was to create protocols for second-generation global cellphone networks. One of the technologies that was created was called the **short messaging service (SMS)**. The concept was developed in 1985 by Friedhelm Hillebrand and Bernard Ghillebaert. SMS originated from radio telegraphy in radio memo pagers using standardized phone protocols and later defined as part of the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) series of standards in 1985. The “short” part of SMS refers to the maximum size of the messages that could be sent at the time: 160 characters (letters, numbers, or symbols in the Latin alphabet). If you haven’t figured it out yet, the system created by Hillebrand and Ghillebaert is the system most of you use every day to send text messages. Now, texting can be either asynchronous or synchronous, but we decided to talk about it here because it’s within the timeline we’re developing, and it is

The World Wide Web

Our last major invention that indeed was groundbreaking came about in 1990. Tim Berners-Lee, a scientist working for Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN), had an idea to help capture information from the people who worked at CERN. At CERN, the typical length of someone conducting research there was only two years, so that meant a lot of new people coming and going without a way to capture what was being done. As Lee noted, “The actual observed working structure of the organization is a multiply connected ‘Web’ whose interconnections evolve with time.”³ Unfortunately, people come and go, and those interconnections often get lost. Furthermore, “The technical details of past projects are sometimes lost forever, or only recovered after a detective investigation in an emergency. Often, the information has been recorded, it just cannot be found.”⁴ You see, Berners-Lee realized that so much information is learned on the job and then leaves with the people as they leave the job. Berners-Lee proposed a new system for keeping electronic information based on hypertext. After getting some initial positive feedback, Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau wrote a management report explaining hypertext, “HyperText is a way to link and access information of various kinds as a Web of nodes in which the user can browse at will. It provides a single user interface to large classes of information (reports, notes, data-bases, computer documentation and on line help). We propose a simple scheme incorporating servers already available at CERN... A program which provides access to the hypertext world we call a browser...”⁵ The title of this report was “WorldWideWeb: Proposal for a HyperText Project.”

CERN was not really concerned with the Internet as its primary scope and emphasis, so they agreed to release the source code for World Wide Web (WWW) to the world in April 1993. By 1994, Berners-Lee left CERN and took a job at MIT where he created the International World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to develop common standards for communication on the WWW. W3C still exists today, and the WWW celebrated its 30th birthday on March 10, 2019. The 5th variation of the hypertext markup language (HTML) created by the W3C is currently in circulation. You’re probably using HTML5 daily and don’t even realize it. As the W3C note, “HTML5 contains powerful capabilities for Web-based applications with more powerful interaction, video support, graphics, more styling effects, and a full set of APIs. HTML5 adapts to any device, whether desktop, mobile, tablet, or television.”⁶

Key Takeaways

- Starting with the invention of the Internet in 1969, computer-mediated communication has changed over the years as technology has advanced.

- Many important figures have helped create computer-mediated communication as we know it today. Some of the key players include Ray Tomlinson (inventor of email), Scott Fahlman (creator of emoticons/emojis), Jarkko “WiZ” Oikarinen (inventor of IRC), Friedhelm Hillebrand and Bernard Gillebaert (creators of text messaging), and Tim Berners-Lee (inventor of the World Wide Web). These are just a handful of the many women and men who had a part in the development of computer-mediated communication.

Exercises

- When you look back at your own life, which computer-mediated technologies do you remember interacting with? Go back as far as you can and think about your first experiences through what you use today.
- Check out the World Wide Web Consortium’s (W3C) website (<https://www.w3.org/>) and see what projects they’re working on today. Why is the W3C still relevant today?

The CMC Process

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between synchronous and asynchronous communication.
2. Explain the role of nonverbal cues in computer-mediated communication.
3. Describe the various rules and norms associated with computer-mediated communication and its importance to netiquette.
4. Examine the human communication factors related to computer-mediated communication.
5. Discuss the process and importance of forming impressions online.

As interpersonal communication scholars, our interest in CMC is less about the technologies that people are using and more about how people are using technology to interact with one another. So instead of focusing on how one goes about coding new software, interpersonal communication scholars focus on how new technologies and software help facilitate interpersonal communication. For example, Pat and Sam are playing the latest Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (e.g., Word of Warcraft, Fortnite, etc.). As you can see in Figure 12.5, each player is playing the same video game together but from different locations. Through a technology called VoIP, Sam and Pat can play video games at the same time while talking to each other through the use of headsets.

Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication

In this section, we’re going to delve more into the areas of synchronous and asynchronous communication. In Figure 12.5, Sam and Pat are in some kind of underworld, fiery landscape. Pat is playing a witch character, and Sam is playing a vampire character. The two can coordinate their movements to accomplish in-game tasks because they can freely talk to one another while playing the game in real-time. As previously discussed, this type of CMC is synchronous communication, or communication that happens in real-time. Conversely, asynchronous communication is communication is the exchange of messages with a time lag. In other words, people can communicate on their own schedules as time permits instead of in real-time.

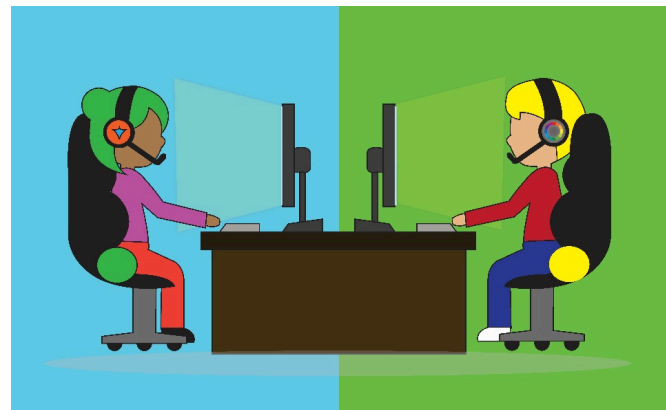


Figure 12.5 Video Game Play

For example, Figure 12.6 shows a conversation between two college students. In this case, two college students are using SMS, commonly called texting) to interact with each other. The conversation starts at 2:25 PM. The first person initiates the conversation, but doesn't get a response until 3:05 PM. The third turn in the interaction then doesn't happen until 5:40 PM. In this exchange, the two people interacting can send responses at their convenience, which is one of the main reasons people often rely on asynchronous communication. Other common forms of asynchronous communication include emails, instant messaging, online discussions, etc....



Figure 12.6 Asynchronous Communication via SMS (Text Messaging)

Now, is it possible for people to use the same SMS technology to interact synchronously? Of course. One of our coauthors remembers two students on a trip sitting next to each other texting back-and-forth because they didn't want their conversation to be overheard by others in the van. Their interaction was clearly mediated, and in real-time, so it would be considered synchronous communication.

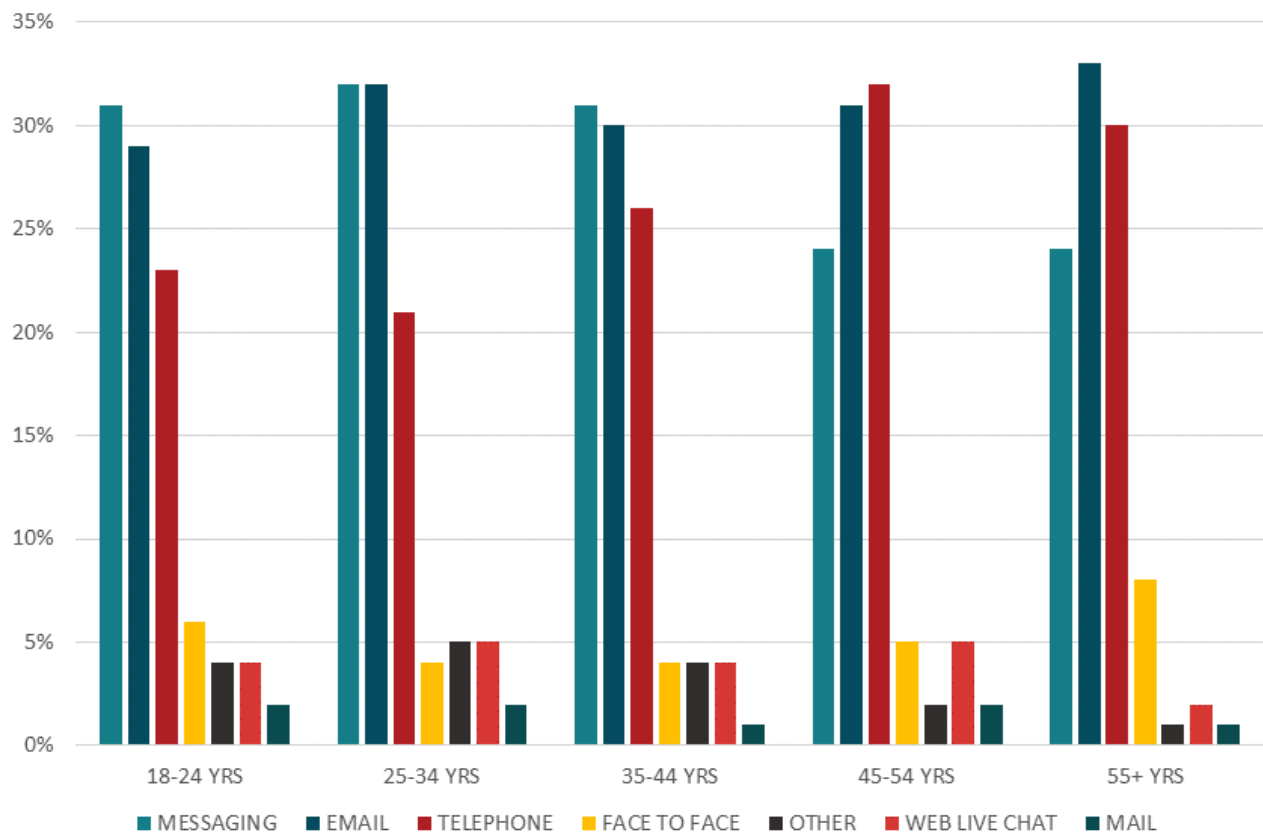
Honestly, how many texts or instant messages do you send in a day? How many emails? Do you prefer communicating by text, instant message app (e.g., SnapChat), or generally online instead of face-to-face in person with businesses? If you're an average millennial sending out and receiving more than the 2013 average of 128 texts per day (Burke, 2016), that's a lot of reading and responding quickly in writing—so much more than people your age were doing 20 years ago. Even if just for social reasons, you are probably writing more than most people in your demographic have at any point in human history. This is mostly an advantage because it gives you a baseline

comfort with the writing process, even if the quality of that writing probably isn't quite where it should be if you were doing it for professional reasons.

Bohns, V. K. (2017, April 11). *A face-to-face request is 34 times more successful than an email*. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2017/04/a-face-to-face-request-is-34-times-more-successful-than-an-email>

Where being overly comfortable with texting becomes a disadvantage, however, is when it is used as a way of avoiding the in-person, face-to-face communication that is vital to the routine functioning of any organization. As uncomfortable as it may sometimes be, developing conversational skills throughout that decade is hugely important by the time you enter a workforce mostly populated by older generations that grew up without smartphones. They developed those advanced conversational skills the hard way by making mistakes and learning from them, and expect well-developed conversational skills of younger generations entering the workforce. Though plenty of business is done online these days, there really is no good substitute for face-to-face interaction.

According to Twilio's 2016 consumer report on messaging, however, the most preferred channel for customer service among 18-24 year-olds (said 31% of respondents) is by text or instant messaging, followed closely by email (p. 8). Face-to-face interaction, however, is preferred by only 6% of respondents. Twilio. (2016). *Understand how consumers use messaging: Global mobile messaging consumer report 2016*. Retrieved from https://assets.contentful.com/2fcg2lkzxxw1t/514ljDXMvSKkqiU64akoOW/cab0836a76d892bb4a654a4dbd16d4e6/Twilio_-_Messaging_Consumer_Survey_Report_FINAL.pdf



	Messaging	Email	Telephone	Face to Face	Other	Web Live Chat	Mail
18-24 years	31%	29%	23%	6%	4%	4%	2%
25-34 years	32%	32%	21%	4%	5%	5%	2%
35-44 years	31%	30%	26%	4%	4%	4%	1%
45 – 54 years	24%	31%	32%	5%	2%	5%	2%
55+ years	24%	33%	30%	8%	1%	2%	1%

Figure 1.2: Preferred customer service channel by age group (Twilio, 2016)

Customer service aside, face-to-face interactions are still vitally important to the functioning of any organization. In a study on the effectiveness of in-person requests for donations versus requests by email, for instance, the in-person approach was found to be 34 times more successful (Bohns, 2017). We instinctively value human over machine interaction in many (but not all) situations we find ourselves. Though some jobs like personal support worker or therapist simply cannot function without in-person interaction and would be the last to be automated (if ever), most others will involve a mix of written and face-to-face communication.

Nonverbal Cues

One factor related to CMC is the issue of nonverbal communication. Historically, most of the mediums people used to interact with one another were asynchronous and text-based. As such, it was impossible to ascertain the meaning behind a string of words fully. Mary J. Culnan and M. Lynne Markus believed that the functions nonverbal behaviours meet in interpersonal interactions simply go unmet in CMC.⁷ As such, interpersonal communication must always be inherently impersonal when it's conducted using computer-mediated technologies. This perspective has three underlying assumptions:

1. Communication mediated by technology filters out communicative cues found in FtF interaction,
2. Different media filter out or transmit different cues, and
3. Substituting technology-mediated for FtF communication will result in predictable changes in intrapersonal and interpersonal variables.⁸

Let's breakdown these assumptions. First, CMC interactions "filter out" communicative cues found in FtF interactions. For example, if you're on the telephone with someone, you can't see their eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, etc.... If you're reading an email, you have no nonverbal information to help you interpret the message because there is none. That's what is meant by nonverbal cues that have been filtered out. For now, we're going to stop our discussion about nonverbal communication because we will revisit this information later in this chapter when we look at a range of theories related to CMC.

Unfortunately, even if we don't have the nonverbals to help us interpret a message, we interpret the message using our perceptions of how the sender intended us to understand this message, which is often wrong. How many times have you seen an incorrectly read text or email start a conflict? Of course, one of the first attempts to recover some sense of nonverbal meaning was the emoticon that we discussed earlier in this chapter.

CMC Rules and Norms

As with any type of communication, some rules and norms govern how people communicate with one another. For example, Twitter has an extensive Terms of Service policy that covers a wide range of communication rules. For our purposes here, let's examine their rules related to hate speech:

Hateful conduct: You may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. We also do not allow accounts whose primary purpose is inciting harm towards others on the basis of these categories.

Hateful imagery and display names: You may not use hateful images or symbols in your profile image or profile header. You also may not use your username, display name, or profile bio to engage in abusive behaviour, such as targeted harassment or expressing hate towards a person, group, or protected category.⁹

This statement is an obvious example of a rule that exists on the Twitter platform. Of course, some have argued that this rule is pretty flexible at times, given the type of hateful political speech that is often Tweeted by different political figures.

In addition to clearly spelled out rules that govern how people communicate via different technologies, there are also norms for how people communicate. A norm, in this context, is an accepted standard for how one communicates and interacts with others in the CMC environment. For example, one norm that can really frustrate people in text-based CMC environments is yelling, or TYPING IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. There's actually not a consensus on when the avoidance of all capital letters as a tool for yelling first happened. We do know that newspapers in the 1880s often used all capital letters to emphasize headlines (basically have them jump off the

page). At some point in the early 1980s, using all caps as a form of yelling became quite the norm, which was noted in a message post from Dave Decot in 1984 (Figure 12. 7).¹⁰



Figure 12.7 The Creation of YELLING

In this example, you see three different attempts to create a system for emphasizing words. The first is the use of all capital letters for making words seem “louder,” which eventually became known as yelling.

Netiquette

Over the years, numerous norms have been created to help individuals communicate in the CMC context. They’re so common that we have a term for them, netiquette. **Netiquette** is the set of professional and social rules and norms that are considered acceptable and polite when interacting with another person(s) through mediated technologies. Let’s breakdown this definition.

Research Spotlight



In a 2019 study conducted by Jale Ataşalar and Aikaterini Michou, the researchers set out to examine whether mindfulness related to problematic Internet use (i.e., Internet addiction). This study was conducted in Ankara, Turkey, and examined 165 Turkish early adolescents (mean age was 13).

To examine mindfulness, the researchers revised the [Mindful Attention Awareness Scale](#) created by Kirk Brown and Richard Ryan.¹¹ The revised measure sought to examine the degree to which individuals engaged in mindful behaviours while online.

Overall, the researchers found that people that were mindful online were less likely to report engaging in problematic Internet use.

Ataşalar, J., & Michou, A. (2019). Coping and mindfulness: Mediators between need satisfaction and generalized problematic Internet use. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 31(2), 110–115. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000230>

Contexts

First, we wanted to ensure that our definition emphasizes that different contexts can create different netiquette needs. Specifically, how one communicates professionally and how one communicates socially are often quite

different. For example, you may find it entirely appropriate to say, “What’s up?!” at the beginning of an email to a friend, but you would not find it appropriate to start an email to your boss in this same fashion. Furthermore, it may be entirely appropriate to downplay or not worry about spelling errors or grammatical problems in a text you send to a friend, but it is completely inappropriate to have those same errors and problems in a text sent to a professional-client or coworker. One of the biggest challenges many employers have with young employees fresh out of college is that they don’t know how to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate communicative behaviour in differing contexts.

This lack of professionalism is also a problem commonly discussed by college and university faculty and staff. Think about the last email you sent to one of your professors? Was this email professional? Did you remember to sign your name? You’d be amazed at the lack of professionalism many college and university faculty and staff see in the emails sent by your peers. We mention this because the context is different from your day-to-day use of email. Here are some general guidelines for sending professional emails:

- Include a concise, direct subject line.
- Do not mark something as “urgent” unless it really is.
- Have a Proper Greeting (Dear Mr. X, Professor Y., etc.)
- Double-check your Grammar.
- Correct any spelling mistakes.
- Include only essential information.
- Your message should be concise.
- Make your intention known clearly and directly.
- Make sure your message follows a logical organization.
- Be polite and ensure your tone is appropriate.
- Avoid all CAPS or all lowercase letters.
- Avoid “textspeak” (e.g., plz, lol, etc.)
- If you want the recipient to do something, make the desired action very clear.
- Have a clear closing (using “please” and “thank you”).
- Do not send an email if you’re angry or upset.
- Edit and proofread before hitting “send.”
- Use “Reply All” selectively (very selectively).

Rules & Norms

Second, in our definition, netiquette is a combination of both rules and norms. Part of being a competent communicator in a CMC environment is knowing what the rules are. For example, if you know that the rules ban hate speech on Twitter, then engaging in hate speech using the Twitter platform shows a disregard for the rules and would not be considered appropriate behaviour. In essence, hate speech is anti-netiquette. We also do not want to ignore the fact that norms often develop in different CMC contexts. For example, maybe you’re taking an online course and you’re required to engage in weekly discussions. One common norm in an online class is to check the previously replies to a post before posting your reply. If you don’t, then it’s like jumping into a conversation that’s already occurred and throwing your two-cents in without knowing what’s happening.

Acceptable & Polite CMC Behaviour

Third, we believe that netiquette attempts to govern what is both acceptable and polite. Yelling via a text message may be acceptable to some of your friends, but is it polite given that typing in all caps is generally seen as yelling? Being polite is merely showing others respect and demonstrating socially appropriate behaviours.

Mindfulness Activity

If you've spent any time online recently, you may have noticed that it can definitely feel like a cesspool. There are so many trolls that are making the Internet a place where genuine interactions are hard to come by. Mitch Abblett came up with five specific guidelines for interacting with others online:

1. Be kind and compassionately courteous with all posts and comments.
2. No hate speech, bullying, derogatory or biased comments regarding self, others in the community, or others in general.
3. No Promotions or Spam.
4. Do not give out mental health advice.
5. Respect everyone's privacy and be thoughtful in the nature and depth of one's sharing.¹²



Think about your interactions with others in the online world. Have you ever communicated with others without considering attention, intention, and attitude?

Online Interaction

Fourth, our definition involves interacting with others. Now, this interaction can be one-on-one, or this interaction can be one-to-many. The first category, one-on-one, is more in the wheelhouse for interpersonal communication. Examples could include sending a text to one person, sending an email to one person, talking to one person via Skype, etc.... One-to-many is also a possibility and will require its own sets of rules and norms. Some common examples of one-to-many CMC could include engaging in a group chat via texting, "replying all" to an email received, being interviewed by a committee via Skype, etc.... Notice that our examples for one-to-many involve the same technologies used for one-on-one communication. With one-to-many, we're dealing with a larger number of people involved in the communicative interactions.

Range of Mediated Technologies

Lastly, netiquette can vary based on the different types of mediated technologies. For example, it may be considered entirely appropriate for you to scream, yell, and curse when your playing with your best friend on Fortnite, but it wouldn't be appropriate using the same communicative behaviours when engaging in a video conference over Skype. Both technologies use VoIP to some extent, but the platforms and the contexts are very different, so they call for different types of communicative behaviours. Some differences will exist in netiquette based on whether you're in an entirely text-based medium (e.g., email, texting, etc.) or one where people can see you (e.g., Skype, WebEx, etc.).

Ultimately, engaging in netiquette requires you to learn what is considered acceptable and polite behaviour across a range of different technologies.

Communication Factors

Communication traits are an essential part of understanding how computer-mediated communication impacts interpersonal relationships. In this section, we're going to examine two specific communication factors that have been researched in a variety of CMC contexts: communication apprehension and self-disclosure.

Communication Apprehension

Most of the research examining CA and CMC started at the beginning of the 21st Century. Until 1996 when America Online (AOL) provided unlimited access to the Internet for a low monthly fee, most people did not have access to the Internet because of the cost. As such, most scholars weren't overly interested in communication traits related to CMC until the public became more actively involved interacting through the technology. One early study conducted by Scott W. Campbell and Michael R. Neer sought to see if an individual's level of communication apprehension (CA) could predict how they felt about CMC.¹³ In the study, the authors predicted that an individual's level of CA could predict whether individuals believed that CMC was an effective medium for

interpersonal communication; however, the researchers did not find a significant relationship. Furthermore, the researchers found that there wasn't a significant relationship between CA and people's satisfaction with their CMC experiences. Here's how the researchers attempted to make sense of these findings:

One plausible interpretation is that high apprehensives simply do not view CMC positively or negatively. Yet, they recognize that it reduces the threat posed to them in FtF settings. An equally plausible explanation is that high apprehensives do not regard CMC as an interpersonal obstacle to overcome because it is not FtF, but a substitute that fails to challenge or override their apprehension level. ¹⁴

Jason S. Wrench and Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter furthered the inquiry into CA and CMC by exploring how people reacted to different types of CMC. Specifically, Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter were interested in examining email CA, online chatting CA, and instant messaging CA. You can see the measures that Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter created for this study in Table 12.1. It's important to emphasize that the technologies listed here were the primary ones people utilized when this study was conducted in the mid-2000s.

Instructions: This set of questions asks you about how you feel while communicating using email. If you have never used email, please leave this section blank. Work quickly and indicate your first impression. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- _____1. When communicating using email, I feel tense.
- _____2. When communicating using email, I feel calm.
- _____3. When communicating using email, I feel jittery.
- _____4. When communicating using email, I feel nervous.
- _____5. When communicating using email, I feel relaxed.

Instructions: This set of questions asks you about how you feel while communicating in online chat rooms, IRCs, or MUDDS. If you have never used chat rooms, IRCs, or MUDDS, please leave this section blank. Work quickly and indicate your first impression. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- _____6. When communicating in a chat room, IRC, or MUDD, I feel tense.
- _____7. When communicating in a chat room, IRC, or MUDD, I feel calm.
- _____8. When communicating in a chat room, IRC, or MUDD, I feel jittery.
- _____9. When communicating in a chat room, IRC, or MUDD, I feel nervous.
- _____10. When communicating in a chat room, IRC, or MUDD, I feel relaxed.

Instructions: This set of questions asks you about how you feel while communicating using Internet Messaging Programs like AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, or MSN Messenger. If you have never used Internet Messaging Programs, please leave this section blank. Work quickly and indicate your first impression. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- _____11. When communicating using an Internet messaging program, I feel tense.
- _____12. When communicating using an Internet messaging program, I feel calm.
- _____13. When communicating using an Internet messaging program, I feel jittery.
- _____14. When communicating using an Internet messaging program, I feel nervous.

_____15. When communicating using an Internet messaging program, I feel relaxed.

Scoring: To compute your scores follow the instructions below:

Email Apprehension

A: Add scores for items 1, 3, and 4 _____

B: Add scores for items 2 and 5 _____

C: Take the total from A and add 12 to the score. Place the new number on the line. _____

Final Score: Now subtract B from C. Place your final score on the line. _____

Chatting Apprehension

A: Add scores for items 6, 8, 9, and 10 _____

B: Add scores for items 7 and 10 _____

C: Take the total from A and add 12 to the score. Place the new number on the line. _____

Final Score: Now subtract B from C. Place your final score on the line. _____

Instant Messaging Apprehension

A: Add scores for items 11, 13, and 14. _____

B: Add scores for items 12 and 15. _____

C: Take the total from A and add 12 to the score. Place the new number on the line. _____

Final Score: Now subtract B from C. Place your final score on the line. _____

Interpreting Your Score:

Scores on all three measures should be between 5 and 25. For email apprehension, scores under 9.5 are considered low and scores over 9.5 are considered high. For chatting apprehension, scores under 11.5 are considered low and scores over 11.5 are considered high. For instant messaging apprehension, scores under 9 are considered low and scores over 9 are considered high.

Source:

Wrench, J. S., & Punyanunt-Carter, N. M. (2007). The relationship between computer-mediated-communication competence, apprehension, self-efficacy, perceived confidence, and social presence. *Southern Journal of Communication*, 72, 355-378.

Table 12.1 Computer-Mediated Communication Apprehension (CMCA). Reprinted with permission of the authors here.

In addition to CMCA, the authors were also interested in an individual's skill levels with CMC. CMC skill was listed as three distinct concepts: computer efficacy (individuals' confidence in using a computer), Internet efficacy (individuals' confidence in using the Internet), and CMC competence. Brian H. Spitzberg believed that CMC competence consisted of three important factors: 1) people must be motivated to interact with others competently, 2) people must possess specialized knowledge and technical know-how, and 3) people must learn the rules and norms for communicating in the CMC context.¹⁵ In the Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter study, the researchers found that CMCA was negatively related to computer efficacy, Internet efficacy, and CMC competence.

In a subsequent study by Daniel Hunt, David Atkin, and Archana Krishnan, the researchers set out to examine CMCA and Facebook interactions.¹⁶ Hunt, Atkin, and Krishnan used a revised version of the Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter CMCA scales to measure Facebook CA. Hunt, Atkin, and Krishnan found that CMCA decreased one's motivation to use Facebook as a tool for interpersonal communication. These findings were similar to those found by Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, J. J. De La Cruz, and Jason S. Wrench, who examined CMCA on the social media app Snapchat.¹⁷ In this study, the researchers examined CMCA with regards to satisfying a combination of both functional and entertainment needs. Functional needs were defined as needs that allow an individual to accomplish something (e.g., feel less lonely, problem-solving, meet new people, decision making, etc.). Entertainment needs were defined as needs that allow an individual to keep her/him/themselves occupied (e.g., because it's fun, because it's convenient, communicate easily, etc.). In this study, Punyanunt-Carter, De La

Cruz, and Wrench found that individuals with high levels of Snapchat CA were more likely to use Snapchat for functional purposes and less likely to use Snapchat for entertainment purposes.

In a second study conducted by Punyanunt-Carter, De La Cruz, and Wrench, the researchers set out to examine social media CA in relation to introversion, social media use, and social media addiction.¹⁸ In this study, the researchers found that social media CA was positively related to introversion, which is in line with previous research examining CA and introversion. Furthermore, introversion was negatively related to social media use, but social media CA was not related to social media use. Lastly, both social media CA and introversion were negatively related to social media addiction. Overall, this shows that individuals with social media CA are just not as likely to use social media, so they're less likely to become addicted.

So, what does all of this tell us? From our analysis of CA and CMC, we've come to the understanding that CMC is a tool for communication. Although people with high levels of CA tend to function better in a CMC environment than in a FtF one, they're still less likely to engage in CMC when compared to those people with low levels of CMCA. People with low levels of CMCA just see CMC as another platform for communication.

Online Impression Formation

In the 21st Century, so much of what we do involves interacting with people online. How we present ourselves to others through our online persona is very important (**impression formation**). How we communicate via social media and how professional our online persona is can be a real determining factor in getting a job.

It's important to understand that in today's world, anything you put online can be found by someone else. According to the 2018 CareerBuilder.com social recruiting survey, in a survey of more than 1,000 hiring managers, 70% admit to screening potential employees using social media, and 66% use search engines to look up potential employees.¹⁹ In fact, having an online persona can actually be very beneficial. Forty-seven percent of hiring managers admit to not calling a potential employee when the employee does not have an online presence. You may be wondering what potential employers are looking for when they checkout people online. The main things employers look for is information to support someone's qualifications (58%); whether or not an individual has a professional online persona (50%); to see what others say about the potential candidate (34%); and information that could lead a hiring manager to decide not to hire someone (22%).²⁰ According to CareerBuilder.com, here are the common reasons someone doesn't get a job because of her/his/their online presence:

- Job candidate posted provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos or information: 40 percent
- Job candidate posted information about them drinking or using drugs: 36 percent
- Job candidate had discriminatory comments related to race, gender, religion, etc.: 31 percent
- Job candidate was linked to criminal behaviour: 30 percent
- Job candidate lied about qualifications: 27 percent
- Job candidate had poor communication skills: 27 percent
- Job candidate bad-mouthed their previous company or fellow employee: 25 percent
- Job candidate's screen name was unprofessional: 22 percent
- Job candidate shared confidential information from previous employers: 20 percent
- Job candidate lied about an absence: 16 percent
- Job candidate posted too frequently: 12 percent²¹

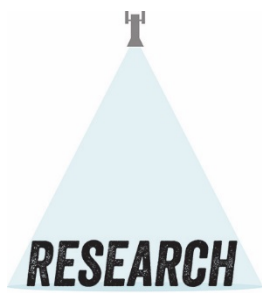
As you can see, what you put online says a lot about you as a person to many organizations, so they are checking the Internet to see what exists about you as a person. The flip of this is that what you have online can also help get you hired. In that same study from CareerBuilder.com, they found that 57% of hiring managers have found information about a candidate online that has solidified their decision to hire that person. Here is a list of what hiring managers found that made them want to hire someone:

- Job candidate's background information supported their professional qualifications for the job: 37 percent
- Job candidate was creative: 34 percent

- Job candidate's site conveyed a professional image: 33 percent
- Job candidate was well-rounded, showed a wide range of interests: 31 percent
- Got a good feel for the job candidate's personality, could see a good fit within the company culture: 31 percent
- Job candidate had great communications skills: 28 percent
- Job candidate received awards and accolades: 26 percent
- Other people posted great references about the job candidate: 23 percent
- Job candidate had interacted with company's social media accounts: 22 percent
- Job candidate posted compelling video or other content: 21 percent
- Job candidate had a large number of followers or subscribers: 18 percent ²²

As you can see, having an online presence is important in the 21st Century. Some people make the mistake of having no social media presence, which can backfire on you. In today's social media society, having no online presence can look very strange to hiring managers. You should consider your social media presence as an extension of your resume. At the very least, you should have a LinkedIn profile because it is the social networking site most commonly used by corporate recruiters. ²³

Research Spotlight



Mikaela Pitcan, Alice E. Marwick, and Danah Boyd set out to explore how young people of low-socioeconomic status handled issues of privacy and presentation in social media. The researchers interviewed 28 young adults who considered themselves to be upwardly mobile. The researchers found two general themes through their interviews: respectability tactics and judgments of female sexuality.

First, the researchers found that the participants “self-censored in a manner they described as presenting a ‘neutral’ or ‘vanilla’ face, catering to the respectability norms of the most powerful potential viewers—often potential employers or high-status community members—rather than peers.”²⁴ The participants realized that having a social media presence was important, but they also knew that others could judge their social media use, so they were cognitively aware of what they posted. Furthermore, the participants were cognizant that their social media use today could be read by others in the future, so they had to consider a long-term perspective when it came to appropriateness online.

Second, there was a pattern of judging females' use of social media in sexually explicit ways. When it came to respectably presenting one's self online, women were judged more harshly for their inclusion of sexually themed posts.

Pitcan, M., Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, d. (2018). Performing a vanilla self: Respectability politics, social class, and the digital world. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 23(3), 163-179. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmy008>

Co-Present Interactions & Mediated Communication

Before going too much further into the world of CMC, we need to explain that not everything is great and perfect with the world of CMC interactions. For this discussion, we need to focus on the idea of **co-present interactions**, or when people are physically occupying the same space while interacting with one another. Historically, most of interpersonal communication involved co-present interactions. With the advent of a range of communication technologies, people don't necessarily have to be co-present to interact. On the flip side, there are many people who are co-present who use their mediated devices as a way of avoiding FtF interactions with those around them. One of our professor friends recently remarked, “when I started my career, I always had to tell students to quiet down at the beginning of class. Now, they're already quiet because they're all looking at their cellphones ignoring those around them.”

Now we often have to encourage collocated social interactions, or how do we get people sitting next to each other to talk to one another. Thomas Olsson, Pradthana Jarusriboonchai, Paweł Woźniak, Susanna Paasovaara, Kaisa Väänänen, and Andrés Lucero argue that there are two basic problems facing people today, “(1) the use of

current technology disrupting ongoing social situations, and (2) lack of social interaction in collocated situations where it would be desirable.”²⁵ When people don’t interact with one another, they tend to become more socially isolated and lonely, which can lead to a true feeling of disengagement with those around them.

How many times have you seen people eating out together yet spending their whole time on their smartphones checking email or texting? Many people believe that this type of multitasking actually enhances productivity, but research tends to disagree with this notion. One study actually demonstrated that when people are confronted with constant distractions like phones ringing or email alerts chiming on a smartphone, people lose an average of 10 IQ points due to these distractions.²⁶ This drop in IQ is equivalent to missing an entire night of sleep. Furthermore, those generations that have grown up with technology are more likely to engage in multitasking behaviour.²⁷ In a 2014 study conducted by Jonathan Bowman and Roger Pace, the researchers tested the impact that cell phone usage vs. FtF conversations had while performing a complex cognitive task.²⁸ Not surprisingly, individuals who interacted via cell phones were less adept at performing the task than those engaged in FtF interactions. Furthermore, individuals involved in the FtF interactions were more satisfied with their interactions than their peers using a cell phone. As the authors of the article note, “People think they are effectively communicating their message while dual-tasking even though they are not.”²⁹

So how can technology benefit social interactions? In the Olsson et al. study, the researchers examined several different studies that were designed to help foster collocated social interactions.³⁰ Table 12.2 illustrates the basic findings from their study.

Role of technology	Social design objectives	Design approaches
Enable (previous work beyond which the reviewed literature explores)		
Facilitate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating ongoing social situations • Enriching means of social interaction • Supporting sense of community • Breaking ice in new encounters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared digital workspace • Open space for shared activity • Topic suggestions • Disclosing information about others
Invite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing awareness • Revealing common ground • Avoiding cocooning in social silos • Engaging people in collective activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open space for shared activity • Matchmaking • Self-expression • Topic suggestions • Open space for shared activity
Encourage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging, incentivizing or triggering people to interact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing constraints
Olsson, T., Jarusriboonchai, P., Woźniak, P. <i>et al.</i> Technologies for Enhancing Collocated Social Interaction: Review of Design Solutions and Approaches. <i>Comput Supported Coop Work</i> 29, 29–83 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-019-09345-0 . CC-BY		

Table 12.2 Mapping the social design objectives and design approaches interpreted from the papers to abstract enhancement categories (Roles of Technology)

In Table 12.2 you are introduced to four different ways that technology can help facilitate collocated social interaction. You are also presented with the design objectives for each of these different ways to encourage collocated social interaction along with specific design approaches that creators can use to help foster collocated social interaction. Let’s look at each of these in turn.

Enabling

First, “**enabling** interaction refers to the role of a technological artifact making it possible or allowing for social interaction to take place.”³¹ The goal of enabling is really to set up situations where collocated social interaction is possible. As such, there’s less information about specific design objectives and approaches. Furthermore, most of the research in the area of helping people interact has historically focused on enabling.

Facilitating

Second, “**facilitating** interaction refers to making it easier to converse, collaborate or otherwise socially interact, or to support desirable feelings, equality or suitable interaction dynamics while doing so.”³² The goal of facilitating

collocated social interactions is to help ease tension and encourage people to interact while minimizing possible negative experiences people may face. For example, one of the ways to achieve facilitating is to have an open space for a shared activity. For example, an online college or university may have coffee shop nights or alumni events in various cities. They don't necessarily have specific events or agendas, but the goal is to provide a space where people can meet and interact.

Inviting

Third, “**inviting** interaction is about the role of informing people of the available proximal social possibilities, which can motivate to spontaneously engage in new encounters.”³³ In this case, the focus is on providing people the ability to invite social interaction or respond to invitations to engage in social interaction. One of the best examples of this type of use of technology to help facilitate collocated social interaction is <https://www.meetup.com/>. Meetup.com provides a range of different activities and groups people can join that then meet up in the real-world. For example, in the next 24 hours, there is a Swing Dance Cruise, Writer's Group, and Meditation Workshop I could go to just in my local area.

Encouraging

Lastly, “**encouraging** interaction is about incentivizing or persuading people to start interacting or maintaining ongoing interaction.”³⁴ In the case of encouraging, it's not just about providing opportunities, but also using technology to help nudge people into collocated social interaction. For example, an application could encourage students in an online class who live near each other to get together to study or work on a course project together. You may notice that the common design approach here is introducing constraints. This means that people are required to meet up and engage in collocated social interaction to accomplish a task because neither can do it on their own. Video games have been using a version of this for years. In many social video games, a single player will not have all of the abilities, skills, weapons, etc. to accomplish a specific goal on their own. As such, they must work with other players to accomplish a task. The only difference here is that the tasks are being completed in a FtF context instead of a mediated.

Key Takeaways

- Synchronous communication, or communication that happens in real-time; whereas, asynchronous communication is communication is the exchange of messages with a time lag.
- Nonverbal behaviours are not inherent in many forms of computer-mediated communication. With text-based messages (email, texts, IRC, etc.), there are no nonverbal cues to attend to at all. In other mediated forms (e.g., Skype, Facetime, etc.), we can see the other person, but it's still not the same as an interaction in a FtF context.
- Netiquette is the set of professional and social rules and norms that are considered acceptable and polite when interacting with another person(s) through mediated technologies.
- A number of human communication variables have been examined within the CMC context: communication apprehension, communication competence, etc.

Exercises

- Think about the asynchronous and synchronous computer-mediated communication technologies you use regularly. Are nonverbal behaviours filtered in or out? How does this impact your ability to understand the other person?
- Have you ever violated netiquette while interacting with other people? What happened? How did other people react?
- Take a few minutes to Google yourself and see what information is easily available about you on the Internet.

You may need to try a couple of variations of your name and even add your hometown if your name is very common. If you find information about yourself, how could a potential employer react to that information? Do you need to clean up your Internet profile? Why?

Taking the Self Online

Learning Objectives

1. Explain Erik Erikson's conceptualization of identity.
2. Describe how Erving Goffman can help us explain online identities.
3. Discuss the three types of identities expressed online from Andrew F. Wood and Matthew J. Smith.

At the beginning of this chapter, we had you describe yourself by answering the question, “Who am I?” 20 different times. Look back at that list. Now, think about yourself in the CMC context. Are you the same person in a FtF interaction as you are in a CMC interaction? Maybe, but maybe not. For example, maybe you're a very shy person in FtF interactions, and you have problems talking with complete strangers online. However, maybe you're a very quiet person in FtF interactions, but when you're playing World of Warcraft, you suddenly become very loud and boisterous. One of the beautiful things about CMC for many people is that they can be almost anyone or anything they want to be online. In this section, we're going to examine some specific factors related to one's online self: identity, personality traits, communication traits, privacy, anonymity, and trust. Many social psychologists over the years have attempted to define and conceptualize what is meant by the term “identity.”

Erik Erikson

One of the more prominent contributors to this endeavor was Erik Erikson.³⁵ Erikson believed that an individual's identity was developed through a series of stages of psychosocial development that occur from infancy to adulthood. At each of the different stages, an individual faces various crises that will influence her/his/their identity positively or negatively. Each crisis pits the psychological needs of the individual versus the larger needs of society, which is why these crises are psychosocial in nature. You can see these stages, the crises that occur, the basic virtues associated with the crises, and the central question that is asked at each stage in Figure 12.8.









Psychosocial Crisis	Trust vs. Mistrust	Autonomy vs. Shame	Initiative vs. Guilt	Industry vs. Inferiority	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Ego Integrity vs. Despair
Basic Virtue	Hope	Will	Purpose	Competency	Fidelity	Love	Care	Wisdom
								
Age	0 to 1½	1½ to 3	3 to 5	5 to 12	12 to 18	18 to 40	40 to 65	65+
Key Question	Am I Safe?	Can I do it on my own, or do I need help?	Am I good or bad?	How can I be good?	Who am I, and where am I going?	Am I loved and wanted?	Will I provide something of real value?	Have I lived a full life?

Figure 12.8 Erikson's Identity Development

Our question then, is how does technology impact an individual's identity development? To answer this question, we need to understand Erikson's concept of "pseudospeciation," or the tendency of humans to try to differentiate ourselves from other humans.³⁶ Basically, we create in-groups (groups we belong to) and out-groups (groups we do not belong to). As Erikson explained, humans have a need "to feel that they are of some special kind (tribe or nation, class or caste, family, occupation, or type), whose insignia they will wear with vanity and conviction, and defend (along with the economic claims they have staked out for their kind) against the foreign, the inimical, the not-so-human kinds."³⁷ This need to differentiate ourselves from others is especially prominent in those individuals who are under 18 years of age.³⁸

Millennials came of age during the influx of new technologies associated with Web 2.0, which was right during this period of identity development. Subsequent generations have grown up with technology from birth. Ever seen a baby using an iPad? It happens. Admittedly, Erikson died the same year as the first major Web browser, Netscape, came on the market. Obviously, he did not have anything to say about the influx of technology and identity formation specifically. However, he had seen the invention of other technologies and how they had impacted identity formation, specifically movies:

interspersed with close-ups of violence and sexual possession and all this without making the slightest demand on intelligence, imagination, or effort. I am pointing here to a widespread imbalance in adolescent experience because I think it explains new kinds of adolescent outbursts and points to new necessities of mastery.³⁹

Avi Kay believes that today's social media and other technologies are even more impactful than movies were in Erikson's day:

An argument can certainly be made that the immediacy, pervasiveness, and intensity of the ideas and images afforded by the advent of movies pale compared to those of the Internet and social media. As such, reactions to those ideas and images via the Internet can only be expected to provoke even greater passions than those Erikson observed among the youth of his generation.⁴⁰

Kay then specifically discusses how the Internet is being used as a tool to radicalize young people in Islamic countries, and the same is also true of many young people in the United States who are radicalized through the Internet into hate groups here. The Internet is a fantastic tool, but the types of information that it can expose an adolescent to during their formative years can send them on a prosocial and anti-social path. Thankfully, there is hope. As Erikson himself said, "There is no reason to insist that a technological world, as such, need weaken inner resources of adaptation, which may, in fact, be replenished by the goodwill and ingenuity of a communicating

species.”⁴¹ Although many forces try to sway adolescents towards anti-social behaviour and ideologies, technology isn’t inherently bad for identity formation. Technology can also be used to help forge positive identities, as well.

Your Online Identity

We just discussed how an individual’s identity could be shaped by her/his/their interaction with technology, but what about the identity we display when we’re online. In the earliest days of the Internet, it was common for people to be completely anonymous on the Internet (more on this in a minute). For our purposes, it’s important to realize that different people present themselves differently in CMC contexts. For example, someone chatting with a complete stranger on Tinder may act one way and then act completely differently when texting with her/his/their mother.

Erving Goffman and Identity

Erving Goffman, in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, was the first to note that when interacting with others, people tended to guide or control the presentation of themselves to the other person.⁴² As people, we can alter how we look (to a degree), how we behave, and how we communicate, and all of these will impact the perception that someone builds of us during an interaction. So, while we’re attempting to create an impression of ourselves, the other person is also attempting to create a perception of who you are as a person at the same time.

In an ideal world, how we hope we’re presenting ourselves will be how the other person interprets this self-presentation, but it doesn’t always work out that way. Goffman coined this type of interactive sensemaking the dramaturgical analysis because he saw the faces people put when interacting with others as similar to roles actors put in on a play. In this respect, Goffman used the term “front stage” to the types of behaviour we exhibit when we know others are watching us (e.g., an interpersonal interaction). “Backstage” then is the behaviour we engage in when we have no audience present, so we are free from the rules and norms of interaction that govern our day-to-day interactions with others. Basically, we can let our hair down and relax by taking off the character we perform on stage. At the same time, we also prepare for future interactions on stage while we’re backstage. For example, maybe a woman will practice a pick up line she plans on using in a bar after work, or a guy will rehearse what he’s going to say when he meets his boyfriend’s parents at dinner that night.

Erving Goffman died in 1982 well before the birth of the WWW and the Internet as most of us know it today, so he didn’t write about the issue of online identities. Syed Murtaza Alfarid Hussain applied Goffman’s dramaturgical approach to Facebook.⁴³ Alfarid Hussain argues that Facebook can be seen as part of the “front stage” for interaction where we perform our identities. As such, Facebook “provides the opportunity for individuals to use props such as user profile information, photo posting/sharing/tagging, status updates, ‘Like’ and ‘Unlike’ others posts, comments or wall posts, profile image/cover page image, online befriending, group/community membership, weblinks and security and privacy settings.”⁴⁴ If you’re like us, maybe sat in front of your smartphone, tablet computer, laptop, or desktop computer and wanted to share a meme, but realized that many people you’re friends with on Facebook wouldn’t find the meme humorous, so you don’t share the meme. When you do this, you are negotiating your identity on stage. You are determining and influencing how others will view you through the types of posts you make, the shares you make, and even the likes you give to others’ posts.

In another study examining identity in blogging and the online 3D multiverse SecondLife, Liam Bullingham and Ana C. Vasconcelos found that most people who blog and those who participated on SecondLife (in their study) “were keen to re-create their offline self online. This was achieved by creating a blogging voice that is true to the offline one, and by publishing personal details about the offline self online, or designing the avatar to resemble the offline self in SL, and in disclosing offline identity in SL.”⁴⁵ In “Goffman-speak,” people online attempt to mimic their onstage performances across different mediums. Now clearly, not everyone who blogs and hangs out in SecondLife will do this, but the majority of the individuals in Bullingham and Vasconcelos’ study did. The authors noted differences between bloggers and SL users. Specifically, SL users have:

more obvious options to deviate from the offline self and adopt personae in terms of the appearance of the 3D avatar. In blogging, it is perhaps expected that persona adoption does not occur, unless a detachment from the offline self is obvious, such as in the case of pseudonymous blogging. Also, the nature of interaction is different, with blogging resembling more closely platform performances and the SL environment offering more opportunities for contacts and encounters.⁴⁶

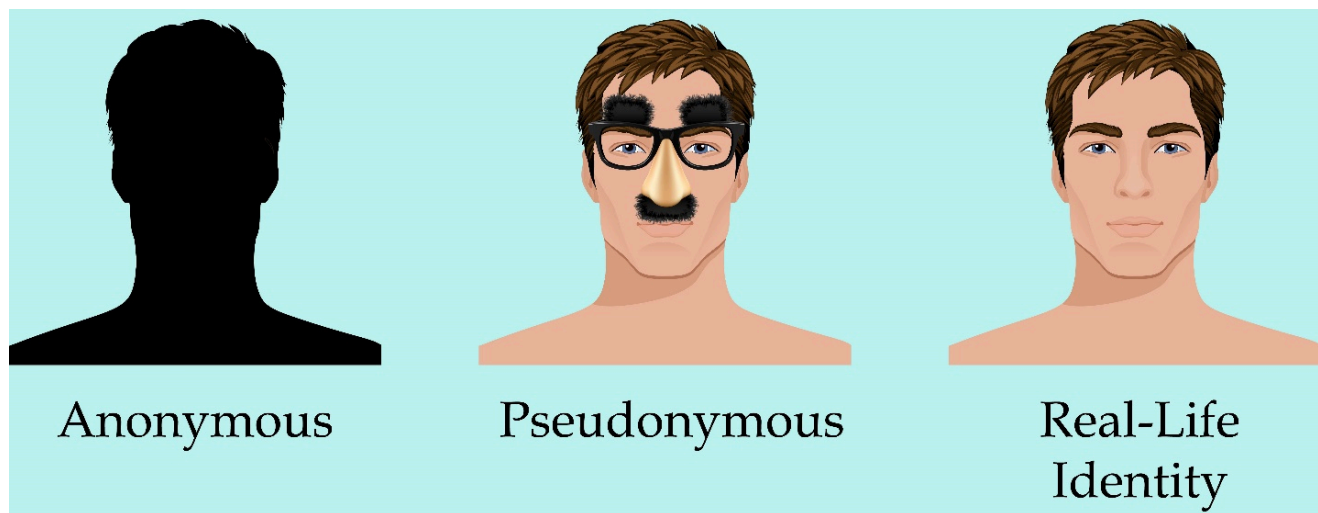


Figure 12.9 Types of Online Identities

Types of Online Identities

Unlike traditional FtF interactions, online interactions can go even further blurring the identities as people act in ways impossible in FtF interaction. Andrew F. Wood and Matthew J. Smith discussed three different ways that people express their identities online: anonymity, pseudonymity, and real-life (Figure 12.9).⁴⁷

Anonymous Identity

First, people in a CMC context can behave in a way that is completely **anonymous**. In this case, people in CMC interactions can communicate in a manner where their actual identity is simply not known. Now, it may be possible for some people to figure out who an anonymous person is (e.g., the NSA, the CIA, etc.), but if someone wants to maintain her or his anonymity, it's possible to do so. Think about how many fake Facebook, Twitter, Tinder, Grindr accounts exist. Some exist to try to persuade you to go to a website (often for illicit purposes like hacking your computer), while others may be attempting “catfishing” for the fun of it.

Catfishing is a deceptive activity perpetrated by Internet predators where they fabricate online identities on social networking sites to lure unsuspecting victims into an emotional/romantic relationship. In the 2010 documentary *Catfish*, we are introduced Yaniv “Nev” Schulman, a New York-based photographer, who starts an online relationship with an 8-year-old prodigy named Abby via Facebook. Over the course of nine months, the two exchanged more than 1,500 messages, and Abby’s family (mother, father, and sister) also become friends with Nev on Facebook as well. Throughout the documentary, Nev and his brother Ariel (who is also the documentarian) start noticing inconsistencies in various stories that are being told. Music that was allegedly created by Abby is found to be right off of YouTube. Ariel convinces Nev to continue the relationship knowing that there are inconsistencies and lies just to see how it will all play out. The success of *Catfish* spawned a television show by the same name on MTV.

From this one story, we can easily see the problems that can arise from anonymity on the Internet. Often behaviour that would be deemed completely inappropriate in a FtF encounter suddenly becomes appropriate because it's deemed as “less real” by some. One of the major problems with anonymity online has been cyberbullying. Teenagers today can post horrible things about one another online without any worry that the messages will be linked back to them directly. Unlike bullying that happened at school, teens facing cyberbullying cannot even find peace at home because the Internet follows them everywhere. In 2013 12-year-old Rebecca Ann Sedwick committed suicide after being the perpetual victim of cyberbullying through social media apps on her phone. Some of the messages found on her phone after her suicide included, “why are you still alive?” and “you haven’t killed yourself yet? Go jump off a building.” Rebecca suffered this barrage of bullying for over a year and by around 15 different girls in her school. Sadly, Rebecca’s tale is one that is all too familiar in today’s world. Although only 9% of middle-school age kids have reported being victims of cyberbullying, there is a relationship between victimization and suicidal ideation.⁴⁸

It’s also important to understand that cyberbullying isn’t just a phenomenon that happens with children. In a

2009 survey of Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union members, they found that 34% of respondents faced FtF bullying, and 10.7% faced cyberbullying. All of the individuals who were targets of cyberbullying were also ones bullied FtF.⁴⁹

Many people prefer anonymity when interacting with others online, and there can be legitimate reasons to engage in online interactions with others. For example, when one of our authors was coming out as LGBTQIA, our coauthor regularly talked with people online as our coauthor melded the new LGBTQIA identity with their Southern/Christian identity. Having the ability to talk anonymously with others allowed our coauthor to gradually come out by forming anonymous relationships with others dealing with the same issues.

Pseudonymous Identity

Second, the second category of interaction is **pseudonymity CMC identity**. Wood and Smith used the term pseudonymous because of the prefix “pseudonym,” “**Pseudonym** comes from the Latin words for ‘false’ and ‘name,’ and it provides an audience with the ability to attribute statements and actions to a common source [emphasis in original].”⁵⁰ Whereas an anonym allows someone to be completely anonymous, a pseudonym “allows one to contribute to the fashioning of one’s own image.”⁵¹

Using pseudonyms is hardly something new. Famed mystery author Agatha Christi wrote over 66 detective novels, but still published six romance novels using the pseudonym Mary Westmacott. Bestselling science fiction author Michael Crichton (of Jurassic Park fame – among others), wrote under three different pseudonyms (John Lange, Jeffery Hudson, and Michael Douglas) when he was in medical school. Even J. K. Rowling (of Harry Potter fame) used the pseudonym Robert Galbraith to write her follow-up novel to the series. Rowling didn’t want the hype or expectation while writing her follow-up novel. Unfortunately for Rowling, the secret didn’t stay hidden very long.

There are many famous people who use pseudonyms in their social media: @TheTweetOfGod (comedy writer and Daily Show producer, David Javerbaum), @pewdiepie (online personality and producer Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg), @baddiewinkle (Octogenarian fashionista and online personality Helen Van Winkle), @doctor.mike (Internet celebrity family practitioner Dr. Mike Varshavski), etc.... Some of these people used parts of their real names, and others used complete pseudonyms. All of them have enormous Internet followings and have used their pseudonyms to build profitable brands. So, why do people use a pseudonym?

The veneer of the Internet allows us to determine how much of an identity we wish to front in online presentations. These images can range from a vague silhouette to a detailed snapshot. Whatever the degree of identity presented, however, it appears that control and empowerment are benefits for users of these communication technologies.⁵²

Now, some people adopt a pseudonym because their online actions may be “out of brand” for their day-job or because they don’t want to be fully exposed online.

Real Life Identity

Lastly, some people have their real-life identities displayed online. You can find JasonSWrench on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.... Our coauthor made the decision to have his social networking site behaviour very public from the beginning. Part of that reason was that when he first joined Facebook in 2007, he was required to use his professional school email address that ended with.edu. In the early days, only people with.edu email addresses could join Facebook. Jason also realizes that this behaviour is a part of his professional persona, so he doesn’t put anything on one of these sites he wouldn’t want other professionals (or even you) to see and read. When it comes to people in the public eye, most of them use some variation of their real names to enhance their brands. That’s not to say that many of these same people may have multiple online accounts, and some of these accounts could be completely anonymous or even pseudonymous.

Key Takeaways

- Erikson believed that an individual’s identity was developed through a series of stages of psychosocial development that occur from infancy to adulthood. At each stage, we face a different set of crises that pits the

psychological needs of the individual versus the larger needs of society. Part of this development is impacted by the introduction of new technologies, which can be both good for society and problematic.

- Erving Goffman in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, used the term “front stage” to the types of behaviour we exhibit when we know others are watching us (e.g., an interpersonal interaction), and he used the term “backstage” to refer to behaviour we engage in when we have no audience present, so we are free from the rules and norms of interaction that govern our day-to-day interactions with others.
- Andrew F. Wood and Matthew J. Smith discussed three specific types of online identities that people can formulate: anonymity (the person behind a message is completely unknown), pseudonymity (someone uses a pseudonym, but people know who the real person behind the message is), and real-life (when our online and FtF identities are the same).

Exercises

- Of the two theoretical approaches to identity (Erikson and Goffman), which do you think is the better tool for explaining how your online identity and offline identity were formed? Why?
- When it comes to your online CMC behaviour, do you have an anonymous, pseudonymous, and real-life identity? If so, how are these similar? How are they different?

Theories of Computer-Mediated Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Describe uses and gratifications theory and how it helps us understand CMC behaviour.
2. Describe social presence theory and how it helps us understand CMC behaviour.
3. Describe media richness theory and how it helps us understand CMC behaviour.
4. Describe social information processing theory and how it helps us understand CMC behaviour.

Most of the early work in computer-mediated communication from a theoretical perspective was conducted using old mediated theories created to discuss the differences between print, radio, and television and applying them to the Internet. As such, we don't see the proliferation of theories. To help us understand the theories of computer-mediated communication, we are going to explore five theories and their implications for CMC.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The first major theory used to explain CMC is the uses and gratifications theory. **Uses and gratifications theory** was originally devised back in the mid-1970s to explain why people use the types of mass media they do.⁵³ The basic premise of the theory is that people choose various media because we get something out of that media, or it makes us happy in some way. From this perspective, people choose various media because we have specific goals that we want to be fulfilled. Zizi Papacharissi and Alan Rubin were the first scholars to apply the uses and gratifications theory to how people use the Internet.⁵⁴ Ultimately, they found five basic reasons people were using the Internet: interpersonal utility (allows people to interact with others), pass time (helps people kill time), information seeking (we look for specific information we want or need), convenience (it's faster than FtF or even a phone call), and entertainment (people enjoy using the Internet). In this first study, the researchers found that people who used the Internet for interpersonal utility were less satisfied with life and more anxious in FtF communication interactions. Please remember that this study was conducted in 2000, so times are quite different now.

In a 2008 follow-up study, the picture of Internet socializing was pretty different, so it's not surprising that the results were indicative of changes in public consumption.⁵⁵ In this study, people found their interpersonal

Internet relationships satisfying if used CMC for self-fulfillment purposes and when they intimately disclosed their personal feelings to others. In essence, if people are using the technology to make their lives better, and they are willing to self-disclose on the Internet, they are going to have more rewarding interpersonal interactions online. However, when people try to substitute FtF interpersonal interactions for CMC interactions, they do not find their CMC interactions as rewarding. On the flip side, when people supplement their FtF interpersonal interactions with CMC interactions, they are fulfilled by those interactions.

Social Presence Theory

The second major theory that has been used to help explain CMC is social presence theory. Social presence theory was originally created by John Short, Ederyn Williams, and Bruce Christie.⁵⁶ Presence is a psychological state of mind and how we relate to technology. When we are truly present, we forget that we are actually using technology. **Social presence** then is “the degree to which we as individuals perceive another as a real person and any interaction between the two of us as a relationship.”⁵⁷ Once again, our perceptions of presence are largely based on the degree to which we have the ability to interpret nonverbal cues from the people we are interacting with.

When it comes to CMC, various technologies are going to have varying degrees of presence. For example, reading information on a website probably is not going to make you forget that you are reading text on a screen. On the other hand, if you’re engaging in a conversation with your best friend via text messaging, you may forget about the technology and just view the interaction as a common one you have with your friend. In essence, people can vary in how they perceive presence. One of our coauthors regularly has students in a CMC course spend time in a couple of virtual worlds like SecondLife and World of Warcraft. SecondLife is a virtual world where people can create avatar and interact in a 3D simulated environment. However, it’s not a game – it’s a 3D virtual world. There is no point system and there is no winning or beating the system. Instead, it’s a place for people to socialize and interact. On the other hand, World of Warcraft (WOW) is first and foremost a game. Although there are definitely highly interactive components involved in WOW and people make life-long friends in WOW, WOW is a virtual world that has a specific end result focused on winning.

These different worlds have different purposes, but people can find both of them highly present. When students who are not familiar with these virtual worlds enter them, they often have a hard time understanding how people can spend hours upon hours interacting with others within these virtual worlds. To the students, they view this as a “strange” experience and experience no social presence at all. Conversely, to the people who “live” in these virtual worlds regularly, they experience high levels of social presence. We do know that those individuals who report higher levels of social presence tend to have more rewarding online interpersonal interactions and are more likely to perceive themselves as competent communicators within these mediated environments.⁵⁸

Media Richness Theory

Our third major theory that has been applied to CMC is media richness theory. Media richness theory was first proposed by Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel.⁵⁹ **Richness** is defined as “the potential information carrying capacity of data.”⁶⁰ In Lengel’s doctoral dissertation, he had proposed that media varied in richness depending on how much information is provided through the communication.⁶¹ For example, in print media, all you have is text. As such, you have no nonverbal behaviours of the author to help you interpret the words you are reading. With FtF communication, on the other hand, we have the full realm of nonverbal behaviours that we can attend to in an effort to understand the sender’s message. As such, Lengel argued that media escalates in richness in the following order: computer output, formal memos, personal memos, telephone, and FtF. You’ll notice that this perspective on media was originally designed to help individuals understand the media choices used in organizations.

So, where does this leave us with CMC? Well, from the basic ideas of media richness theory, we can ascertain that the richer the media, the less ambiguous a message is for a receiver. As such, the more rich an individual perceives a medium, the more likely they are to have successful social interactions online. From an organizational perspective, the richer the medium, the better individuals will be able to accomplish specific tasks when they are at a distance from one another. When it comes to the workplace, the more ambiguous a task is, the more people prefer highly rich media for their interactions.⁶²

Social Information Processing Theory

Up to this point, the first three theories we examined that have been used to explain why people use CMC have all been theories originally designed to examine media before the proliferation of CMC. The first truly unique theory designed to look at CMC from a communication perspective came from Joseph Walther back in 1992 in his social information processing theory.⁶³ As someone with a background in communication, Walther realized that interpersonal interactions change over time. As such, some of the other theories really didn't take into account how interpersonal relationships evolve as the interpersonal interactants spend more time getting to know one another. The three previous theories applied to CMC do not take into account how our impressions of those we interact with can change over time. For example, both media richness and social presence theory focus on the nonverbal aspects and assume that because of the lack of nonverbal cues in CMC, people will inherently find CMC as either less rich or less present when compared to FtF interactions. Walther argued that the filtering out of nonverbal cues doesn't hurt an individual's ability to form an impression of someone over time in a CMC context. Ultimately, Walther argues that overtime relationships formed in a CMC context can develop like those that are FtF. He does admit that these relationships will take more time to develop, but that they can reach the same end states as those relationships formed FtF.

Walther later expanded his ideas of social information processing to include a new concept he dubbed hyperpersonal interactions.⁶⁴ **Hyperpersonal** interactions are those that exceed those possible of traditional FtF interactions. For example, many people who belong to online self-help groups discuss feelings and ideas that they would never dream of discussing with people in an FtF interaction unless that person was their therapist. Furthermore, during CMC interactions an individual can refine her or his message in a manner that is impossible to do during an FtF interaction, which will help present a specific face to an interactant. I'm sure we've all written a text, Facebook post, or email and then decided to delete what you'd just written because it was in your best interest not to put it out to the world. In CMC interactions, we have this ability to fine-tune our messages before transmitting; whereas, in FtF messages, once something has been communicated, there is no ability to refine the message. Furthermore, in FtF interactions, there is an expectation that the interaction keeps moving at a steady pace without the ability to edit one's ideas; whereas, with CMC we can take time to fine-tune our messages in a way that is impossible during an FtF interaction. All of this helps an individual create the public face that they want to be known by.

Key Takeaways

- Uses and gratifications theory helps explain why people use the types of mass media they do. Papacharissi and Rubin found that there were five reasons why people use the Internet: interpersonal utility (allows people to interact with others), pass time (helps people kill time), information seeking (we look for specific information we want or need), convenience (it's faster than FtF or even a phone call), and entertainment (people enjoy using the Internet).
- Social presence theory helps us understand whether or not individuals using CMC technologies perceive the people they are interacting with as "real." Our perceptions of presence are largely based on the degree to which we can interpret nonverbal cues from the people we are interacting with.
- Media richness theory helps us understand CMC behaviour by examining the capacity that people have for data. As media becomes richer and has more nonverbal content, the easier it is for a receiver to interpret the message accurately. As such, the more rich an individual perceives a medium the more likely they are to have successful social interactions online.
- Social information processing (SIP_ theory helps researchers understand the development of interpersonal relationships in CMC contexts. SIP argues that overtime relationships formed in a CMC context can develop like those that are FtF.

Exercises

- Uses and gratifications theory is one of the oldest and still most commonly studied theories in media. For this exercise, find a research study that examines uses and gratifications theory that has been conducted in the previous five years related to CMC. Look for the outcomes from that specific study and report them back to your class.
- Compare and contrast social presence theory, media richness theory, and social information processing theory and its explanation of the importance of nonverbal communication in CMC relationships.
- If you've experienced a hyperpersonal relationship online, think about that relationship as you answer the following questions. If you have not had a hyperpersonal relationship online, then talk with someone who has and answer the following questions.
 - How did this hyperpersonal relationship develop?
 - What was different about this relationship when compared to FtF relationships?
 - Do you still have this relationship today? Why?

Key Terms

anonymous CMC identities

People in CMC interactions can communicate in a manner where their actual identity is simply not known.

ARPANET

The U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, which was the precursor to what is now known as the Internet.

asynchronous communication

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are not concurrently engaged in communication.

catfishing

Deceptive activity perpetrated by Internet predators where they fabricate online identities on social networking sites to lure unsuspecting victims into an emotional/romantic relationship.

co-present interactions

When people are physically occupying the same space while interacting with one another.

emoticon

A series of characters and/or letters designed to help readers interpret a writer's intended feelings and/or tone.

hyperpersonal

CMC interactions that exceed those possible of traditional FtF interactions.

impression formation

How we present ourselves to others through our online persona.

message/bulletin boards

Online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages.

netiquette

The set of professional and social rules and norms that are considered acceptable and polite when interacting with another person(s) through mediated technologies.

pseudonymity CMC identity

Identity that someone takes on that is beyond themselves in the creation of CMC messages.

real-life CMC identity

When our CMC identity and our FtF identities are congruent.

richness

The potential information carrying capacity of data.

short message service (SMS)

Communication technology allowing for the exchange of short alphanumeric messages between digital and mobile devices found in phones, the Web, or in mobile communication systems (commonly referred to as “text messaging”).

social presence

The degree to which we, as individuals, perceive another as a real person and any interaction between the two of us as a relationship.

synchronous communication

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are concurrently engaged in communication.

uses and gratifications theory

Theoretical explanation for why people use the types of mass media they do.

Chapter Wrap-Up

This chapter explored many of the ways that modern communication technologies help us interact with each other. Whether we’re talking over a headset to someone through our gaming console or texting our roommate, we use these technologies to communicate with people all the time. The first part of this chapter explored the history of computer-mediated communication, which was followed by a discussion of the process of computer-mediated communication. We then discussed identity formation in virtual environments. We ended the chapter looking at four of the most commonly discussed theories related to computer-mediated communication. Hopefully, you realize that this chapter barely scratches the surface when it comes to how people are using technology to create and enhance their interpersonal relationships.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Jenny decided that she wasn’t meeting any potential boyfriends living in Denver. As a 28-year-old woman, she’s found meeting people more and more difficult. She’s not really into the bar scene, so meeting people in that environment is pretty much out. One day a friend of hers at work tells her about a new smartphone app called Fndr. Basically, the app allows people to see how many people are also looking for dates within a geographic location.

She decides to download the app and see what all of the fuss was about. She created a profile and uploaded a professional picture and decided to take a chance. Immediately, she saw a screen filled with men all look for relationships. There was Chad that was 1.5 miles from her. There was Andrew, who was 678 feet from her. Then there was Bobby, who was less than 100 feet from her. *That’s very creepy*, Jenny thought to herself. She looked at Bobby’s profile, which showed a picture of a bare-chested male torso. *God, he’s ripped!* She looked at another photo that showed his back flexed. That’s when she noticed his eagle tattoo in the bottom center of his back. *Oh my god! That’s Martha’s Husband!!!*

1. If you were Jenny, how would you respond to finding someone’s husband on a social media site for people looking for relationships?
2. Do you think Jenny should confront Martha’s husband through Fndr?
3. Do you think computer-mediated communication has made infidelity in the 21st Century easier?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. What are the principles of behaviour and communication that are appropriate and effective in workplace settings?
 - a. professionalism
 - b. communication competence
 - c. communication intelligence
 - d. etiquette

- e. formality
2. As her union chapter's local union representative, Darlene is crafting an email message that will be sent to her CEO describing some of the concerns the union is having. What type of communication does this represent?
 - a. downward
 - b. horizontal
 - c. informal
 - d. lateral
 - e. upward
 3. Joan has a problematic subordinate named Dez. Dez is always coming in late, having other people do his work and taking credit for it, and taking extra-long lunch breaks. Dez just seems to think that he is above the rules and norms in Joan's organization. What type of problematic subordinate does Joan have?
 - a. abrasive
 - b. bully
 - c. different other
 - d. incompetent renegade
 - e. incompetent subordinate
 4. Dae-Jae is a computer designer in Korea. He works for a large multinational automobile company in the training department. He's been tasked with creating a new virtual training program for salespeople around the world. One of his biggest concerns is ensuring that the game he designs for this training is able to immerse people in a realistic environment as possible. Dae-Jae really wants learners to feel like they are interacting with a real customer. Which theory of mediated communication best describes what Dae-Jae is concerned with?
 - a. media richness theory
 - b. social presence theory
 - c. medium is the message
 - d. social information processing theory
 - e. uses and gratifications theory
 5. Alima is hanging out with her best friend at a local diner. She's chit-chatting with her best friend, but both of them are also constantly texting other people. What type of interaction is Alima having?
 - a. co-present
 - b. dual-processing
 - c. effective
 - d. communicatively competent
 - e. rewarding

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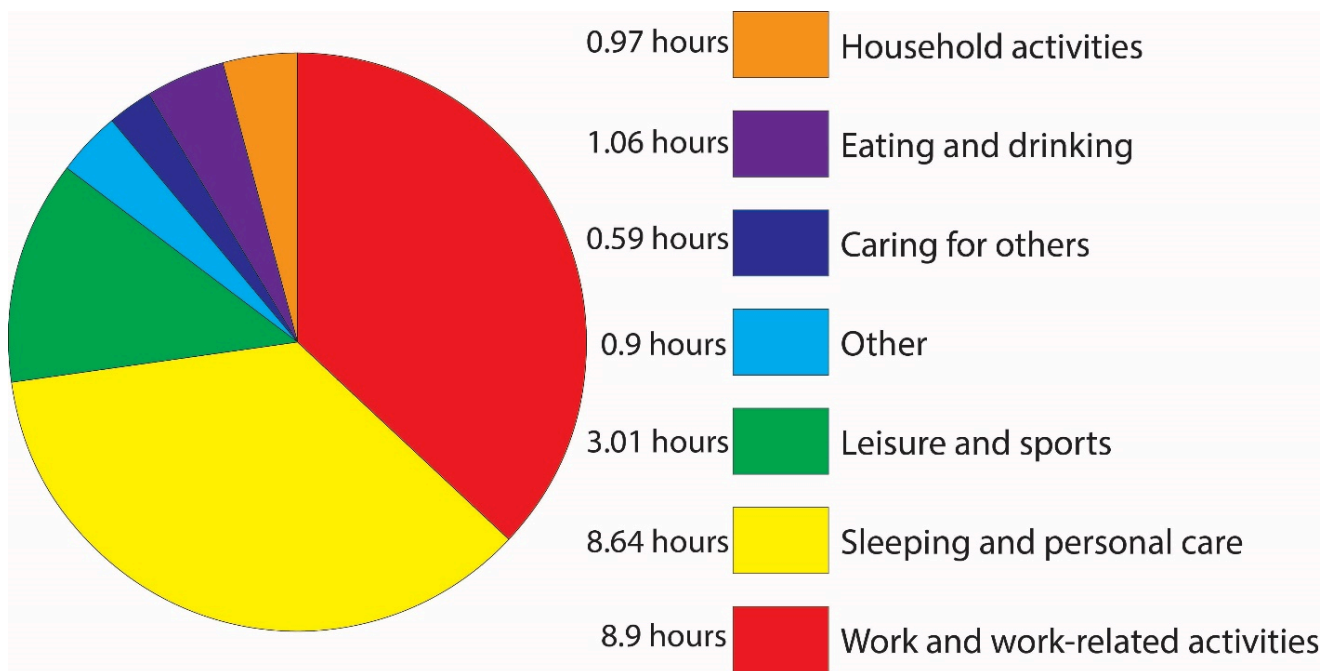
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[9]

Interpersonal Relationships at Work

Second to spending time with your family, you'll probably end up spending more time working than anything else you do for the rest of your life (besides sleeping). Figure 13.1 shows you what the average full-time working person's day is like.



Average hours per day spent in selected activities on days worked by employment status.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey, 2017

Figure 13.1 Daily Life Breakdown

We spend more time with the people we work with than the people we live with during the five-day workweek. So, it shouldn't be too surprising that our workplace relationships tend to be very important to our overall quality of life. In previous chapters, we've looked at the importance of a range of different types of relationships. In this chapter, we're going to explore some areas directly related to workplace interpersonal relationships, including professionalism, leader-follower relationships, workplace friendships, romantic relationships in the workplace, and problematic workplace relationships. Finally, we'll end this chapter by discussing essential communication skills for work in the 21st Century.

The Requirements of Professionalism

Learning Objectives

1. Define the terms profession and professionalism.
2. Define the term “ethics” and recall several modern ethical lapses in organizations.
3. Understand the importance of respecting one’s coworkers.
4. Explain the concept of personal responsibility in the workplace.
5. Differentiate between formal and informal language.

What is professionalism? A **profession** is an occupation that involves mastery of complex knowledge and skills through prolonged training, education, or practical experience. Becoming a member of a specific profession doesn’t happen overnight. Whether you seek to be a public relations expert, lawyer, doctor, teacher, welder, electrician, and so on, each profession involves that interested parties invest themselves in learning to become a professional or a member of a profession who earns their living through specified expert activity. It’s much easier to define the terms “profession” and “professional” than it is to define the term “professionalism” because each profession will have its take on what it means to be a professional within a given field.

According to the United States Department of Labor,¹ professionalism “does not mean wearing a suit or carrying a briefcase; rather, it means conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability, and excellence. It means communicating effectively and appropriately and always finding a way to be productive.” The U.S. Department of Labor’s book *Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success* goes on to note:

Professionalism isn’t one thing; it’s a combination of qualities. A professional employee arrives on time for work and manages time effectively. Professional workers take responsibility for their own behaviour and work effectively with others. High quality work standards, honesty, and integrity are also part of the package. Professional employees look clean and neat and dress appropriately for the job. Communicating effectively and appropriately for the workplace is also an essential part of professionalism.²

The Requirements of Professionalism

As you can see here, professionalism isn’t a single “thing” that can be labelled. Instead, **professionalism** involves the aims and behaviours that demonstrate an individual’s level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession. By the word “aims,” we mean that someone who exhibits professionalism is guided by a set of goals in a professional setting. Whether the aim is to complete a project on time or help ensure higher quarterly incomes for their organization, professionalism involves striving to help one’s organization achieve specific goals. By “behaviours,” we mean specific ways of behaving and communicating within an organizational environment. Some common behaviours can include acting ethically, respecting others, collaborating effectively, taking personal/professional responsibility, and professionally using language. Let’s look at each of these separately.

Ethics

Every year there are lapses in ethical judgment by organizations and organizational members. For our purposes, let’s look at just two years of ethical lapses.

1. We saw aviation police officers drag a bloodied pulmonologist off a plane when he wouldn’t give up his seat on United Airlines.
2. We saw the beginnings of the #MeToo movement in October 2017 after Alyssa Milano uses the hashtag in response to actor Ashley Judd accusing media mogul Harvey Weinstein of serious sexual misconduct in an article within *The New York Times*. Since that critical moment, many courageous victims of sexual violence have raised their voices to take on the male elites in our society who had gotten away with these behaviours for decades.¹

3. Facebook (among others) was found to have accepted advertisements indirectly paid for by the Kremlin that influenced the 2016 election. The paid advertisements constituted a type of cyber warfare.
4. Equifax had a data breach that affected 145 million people (mostly U.S. citizens as well as some British and Canadian customers) and didn't publicly disclose this for two months.
5. The head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Scott Pruitt, committed many ethical lapses during his tenure with the agency prompting his resignation. Some of the ethical lapses included ordering raises for two aides even when the White House rejected them, spending \$3.5 million (twice times as much as his predecessor) on taxpayer-funded security, using that security to pick up his favourite moisturizing lotion and dry-cleaning, renting a room from a lobbyist who had dealings with the EPA for \$50 per night, installing a \$43,000 private phone booth in his office that allegedly was used once, spending \$124,000 on first-class flights, purchasing two season-ticket seats at a University of Kentucky basketball game from a billionaire coal executive, tried to use his position to get his wife a Chick-fil-A franchise, and others.

Sadly, these ethical lapses are still frequent in corporate America, and they often come with huge lawsuit settlements and/or jail time.

The word “ethics” actually is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which means the nature or disposition of a culture.³ From this perspective, ethics then involves the moral center of a culture that governs behaviour. Without getting too deep, let's just say that philosophers debate the very nature of ethics, and they have described a wide range of different philosophical perspectives on what constitutes ethics. For our purposes, **ethics** is the judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just.

In the business world, we often talk about business ethics, which involves things like not stealing from a company; not lying to one's boss, coworkers, or customers/clients; not taking bribes, payoffs, or kickbacks; taking credit for someone else's work; abusing and belittling someone in the workplace; or simply letting other people get away with unethical behaviour. For example, if you know your organization has a zero-tolerance policy for workplace discrimination and you know that one supervisor is purposefully not hiring pregnant women because “they'll just be leaving on maternity leave soon anyway,” then you are just as responsible as that supervisor. We might also add, that discriminating against someone who is pregnant or can get pregnant is also a violation of Equal Employment Opportunity law, so you can see that often the line between ethics and rules (or laws) can be blurred.

From a communication perspective, there are also ethical issues that you should be aware of. W. Charles Redding, the father of organizational communication, broke down unethical organizational communication into six specific categories.⁴

1. Although #MeToo gained popularity in 2017, the phrase was originally coined in 2006 by Tarana Burke to help women and girls of colour who had survived sexual assault and violence.

An organizational communication act is unethical if it is...	Such organizational communication unethically...
coercive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abuses power or authority • unjustifiably invades others' autonomy • stigmatizes dissents • restricts freedom of speech • refuses to listen • uses rules to stifle discussion and complaints
destructive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attacks others' self-esteem, reputations, or feelings • disregards other's values • engages in insults, innuendoes, epithets, or derogatory jokes • uses put-downs, backstabbing, and character assassination • employs so-called "truth" as a weapon • violates confidentiality and privacy to gain an advantage • withholds constructive feedback
deceptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • willfully perverts the truth to deceive, cheat, or defraud • sends evasive or deliberately misleading or ambiguous messages • employs bureaucratic euphemisms to cover up the truth
intrusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses hidden cameras • taps telephones • employs computer technologies to monitor employee behaviour • disregards legitimate privacy rights
secretive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses silence and unresponsiveness • hoards information • hides wrongdoing or ineptness
manipulative/exploitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses demagoguery • gains compliance by exploiting fear, prejudice, or ignorance • patronizes or is condescending toward others
Reprinted with permission from Wrench, Punyanunt, and Ward's (2014, Flat World Knowledge) book <i>Organizational communication: Practice, Research, and Theory</i> .	

Table 13.1. Redding's Typology of Unethical Communication

As you can see, unethical organizational communication is an area many people do not overly consider.

Respect for Others

Our second category related to professionalism is respecting others. In Disney's 1942 movie, *Bambi*, Thumper sees the young Bambi learning to walk, which leads to the following interaction with his mother:

Thumper: He doesn't walk very good, does he?
 Mrs. Rabbit: Thumper!
 Thumper: Yes, mama?
 Mrs. Rabbit: What did your father tell you this morning?
 Thumper: If you can't say something nice, don't say nothing at all.

Sadly, many people exist in the modern workplace that needs a refresher in respect from Mrs. Rabbit today. From workplace bullying to sexual harassment, many people simply do not always treat people with dignity and respect in the workplace. So, what do we mean by treating someone with respect? There are a lot of behaviours one can engage in that are respectful if you're interacting with a coworker or interacting with leaders or followers. Here's a list we created of respectful behaviours for workplace interactions:

- Be courteous, polite, and kind to everyone.

- Do not criticize or nitpick at little inconsequential things.
- Do not engage in patronizing or demeaning behaviours.
- Don't engage in physically hostile body language.
- Don't roll your eyes when your coworkers are talking.
- Don't use an aggressive tone of voice when talking with coworkers.
- Encourage coworkers to express opinions and ideas.
- Encourage your coworkers to demonstrate respect to each other as well.
- Listen to your coworkers openly without expressing judgment before they've finished speaking.
- Listen to your coworkers without cutting them off or speaking over them.
- Make sure you treat all of your coworkers fairly and equally.
- Make sure your facial expressions are appropriate and not aggressive.
- Never engage in verbally aggressive behaviour: insults, name-calling, rumor-mongering, disparaging, and putting people or their ideas down.
- Praise your coworkers more often than you criticize them. Point out when they're doing great things, not just when they're doing "wrong" things.
- Provide an equal opportunity for all coworkers to provide insight and input during meetings.
- Treat people the same regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, etc....
- When expressing judgment, focus on criticizing ideas, and not the person.

Now that we've looked a wide range of ways that you can show your respect for your coworkers, we would be remiss if we didn't bring up one specific area where you can demonstrate respect, the language we use. In a recent meeting, one of our coauthors was reporting on some work that was being completed on campus and let people in the meeting know that some people were already "grandfathered in" to the pre-existing process. Without really intending to use language that was sex-based, our coauthor had. One of the other people in the room quickly quipped, "or grandmothered." Upon contemplation, our coauthor realized that the seemingly innocuous use of the phrase "grandfathered in," which admittedly is very common, is one that has a biological sex connotation that limits it to males. Even though our coauthor's purpose had never been to engage in sexist language, the English language is filled with sexist language examples, and they come all too quickly to many of us because of tradition and the way we were taught the language. This experience was a perfect reminder for our coauthor about the importance of thinking about sexist and biased language and how it impacts the workplace. Table 13.2 is a list of common sexist or biased language and corresponding inclusive terms that one could use instead.

Sexist or Biased Language	Inclusive Term
Businessman	business owner, business executive, or business person
cancer victim; AIDS victim	cancer patient; person living with AIDS
chairman	chairperson or chair
confined to a wheelchair	uses a wheelchair
congressman	congressperson
Eskimo	Inuit or Aleut
fireman	firefighters
freshman	first-year student
Indian (when referring to U.S. indigenous peoples)	Native American or specific tribe
policeman	police officer
man or mankind	people, humanity, or the human race
man-hours	working hours
man-made	manufactured, machine-made, or synthetic
manpower	personnel or workforce
Negro or coloured	African American or Black
old people or elderly	senior citizens, mature adults, older adults
Oriental	Asian, Asian American, or specific country of origin
postman or mailman	postal worker or mail carrier
steward or stewardess	flight attendant
suffers from diabetes	has diabetes
to man	to operate; to staff; to cover
waiter or waitress	server

Table 13.2. Replacing Sexist or Biased Language with Inclusive Terms

Mindfulness Activity



We live in a world where respect and bias are not always acknowledged in the workplace setting. Sadly, despite decades of anti-discrimination legislation and training, we know this is still a problem. Women, minorities, and other non-dominant groups are still woefully underrepresented in a broad range of organizational positions, from management to CEO. Some industries are better than others, but this problem is still very persistent in the United States. Most of us mindlessly participate in these systems without even being consciously aware. Byron Lee put it this way:

Our brains rapidly categorize people using both obvious and subtler characteristics, and also automatically assign an unconscious evaluation (eg good or bad) and an emotional tone (ie pleasant, neutral or unpleasant) with this memory. Importantly, because these unconscious processes happen without awareness, control, intention or effort, everyone, no matter how fair-minded we might think we are, is unconsciously biased.⁵

These unconscious biases often lead us to engage in microaggressions against people we view as “other.” Microaggressions are “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.”⁶ Notice that microaggressions can be targeted at women, minorities, and other non-dominant groups. Research has shown us that these unconscious biases affect everything from perceptions of hire ability, to job promotions, to determining who gets laid off, and so many other areas within the workplace.

Byron Lee devised a five-point strategy for engaging in mindful intercultural interactions:

1. Preparing for your interpersonal encounter by recognizing and gently observing preconceptions, biases, emotions and sensations as part of your ongoing internal experience (Nonjudging). Bringing into awareness an intention to connect (Presence).
2. Beginning your conversation by remaining open to hear whatever the person may bring (Acceptance), and a willingness to get close to and understand another's suffering (Empathic Concern).
3. Bringing a kindly curiosity to your own internal experience and to the experiences shared by the other person throughout the encounter (Beginner's Mind).
4. Noticing and letting go of your urge to 'fix' the 'problem' (Non-striving) and letting the process unfold in its own time (Patience).
5. The collaborative interaction concludes when you mutually reach a way forward that reflects the other person's world view and needs (Compassionate Action), and not your own (Letting Go).⁷

For this activity, we want you to explore some of your own unconscious biases. To start, go to the Implicit Bias Tests website run by [Harvard University's Project Implicit](#). On their website, you'll find several tests that examine your unconscious or implicit biases towards various groups. Complete a couple of these tests and then ponder what your results say about your own unconscious biases. After completing the tests, answer the following questions:

1. Were you surprised by your scores on the Implicit Bias Tests? Why?
2. How do you think your own implicit biases impact how you interact with others interpersonally?
3. How can you be more mindful of your interactions with people from different groups in the future?

Personal Responsibility

Let's face it; we all make mistakes. Making mistakes is a part of life. **Personal responsibility** refers to an individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave. Whether we're talking about our attitudes, our thought processes, or physical/communicative behaviours, personal responsibility is simply realizing that we are in the driver's seat and not blaming others for our current circumstances. Now, this is not to say that there are never external factors that impede our success. Of course, there are. This is not to say that certain people have a leg-up on life because of a privileged background, of course, some people have. However, personal responsibility involves differentiating between those things we can control and those things that are outside of our control. For example, I may not be able to control a coworker who decides to yell at me, but I can control how I feel about that coworker, how I think about that coworker, and how I choose to respond to that coworker. Here are some ways that you can take personal responsibility in your own life (or in the workplace):

- Acknowledge that you are responsible for your choices in the workplace.
- Acknowledge that you are responsible for how you feel at work.
- Acknowledge that you are responsible for your behaviours at work.
- Accept that your choices are yours alone, so you can't blame someone else for them.
- Accept that your sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem are yours.
- Accept that you can control your stress and feelings of burnout.
- Decide to invest in your self-improvement.
- Decide to take control of your attitudes, thoughts, and behaviours.
- Decide on specific professional goals and make an effort and commitment to accomplish those goals.

Although you may have the ability to take responsibility for your feelings, thoughts, and behaviours, not everyone in the workplace will do the same. Most of us will come in contact with coworkers who do not take personal responsibility. Dealing with coworkers who have a million and one excuses can be frustrating and demoralizing.

Excuse-making occurs any time an individual attempts to shift the blame for an individual's behaviour from reasons more central to the individual to sources outside of their control in the attempt to make themselves look

better and more in control.⁸ For example, an individual may explain their tardiness to work by talking about how horrible the traffic was on the way to work instead of admitting that they slept in late and left the house late. People make excuses because they fear that revealing the truth would make them look bad or out of control. In this example, waking up late and leaving the house late is the fault of the individual, but they blame the traffic to make themselves look better and in control even though they were late.

Excuse-making happens in every facet of life, but excuse-making in the corporate world can be highly problematic. For example, research has shown that when front-line service providers engage in excuse-making, they are more likely to lose return customers as a result.⁹ In one study, when salespeople attempted to excuse their lack of ethical judgment on their customer's lack of ethics, supervisors tended to punish more severely those who engaged in excuse-making than those who had not.¹⁰ Of course, even an individual's peers can become a little annoyed (or downright disgusted) by a colleague who always has a handy excuse for their behaviour. For this reason, Amy Nordam recommends using the ERROR method when handling a situation where your behaviour was problematic: Empathy, Responsibility, Reason, Offer Reassurance.¹¹ Here is an example Nordam uses to illustrate the ERROR method:

I hate that you [burden placed on person] because of me (Empathy). I should have thought things out better (Responsibility), but I got caught up in [reason for behaviour] (Reason). Next time I'll [preventative action] (Offer Reassurance).

As you can see, the critical parts of this response involve validating the other person, taking responsibility, and providing an explanation for how you'll behave in the future to avoid similar problems.

Language Use

In the workplace, the type of language and how we use language is essential. In a 2016 study conducted by PayScale,¹² researchers surveyed 63,924 managers. The top 3 Hard-Skills managers reported that new college graduates lack are writing proficiency (44%), public speaking (39%), and data analysis (36%). The top 3 Soft Skills the managers reported that new college graduates lack are critical thinking/problem-solving (60%), attention to detail (56%), and communication (46%). One of the most important factors of professionalism in today's workplace is effective written and oral communication. From the moment someone sends in a resume with a cover letter, their language skills are being evaluated, so knowing how to use both formal language effectively and jargon/specialized language is paramount for success in the workplace.

Formal Language

Formal language is a specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar. This is in contrast to informal language, which is more common when we speak. In the workplace, there are reasons why someone would use both formal and informal language. Table 13.3 provides examples of formal and informal language choices.

Characteristic	Informal	Formal
Contraction	I <i>won't</i> be attending the meeting on Friday.	I <i>will not</i> be attending the meeting on Friday.
Phrasal Verbs	The report <i>spelled out</i> the need for more resources.	The report <i>illustrated</i> the need for more resources.
Slang/Colloquialism	The <i>nosedive</i> in our quarterly earnings <i>came out of left field</i> .	The <i>downturn</i> in our quarterly earnings <i>was unexpected</i> .
First-Person Pronouns	<i>I</i> considered numerous research methods before deciding to use an employee satisfaction survey.	<i>Numerous research methods were</i> considered before deciding to use an employee satisfaction survey.
	<i>We</i> need to come together to complete the organization's goals.	<i>The people within the organization</i> must work towards the organization's goals.

Table 13.3 Formal and Informal Language Choices

As you can see from Table 13.3, formal language is less personal and more professional in tone than informal language. Some key factors of formal language include complex sentences, use of full words, and the third person. **Informal language**, on the other hand, is more colloquial or common in tone; it contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations, and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays. For people entering the workplace, learning how to navigate both formal and informal language is very

beneficial because different circumstances will call for both in the workplace. If you're writing a major report for shareholders, then knowing how to use formal language is very important. On the other hand, if you're a PR professional speaking on behalf of an organization, speaking to the media using formal language could make you (and your organization) look distant and disconnected, so using informal language can help in this case.

Use of Jargon/Specialized Language

Every industry is going to be filled with specialized **jargon** or the specialized or technical language particular to a specific profession, occupation, or group that is either meaningless or difficult for outsiders to understand. For example, if I informed that we conducted a “factor analysis with a varimax rotation,” most of your heads would immediately start to spin. However, for those of us who study human communication from a social scientific perspective, we would all know what that phrase means because we learned it during our training in graduate school. If you walked into a hospital and heard an Emergency Department (ED) physician referring to the GOMER in bay 9, most of you would be equally perplexed. Every job has some jargon, so part of being a professional is learning the jargon within your industry and peripherally related sectors as well. For example, if you want to be a pharmaceutical sales representative, learning some of the jargon of an ED (notice they're not called ERs anymore). Trust us, watching the old television show *ER* isn't going to help you learn this jargon very well either.¹³

Instead, you have to spend time within an organization or field to pick up the necessary jargon. However, you can start this process as an undergraduate by joining student groups associated with specific fields. If you want to learn the jargon of public relations, join the Public Relations Student Society of America. If you want to go into training and development, becoming a student member of the Association for Talent Development. Want to go into nonprofit work, become a member of the Association for Volunteer Administration or the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network. If you do not have a student chapter of one of these groups on your campus, then find a group on LinkedIn or another social networking site aimed at professionals. One of the great things about modern social networking is the ability to watch professionals engaging in professional dialogue virtually. By watching the discussions in LinkedIn groups, you can start to pick up on the major issues of a field and some of the everyday jargon.

Key Takeaways

- A profession is an occupation that involves mastery of complex knowledge and skills through prolonged training, education, or practical experience. Professionalism, on the other hand, involves the aims and behaviours that demonstrate an individual's level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession.
- The term ethics is defined as the judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just. In our society, there have been several notable ethical lapses, including such companies as United Airlines, Facebook, Equifax, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Starting in Fall 2017 the #MeToo movement started shining a light on a wide range of ethical issues involving the abuse of one's power to achieve sexual desires in the entertainment industry.
- Respecting our coworkers is one of the most essential keys to developing a positive organizational experience. There are many simple things we can do to show our respect, but one crucial feature is thinking about the types of language we use. Avoid using language that is considered biased and marginalizing.
- Personal responsibility refers to an individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave. Part of being a successful coworker is taking responsibility for your behaviours, communication, and task achievement in the workplace.
- Formal language is a specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar. Conversely, informal language is more colloquial or common in tone; it contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations, and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays.

Exercises

- Think of a time in an organization where you witnessed unethical organizational communication. Which of Redding's typology did you witness? Did you do anything about the unethical organizational communication? Why?
- Look at the list of respectful behaviours for workplace interactions. How would you react if others violated these respectful behaviours towards you as a coworker? Have you ever been disrespectful in your communication towards coworkers? Why?
- Why do you think it's essential to take personal responsibility and avoid excusing making in the workplace? Have you ever found yourself making excuses? Why?

Leader-Follower Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Visual and explain Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership theory, including the four types of leaders.
2. Describe the concept of leader-member exchange theory and the three stages these relationships go through.
3. Define Ira Chaleff's concept of followership and describe the four different followership styles.

Perspectives on Leadership

When you hear the word "leader" what immediately comes to your mind? What about when you hear the word "follower?" The words "leader" and "follower" bring up all kinds of examples (both good and bad) for most of us. We've all experienced times when we've followed a fantastic leader, and we've had times when we've worked for a less than an effective leader. At the same time, are we always the best followers? This section is going to examine prevailing theories related to leadership (situational-leadership theory and leader-member exchange theory), and then we'll end the section discussing the concept of followership.

Hersey and Blanchard's Situational-Leadership Theory

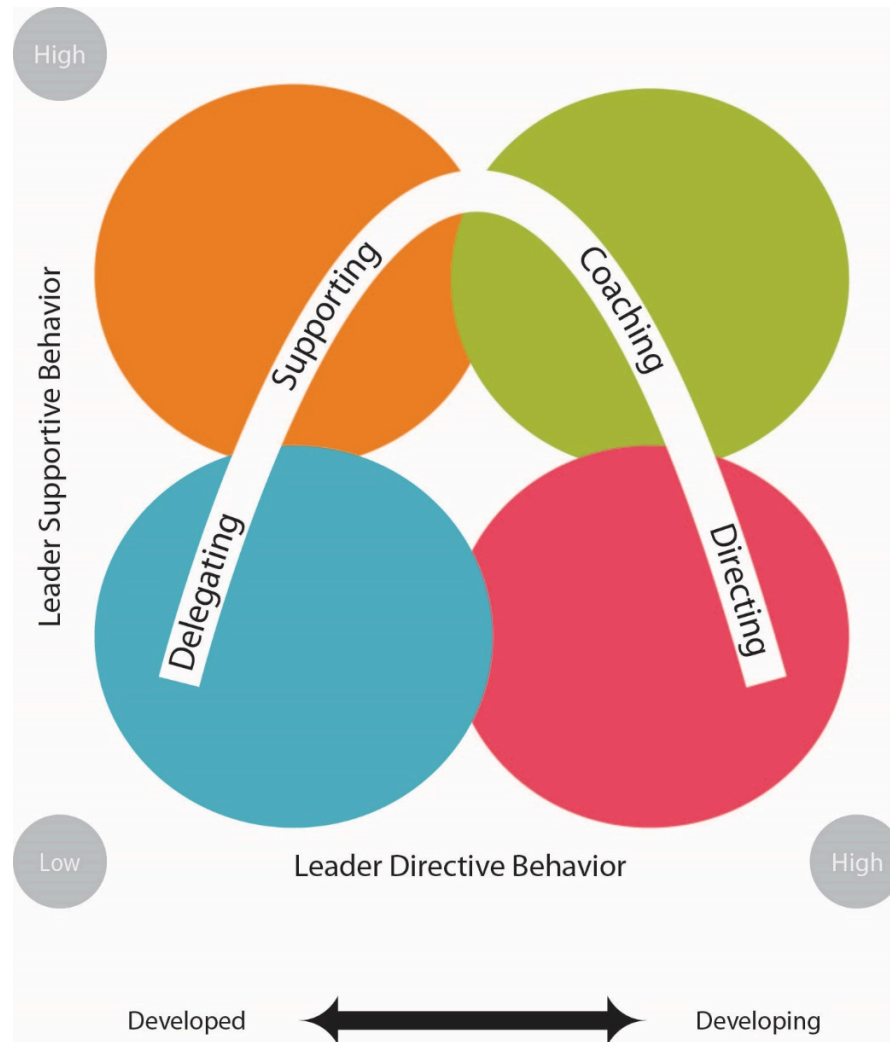


Figure 13.2 Situational-Leadership

One of the most commonly discussed models of leadership is Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard Situational-Leadership Model (<https://www.situational.com/>). The model is divided into two dimensions: task (leader directive behaviour) and relational (leader supportive behaviour).¹⁴ Hersey and Blanchard's Situational-Leadership Model starts with the basic idea that not all employees have the same needs. Some employees need a lot more hand-holding and guidance than other employees, and some employees need more relational contact than others. As such, Hersey and Blanchard defined leadership along two continuums: supportive and directive. **Supportive leadership behaviour** occurs when a leader is focused on providing relational support for their followers; whereas, **directive support** involves overseeing the day-to-day tasks that a follower accomplishes. As a leader and follower progress in their relationship, Hersey and Blanchard argue that the nature of their relationship often changes. Figure 13.2 contains the basic model proposed by Hersey and Blanchard and is ultimately broken into four leadership styles: directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating.¹⁵

Directing

Hersey and Blanchard's first type of leader is the directing leader. Directing leaders set the basic roles an individual has and the tasks an individual needs to accomplish. After setting these roles and tasks, the leader then monitors and oversees these followers closely. From a communication perspective, these leaders tend to make decisions and then communicate them to their followers. There tends to be little to no dialogue about either roles or tasks.

Coaching

Hersey and Blanchard's second type of leader is the coaching leader. Coaching leaders still set the basic roles and tasks that need to be accomplished by specific followers, but they allow for input from their followers. As such, the communication between coaching leaders and their followers tends to be more interactive instead of one-way. However, the ultimate decisions about roles and tasks are still ultimately the leader's decision.

Supporting

Hersey and Blanchard's third type of leader is the supporting leader. As a leader becomes more accustomed to a follower's ability to accomplish tasks and take responsibility for those tasks, a leader may become more supportive. A supporting leader allows followers to make the day-to-day decisions related to getting tasks accomplished, but determining what tasks need to be accomplished is a mutually agreed upon decision. In this case, the leader is more like a facilitator of a follower's work instead of dictating the follower's work.

Delegating

Hersey and Blanchard's final type of leader is the delegating leader. The delegating leader is one where the follower and leader are mutually involved in the basic decision making and problem-solving process. Still, the ultimate control for accomplishing tasks is left up to the follower. Followers ultimately determine when they need a leader's support and how much support is needed. As you can see from Figure 13.2, these relationships are ones that are considered highly developed and ultimately involve a level of trust on both sides of the leader-follower relationship.

Leader-Member Exchange Relationships

George Graen¹⁶ proposed a different type of theory for understanding leadership. In Graen's **leader-member exchange** (LMX) theory, leaders have limited resources and can only take on high-quality relationships with a small number of followers. For this reason, some relationships are characterized as high-quality LMX relationships, but most relationships are characterized as low-quality LMX relationships. High-quality LMX relationships are those "characterized by greater input in decisions, mutual support, informal influence, trust, and greater negotiating latitude."

In contrast, low-quality LMX relationships "are characterized by less support, more formal supervision, little or no involvement in decisions, and less trust and attention from the leader."¹⁷ Ultimately, many positive outcomes happen for a follower who enters into a high LMX relationship with a leader. Before looking at some positive outcomes from high LMX relationships, we're first going to examine the stages involved in the creation of these relationships.

Stages of LMX Relationships

So, you may be wondering how LMX relationships are developed. George B. Graen and Mary Uhl-Bien¹⁸ created a three-stage model for the development of LMX relationships. Figure 13.3 represents the three different stages discussed by Graen and Uhl-Bien: stranger, acquaintance, and partner.

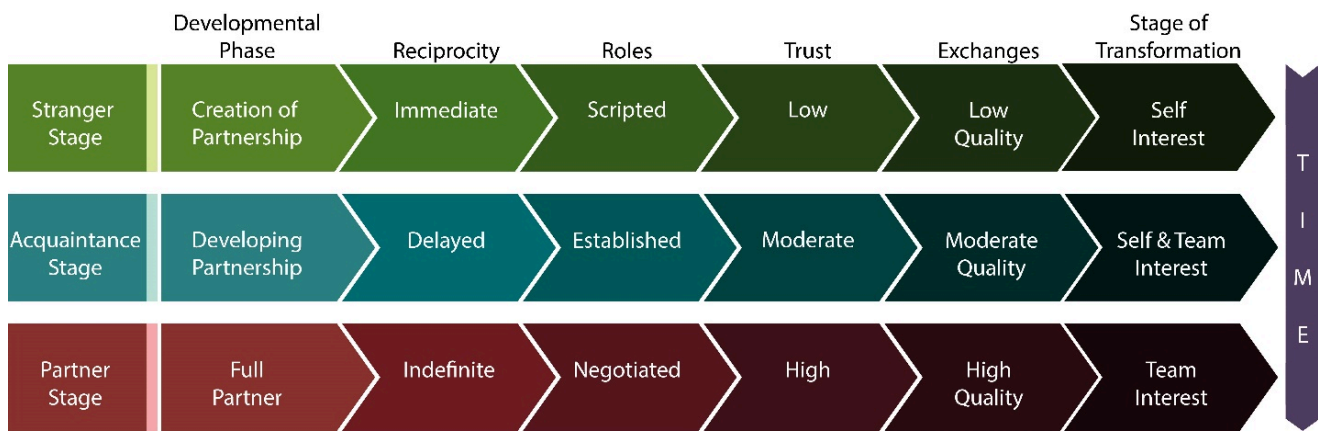


Figure 13.3. 3 Stages of LMX Relationships

Stranger Stage

The first stage of LMX relationships is the stranger stage, and this is the beginning of the creation of an LMX relationship. Most LMX relationships never venture beyond the stranger stage because of the resources needed on both the side of the follower and the leader to progress further.

As you can see from Figure 13.3, the stranger stage is one where their self-interests primarily guide the follower and the leader. These exchanges generally involve what Graen and Uhl-Bien call a “cash and carry” relationship. Cash and carry refers to the idea that some stores don’t utilize credit, so all purchases are made in cash, and customers carry their purchased goods right then. In the stranger stage, interactions between a follower and leader follow this same process. The leader helps the follower and gets something immediately in return. Low levels of trust mark these relationships, and interactions tend to be carried out through scripted forms of communication within the normal hierarchical structure of the organization.

Acquaintance Stage

The second stage of high-quality LMX relationships is the acquaintance stage or exchanges between a leader and follower become more normalized and aren’t necessarily based on a cash and carry system. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien, “Leaders and followers may begin to share greater information and resources, on both a personal and work level. These exchanges are still limited, however, and constitute a ‘testing’ stage—with the equitable return of favours within a limited time perspective.”¹⁹ At this point, neither the leader nor the follower expects to get anything immediately in return within the exchange relationship. Instead, they start seeing this relationship as something that has the potential for long-term benefits for both sides. There also is a switch from purely personal self-interests to a combination of both self-interests and the interests of one’s team or organization.

Partner Stage

The final stage in the development of LMX relationships is the partner stage or the stage where a follower stops being perceived as a follower and starts being perceived as an equal or colleague. A level of maturity marks these relationships. Even though the two people within the exchange relationship may still have titles of leader and follower, there is a sense of equality between the individuals within the relationship.

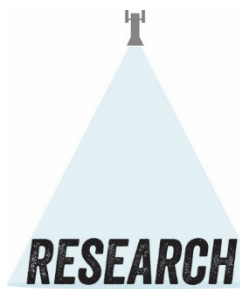
Outcomes of High LMX Relationships

Ultimately, high LMX relationships take time to develop, and most people will not enter into a high LMX relationship within their lifetime. These are special relationships but can have a wildly powerful impact on someone’s career and life. The following are some of the known outcomes of high LMX relationships when compared to those in low LMX relationships:

1. Increased productivity (both quality and quantity).
2. Increased job satisfaction.

3. Less likely to quit.
4. Increased supervisor satisfaction.
5. Increased organizational commitment.
6. Increased satisfaction with the communication practices of the team and organization.
7. Increased clarity about one's role in the organization.
8. Increased likelihood to go beyond their job duties to help other employees.
9. Higher levels of success in their careers.
10. Increased likelihood of providing honest feedback.
11. Increased motivation at work.
12. Higher levels of influence within their organization.
13. Receive more desirable work assignments.
14. Higher levels of attention and support from organizational leaders.
15. Increased organizational participation. [20](#), [21](#), [22](#), [23](#)

Research Spotlight



In a 2019 article, Leah Omilion-Hodges, Scott Shank, and Christine Packard wanted to find out what young adults want in a manager. To start, the researchers orally interviewed 22 undergraduate students (mean age was 22). They asked the students about the general desires they have for managers, which included questions about general management style and communication (frequency and quality). Previous research by Omilion-Hodges and Christine Sugg had determined five management archetypes, which was reaffirmed in the current study: [24](#)

1. Mentor: An empathetic advocate, professional, and personal guide.
2. Manager: A proxy for organizational leadership who takes a transactional approach to leader-follower relationships.
3. Teacher: Seen as a traditional educator who provides role-testing episodes, clear feedback, and opportunities for redemption and growth.
4. Friend: Although in a managerial position, perceived as an informed and approachable peer.
5. Gatekeeper: A high-status actor who is positioned to either advocate for or against an employee. [25](#)

In the current set of focus group interviews, the researchers focused more on the communicative and relational behaviours students wanted out of managers:

1. Mentor: Role model, leads by example, makes and leaves an impact, advocate, and life coach.
2. Manager: The nuts and bolts of a functional organization, lack of personal relationship, monitor and delegate tasks, maintain the establishment, structured and organized, stick to the plan, follow rules and regulations, strictly business, rules, hierarchy, protocol, and proficient.
3. Teacher: Dedicated, provide learning opportunities, supportive, dedicated to growth of the organization, information delegation, provides necessary resources, provides explicit directions and feedback, one-on-one instruction.
4. Friend: Well-developed relationship outside of work, empathetic; support in all areas of your life, similarity, identity development, values employees as whole people, relationally focused.
5. Gatekeeper: Removed from day-to-day operations, strategic, can help you advance or hold you back, rules and regulation abiding, restricts information at their discretion, communicates only to influence, controls the successes and or failures of followers. [26](#)

With the focus groups completed, the researchers used what they learned to create a 54-item measure of management archetypes, which they then tested with a sample of 153 participants. During the analysis process, the researchers lost the gatekeeper set of questions, but the other four management archetypes held firm. This study was confirmed in a third study using 249 students.

Omilion-Hodges, L. M., Shank, S. E., & Packard, C. M. (2019). What young adults want: A multistudy examination of vocational anticipatory socialization through the lens of students' desired managerial communication behaviours. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 33(4), 512–547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318919851177>

Followership

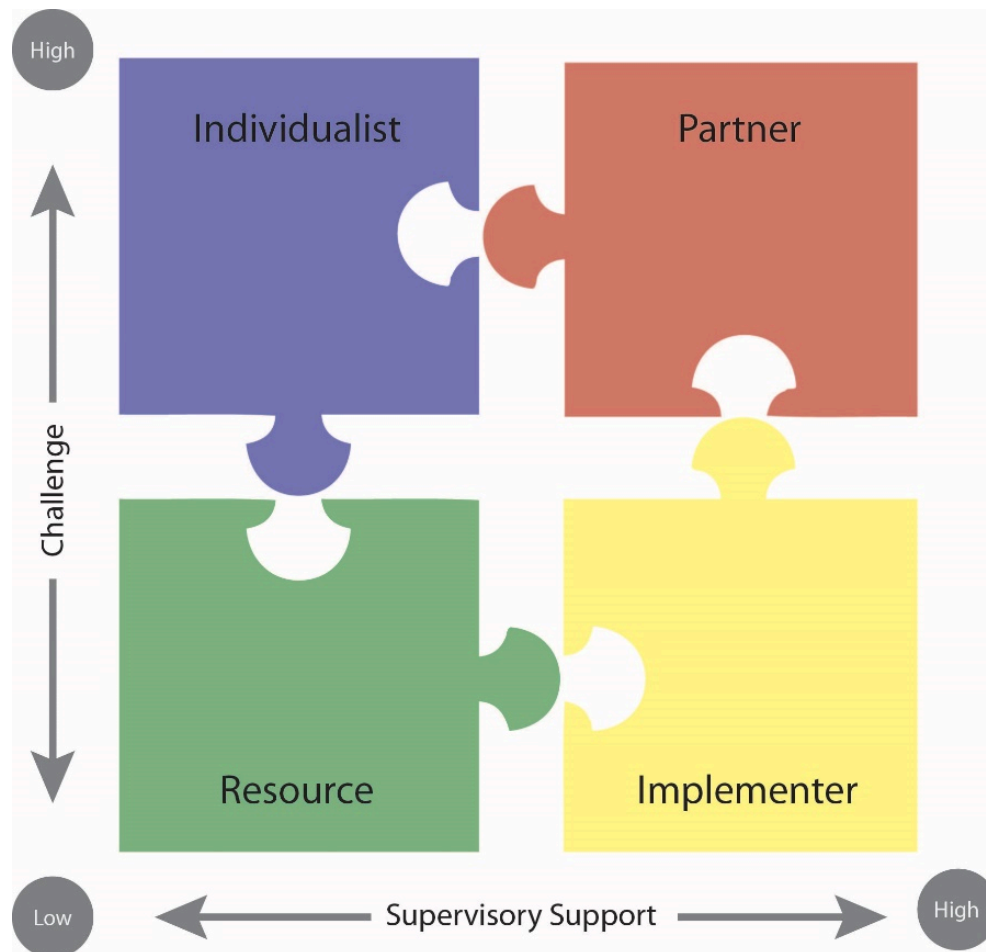


Figure 13.4 Styles of Followership

Although there is a great deal of leadership about the concepts of leadership, there isn't as much about people who follow those leaders. **Followership** is "the act or condition under which an individual helps or supports a leader in the accomplishment of organizational goals."²⁷

Ira Chaleff (<http://www.courageousfollower.net/>) was one of the first researchers to examine the nature of followership in his book, *The Courageous Follower*.²⁸ Chaleff believes that followership is not something that happens naturally for a lot of people, so it is something that people must be willing to engage in. From this perspective, followership is not a passive behaviour. Ultimately, followership can be broken down into two primary factors: the courage to support the leader and the courage to challenge the leader's behaviour and policies. Figure 13.4 represents the general breakdown of Chaleff's four types of followers: resource, individualist, implementer, and partner. Before proceeding, you may want to watch the video Chaleff produced that uses tango to illustrate his basic ideas of followership (<https://youtu.be/Cswrncldggg>).

Resource

The first follower style discussed by Chaleff is the resource. Resources will not challenge or support their leader.

Chaleff argues that resources generally lack the intellect, imagination, and courage to do more than what is asked of them. When it comes to resources, they usually do what is requested of them, but nothing that goes beyond that.

Individualist

The second followership style is the individualist. Individualists tend to do what they think is best in the organization, not necessarily what they've been asked to do. It's not that individualists are inherently bad followers; they have their perspectives on how things should get accomplished and are more likely to follow their perspectives than those of their leaders. Individualists provide little support for their leaders, and they are the first to speak out with new ideas that contradict their leader's ideas.

Implementer

The third followership style is the implementer. Implementers are very important for organizations because they tend to do the bulk of the day-to-day work that needs to be accomplished. Implementers busy themselves performing tasks and getting things done, but they do not question or challenge their leaders.

Partner

The final type of followership is the partner. Partners have an inherent need to be seen as equal to their leaders with regard to both intellect and skill levels. Partners take responsibility for their own and their leader's ideas and behaviours. Partners do support their leaders but have no problem challenging their leaders. When they do disagree with their leaders, partners point out specific concerns with their leader's ideas and behaviours.

Key Takeaways

- Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership theory can be seen in Figure 13.2. As part of this theory, Hersey and Blanchard noted four different types of leaders: directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. Directing leaders set the basic roles an individual has and the tasks an individual needs to accomplish. Coaching leaders still set the basic roles and tasks that need to be accomplished by specific followers, but they allow for input from their followers. Supporting leader allows followers to make the day-to-day decisions related to getting tasks accomplished, but determining what tasks need to be accomplished is a mutually agreed upon decision. And a delegating leader is one where the follower and leader are mutually involved in the basic decision making and problem-solving process, but the ultimate control for accomplishing tasks is left up to the follower.
- Leader-member exchange theory (LMX) explores how leaders enter into two-way relationships with followers through a series of exchange agreements enabling followers to grow or be held back. There are three stages of LMX relationships: strange, acquaintance, and partner. The stranger stage is one where their self-interests primarily guide the follower and the leader. Next, the acquaintance stage involves exchanges between a leader and follower become more normalized and aren't necessarily based on a cash and carry system. Finally, the partner stage is when a follower stops being perceived as a follower and starts being perceived as an equal or colleague.
- Followership is the act or condition under which an individual helps or supports a leader in the accomplishment of organizational goals. In Ira Chaleff's concept of followership, he describes for different followership styles: resource, individualist, implementer, and partner. First, a resource is someone who will not support nor challenge their leader. Second, an individualist is someone who engages in low levels of supervisory support but high levels of challenge for a leader. Third, implementers support their leaders but don't challenge them, but they are known for doing the bulk of the day-to-day work. Lastly, partners are people who show both high levels of support and challenge for their leaders. Partners have an inherent need to be seen as equal to their leaders with regard to both intellect and skill levels.

Exercises

- Think back to one of your most recent leaders. If you were to compare their leadership style to Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership theory, which of the four leadership styles did this leader use with you? Why do you think this leader used this specific style with you? Did this leader use different leadership styles with different followers?
- Why do you think high LMX relationships are so valuable to one's career trajectory? Why do you think more followers or leaders go out of their ways to develop high LMX relationships?
- When thinking about your relationship with a recent leader, what type of follower were you according to Ira Chaleff's concept of followership? Why?

Coworker (Peer Relationships)

Learning Objectives

1. List and explain Patricia Sias' characteristics of coworker relationships and Jessica Methot's three additional characteristics.
2. Differentiate among Kathy Kram and Lynn Isabella's three types of coworker relationships.
3. Explain Patricia Sias and Daniel Cahill's list of influencing factors on coworker relationships.
4. Describe the three ways coworkers go about disengaging from workplace relationships articulated by Patricia Sias and Tarra Perry.

Characteristics of Coworker Relationships

According to organizational workplace relationship expert Patricia Sias, peer coworker relationships exist between individuals who exist at the same level within an organizational hierarchy and have no formal authority over each other.²⁹ According to Sias, we engage in these coworker relationships because they provide us with mentoring, information, power, and support. Let's look at all four of these.

Sias' Reasons for Workplace Relationships

Mentoring

First, our coworker relationships are a great source for mentoring within any organizational environment. It's always good to have that person who is a peer that you can run to when you have a question or need advice. Because this person has no direct authority over you, you can informally interact with this person without fear of reproach if these relationships are healthy. We'll discuss what happens when you have nonhealthy relationships in the next section.

Sources of Information

Second, we use our peer coworker relationships as sources for information. One of our coauthors worked in a medical school for a while. Our coauthor quickly realized that there were some people he could talk to around the hospital who would gladly let our coauthor know everything that was going on around the place. One important caveat to all of this involves the quality of the information we are receiving. By information quality, Sias refers to the degree to which an individual perceives the information they are receiving as accurate, timely, and useful. Ever had that one friend who always has great news, that everyone else heard the previous week? Yeah, not all information sources provide you with quality information. As such, we need to establish a network of high-quality information sources if we are going to be successful within an organizational environment.

Issues of Power

Third, we engage in coworker relationships as an issue of power. Although two coworkers may exist in the same

run within an organizational hierarchy, it's important also to realize that there are informal sources of power as well. In the next chapter, we are going to explore the importance of power within interpersonal relationships in general. For now, we'll say that power can be useful and helps us influence what goes on within our immediate environments. However, power can also be used to control and intimidate people, which is a huge problem in many organizations.

Social Support

The fourth reason we engage in peer coworker relationships is social support. For our purposes, let's define **social support** as the perception and actuality that an individual receives assistance, care, and help from those people within their life. Let's face it; there's a reason corporate America has been referred to as the concrete jungle, circuses, or theatres of the absurd. Even the best organization in the world can be trying at times. The best boss in the world will eventually get under your skin about something. We're humans; we're flawed. As such, no organization is perfect, so it's always important to have those peer coworkers we can go to who are there for us. One of our coauthors has a coworker our coauthor calls whenever our coauthor needs to be "talked off the ledge." Our coauthor likes higher education and loves being a professor, but occasionally something happens, and our coauthor needs the coworker to vent to about something that has occurred. For the most part, our coauthor doesn't want the coworker to solve a problem; our coauthor just wants someone to listen as our coauthor vents. We all need to de-stress in the workplace, and having peer coworker relationships is one way we do this.

Other Characteristics

In addition to the four characteristics discussed by Sias, Jessica Methot³⁰ argued that three other features are also important: trust, relational maintenance, and ability to focus.

Trust

Methot defines trust as "the willingness to be vulnerable to another party with the expectation that the other party will behave with the best interest of the focal individual."³¹ In essence, in the workplace, we eventually learn how to make ourselves vulnerable to our coworkers believing that our coworkers will do what's in our best interests. Now, trust is an interesting and problematic concept because it's both a function of workplace relationships but also an outcome. For coworker relationships to work or operate as they should, we need to be able to trust our coworkers. However, the more we get to know our coworkers and know they have our best interests at heart, then the more we will ultimately trust our coworkers. Trust develops over time and is not something that is not just a bipolar concept of trust or doesn't trust. Instead, there are various degrees of trust in the workplace. At first, you may trust your coworkers just enough to tell them surface level things about yourself (e.g., where you went to college, major, hometown, etc.), but over time, as we've discussed before in this book, we start to self-disclose as deeper levels as our trust increases. Now, most coworker relationships will never be intimate relationships or even actual friendships, but we can learn to trust our coworkers within the confines of our jobs.

Relational Maintenance

Kathryn Dindia and Daniel J. Canary wrote that definitions of the term "relational maintenance" could be broken down into four basic types:

1. To keep a relationship in existence;
2. To keep a relationship in a specified state or condition;
3. To keep a relationship in a satisfactory condition; and
4. To keep a relationship in repair.³²

Mithas argues that **relational maintenance** is a difficult task in any context. Still, coworker relationships can have a range of negative outcomes if organizational members have difficulty maintaining their relationships with each other. For this reason, Mithas defines maintenance difficulty as "the degree of difficulty individuals experience in interpersonal relationships due to misunderstandings, incompatibility of goals, and the time and effort necessary to cope with disagreements."³³ Imagine you have two coworkers who tend to behave in an inappropriate fashion

nonverbally. Maybe he sits there and rolls his eyes at everything his coworker says, or perhaps she uses exaggerated facial expressions to mock her coworker when he's talking. Having these types of coworkers will cause us (as a third party witnessing these problems) to spend more time trying to maintain relationships with both of them. On the flip side, the relationship between our two coworkers will take even more maintenance to get them to a point where they can just be collegial in the same room with each other. The more time we have to spend trying to decrease tension or resolve interpersonal conflicts in the workplace, the less time we will ultimately have on our actual jobs. Eventually, this can leave you feeling exhausted feeling and emotionally drained as though you just don't have anything else to give. When this happens, we call this having inadequate resources to meet work demands. All of us will eventually hit a wall when it comes to our psychological and emotional resources. When we do hit that wall, our ability to perform job tasks will decrease. As such, it's essential that we strive to maintain healthy relationships with our coworkers ourselves, but foster an environment that encourages our coworkers to maintain healthy relationships with each other. However, it's important to note that some people will simply never play well in the sandbox others. Some coworker relationships can become so toxic that minimizing contact and interaction can be the best solution to avoid draining your psychological and emotional resources.

Ability to Focus

Have you ever found your mind wandering while you are trying to work? One of the most important things when it comes to getting our work done is having the ability to focus. Within an organizational context, Methot defines "ability to focus" as "the ability to pay attention to value-producing activities without being concerned with extraneous issues such as off-task thoughts or distractions."³⁴ When individuals have healthy relationships with their coworkers, they are more easily able to focus their attention on the work at hand. On the other hand, if your coworkers always play politics, stabbing each other in the back, gossiping, and engaging in numerous other counterproductive workplace (or deviant workplace) behaviours, then it's going to be a lot harder for you to focus on your job.

Types of Coworker Relationships

Now that we've looked at some of the characteristics of coworker relationships, let's talk about the three different types of coworkers research has categorized. Kathy Kram and Lynn Isabella³⁵ found that there are essentially three different types of coworker relationships in the workplace: information peer, collegial peer, and special peer. Figure 13.5 illustrates the basic things we get from each of these different types of peer relationships.



Figure 13.5 Types of Coworker Relationships

Information Peers

Information peers are so-called because we rely on these individuals for information about job tasks and the organization itself. As you can see from Figure 13.5, there are four basic types of activities we engage information peers for: information sharing, workplace socialization/onboarding, networking, and knowledge management/maintenance.

Information Sharing

First, we share information with our information peers. Of course, this information is task-focused, so the information is designed to help us complete our job better.

Workplace Socialization and Onboarding

Second, information peers are vital during workplace socialization or onboarding. Workplace socialization can be defined as the process by which new organizational members learn the rules (e.g., explicit policies, explicit procedures, etc.), norms (e.g., when you go on break, how to act at work, who to eat with, who not to eat with, etc.), and culture (e.g., innovation, risk-taking, team orientation, competitiveness, etc.) of an organization. Organizations often have a very formal process for workplace socialization that is called onboarding. Onboarding is when an organization helps new members get acquainted with the organization, its members, its customers, and its products/services.

Networking

Third, information peers help us network within our organization or a larger field. Half of being successful in any organization involves getting to know the key players within the organization. Our information peers will already have existing relationships with these key players, so they can help make introductions. Furthermore, some of our peers may connect with others in the field (outside the organization), so they could help you meet other professionals as well.

Knowledge Management/Maintenance

Lastly, information peers help us manage and maintain knowledge. During the early parts of workplace socialization, our information peers will help us weed through all of the noise and focus on the knowledge that is important for us to do our jobs. As we become more involved in an organization, we can still use these information peers to help us acquire new knowledge or update existing knowledge. When we talk about knowledge, we generally talk about two different types: explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is information that is kept in some retrievable format. For example, you'll need to find previously written reports or a list of customers' names and addresses. These are examples of the types of information that physically (or electronically) may exist within the organization. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is the knowledge that's difficult to capture permanently (e.g., write down, visualize, or permanently transfer from one person to another) because it's garnered from personal experience and contexts. Informational peers who have been in an organization for a long time will have a lot of tacit knowledge. They may have an unwritten history of why policies and procedures are the way they are now, or they may know how to "read" certain clients because they've spent decades building relationships. For obvious reasons, it's much easier to pass on explicit knowledge than implicit knowledge.

Collegial Peers

The second class of relationships we'll have in the workplace are **collegial peers** or relationships that have moderate levels of trust and self-disclosure and is different from information peers because of the more openness that is shared between two individuals. Collegial peers may not be your best friends, but they are people that you enjoy working with. Some of the hallmarks of collegial peers include career strategizing, job-related feedback, recognizing competence/performance, and friendship.

Career Strategizing

First, collegial peers help us with career strategizing. **Career strategizing** is the process of creating a plan of action for one's career path and trajectory. First, notice that career strategizing is a process, so it's marked by gradual changes that help you lead to your ultimate result. Career strategizing isn't something that happens once, and we stay on that path for the rest of our lives. Often our intended career paths take twists and turns we never expected nor predicted. However, our collegial peers are often great resources for helping us think through this process either within a specific organization or a larger field.

Job-Related Feedback

Second, collegial peers also provide us with job-related feedback. We often turn to those who are around us the most often to see how we are doing within an organization. Our collegial peers can provide us this necessary feedback to ensure we are doing our jobs to the utmost of our abilities and the expectations of the organization. Under this category, the focus is purely on how we are doing our jobs and how we can do our jobs better.

Recognizing Competence/Performance

Third, collegial peers are usually the first to recognize our competence in the workplace and recognize us for excellent performance. Generally speaking, our peers have more interactions with us on the day-to-day job than does middle or upper management, so they are often in the best position to recognize our competence in the workplace. Our competence in the workplace can involve having valued attitudes (e.g., liking hard work, having a positive attitude, working in a team, etc.), cognitive abilities (e.g., information about a field, technical knowledge, industry-specific knowledge, etc.), and skills (e.g., writing, speaking, computer, etc.) necessary to complete critical

work-related tasks. Not only do our peers recognize our attitudes, cognitive abilities, and skills, they are also there to pat us on the backs and tell us we've done a great job when a task is complete.

Friendship

Lastly, collegial peers provide us a type of friendship in the workplace. They offer us a sense of camaraderie in the workplace. They also offer us someone we can both like and trust in the workplace. Now, it's important to distinguish this level of friendships from other types of friendships we have in our lives. Collegial peers are not going to be your "best friends," but they will offer you friendships within the workplace that make work more bearable and enjoyable. At the collegial level, you may not associate with these friends outside of work beyond workplace functions (e.g., sitting next to each other at meetings, having lunch together, finding projects to work on together, etc.). It's also possible that a group of collegial peers will go to events outside the workplace as a group (e.g., going to happy hour, throwing a holiday party, attending a baseball game, etc.).

Special Peers

The final group of peers we work with are called special peers. Kram and Isabella note that special peer relationships "involves revealing central ambivalences and personal dilemmas in work and family realms. Pretense and formal roles are replaced by greater self-disclosure and self-expression."³⁶ **Special peer** relationships are marked by confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship.

Confirmation

First, special peers provide us with confirmation. When we are having one of our darkest days at work and are not sure we're doing our jobs well, our special peers are there to let us know that we're doing a good job. They approve of who we are and what we do. These are also the first people we go to when we do something well at work.

Emotional Support

Second, special peers provide us with emotional support in the workplace. Emotional support from special peers comes from their willingness to listen and offer helpful advice and encouragement. Kelly Zellars and Pamela Perrewé have noted there are four types of emotional social support we get from peers: positive, negative, non-job-related, and empathic communication.³⁷ Positive emotional support is when you and a special peer talk about the positive sides to work. For example, you and a special peer could talk about the joys of working on a specific project. Negative emotional support, on the other hand, is when you and a special peer talk about the downsides to work. For example, maybe both of you talk about the problems working with a specific manager or coworker. The third form of emotional social support is non-job-related or talking about things that are happening in your personal lives outside of the workplace itself. These could be conversations about friends, family members, hobbies, etc. A good deal of the emotional social support we get from special peers has nothing to do with the workplace at all. The final type of emotional social support is empathic communication or conversations about one's emotions or emotional state in the workplace. If you're having a bad day, you can go to your special peer, and they will reassure you about the feelings you are experiencing. Another example is talking to your special peer after having a bad interaction with a customer that ended with the customer yelling at you for no reason. After the interaction, you seek out your special peer, and they will confirm your feelings and thoughts about the interaction.

Personal Feedback

Third, special peers will provide both reliable and candid feedback about you and your work performance. One of the nice things about building an intimate special peer relationship is that both of you will be honest with one another. There are times we need confirmation, but then there are times we need someone to be bluntly honest with us. We are more likely to feel criticized and hurt when blunt honesty comes from someone when we do not have a special peer relationship. Special peer relationships provide a safe space where we can openly listen to feedback even if we're not thrilled to receive that feedback.

Friendship

Lastly, special peers also offer us a sense of deeper friendship in the workplace. You can almost think of special

peers as your best friend(s) within the workplace. Most people will only have one or maybe two people they consider a special peer in the workplace. You may be friendly with a lot of your peers (i.g., collegial peers), but having that special peer relationship is deeper and more meaningful.

A Further Look at Workplace Friendships

At some point, a peer coworker relationship may, or may not, evolve into a workplace friendship. According to Patricia Sias, there are two key hallmarks of a workplace friendship: voluntariness and personalistic focus. First, workplace friendships are voluntary. Someone can assign you a mentor or a mentee, but that person cannot make you form a friendship with that person. Most of the people you work with will not be your friends. You can have amazing working relationships with your coworkers, but you may only develop a small handful of workplace friendships. Second, workplace friendships have a personalistic focus. Instead of just viewing this individual as a coworker, we see this person as someone who is a whole individual who is a friend. According to research, workplace friendships are marked by higher levels of intimacy, frankness, and depth than those who are peer coworkers.³⁸

Friendship Development in the Workplace

According to Patricia Sias and Daniel Cahill, workplace friendships are developed by a series of influencing factors: individual/personal factors, contextual factors, and communication changes.³⁹ First, some friendships develop because we are drawn to the other person. Maybe you're drawn to a person in a meeting because she has a sense of humour that is similar to yours, or maybe you find that another coworker's attitude towards the organization is exactly like yours. Whatever the reason we have, we are often drawn to people that are like us. For this reason, we are often drawn to people who resemble ourselves demographically (e.g., age, sex, race, religion, etc.).

A second reason we develop relationships in the workplace is because of a variety of different contextual factors. Maybe your office is right next to someone else's office, so you develop a friendship because you're next to each other all the time. Perhaps you develop friendships because you're on the same committee or put on the same work project with another person. In large organizations, we often end up making friends with people simply because we get to meet them. Depending on the size of your organization, you may end up meeting and interact with a tiny percentage of people, so you're not likely to become friends with everyone in the organization equally. Other organizations provide a culture where friendships are approved of and valued. In the realm of workplace friendship research, two important factors have been noticed concerning contextual factors controlled by the organization: opportunity and prevalence.⁴⁰ Friendship opportunity refers to the degree to which an organization promotes and enables workers to develop friendships within the organization. Does your organization have regular social gatherings for employees? Does your organization promote informal interaction among employees, or does it clamp down on coworker communication? Not surprisingly, individuals who work in organizations that allow for and help friendships tend to be satisfied, more motivated, and generally more committed to the organization itself.

Friendship prevalence, on the other hand, is less of an organizational culture and more the degree to which an individual feels that they have developed or can develop workplace friendships. You may have an organization that attempts to create an environment where people can make friends, but if you don't think you can trust your coworkers, you're not very likely to make workplace friends. Although the opportunity is important when seeing how an individual responds to the organization, friendship prevalence is probably the more important factor of the two. If I'm a highly communicative apprehensive employee, I may not end up making any friends at work, so I may see my workplace place as just a job without any commitment at all. When an individual isn't committed to the workplace, they will probably start looking for another job.⁴¹

Lastly, as friendships develop, our communication patterns within those relationships change. For example, when we move from being just an acquaintance to being a friend with a coworker, we are more likely to increase the amount of communication about non-work and personal topics. When we transition from friend to close friend, Sias and Cahill note that this change is marked by decreased caution and increased intimacy. Furthermore, this transition in friendship is characterized by an increase in discussing work-related problems. The final transition from a close friend to "almost best" friend. According to Sias and Cahill, "Because of the increasing amount of trust developed between the coworkers, they felt freer to share opinions and feelings,

particularly their feelings about work frustrations. Their discussion about both work and personal issues became increasingly more detailed and intimate.”⁴²

Relationship Disengagement

Thus far, we’ve talked about workplace friendships as positive factors in the workplace, but any friendship can sour. Some friendships sour because one person moves into a position of authority of the other, so there is no longer perceived equality within the relationship. Other friendships occur when there is a relationship violation of some kind (see [Chapter 8](#)). Some friendships devolve because of conflicting expectations of the relationship. Maybe one friend believes that giving him a heads up about insider information in the workplace is part of being a friend, and the other person sees it as a violation of trust given to her by her supervisors. When we have these conflicting ideas about what it means to “be a friend,” we can often see a schism that gets created. So, how does an individual get out of workplace friendships? Patricia Sias and Tarra Perry were the first researchers to discuss how colleagues disengage from relationships with their coworkers.⁴³ Sias and Perry found three distinct tools that coworkers use: state-of-the-relationship talk, cost escalation, and depersonalization. Before explaining them, we should mention that people use all three and do not necessarily progress through the three in any order.

State-of-the-Relationship Talk

The first strategy people use when disengaging from workplace friendships involves state-of-the-relationship talk. **State-of-the-relationship talk** is exactly what it sounds like; you officially have a discussion that the friendship is ending. The goal of state-of-the-relationship talk is to engage the other person and inform them that ending the friendship is the best way to ensure that the two can continue a professional, functional relationship. Ideally, all workplace friendships could end in a situation where both parties agree that it’s in everyone’s best interest for the friendship to stop. Still, we all know this isn’t always the case, which is why the other two are often necessary.

Cost Escalation

The second strategy people use when ending a workplace friendship involves cost escalation. **Cost escalation** involves tactics that are designed to make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship. For example, a coworker could start belittling a friend in public, making the friend the center of all jokes, or talking about the friend behind the friend’s back. All of these behaviours are designed to make the cost of the relationship too high for the other person.

Depersonalization

The final strategy involves depersonalization. **Depersonalization** can come in one of two basic forms. First, an individual can depersonalize a relationship by stopping all the interaction that is not task-focused. When you have to interact with the workplace friend, you keep the conversation purely business and do not allow for talk related to personal lives. The goal of this type of behaviour is to alter the relationship from one of closeness to one of professional distance. The second way people can depersonalize a relationship is simply to avoid that person. If you know a workplace friend is going to be at a staff party, you purposefully don’t go. If you see the workplace friend coming down the hallway, you go in the opposite direction or duck inside a room before they can see you. Again, the purpose of this type of depersonalization is to put actual distance between you and the other person. According to Sias and Perry’s research, depersonalization tends to be the most commonly used tactic.⁴⁴

Key Takeaways

- According to Patricia Sias, people engage in workplace relationships for several reasons: mentoring, information, power, and support. Jessica Methot’s further suggested that we engage in coworker relationships for trust, relational maintenance, and the ability to focus.
- Kathy Kram and Lynn Isabella explained that there are three different types of workplace relationships: information peer, collegial peer, and special peer. Information peers are coworkers we rely on for information about job tasks and the organization itself. Collegial peers are coworkers with whom we have

moderate levels of trust and self-disclosure and more openness that is shared between two individuals. Special peers, on the other hand, are coworkers marked by high levels of trust and self-disclosure, like a “best friend” in the workplace.

- Patricia Sias and Daniel Cahill’s created a list of influencing factors on coworker relationships. First, some coworkers we are simply more drawn to than others. As such, traditional notions of interpersonal attraction and homophily are at play. A second influencing factor involves contextual changes. Often there are specific contextual changes (e.g., moving offices, friendship opportunity, and friendship prevalence) impact the degree to which people develop coworker friendships. Finally, communication changes as we progress through the four types of coworker friendships: acquaintance, friend, close friend, and almost best friend.
- Patricia Sias and Tarra Perry describe three different ways that coworkers can disengage from coworker relationships in the workplace. First, individuals can engage in state-of-the-relationship talk with a coworker, or explain to a coworker that a workplace friendship is ending. Second, individuals can make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship, which is called cost escalation. The final disengagement strategy coworkers can utilize, depersonalization occurs when an individual stops all the interaction with a coworker that is not task-focused or simply to avoid the coworker.

Exercises

- Think about your workplace relationships with coworkers. Which of Patricia Sias’ four reasons and Jessica Methot’s three additional characteristics were at play in these coworker relationships?
- Kathy Kram and Lynn Isabella described three different types of peers we have in the workplace: information peer, collegial peer, and special peer. Think about your workplace. Can you identify people who fall into all three categories? If not, why do you think you don’t have all three types of peers? If you do, how are these relationships distinctly different from one another?
- Think about an experience where you needed to end a workplace relationship with a coworker. Which of Patricia Sias and Tarra Perry’s disengagement strategies did you use? Do you think there are other disengagement strategies available beyond the ones described by Sias and Perry?

Romantic Relationships at Work

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term “romantic workplace relationship.”
2. Reconstruct Charles Pierce, Donn Byrne, and Herman Aguinis’ model of romantic workplace relationships.
3. Describe the four reasons why romantic workplace relationships develop discovered by Renee Cowan and Sean Horan.
4. Summarize the findings related to how coworkers view romantic workplace relationships.

In 2014 poll conducted by CareerBuilder.com and Harris Interactive Polling, they found that 38% of U.S. workers had dated a coworker at least once, and 20% of office romances involve someone who is already married.⁴⁵ According to the press release issued by the researchers, “Office romances most often start with coworkers running into each other outside of work (12 percent) or at a happy hour (11 percent). Some other situations that led to romance include late nights at work (10 percent), having lunch together (10 percent), and love at first sight (9 percent).” Furthermore, according to data collected by Stanford University’s “How Couples Meet and Stay Together” research project, around 12% of married couples meet at work.⁴⁶ Meeting through friends is the number one way that people meet their marriage partners, but those who met at work were more likely to get married than those who met through friends.

In essence, workplaces are still a place for romance, but this romance can often be a double-edged sword for

organizations. In the modern organization, today's office fling can easily turn into tomorrow's sexual harassment lawsuit.

Understanding Romantic Workplace Relationships

According to Charles Pierce, Donn Byrne, and Herman Aguinis, a **romantic workplace relationship** occurs when “two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association.”⁴⁷ From this perspective, the authors noted five distinct characteristics commonly associated with workplace romantic relationships:

1. Passionate desire to be with one's romantic partner;
2. Shared, intimate self-disclosures;
3. Affection and mutual respect;
4. Emotional fulfillment; and
5. Sexual fulfillment/gratification.

A Model of Romantic Workplace Relationships



Figure 13.6 Romantic Workplace Relationship Model

In their article examining romantic workplace relationships, Pierce, Byrne, and Aguinis proposed a model for understanding workplace relationships. Figure 13.6 is a simplified version of that basic model. The basic model is pretty easy to follow. First, it starts with the issue of propinquity, or the physical closeness of two people in a given space. One of the main reasons romantic relationships develop in the workplace is because we are around people in our offices every day. It's this physical proximity that ultimately leads people to develop interpersonal attractions for some people. However, just because we find someone interpersonally attractive doesn't mean we're going to jump in a romantic relationship with them. Most people (if not all people) that we find interpersonally attractive at work will never develop romantic attractions towards. However, romantic attraction does happen. At the same time, if you don't desire a workplace relationship, then even a romantic attraction won't lead you to start engaging in a workplace relationship. If, however, you decide or desire to workplace relationship, then you are likely to start participating in that romantic workplace relationship.

Once you start engaging in a romantic workplace relationship, there will be consequences of that relationship. Now, some of these consequences are positive, and others could be negative. For our purposes, we broadly put these consequences into three different categories: personal, professional, and organizational.

Personal Outcomes

The first type of outcomes someone may face are personal outcomes or outcomes that affect an individual and not their romantic partner. Ultimately, romantic relationships can have a combination of both positive and negative outcomes for the individuals involved in them. For our purposes here, we will assume that both romantic partners are single and not in any other kind of romantic relationship. As long as that romantic relationship is functioning

positively, individuals will be happy, which can positively impact someone's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee motivation. Employees engaged in romantic workplace relationships will even work longer hours so they can be with their romantic partners.

On the flip side, romantic relationships always have their ups and downs. If a relationship is not going well, then the individuals in those romantic workplace relationships can lead to adverse outcomes. In this case, we could see a decrease in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee motivation. You could also see romantic partners trying to put more distance between themselves and their romantic partner at work. In these cases, you could see people avoid being placed on the same project or working longer hours to avoid extra time with their romantic partner.

Overall, it's important to remember that romantic workplace relationships can lead to personal outcomes in the workplace environment. People often think they can keep their romantic and professional selves apart, but these distinctions can often become blurry and harder to separate.

Professional Outcomes

The second type of outcomes someone in a romantic workplace relationship may face are professional. According to Robert Quinn, there is a range of professional outcomes that can occur when someone is involved in a romantic relationship.⁴⁸ Quinn listed six basic outcomes someone people achieve professionally as a result of engaging in a romantic workplace relationship: advancement, job security, increased power, financial rewards, easier work, job efficiency. Each of these professional outcomes are not guaranteed, and depend on the nature of the romantic relationship and who the partner is. If someone's partner has more power within the organization, then they can show more favouritism towards their romantic power. Whereas, individuals on the same rung of the hierarchy, may not have the ability to create professional advancement.

There is also the flipside to professional outcomes. If a relationship starts to sour, someone could see their career advancement slowed, less job security, less power in the workplace, etc.... It's in cases where romantic relationships sour (especially between individuals at different rungs of an organization's hierarchy) when we start to see the real problems associated with romantic workplace relationships.

Organizational Outcomes

The final type of outcomes happens not directly to the individuals within a romantic workplace relationship, but rather to the organization itself. Organizations face a wide range of possible outcomes that stem from romantic workplace relationships. When romantic workplace relationships are going well, organizations have members who are more satisfied, motivated, and committed. Of course, this all trickles over into higher levels of productivity.

On the other hand, there are also negative outcomes that stem from romantic workplace relationships. First, people who are in an intimate relationship with each other in the workplace are often the subjects of extensive office gossip.⁴⁹ And this gossiping is time-consuming and can become a problem from a wide range of organizational members. Second, individuals who are "dating their boss" can lead to resentment by their peers if their peers perceive the boss as providing any kind of preferential treatment for their significant other in the workplace. Furthermore, not all romantic workplace relationships are going to turn out well. Many romantic workplace relationships simply will dissolve. Sometimes this dissolution of the relationship is amicable, or both parties are OK with the breakup and can maintain professionalism after the fact. Unfortunately, there are times when romantic workplace relationships dissolve, and things can get a bit messy and unprofessional in the workplace. Although happy romantic workplace relationships have many positive side-effects, negative romantic workplace relationships can have the opposite outcomes for an organization leading to a decrease in job satisfaction, employee motivation, and organizational commitment, which leads to decreased productivity.

Many dissolutions of romantic workplace relationships could lead to formerly happy and productive organizational members looking for new jobs away from the person they were dating. In other cases (especially those involving people on different rungs of the organizational hierarchy), the organization could face legal claims of sexual harassment. Many organizations know that this last outcome is a real possibility, so they require any couple engaged in a romantic workplace relationship to enter into a consensual relationship agreement or "love contract" (see Side Bar for an example love contract). Other organizations ban romantic workplace relationships completely, and people found violating the policy can be terminated.

Consensual Romance in the Workplace Agreement (Love Contract)⁵⁰

A consensual romance agreement to be signed by two romantically-involved employees representing that their relationship is entirely consensual and acknowledging the employer's anti-harassment policies and rules. This Standard Document is drafted in favour of the employer. It is based on federal law. This Standard Document has integrated notes with important explanations and drafting tips. For information on state law requirements for discrimination and harassment, see Anti-Discrimination Laws: State Q&A Tool.

Consensual Romance in the Workplace Agreement (Love Contract)

DRAFTING NOTE: READ THIS BEFORE USING DOCUMENT

Employers allowing employees to engage in romantic relationships with one another can ask romantically involved employees to sign an agreement stating that their romantic relationship is entirely consensual and free from coercion, intimidation, and harassment. These agreements are often referred to as love contracts.

Employers should consider using this love contract to minimize legal risk associated with employee romantic relationships, particularly potential sexual harassment claims. For more information about the risks associated with employee romantic relationships, see Practice Notes, Romance in the Workplace (0-502-6127)¹ and Harassment (9-502-7844).

USE OF A LOVE CONTRACT

Before employers request romantically involved employees to sign this agreement, they should interview each employee separately. They should record the conversation in written notes and ask questions designed to confirm that the relationship is entirely consensual. The employer should then explain each portion of the agreement to each employee separately and review the policies it references with them. Finally, the employer should ask each employee to review the agreement and to sign it if they agree with its terms.

MINIMIZING RISK

To further minimize risk, all employers should consider:

- Implementing and uniformly enforcing an anti-harassment policy (for a sample policy, see Standard Document, Anti-Harassment Policy (7-501-6926)).
- Implementing and uniformly enforcing a romance in the workplace policy (for a sample policy, see Standard Document, Romance in the Workplace Policy (8-502-7646)).
- Conducting training on sexual harassment prevention (for more information, see Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Checklist (9-502-7349)).

BRACKETED TEXT

Counsel should replace bracketed text in ALL CAPS with information specific to the particular circumstances. Bracketed text in sentence case is optional or alternative language that counsel should include, modify, or delete, as appropriate. A forward slash in bracketed text indicates that counsel should choose from among two or more alternative words or phrases.

1. This number refers to other legal templates available from legalsolutions.com/practical-law.

1. Equal Employment Opportunity Workplace. The undersigned recognize and agree that it is [EMPLOYER NAME]'s policy to provide an equal opportunity in hiring, employment, promotion, compensation, and all other employment-related decisions without regard to race, colour, religion, creed, national origin or ancestry, sex, age (40 or older), being a qualified person with a physical or mental disability, veteran status, genetic information, or any other basis set forth in the applicable federal, state, and local laws or regulations relating to discrimination in employment. The undersigned understand that [EMPLOYER NAME] does not tolerate unwelcome or offensive conduct or conduct that creates a hostile work environment that is in any way based on or related to a person having any of the characteristics described above.

The undersigned agree that they have received, read, and understand [EMPLOYER NAME]'s [NAME OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY POLICY] and agree to adhere to all of its terms.

DRAFTING NOTE: EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY WORKPLACE

Employers should consistently take advantage of opportunities to remind employees that they are an equal employment opportunity employer and that they do not discriminate based on any protected characteristic, whether under federal, state, or local law.

Employers should ensure employees acknowledge this fact in this type of agreement in case one or both later brings a claim for harassment or discrimination related to a failed relationship. For more information about the legal risks of a failed employee romantic relationship, see Practice Note, Romance in the Workplace (0-502-6127). For a sample equal employment opportunity policy, see Standard Document, Equal Employment Opportunity Policy (6-500-4349).

2. All Forms of Sexual Harassment Prohibited. The undersigned also recognize and agree that [EMPLOYER NAME] does not tolerate sexual harassment, a form of unlawful discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- submission to such conduct is made, explicitly or implicitly, a condition of an individual's employment or advancement;
- submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting the individual; or
- such unreasonable conduct interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

The undersigned agree that they have received, read, and understand [EMPLOYER NAME]'s [NAME OF ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY] and agree to adhere to all of its terms.

DRAFTING NOTE: ALL FORMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT PROHIBITED

Sexual harassment is the most likely discriminatory practice an employee may claim if an employee romance goes awry. Accordingly, it is especially important to remind and request employees to acknowledge in writing that sexual harassment of any kind is absolutely prohibited and not tolerated (for more information on the different types of sexual harassment, quid pro quo and hostile work environment harassment, see Practice Note, Harassment (9-502-7844)).

It is also helpful to remind employees about the employer's anti-harassment policy, which should contain mandatory procedures for reporting harassment if it occurs, and request that they acknowledge the policy in writing. Having this policy and applying it uniformly assists employers in making a defense in certain sexual harassment cases called the Faragher- Ellerth defense. For more information about the importance of anti-harassment policies and the Faragher- Ellerth defense, see Practice Note, Harassment: Liability for HWE Harassment Subject to Faragher- Ellerth Defense (9-502-7844). For a sample anti-harassment policy, see Standard Document, Anti- Harassment Policy (7-501-6926).

3. Consensual Relationship. We, the undersigned employees, have entered into a personal relationship with each other. We agree as follows:

- Our relationship is entirely voluntary and consensual.
- Our relationship will not have a negative impact on our work.
- We will not engage in any public displays of affection or other behaviour that might create a hostile work environment for others or that might make others uncomfortable.

- [We understand that one or both of us may need to transfer to another [department/group/location] to remove any conflicts of interest in our working environment. If a transfer will not remove the conflict of interest, we understand that one of us may have to resign or be demoted to remove the conflict of interest. We further understand that [EMPLOYER NAME] will first ask us to choose which of us will be subject to a transfer, demotion, or resignation. If we fail to choose, [EMPLOYER NAME] will be forced to choose for us. We understand that [EMPLOYER NAME] will make such a decision without regard to any protected class characteristic and in compliance with [EMPLOYER NAME]'s [NAME OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY POLICY] and [NAME OF ROMANCE IN THE WORKPLACE POLICY].]
- We will act professionally toward each other at all times, even after the relationship has ended.
- We will not participate in any company decision making processes that could affect each other's pay, promotional opportunities, performance reviews, hours, shifts, or career, while in this relationship [and after the relationship ends].
- We agree that, if the relationship ends, we will inform [EMPLOYER NAME] if we believe it is necessary to protect our rights or if the [NAME OF ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY] is violated.
- We each agree that, if the relationship ends, we will respect the other person's decision to end the relationship and will not retaliate against the other person, engage in any unprofessional or inappropriate efforts to resume the relationship, or engage in any other conduct toward the other person that could violate the [NAME OF ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY].

DRAFTING NOTE: CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIP

This section, the most important of the agreement, allows employees to show that the parties represented to the employer that their relationship was free from harassment, coercion, or intimidation. This representation minimizes risk to the employer that one of the employees will later claim they were sexually harassed or pressured into the relationship. It also demonstrates to courts that the employees were on notice about their expected conduct should problems later arise.

ACKNOWLEDGING POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The employees also acknowledge in this section that their relationship could create a conflict of interest and agree to cooperate with certain procedures necessary to remove the conflict of interest, including an optional clause subjecting one or both of them to transfer, or in a worst-case scenario, demotion or termination.

Possible Conflicts in Reporting Structure

It is strongly recommended that employers do not permit romantically involved employees to remain in the same reporting structure. This may include circumstances where one employee supervises the other or any other structure where one of the employees is able to affect the terms and conditions of the other's employment. A lateral transfer of one of the employees to another department, group, or location is the easiest way to remove the conflict, but where a transfer is not possible or feasible, it may be necessary to consider a demotion or termination of one of the romantic partners. In all cases, the employer should ask the romantically involved employees to determine which employee will be affected to minimize risk of discrimination claims.

Decision Making Authority Over Terms and Conditions of Employment

In this section, the romantically involved employees also agree that they will not participate in any decision making processes that could affect each other's terms and conditions of employment. This clause contains an optional phrase allowing the employer to choose whether it should apply only for the duration of the relationship or afterwards as well. Although it may be logistically easier for the employer to limit it to the duration of the relationship, employers should strongly consider leaving the prohibition in place after the relationship ends to minimize risk of discrimination and retaliation claims (for more information about retaliation, see Practice Note, Retaliation (5-501-1430) and Standard Document, Anti-Retaliation Policy (8-503-5830)).

EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIONS

The representations by the romantic partners also help ensure that the employees will not:

- Disrupt the workplace by acting unprofessionally.
- Allow the relationship to negatively impact their work.
- Negatively impact the environment of those around them.

Finally, the representations reiterate that the employees:

- Are aware of the employer's anti-harassment policy.
- Will not violate the policy in any way.
- Will follow its procedures for reporting any harassing behaviour.

This minimizes risk of a harassment claim and increases the likelihood of being able to use the Faragher- Ellerth defence in litigation if necessary.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned have executed this Agreement as of the [DAY OF MONTH] day of [MONTH], [YEAR].

Dated this _____ day of _____, _____.

Employees:

(Employee Signature)

(Printed Name)

(Employee Signature)

(Printed Name)

Witness:

(Witness Signature)

(Printed Name)

Created by: Joseph L. Beachboard, Ogletree Deakins, With Practical Law Labor & Employment

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Why Romantic Workplace Relationships Develop

Robert Quinn was the first researcher to examine why individuals decide to engage in romantic workplace relationships.⁵¹ Renee Cowan and Sean Horan more recently updated the list of motives Quinn created.⁵² Cowan and Horan found that the modern worker engages in romantic workplace relationships for one of four reasons: ease of opportunity, similarity, time, and the hookup. The first three of these motives are very similar to other motives one generally sees in interpersonal relationships in general. Furthermore, these categories were not mutually exclusive categories. Let's examine these motives in more detail

Ease of Opportunity

The first reason people engage in romantic workplace relationships; **ease of opportunity** happens because work fosters an environment where people are close to one another. We interact with a broad range of people in the

workplace, so finding someone that one is romantically attracted to is not that surprising. This is similar to the idea of propinquity discussed by Pierce, Byrne, and Aguinis in their romantic workplace relationship development model discussed earlier in this chapter.⁵³

Similarity

The second motive discussed by Cowan and Horan is **similarity**, or finding that others in the workplace may have identical personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc.... As discussed earlier in this book, we know that when people perceive others as having the same attitude, background, or demographic similarities (homophily), we perceive them as more like us and are more likely to enter into relationships with those people. The longer we get to know those people, the greater that probability that we may decide to turn this into a special peer relationship or a romantic workplace relationship.

Time

As we discussed at the very beginning of this chapter, we spend a lot of our life at work. In a typical year, we spend around 92.71 days at work (50-weeks a year * 5 days a week * 8.9 hours per day). You ultimately spend more **time** with your coworkers than you do with almost any other group of people outside your immediate family. When you spend this much time with people, we learn about them and develop a sense of who they are and what they're like. We also know that time is a strong factor when predicting sexual attraction.⁵⁴

The Hook Up

Speaking of sexual attraction, the final motive people have for engaging in romantic workplace relationships was called "the hook up" by Cowan and Horan. The purpose of "**the hook up**" is casual sex without any romantic entanglements. Unlike the other three motives, this one is less about creating a romantic workplace relationship, and more about achieving mutual sexual satisfaction with one's coworker. In Cowan and Horan's study, they did note, "What we found interesting about this theme was that it was only attributed to coworker's WRs. Although several participants described WRs they had engaged in, this motive was never attributed to those pursuit."⁵⁵

How Coworkers View Romantic Workplace Relationships

The final part of this section is going to examine the research related to how coworkers view these romantic workplace relationships. The overwhelming majority of us will never engage in a romantic workplace relationship, but most (if not all) of us will watch others who do. Sometimes these relationships work out, but often these relationships don't. Some researchers have examined how coworkers view their peers who are engaging in romantic workplace relationships.

- Coworkers trust peers less when they were involved in a romantic workplace relationship with a supervisor than with a different organizational member.⁵⁶
- Coworkers reported less honest and accurate self-disclosures to peers when they were involved in a romantic workplace relationship with a supervisor than with a different organizational member.⁵⁷
- "[C]oworkers perceived a peer dating a superior to be more driven by job motives and less by love motives than they perceived peer dating individuals of any other status type."⁵⁸
- Coworkers reported that they felt their peers were more likely to get an unfair advantage when dating one's leader rather a coworker at a different level of the hierarchy.⁵⁹
- Peers dating subordinates were also felt to get an unfair advantage than peers dating people outside the organization.⁶⁰
- Gay or lesbian peers who dated a leader were trusted less, deceived more, and perceived as less credible than a peer dating a peer.⁶¹
- "[O]rganizational peers are less likely to deceive gay and lesbian peers involved in WRs and to perceive gay and lesbian peers in WRs as more caring and of higher character than heterosexual peers who date at work."⁶²

- Women who saw higher levels of sexual behaviour in the workplace have lower levels of job satisfaction, but there was no relationship between observing sexual behaviours at work and job satisfaction for men.⁶³
- When taking someone's level of job satisfaction out of the picture, people who saw higher levels of sexual behaviour in the workplace were more likely to look for another job.⁶⁴

As you can see, dating in the workplace and open displays of sexuality in the workplace have some interesting outcomes for both the individuals involved in the relationship, their peers, and the organization.

Key Takeaways

- According to Charles Pierce, Donn Byrne, and Herman Aguinis, a romantic workplace relationship occurs when “two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association.”
- Charles Pierce, Donn Byrne, and Herman Aguinis' model of romantic workplace relationships (Seen in Figure 13.6) have six basic stages: propinquity, interpersonal attraction, romantic attraction, desire for romantic relationship, engage in workplace relationship, and outcomes of workplace relationship (personal, professional, and organizational).
- Renee Cowan and Sean Horan found four basic reasons why romantic workplace relationships occur: ease of opportunity, similarity, time, and the hookup. First, relationships develop because we are around people a lot, and we are naturally drawn to some people around us. Second, we perceive ourselves as similar to coworkers having identical personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc.... Third, we spend a lot of time at work and the more we spend time with people the closer relationships become and can turn into romantic ones. Lastly, some people engage in romantic workplace relationships casual sex without any kind of romantic entanglements, known as the hookup.
- As a whole, the research on coworkers and their perceptions of romantic workplace relationships are generally more in favour of individuals (both gay/lesbian and straight) who engage in relationships with coworkers at the same level. Coworkers do not perceive their peers positively when they are dating someone at a more senior level (especially one's direct supervisor). Furthermore, observing coworkers engaging in sexual behaviours tends to lead to decreases in job satisfaction, which can lead to an increase in one's desire to find another job.

Exercises

- Where do you think the difference lies between romantic workplace relationships and sexual harassment?
- When you evaluate the reasons people engage in romantic workplace relationships described by Renee Cowan and Sean Horan, do you think their list is complete? Do you believe there are other reasons people engage in romantic workplace relationships?
- If you decided to engage in a romantic workplace relationship, would you be comfortable signing a “love contract” with your human resources department? Does your opinion differ if the target of your romantic affection is a follower, peer, or leader?

Problematic Workplace Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Define and explain the term deviant workplace behaviour.
2. Explain Janie Harden Fritz's six types of problematic bosses.

3. Describe Janie Harden Fritz's eight types of problematic coworkers.
4. Assess Janie Harden Fritz's five types of problematic subordinates.

Eventually, everyone is going to run into someone within the workplace that is going to drive you crazy. There are a ton of books out there designed to help you deal with difficult people, toxic people, workplace vampires, jerks, energy drainers, etc.... Some of these people are just irritants while other problem people can be more egregious (e.g., aggressive, bullying, deviating from work norms, overly cynical about everything, etc.). We view these people as problem people because they ultimately take more of our resources to deal with. There's a reason some writers refer to problem people as **emotional vampires** because we have to use more of our emotional resources to deal with these people, and they increase our levels of stress along the way.⁶⁶ In this section, we are going to explore the different types of "problem people" we come in contact within the workplace and how we can strive towards workplace civility. In the organizational literature, we often refer to these people as engaging in **deviant workplace behaviour**, or voluntary behaviour of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and practices or threatens the wellbeing of the organization and its members.

Research on problem people in the workplace tends to demonstrate that we have problem people at all levels of the organization. We have problematic bosses, peers, and subordinates. In an attempt to understand the types of problem people individuals face in the workplace, in 2002 Janie Harden Fritz created a typology of the different types of problem people we encounter in the workplace,⁶⁷ which was later updated in 2009.⁶⁸ Figure 13.7 shows the typology. In this typology, Harden Fritz discusses how different positions in the workplace can lead to varying types of problem people. Let's examine each of these individually.

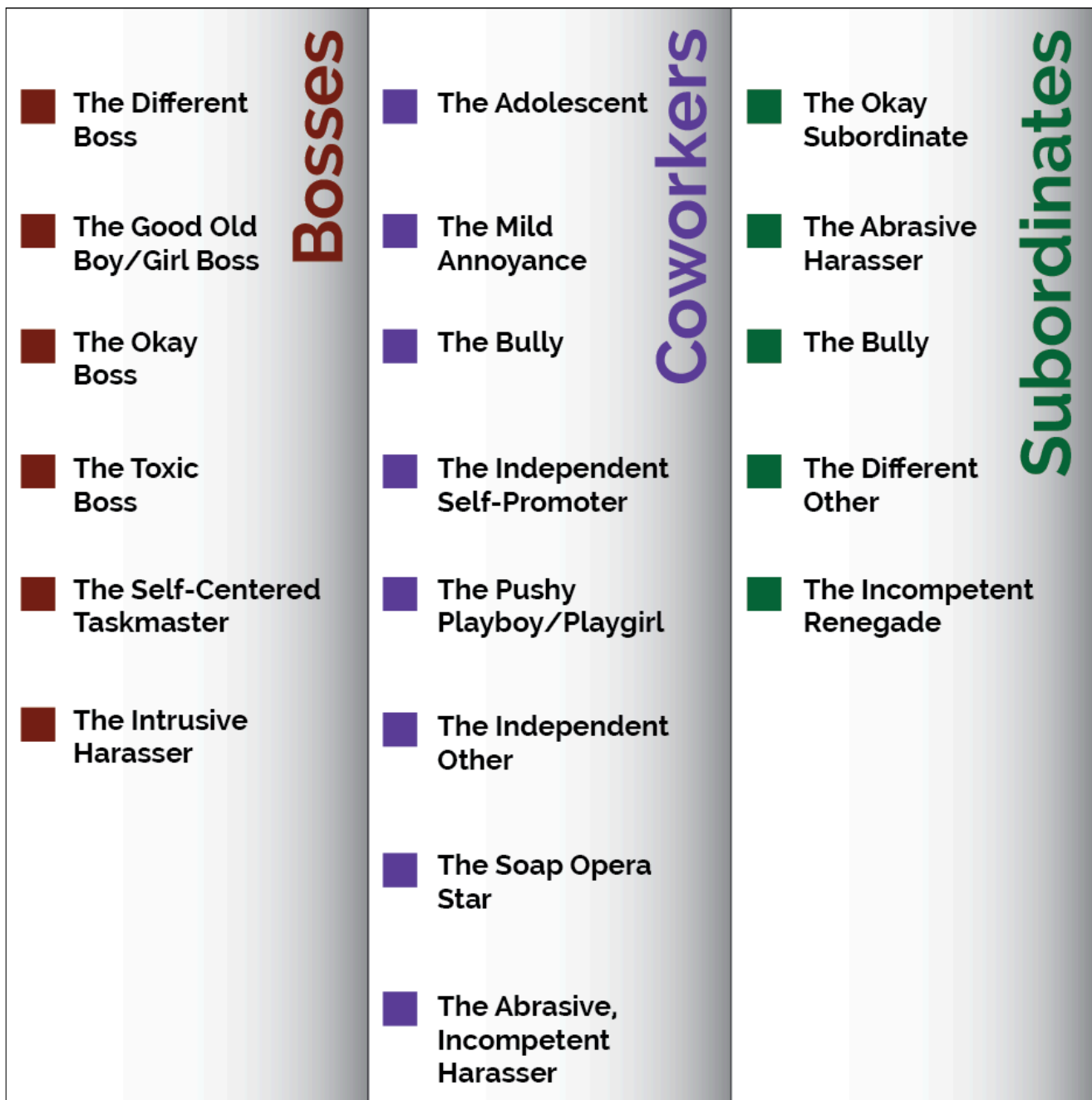


Figure 13.7 Problematic People in the Workplace

Problem Bosses

Through Harden Fritz's research into bosses, she found that there are six common types of problematic bosses: different, okay good old boy/girl, toxic, self-centered taskmaster, and intrusive harasser.

The Different Boss

First, The Different Boss is someone a subordinate sees as distractingly different from them as a person. Different subordinates are going to view what is "distractingly different" in a wide range of different ways. Some people who view their bosses as "distractingly different" may also be succumbing to their prejudices about people from various social groups.

Good Old Boy or Good Old Girl Boss

Second, is the Good Old Boy or Good Old Girl Boss. This type of boss is someone who probably hasn't progressed along with the modern world of corporate thinking. This person may be gregarious and outgoing, but this person tends to see the "old ways of doing things" as best – even when they're problematic. These individuals tend to see sexual harassment as something that isn't a big deal in the workplace. Their subordinates are also more likely to view some of their behaviours as unethical.

Okay Boss

The third type of boss is the Okay Boss. This person is exactly like the name says, okay and average in just about every way possible. These individuals are, in many ways, coasting towards retirement. They try not to rock the boat within the organization, so they will never stand up to their bosses, nor will they advocate for their subordinates. For someone who likes work and wants to succeed in life, working for one of these people can be very frustrating because they like the average and can create an environment where the average is the norm, and people who exceed the average are the outcasts.

The Toxic Boss

Fourth, we have the toxic boss. These bosses are just all-around problematic in the workplace. These people are often seen as unethical, obnoxious, and unprofessional by their subordinates. These are the types of bosses that can create reasonably hostile work environments and pit employees against each other for their amusement. However, when it comes to harassing behaviour, they are less likely to engage in harassment directly. Still, they can often create environments where both sexual harassment and bullying become the norm.

Self-Centered Taskmaster

The fifth type of problematic boss is the self-centered taskmaster. The self-centered taskmaster is ultimately "focused on getting the job done to advance his/her own goals, without concern for others."⁶⁹ This type of boss is purely focused on getting work done. This individual may be excessive in the amount of work they give subordinates. Ultimately, this individual wants to show their superiors how good of a boss they are to move up the organizational hierarchy. On the flip side, these people are highly competent, but their tendency to lord power over others in an obnoxious way makes working for this type of boss very stressful.

The Intrusive Harasser Boss

Sixth, we have the intrusive harasser boss. This individual tends to be highly interfering and often wants to get caught up in their subordinates' personal and professional lives. They are likely to be overly attentive in the workplace, which can interfere with an individual's ability to complete their task assignments. Furthermore, this boss is likely to be one who engages in activities like sexual harassment, backstabbing, and busybody behaviour.

Problem Coworkers

Through Harden Fritz's research into coworkers, she found that there are eight common types of problematic coworkers: adolescent, bully, mild annoyance, independent self-promoter, pushy playboy/playgirl, independent other, soap opera star, and the abrasive, incompetent harasser.

Adolescent

The first common problematic coworker you can have is the adolescent. The adolescent is the Peter Pan of the business world, they don't want to grow up. These people tend to want to be the center of attention and will be the first to let everyone know when they've accomplished something. You almost feel like you need to give them a Scooby Snack just for doing their job. However, if someone dares to question them, they tend to become very defensive, probably because they don't want others to know how insecure they feel.

Bully

Second, we have the bully. Bullying is sadly alive and well in corporate America. This individual has a knack

of being overly demanding on their peers, but then dares to take credit for their peers' work when the time comes. This is your prototypical schoolyard bully all grown up and in an office job. In 2005, Charlotte Rayner and Loreleigh Keashly examined the available definitions for "workplace bullying" and derived at five specific characteristics:

1. the experience of negative behaviour;
2. behaviours experienced persistently;
3. targets experiencing damage;
4. targets labeling themselves as bullied; and
5. targets with less power and difficulty defending themselves.⁷⁰

You'll notice from this list that being a bully isn't a one-off behaviour for these coworkers. This behaviour targets individuals in a highly negative manner, happens over a long period, and can have long-term psychological and physiological ramifications for individuals who are targeted. We should note that more often than not, bullies do not happen in isolation, but more often than not run in packs. For this reason, a lot of European research on this subject has been called mobbing instead of bullying. Sadly, this is an all-too-often occurrence in the modern work world. In a large study examining 148 international corporations through both qualitative and quantitative methods, Randy Hodson, Vincent Roscigno, and Steven Lopez reported that 49 percent of the organizations they investigated had routine patterns of workplace bullying.⁷¹

Mild Annoyance

The third type of problematic coworker is the mild annoyance. When it comes down to it, this person isn't going to ruin your day, but they are mildly annoying and tend to be so on a routine basis. Maybe it's a coworker who wants to come in every morning and talk to you about what they watched on television the night before while you're trying to catch up on email. Or maybe it's the coworker who plays music a little too loudly in the workplace. There are all kinds of things that can annoy us as human beings, so the mildly annoying coworker is one that generally is tolerated.

Independent Self-Promoter

Fourth, we have the independent self-promoter. The independent self-promoter is someone who likes to toot their own horn at work. This individual tends to be slight to extremely narcissistic and thinks the world revolves around them. These individuals are not the type to take credit for other people's work, but they also aren't the type to do work that needs to be done unless they see its utility in making them look good.

Pushy Playboy/Playgirl

The fifth problematic coworker is the pushy playboy/playgirl. The pushy playboy/playgirl is an individual marked by their tendency to push other coworkers into doing things for the pushy playboy/playgirl. Often these tasks have nothing to do with work at all. For example, the pushy playboy/playgirl would be the type of person to demand that a younger or more submissive coworker run down the street for a Starbucks run. Furthermore, these are the types of people who tend to be overly demanding of coworkers and then misrepresent their performance to those higher up in the corporate food chain.

Independent Other

The sixth common problematic coworker is the independent other. In many ways, the independent other is similar to the different bosses discussed earlier. These people tend to be perceived as uniquely different from their coworkers. There are a lot of characteristics that can make someone viewed as uniquely other. Any specific demographic that goes against the workplace norm could be cause for perceiving someone as different: age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, race, etc.... Some people may view them as having a low work ethic, but this perception may stem out of that perceived "otherness."

Soap Opera Star

The seventh common problematic coworker identified by Harden Fritz is the Soap Opera Star.⁷² The soap opera star lives for drama in the workplace. New rumors of office romances? This person will have the 411 and probably a Tumblr page devoted to the couple. For this reason, this person tends to be a busybody to the n^{th} degree and will be all up in everyone's business both at work and in their personal lives. Because of their tendency towards drama (both finding it and often creating it), they are generally seen as highly distracting by their peers. At the same time, they tend to spend so much time digging for office gossip that they are typically perceived as having a poor work ethic by others.

Abrasive, Incompetent Harasser

The final type of problematic coworker is the abrasive, incompetent harasser, which is an individual who tends to be highly uncivil in the workplace with a particular emphasis on sexually harassing behaviour. This coworker is very similar to the intrusive harasser boss discussed earlier. This individual is generally viewed as incompetent and unprofessional in the workplace. This person tends to score high on all of the problematic work behaviours commonly seen by coworkers.

Mindfulness Activity



There are a ton of books on the market designed for business people to help them get along with their coworkers. Like it or not, but we all are going to work with people that drive us crazy. So, what's a mindful way to approach these situations when you have to interact with a coworker is far from being mindful. As usual, our first steps should always be attention, intention, and attitude. However, we can only control our perspectives about others and not their behaviours.

Think of a time when you had to interact with a coworker who was not behaving mindfully.

1. How was their behaviour problematic? How did you feel challenged by this person?
2. What was the outcome of this person's behaviour on your mindfulness practice, your relationship, or your work?
3. If others were involved, how did they respond?
4. What role (if any) did you play in triggering this person's behaviour?
5. What will take away from this experience? How can you approach this person more mindfully in the future?

Research Spotlight



In 2017, Stacy Tye-Williams and Kathleen J. Krone wanted to examine the advice given to victims of workplace bullying. Going into this study, the researchers realized that a lot of the advice given to victims makes it their personal responsibility to end the bullying, "You should just stand up to the bully" or "You're being too emotional this."

In the current study, the researchers interviewed 48 people who had been the victims of workplace bullying (the average age was 28). The participants had worked on average for 5 ½ years in the organization where they were bullied. Here are the top ten most common pieces of advice victims received:

1. Quit/get out
2. Ignore it/blow it off/do not let it affect you
3. Fight/stand up
4. Stay calm
5. Report the bullying

6. Be quiet/keep mouth shut
7. Be rational
8. Journal
9. Avoid the bully
10. Toughen up

The researchers discovered three underlying themes of advice. First, participants reported that they felt they were being told to downplay their emotional experiences as victims. Second, was what the researchers called the “dilemma of advice,” or the tendency to believe that the advice given wasn’t realistic and wouldn’t change anything. Furthermore, many who followed the advice reported that it made things worse, not better. Lastly, the researchers noted the “paradox of advice.” Some participants wouldn’t offer advice because bullying is contextual and needs a more contextually-based approach. Yet others admitted that they offered the same advice to others that they’d been offered, even when they knew the advice didn’t help them at all.

The researches ultimately concluded, “The results of this study point to a paradoxical relationship between advice and its usefulness. Targets felt that all types of advice are potentially useful. However, the advice either would not have worked in their case or could possibly be detrimental if put into practice.”⁷³ Ultimately, the researchers argue that responding to bullying must first take into account the emotions the victim is receiving, and that responses to bullying should be a group and not a single individual’s efforts.

Tye-Williams, S., & Krone, K. J. (2017). Identifying and re-imagining the paradox of workplace bullying advice. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 45(2), 218–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2017.1288291>

Problem Subordinates

In the two previous sections, we’ve looked at problematic bosses and coworkers, but subordinates can also be a bit of a problem in the workplace. For this reason, Harden Fritz identified five clear troublesome subordinates: the okay subordinate, the abrasive harasser, the bully, the different other, and the incompetent renegade.⁷⁴

Okay Subordinate

First, we have the okay subordinate. Just like the name sounds, this person is not stellar, nor is this person awful; this person is just OK. This person does tend towards being a mildly annoying busybody at work. Still, none of their behaviour rises to the status where a supervisor would need to step in and counsel the employee’s behaviour formally.

Abrasive Harasser

Second, we have the abrasive harasser. The abrasive harasser is an individual who tends to be someone who needs counselling regularly about what constitutes sexual harassment. They may not even always realize what types of behaviour are appropriate in the workplace. For example, this subordinate could forward their supervisor a sexual joke via email without thinking others could perceive the joke as inappropriate in the workplace. On the more advanced end, you have people who are perpetual sexual harassers who need to be severely counselled to protect the organization and start the process of firing the person for harassing behaviour.

The Bully

The next common problem subordinate is the bully. According to Harden Fritz, this subordinate is one “who bosses others, usurps authority, is competitive and is at the same time insecure.”⁷⁵ If this person’s behaviour is not curtailed by their supervisor, this type of behaviour can quickly become infectious and end up hurting cohesion throughout the entire office. Furthermore, supervisors need to recognize this behaviour and ensure that the targets of the bully have a safe and secure place to work. Don’t be surprised if this person decides to bully upward, or attempt to bully their supervisor because it can happen.

The Different Other

The fourth common problem subordinate is the different other. Just like the two previous versions of “difference”

discussed for bosses and coworkers, the different other is a subordinate who is perceived as distinctly different from their supervisor. One thing we know from years of management research is that people who are perceived as different from their supervisors are less likely to enjoy protective and mentoring relationships with their supervisors. As such, when a supervisor views someone as a “different other,” they may engage in subconscious discriminatory behaviour towards their subordinate.

Incompetent Renegade

Finally, we have the incompetent renegade. This individual tends to be ethically incompetent and views themselves as above the law within the organization. This individual may view themselves as better than the organization to begin with, which causes a lot of problems around the office. However, instead of accomplishing their work, this person is more likely to take credit for others' work. If this subordinate is allowed to keep behaving in this manner, they will be viewed by others as running the place. For this reason, subordinates need to stop this behaviour when they see it occurring and immediately initiate counselling to stop the behaviour and build a case for termination if the behaviour does not cease.

Key Takeaways

- Workplace deviance involves the voluntary behaviour of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and practices or threatens the well-being of the organization and its members.
- Janie Harden Fritz categorized six types of problematic bosses: different, okay good old boy/girl, toxic, self-centred taskmaster, and intrusive harasser. First, the different boss is someone a subordinate sees as distractingly different from them as a person. Second, the good old boy/girl boss considers the “old ways of doing things” as best – even when they’re problematic. Third, the OK boss is okay and average in just about every way possible coasting towards retirement. Fourth, the toxic boss is seen as unethical, obnoxious, and unprofessional by their subordinates. Fifth, the self-centred taskmaster is entirely concerned with completing tasks with no concern for developing relationships with their followers. Lastly, the intrusive harasser boss tends to be highly interfering and often wants to get caught up in their subordinates’ personal and professional lives.
- Janie Harden Fritz categorized eight types of problematic coworkers: adolescent (wants to be the center of attention and get nothing done), bully (is overly demanding of their peers and takes credit for their work), mild annoyance (they engage in disruptive behaviours regularly but not to a drastic degree), independent self-promoter (likes to toot their own horn), pushy playboy/playgirl (pushes people into doing things for them), independent other (perceived as distinctly different from their coworkers), soap opera star (loves to gossip and be in the middle of all of the workplace drama), and the abrasive, incompetent harasser (is highly uncivil in the workplace with a special emphasis in sexually harassing behaviour).
- Janie Harden Fritz categorized five types of problematic subordinates: the okay subordinate, the abrasive harasser, the bully, the different other, and the incompetent renegade. First, the okay subordinate is a follower who is not stellar or awful, just very much middle of the road. Second, the abrasive harasser is an individual who tends to be someone who needs counselling regularly about what constitutes sexual harassment. Third, the bully is someone who bosses their peers around, usurps authority, and engages in hypercompetitive behaviour when competition is not necessary (all signs of someone who is deeply insecure). Fourth, the different other is a follower who is perceived as distinctly different from their supervisor. Finally, the incompetent renegade is ethically incompetent and views themselves as above the law within the organization.

Exercises

- Which of the six types of problematic bosses would you have the most problem working for? Why?
- In both the coworker and subordinate categories, “difference” is viewed as a problem in the workplace. Why do you think so many workers have a problem with difference? How should management approach situations where difference is impacting coworker relationships or leader-follower relationships?
- Think of a time when you’ve worked with a problematic coworker. Which of Janie Harden Fritz’s eight types

of problematic coworkers did your coworker fit into (it's possible to fit into more than one)? How did you handle this coworker relationship?

Key Terms

career strategizing

The process of creating a plan of action for one's career path and trajectory.

collegial peers

Type of coworker with whom we have moderate levels of trust and self-disclosure and more openness that is shared between two individuals.

cost escalation

A form of relational disengagement involving tactics that are designed to make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship.

depersonalization

A form of relational disengagement where an individual stops all the interaction that is not task-focused or simply to avoids the person.

deviant workplace behaviour

The voluntary behaviour of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and practices or threatens the well-being of the organization and its members.

directive support

The factor of Hersey and Blanchard Situational-Leadership Model involves a leader overseeing the day-to-day tasks that a follower accomplishes.

ease of opportunity

Reason explaining romantic workplace relationships happen because work fosters an environment where people are close to one another.

emotional vampires

A colloquial term used to describe individuals with whom we interact that use more of our emotional resources when interacting with people, which often causes an increase in our levels of stress.

ethics

The judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just.

excuse-making

Any time an individual attempts to shift the blame for an individual's behaviour from reasons more central to the individual to sources outside of their control in the attempt to make themselves look better and more in control.

followership

The act or condition under which an individual helps or supports a leader in the accomplishment of organizational goals.

formal language

Specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar that uses complex sentences, full words, and the third person.

informal language

Specific writing and spoken style that is more colloquial or common in tone; contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations; and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays.

information peers

Type of coworker who we rely on for information about job tasks and the organization itself.

jargon

The specialized or technical language particular to a specific profession, occupation, or group that is either meaningless or difficult for outsiders to understand.

leader-member exchange

Theory of leadership that explores how leaders enter into two-way relationships with followers through a series of exchange agreements enabling followers to grow or be held back.

personal responsibility

An individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave.

profession

An occupation that involves mastery of complex knowledge and skills through prolonged training, education, or practical experience.

professionalism

The aims and behaviours that demonstrate an individual's level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession.

relational maintenance

"[T]he degree of difficulty individuals experience in interpersonal relationships due to misunderstandings, incompatibility of goals, and the time and effort necessary to cope with disagreements."

romantic workplace relationship

When "two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association."⁶⁵

similarity

Reason explaining romantic workplace relationships occur because people find coworkers have identical personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc....

social support

The perception and actuality that an individual receives assistance, care, and help from those people within their life.

special peer

Type of coworker relationship marked by high levels of trust and self-disclosure; like a "best friend" in the workplace.

state-of-the-relationship talk

A form of relational disengagement where an individual explains to a coworker that a workplace friendship is ending.

supportive leadership behaviour

The factor of Hersey and Blanchard Situational-Leadership Model that occurs when a leader is focused on providing relational support for their followers

the hookup

Reason explaining romantic workplace relationships occur because individuals want to engage in casual sex without any romantic entanglements.

time

Reason explaining romantic workplace relationships occur because people put in a great deal of time at work, so we are around and interact with potential romantic partners a great deal of the average workday.

Chapter Wrap-Up

At the beginning of this chapter, we discussed how a good chunk of our lives is spent at work, so engaging in a range of interpersonal relationships in the workplace is unavoidable. We started the chapter by defining the term "professionalism" and what it means to be a professional in today's workplace. We then scratched the surface of the communication and leadership research that examines leadership and followership. We then discussed one of the most common relationships we have in the workplace, the coworker relationship. Coworker relationships were followed by an examination of romantic entanglements in the workplace, along with their pros and cons. We end this chapter looking at problematic interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Morren Michaels had been working with Raja Rahal for several years, and the two were pretty friendly with each

other. They went out to eat after work and often strategized on how to make their office better. The two weren't exactly best friends in the workplace, but they were friends.

Out of nowhere, Morren is promoted by the CEO of the company and asked to take over the realms of her division. At first, things were smooth sailing. Morren had no problems, and she had the division being more profitable than it had under the previous manager. However, Morren quickly realized she was going to have problems with her old friend Raja. Almost immediately, Raja pointed out that Morren was "not one of us" anymore to the rest of the division since Morren was now in management. At first, it was a snide remark, but things quickly started escalating.

Anytime Raja wouldn't get her way, she would email everyone up the corporate ladder with her complaints against Morren (e.g., the head of HR, the CEO, the chief operating officer, etc.). In Morren's mind, all she was doing was expecting the same level of work from Raja as she did from anyone else in her division. One day in a meeting, Morren asked Raja to take on a new project. Surprisingly, Raja said yes and thought it was a good fit for her. Morren asked Raja to give the group an update on the project at the next meeting.

Throughout the next month, Morren checked in with Raja to see how the project was going. Raja scheduled a couple of meetings with Morren to talk about the project, but had to cancel because she was sick or her kid was sick. Morren even suggested meeting at a coffee shop near Raja's house to make things easier, but Raja had to bail out because she'd forgotten she'd scheduled another appointment.

Ultimately, the day of the next meeting came. When Morren got to the place on the agenda where Raja was supposed to report in, Raja looked at the entire group and said, "I never agreed to do that." Morren sat stunned as the rest of the division sat there uncomfortably. Finally, Morren pulled herself together and informed Raja that she had indeed agreed to take on the project. And that the meeting minutes from the previous meeting along with the tape recording of the last meeting, the secretary kept had her agreeing.

After the meeting, Morren goes back into her office and closes the door. She's a bit dumbfounded by what transpired. After the meeting, many of her coworkers came up to her to see if she was OK. They all said variations of the same thing, "We heard her agree to take on the project last month." Thankfully, Morren had the secretary record their meetings to make taking notes easier. She then put the audio recordings on an internal server so all members of the department could relisten to them if necessary.

Morren sat at her desk and opened her email and quickly noticed an email from Raja. Morren could only imagine what the email would say. As she read the email, she was concerned at how twisted the facts of what had transpired had become. Raja accused Morren of embarrassing her during the meeting by falsely accusing her of not having done her job. Of course, the email was copied to everyone within the division and the higher corporate hierarchy.

1. Why do you think Morren and Raja's relationship changed when Morren took on a position of leadership?
2. What type of problematic follower do you think Raja is?
3. If you were Morren, what would your next step be? Why?

End-of-Chapter Assessment Head

1. In an attempt to make herself look good in the organization, Agotha tends to hoard information. If something important comes across her desk, she tends to keep it instead of giving it to the people who could use the information. What type of unethical organizational communication is Agotha engaging in, according to W. Charles Redding?
 - a. coercive
 - b. destructive
 - c. deceptive
 - d. intrusive
 - e. secretive
2. Which of the following is NOT a way to take personal responsibility in the workplace?
 - a. Acknowledge that you are responsible for your choices in the workplace.
 - b. Acknowledge that you are responsible for how you feel at work.

- c. Accept that you can control your stress and feelings of burnout.
 - d. Decide to take control of your attitudes, thoughts, and behaviours.
 - e. Decide to let your supervisor determine the best path for your self-improvement.
3. During a meeting, Baraba says, "I will not be joining the rest of the group this weekend at the trade show due to a pre-arranged meeting I have had on my schedule for a few months." The use of the words "will not" and "I have" instead of their contraction forms are examples of what type of language use?
- a. Common
 - b. Formal
 - c. Informal
 - d. Jargon
 - e. Peripheral
4. At work, Stella has an inherent need to be seen as her supervisor's peer and not as an underling. Stella does support her supervisor, but she has no problem confronting her supervisor when Stella thinks her supervisor is making a bad decision. According to Ira Chaleff, what type of follower is Stella?
- a. Avoider
 - b. Implementer
 - c. Individualist
 - d. Partner
 - e. Resource
5. Susan always looks at her coworker Polly as a kind of problem. Polly came from a very religious upbringing and didn't seem to fit in with the rest of the people who work at GenCorp. For example, when Susan and her coworkers go out to eat, Polly doesn't join them because her male colleagues will be there. Polly also doesn't have any sense of pop culture at all. At a meeting recently, someone mentioned Lady Gaga, and Polly asked if she was a member of British royalty. Although everyone had a good laugh and Polly played along, Susan could tell that Polly was completely unaware of why her question was funny. According to Janie Harden Fritz, Polly is an example of what kind of "problematic coworker" for Susan?
- a. The Adolescent
 - b. The Mild Annoyance
 - c. The Independent Other
 - d. The Soap Opera Star
 - e. The Pushy Playgirl

Notes

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- ⁵ Lee, B. (2016). A mindful path to a compassionate cultural diversity. In M. Chapman-Clarke (Ed.), *Mindfulness in the workplace: An evidence-based approach to improving wellbeing and maximizing performance* (pp. 266-287). Kogan Page.
- ⁶ Wing, D. (2010, November 17). Microaggressions in everyday life: More than just race – Can microaggressions

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[10]

The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication

In this chapter, we will explore the dark side of interpersonal communication. Communication often results in positive outcomes, but communication may also result in hurt, conflict, psychological damage, and relationship termination. The dark side of interpersonal communication generally refers to communication that results in negative outcomes. Some types of communication that are considered to be on the “dark side” are: verbal aggression, deception, psychological abuse, bullying, and infidelity, to name a few. For many years, communication scholars failed to focus on the more negative aspects of communication, but in doing so, overlooked opportunities to create solutions for those who are on the receiving end of this type of communication and for those who are the source. This chapter will explore destructive behaviours in relationships and negative communication strategies. Awareness of these negative communication strategies may be the first step in preventing these strategies.

Destructive Relationship Behaviours

Learning Objectives

1. Familiarize yourself with the concept of secret testing.
2. Understand the effects of empty apologies.
3. Discuss the challenge of identifying Internet infidelity and emotional infidelity.
4. Explain hurtful messages and reactions to hurtful messages.

Secret Testing

Very often, in relationships, individuals seek to understand the nature or state of their relationship. The most direct way to understand a relationship is to talk about it, but sometimes the timing doesn’t seem right. Perhaps it’s too soon, or maybe the relational partner is squeamish about talking. Regardless, individuals experience a great deal of uncertainty about the nature of the relationship. Uncertainty also exists when relationships seem to be headed toward termination.

Humans engage in intrapersonal communication in which we think about how our dating partner feels about us or about whether the individual wishes to continue in the relationship. A great deal of time may be spent thinking about how the relationship partner feels. If you have ever called a friend to ask your friend’s opinion about how your boyfriend or girlfriend feels about you, then you are engaging in information seeking about your relationship. In the early stages of relationships, the relational partners may not share the same definition of the relationship.¹ As a result, one or both relational partners experience uncertainty. Research demonstrates that individuals experiencing uncertainty will work to reduce uncertainty.² As research continued, it was determined that it is taboo to talk directly with a relationship partner about the state-of-the-relationship.³ Consider your own experiences with dating and whether it is comfortable to ask or be asked, “so, where are we? Are we dating

exclusively, seeing other people...?” Because of the discomfort of such direct questions, individuals tend to use indirect strategies.

There are seven indirect strategies individuals use to assess the state of their relationship. These indirect strategies are referred to as **secret tests**. Some secret tests actually invoke negative relational strategies such as provoking jealousy, deliberately behaving negatively toward a partner, being overly demanding, intentionally creating distance, and testing a partner through a third party “fidelity check.” Many secret tests may result in relational hurt or even relationship termination.

Secret tests are labelled directness, endurance, indirect suggestions, public presentation, separation, third party, and triangle test.

Directness Test

Directness is the least secretive of the strategies and involves asking the relational partner about his/her feelings toward the relationship and commitment to the relationship. Alternatively, an individual might disclose their feelings about the relationship with the hope that the relationship partner will reciprocate. Although this “test” may not feel comfortable at first, it can have positive outcomes and involves open communication. Though employing this test may lead to answers that one may not want to hear, at least information is obtained directly from the relationship partner. Research conducted by Melanie Booth-Butterfield and Rebecca Chory-Assad⁴ indicates that individuals in more stable relationships are more likely to use this overt strategy.

Endurance Test

Endurance test is another form of secret testing in which the partner is tested by engaging in actions that the partner might perceive to be a cost in the relationship. If the partner remains in the relationship, then it is presumed that the partner is committed to the relationship. Research revealed three types of endurance tests: behaving negatively toward the partner, criticizing oneself to the point of being annoying, and making a request that required the partner to exert a great deal of effort. Because the endurance test involves introducing cost into the relationship, individuals risk tipping the scales, i.e., creating more costs than rewards which social exchange theory tells us may result in relationship dissolution. Melanie Booth-Butterfield and Rebecca Chory-Assad explored secret test use in deteriorating relationships.⁵ Their research revealed that in unstable relationships, any secret test involving behaviours that deviated from what one would normally do in a relationship was associated with a desire for relationship disengagement.

Indirect Suggestions Test

The third form of secret testing is **indirect suggestions**. Indirect suggestions involve joking or hinting about more serious stages of relationships such as marriage or having children. If joking about more serious stages in a relationship is met with laughter, flirting, or intimate touching, then it might be assumed that the partner is interested in pursuing a more serious relationship. Another indirect suggestion comes in the form of increasingly more intimate touch. If the intimate touch is received positively or reciprocated, then it is also assumed that there is a commitment to the relationship.

Presenting the Relationship to Outsiders Test

The fourth form of secret testing involves **presenting the relationship to outsiders** as a relationship in which a mutual commitment is involved. This public presentation is meant to gauge the partner’s response. For example, you might change your Facebook status to “in a relationship” to gauge your partner’s reaction. Another example is introducing your relationship partner as girlfriend/boyfriend and observing the reaction. This secret test is particularly risky because it may result in a public rejection. The advantage is that it might result in public acceptance.

Separation Test

A fifth secret test is the **separation test**. Have you ever been in the beginning stages of a relationship and found it necessary to travel and hoped that your new relationship would survive the physical distance? At times, individuals intentionally create physical distance to test the strength of the relationship. If the relationship survives a few days

of separation, then this is an affirmation that the partner is committed. If the relationship partner does not attempt to make contact during the physical separation, then this may be a sign that there is a less than desirable level of interest.

Third-Party Test

The sixth form of secret testing is **third-party testing**. In this case, one might seek the opinion or insight from the partner's friends, family members, or coworkers.

Triangle Test

The final form of secret testing is the **triangle test**. This test involves the manipulation of a third person to obtain information about the relationship. A common form of triangle testing is to induce a jealous reaction by mentioning an interested third party. For example, a relationship partner might be told that a classmate was making flirtatious advances in class. The partner's reaction to this information is presumed to be an indicator of the partner's commitment. A "fidelity check" is another form of triangle testing in which a situation is created to allow the partner to "cheat." The partner's reaction is then observed.

In more recent research, Rebecca Chory-Assad and Melanie Booth-Butterfield determined that relationship partners use different strategies when attempting to maintain a relationship than when attempting to end a relationship.⁶ These researchers determined that relationship partners who wish to maintain a relationship when the relationship seems to be coming to an end will use the direct secret test in which the partner is approached directly. On the other hand, individuals who wish to end a relationship will do so by utilizing a secret test such as jealousy. Still, these individuals also report having low self-esteem. They concluded that individuals with low self-esteem might use secret testing as a means to "break up" because they do not have the confidence to talk with the partner directly.

Empty Apologies

Apologies are a necessary part of everyday interactions and important to correcting either intentional or unintentional hurt created in others. Despite the positive aspect of apologizing, it is often difficult to do. If your parents/guardians ever required you to apologize to a sibling, then you may recall the difficulty of uttering the words, "I apologize." Conversely, some individuals use apologies so frequently that the apology becomes meaningless. An apology implies acknowledgment of wrongdoing.⁷

Acknowledgment includes expression of responsibility, conveyance of remorse and direct request for forgiveness. Acknowledgment of wrongdoing should imply that there will be an effort to avoid repeated occurrences of the same behaviour. Regardless of the difficulties presented by the need to apologize, the positive aspects must be considered. Apologies have positive benefits such as increased feelings of empathy for the offender⁸ and reducing the consequences for an offender.⁹ Individuals who offer more elaborate apologies receive more favourable evaluation, are blamed less, forgiven more, and liked more by the individuals to whom an apology is made. *Apology Sincerity* influences how the victim feels after the negative event.¹⁰ Apology sincerity may alleviate strong negative emotions, including anger. Sincere apologies may also lead victims to think about conflict less negatively and be less vengeful.

Internet Infidelity

The amount of time spent online by a wide range of people makes the Internet an adequate "meeting place" for relationships of all types. The Internet shrinks our world and enables individuals to find others with similar interests, desirable knowledge (health information, how to clean, the best campgrounds, etc.), and attractive qualities. We might consider that the Internet provides privacy, the ability to interact frequently, and enables close proximity. Research shows that when it comes to Internet infidelity, partners perceive their infidelity to be more acceptable than their partner's infidelity. Also, males find involving/goal-directed acts (making plans, expressing love) as more acceptable than women.¹¹ Because of the murky nature of what constitutes infidelity via the Internet, researchers have worked to define it accurately. **Internet infidelity** is defined as using "sexual energy of any sort—thoughts, feelings, and behaviours—outside of a committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship, and then pretending that this drain in energy will affect neither partner nor the

relationship as long as it remains undiscovered.”¹² Partners take a harsher approach to Internet infidelity with their partners than themselves.¹³ Specifically, the researchers concluded that there is a double standard in Internet infidelity. Individuals find the Internet infidelity of their partner to be worse than their Internet infidelity. Also, relational partners use self-motivated rules regarding Internet infidelity and have different expectations for self than for the relationship partner. Internet infidelity led to the murder of Google executive Forrest Hayes who was described as a loving father and husband. Hayes made an unfortunate decision to make contact with Alix Tichelman on SeekingArrangement.com. After meeting with Tichelman several times, she injected him with an overdose of heroin, and he was found dead on his yacht in Santa Cruz’s Craft Harbor the next day. According to the Washington Post, the woman coldly injected him with heroin and simply walked away. Her actions were caught on camera and she is now on trial for.¹⁴

Internet Characteristics Fostering Online Infidelity

Contributing to the ease of forming relationships via the Internet are several characteristics identified through research.^{15,16,17} First, the Internet increases the speed with which messages are sent. Consider the difference in sending messages today in comparison to the early 1990s. Mail and landline phones were the primary means of communicating “quickly.” Widespread use of emails and instant messaging increased the speed with which people could communicate. Reach is another characteristic of the Internet, which enables individuals to establish many more relationships than in the past. Relationships were previously established by those in our immediate vicinity including our hometown, workplace, places for social gatherings, and churches. Now, our computer/smartphone puts us in touch with people all over the world without ever leaving our home. Anonymity (revelation of identity or lack thereof) also opens up opportunities for relationships. Consider the case of Manti Te’o in which anonymity allowed him to be fooled into believing that he had a girlfriend and that she died as the result of leukemia.¹⁸

Finally, interactivity, defined as the ability to send and receive messages and react to these messages, makes the Internet a breeding ground for infidelity. An additional characteristic of the Internet that may deceive individuals into thinking that they are not engaged in infidelity is the lack of physical presence, which makes the issue of infidelity ambiguous. After all, if one is not physically present, how can one cheat?

Research Spotlight

Tony Docan-Morgan and Carol A. Docan set out to examine how men and women view Internet infidelity in a 2007 study. The researchers started by having 43 undergraduates list what they thought could be Internet infidelity. The researchers reviewed the open-ended responses and paired down the list to the following:

- having cybersex (engaging in sexually explicit conversations with someone online)
- flirtatious behaviour (flirting with someone they met online)
- emotional (developing an emotional connection with someone online)
- seeking another (posting a personal ad online)
- conversing with another (having a conversation with someone online)
- exchanging information (giving personal information about yourself online – e.g., email address, cellphone number, etc.).
- other (engaging in casual conversational topics, not relational or emotional ones)



Based on these six categories and other literature on the subject, the researchers developed a measure and narrowed it down to 27 items. The measure ultimately discovered two different patterns of Internet infidelity *superficial/informal acts* (e.g., chatting about sports, talking about current events, joking, etc.) and *involving/goal-directed* (e.g., disclosing love, viewing personal ads, making plans to meet someone, etc.).

The researchers found that superficial/informal acts were rated as less severe than involving/goal-directed ones. When it came to the severity of superficial/informal acts, there were no differences between females and males in this study. However, females did find involving/goal-directed Internet infidelity as more severe than did men.

Lastly, the researchers found that people tended to rate their Internet infidelity as less severe than they rated their partner's infidelity on both involving/goal-directed and superficial/informal acts.

Docan-Morgan, T., & Docan, C. (2007). Internet infidelity: Double standards and the differing views of women and men. *Communication Quarterly*, 55(3), 317-342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370701492519>

Emotional vs. Sexual Infidelity

The lack of physical presence in online relationships drives the need to differentiate between sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity. It seems clear that physical interaction with another individual constitutes sexual infidelity. Still, some individuals might say that as long as there is no sexual intercourse, then there has been no infidelity. If we can't all agree on when cheating has occurred after physical contact, then it is easy to see why there tends to be a great deal of disagreement as to what constitutes emotional infidelity. One might even question whether emotional attachment to an infidel outside of one's primary relationship constitutes infidelity at all. Sexual infidelity involves sexual intimacy and physical involvement. In contrast, emotional infidelity includes "emotional involvement with another person, which leads one's partner to channel emotional resources such as romantic love, time, and attention to someone else."¹⁹ For example, if you receive a promotion at work, it might be assumed that the first person you would tell would be your relational partner. However, if emotional resources have been directed toward another individual, then this individual may be the first individual you might call. The relationship partner might view this as a betrayal or a dependence on another individual at the very least.

It was initially proposed that women would perceive emotional infidelity as worse than sexual infidelity and that men would perceive sexual infidelity in their partners as worse than emotional infidelity. This proposal developed from the evolutionary psychology perspective. In summary, this perspective indicates that males would be concerned with sexual infidelity because they had no way of knowing whether their mate was carrying their child and thus carrying on their genetic material. On the other hand, women were more concerned with emotional infidelity because women feared that their male counterparts would become attached to another female and that his resources (e.g., money, time, etc.) would be directed toward the other. Although this perspective provides insight into the basic differences between perspectives that might be held by females and males, research consistently shows that both females and males find sexual infidelity to be worse than emotional infidelity.²⁰

Researchers reported that sexual infidelity occurred in 30% to 40% of relationships.²¹ When sexual infidelity occurs, research shows that how infidelity is discovered determines relational outcomes.²² Voluntary admission seems to result in increased forgiveness, less likelihood of dissolution, and was the least damaging to relational quality.

Hurtful Messages

"Even in the closest, most satisfying relationships, people sometimes say things that hurt each other."²³ We have all been in the position of having our feelings hurt or hurting the feelings of another. When feelings are hurt, individuals respond in many different ways. Though hurtful messages have existed since humans began interacting, it was in 1994 that Anita L. Vangelisti first developed a typology of hurtful messages. Her work resulted in ten types of messages.²⁴ She furthered her work by exploring reactions to hurtful messages. First, we will discuss her typology of hurtful messages, and then we will address how individuals respond to hurtful messages.

Types of Hurtful Messages

Evaluations

Evaluations are messages that assess value or worth. These messages are a negative assessment of the other individual that result in hurt. One of the coauthors was once riding in a car with a coworker and his wife. He was driving and made an error. She said, "You are the worst driver ever." The moment was awkward for everyone.

Accusation

The second type of hurtful message is an accusation. Accusations are an assignment of fault or blame. Any number of topics can be addressed in accusations. A common source of conflict in relationships is money. An example of an accusation that might arise for conflict over money is "You are the reason this family is in constant financial turmoil."

Directives

Directives are the third type of hurtful message, and involve an order or a command. “Go to hell” is a common directive in some relationships depicted in movies and television, but is a more extreme example. In everyday interaction, examples might include, “leave me alone,” “don’t ever call me again,” or “stay away from me.” One of the coauthors remembers a short-lived relationship in which she called her boyfriend’s house. The boyfriend had told his mother that he was out with her. The phone call to his house ultimately resulted in the boyfriend being punished for lying, but he relayed a potentially hurtful message to the coauthor, which was, “Don’t ever call my house unless I ask you to.” As noted, the relationship was short-lived, but the hurtful message indicating a lack of value for the coauthor’s feelings still stings.

Informative Statements

Informative statements are hurtful messages that reveal unwanted information. A supervisor might reveal the following to an employee: “I only hired you because the owner made me.” Siblings might reveal “I never wanted a younger sister” or “When Mother was dying, she told me I was her favourite.” Friends might say something like, “When you got a job at the same place as me, I felt smothered.” Informative messages reveal information that could easily be kept a secret, but are intended to hurt.

Statement of Desire

A statement of desire expresses an individual’s preference. A romantic partner might state, “the night I met you, I was more interested in your friend and really wanted to go out with him.” A friend might say, “Callie has always been a better friend than you.” A parent/guardian with multiple children might state, “God only gives you one good child.”

Advising Statement

An advising statement calls for a course of action such as “you need to get yourself some help.” One of the coauthors inadvertently communicated an advising statement when a friend was talking about going on so many interviews and not getting hired. The coauthor said, “There are courses that offer interview training. You could take a course in interviewing.” The statement hurt the coauthor’s friend as she was only seeking comfort and not advice that seemingly indicated she had poor interview skills.

Question

A question is another type of hurtful message which, when asked, implies something negative. A very direct hurtful question is, “What is wrong with you?” Another subtler question that might be perceived as hurtful is, “You’ve been at the bank for ten years. Have you been promoted yet?”

Threats

Threats are messages that indicate a desire to inflict harm. Harm can be physical or psychological. For example, a romantic partner might say, “if you go out with your friends tonight, I’m going to break up with you.” A direct physical threat is a statement directed toward inflicting bodily harm such as, “I’m going to knock the crap out of you if you don’t change out of that outfit.”

Jokes

Jokes are another type of hurtful message that involves a prank or witticism. For example, a cousin might say to his athletically built female cousin, “what’s up quarterback thighs?” implying that the female’s looks are masculine. In an organization, a coworker could jokingly comment to a supervisor on the supervisor’s relationship with a subordinate, “I can see who’s really in charge here.” A prank can be hurtful if it results in humiliating or embarrassing the object of the prank. Pranks are sometimes carried too far. *The Breakfast Club* includes a perfect example of a prank carried too far when the jock explains that he and his wrestling buddies duct-taped the butt cheeks of a nerd. It was meant to be funny, but results in physical injury to the nerd. Jokes in the form of witticism

are often open to interpretation, but hurt may result if the recipient feels that the sender intended to hurt more so than humour. Pranks that embarrass or cause physical harm often create emotional pain for the recipient.

Lies

Lies are deceptive speech acts that result in the hurt of the recipient. In an episode of *The King of Queens*, Doug tells his wife Carrie that her forehead is too big after she hurt his feelings. He didn't really feel that way, but his words resulted in Carrie trying to cover her forehead because she was embarrassed that her forehead was "too big." Lies can range from the mundane such as "I was late for dinner because I was on the phone with my boss." to "I'm going to San Diego on business." Lies, when discovered, may result in feelings of being disrespected or betrayal.

Reactions to Hurtful Messages

After exploring the types of hurtful messages that exist, Anita Vangelisti and Linda Crumley investigated the reactions individuals have to hurtful messages.²⁵ The results of Vangelisti's and Crumley's investigation revealed three broad categories of reactions: active verbal responses, acquiescent responses, and invulnerable responses.

Active verbal responses involve attacking the other, defending the self, and asking for an explanation. Suppose that you and a romantic partner go to friends for dinner. Upon entering the home, you take off your shoes. Your romantic partner poses a hurtful question, such as "what is wrong with you? What kind of guest takes off their shoes?" An active verbal response that attacks the other is "nothing is wrong with me. What's wrong with you, you idiot? Everybody knows wearing street shoes bring in germs and allergens." Alternatively, one might respond by saying, "nothing is wrong with me. It is perfectly normal to take one's shoes off when entering another person's home." Finally, one might ask for an explanation, such as "Why do you think there is something wrong with me?"

Acquiescent responses involve crying, conceding, or apologizing. This type of response demonstrates that the message is hurtful or that the recipient believes they have engaged in some wrongdoing. For example, if a friend says, "I never want to see you again," a conceding response might be, "that's fine. I won't bother you anymore." Alternatively, an apologetic response is, "I am so sorry. Is there something I can do to change your mind?"

Finally, hurtful messages can result in invulnerable responses. We have all heard the phrase "sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but words will never hurt me." This phrase, while not true, does demonstrate a desire to demonstrate invulnerability. Reactions of invulnerability range from ignoring the message to laughing. Recall the example from the directive message earlier in which one of the coauthors was told not to call the boyfriend's house. Although the coauthor felt that the message was disrespectful, the response was to laugh. The boyfriend was told that his "directive" was ridiculous and that if she was going to be used as an excuse, then he should be smart enough to let her in on that little secret unless he was lying to her, too.

Key Takeaways

- Because it is considered taboo to ask one's relational partner about the nature of the relationship, one or both relational partners may use secret tests.
- Inherent characteristics of the Internet may facilitate infidelity.
- Emotional infidelity is particularly challenging because relationship partners may not agree on what constitutes infidelity.
- Hurtful messages are a part of the human experience, but they can be avoided by becoming aware of the types of messages that exist.

Exercises

- Review the types of secret tests. For each type, provide an example from your own life in which you have engaged in the secret test or observed a friend doing so. For each example, state whether you believe the secret test was helpful or harmful and why.

- Create your definition of emotional infidelity. Ask three friends to come up with their definition of emotional infidelity. Compare and contrast the four definitions.
- After reading the section on Internet infidelity and Internet characteristics, find your example in the popular media that relates to one of the characteristics of the Internet that seems to facilitate infidelity. For example, you might choose the characteristic “speed.” Find an article in the popular media in which speed played a role in an individual’s ability to “cheat” in the virtual environment.
- Working in a group, create an example of each type of hurtful message from your own life that you have experienced or witnessed. What was the reaction? Label the reaction according to Vangelisti and Crumley’s Reaction Types.

The Dark Side of Relationships: Aggression

Learning Objectives

1. Explain relational aggression.
2. Explore relational aggression among women.
3. Define and explain the term “verbal aggression.”
4. Describe bullying and bullying in the workplace.
5. Explain basic strategies for handling the dark side of interpersonal communication.

Relational Aggression

Relational aggression is defined as behaviours that harm others.²⁶ Harm is created through damaging social relationships or feelings of acceptance. Research on relational aggression indicates that it involves both confrontational and nonconfrontational behaviours. Specific behaviours associated with *confrontation*, or direct behaviour, include name-calling, cruel teasing, ridicule, and verbal rejection directed at the target. *Nonconfrontational* or indirect behaviours include spreading rumours, gossiping, and social manipulation.^{27,28} Adolescents use indirect aggression more than direct aggression to harm relationships.

Relationally Aggressive Categories

When researching 11 to 13-year-olds, five categories of relationally aggressive behaviours were identified.²⁹ The categories are labelled inconsistent friendships, rumours/gossip, excluding/ditching friends, social intimidation, and notes/technological aggression. Additional research identified seven types of relationally aggressive behaviours among high school girls.³⁰ Based on open-ended descriptions from high school girls, the following categories of relational aggression were found: the physical threat/physical attack, rejection, humiliation, betrayal, personal attack, boy manipulation, and relational depreciation. In addition to the categories of relationship aggression, it is essential to note that gossiping and spreading rumours were the most common forms of relational aggression across age groups.^{31,32}

Relational Aggression in College: Bad and Normal

Current research indicates that relational aggression begins in childhood and extends into the workplace. Maintaining an awareness of this tendency may help to avoid this situation in the future. A challenge with relational aggression among women is that it is known to be negative and yet labelled as normal.^{33,34,35,36,37} Evidence of this dual perspective on relational aggression among women is found within the media in movies such as *Mean Girls* (also a Broadway musical). Because of the acceptance of this behaviour as negative and normal, conversations were held with women to understand their explanation for engaging in negative behaviour. Through these conversations, several themes emerged. These themes included (a) girls will be girls; (b) relational aggression as venting; (c) blaming the victim; (d) minimizing their role; and (e) regret. The “girls will be girls”

theme is especially problematic because it indicates that women know that relational aggression has negative consequences, but they accept it as normal. Researchers report that college-aged women when discussing relational aggression made such statements as “something you expect [among women], drama and gossip and cattiness” and “typical girl stuff.” They concluded that women continue to engage in relational aggression because it is perceived to be normal. In other words, it is acceptable because everyone is doing it.³⁸

The second theme that emerged in discussions of relational aggression among college-aged women was relational aggression as venting. Women regularly described gossiping, name-calling and talking behind someone’s back as cathartic in nature. It was described as a form of stress relief. It was concluded that women view this form of communication as acceptable because it is beneficial. This “excuse” makes it okay to vent to other women even if it might be harmful if discovered by the target.³⁹

The third theme among women discussing relational aggression was “blaming the victim.” The majority of women reported that the targets were to blame for the relationally aggressive behaviour because they were either “crazy” or engaged in sexually inappropriate behaviour. Other reasons given were that the target was either mean to them first or “different.” For example, one girl reported targeting her roommate, whom she knew to be mentally ill. She blamed the girl by stating that the girl should have taken her medicine more regularly to control her behaviour better. Additionally, the majority of women in their study stated that they engage in relational aggression because the target engaged in inappropriate sexual behaviour.

A fourth theme related to relational aggression emerged in which women attempted to minimize their role. Study participants mainly reported that they were simply going along with the actual perpetrator and acted as an audience member. Individuals described themselves as listeners rather than being the real aggressor. Another way in which women attempted to minimize their role was to compare their behaviours to others. This comparison served to demonstrate that their behaviour was not as aggressive as that of others.

Finally, women discussed feeling regret for having behaved in a relationally aggressive manner. Though the women did express regret, their regret was generally paired with blaming the victim. For example, participants acknowledged that they felt bad for behaving as they did even though the target was crazy.

Verbal Aggression

Defining Verbal Aggression

Verbal aggression is defined as communication that attacks an individual’s self-concept intending to create psychological pain. If you have ever had an argument and been called a name or been putdown, then you have been the target of verbal aggression.⁴⁰ Verbal aggression is considered a destructive form of communication. Because verbal aggression is regarded as a negative form of communication, researchers have worked to determine characteristics that may increase the likelihood of individuals behaving in an aggressive manner. Researchers found that six dimensions of self-esteem (defensive self-enhancement, moral self-approval, lovability, likability, self-control, and identity integration) were significantly and negatively related to trait verbal aggressiveness.⁴¹ History of familial verbal aggression was positively associated with the perceived acceptability of verbal aggression against a romantic partner, and this association was stronger for individuals with higher behavioural inhibition system scores. Individuals with high behavioural inhibition are more likely to be anxious and react nervously when facing punishment. In other words, people who have been exposed to verbal aggression are more likely to find it acceptable to engage in verbal aggression against a relational partner, especially when the individual also scores high in behavioural inhibition. Also, individuals who score high in behavioural inhibition are more likely to find verbal aggression to be acceptable regardless of whether they have been exposed to verbal aggression in the past.⁴²

Perceptions of Verbal Aggression

If your parents/guardians ever told you that it wasn’t what you said, it was the way you said it, then they were offering you sage advice. Research shows that when engaged in interpersonal disputes, smaller amounts of verbal aggression were perceived when the affirming communicator style (relaxed, friendly, and attentive) was used.⁴³ Thus the communicator’s style of communication impacted the perception of the message. Table 14.1 provides a list of the ten most common examples of verbally aggressive messages.⁴⁴

Type of Message	Example
Character Attacks	You're a lying jerk!
Competence Attacks	You're too stupid to manage our finances.
Background Attacks	You don't even have a college degree!
Physical Appearance	You are as fat as a pig!
Maledictions	I wish you were dead.
Teasing	Your hair colour makes you look like a clown.
Ridicule	Your nose looks like a beak.
Threats	I'll leave you and you won't have a dime to your name.
Swearing	Go to _____!
Nonverbal Emblems	shaking fists, "flipping off"

Table 14.1 Verbally Aggressive Messages

Bullying

Bullying is a form of communication in which an aggressive individual targets an individual who is perceived to be weaker. **Bullying** is a form of aggressive behaviour in which a person of greater power attempts to inflict harm or discomfort on individuals. This definition also indicates that the behaviour is repeated over time.⁴⁵ For example, a child might call his friend an idiot on the playground one day. A single incident of name-calling would not be considered bullying, but if it happened day after day, then the name-calling would be considered bullying. You may have been bullied or known someone who was bullied. It is also possible that you bullied someone. Bullies use their authority, size or power to create fear in others. Bullying is known to have negative consequences, such as dropping out of school. It was found that the actions of bullies leave their victims feeling helpless, anxious, and depressed.⁴⁶ Other researchers report three types of bullying: physical, verbal, and relational.⁴⁷

Physical Bullying

Physical bullying involves hitting, kicking, pulling hair, strapping a female's bra strap or giving a "wedgie." Witnesses easily observe this type of bully. You may recall being the victim of these behaviours, engaging in these behaviours, or watching others engage in these behaviours. Physical bullying can be prevented by observers, such as teachers or even peers. There are several Public Service Campaigns directed toward bystanders to let the bystander know that they can help prevent or stop bullying. However, bullies may corner their victims in a more private setting, knowing that the weaker individual will not be able to defend themselves.

Relational Bullying

The second type of bullying is indirect or **relational bullying**. This form of bullying is the manipulation of social relationships to inflict hurt upon another individual.⁴⁸ This type of bullying includes either withholding friendship or excluding. Relational bullying often increases as children age because physical bullying decreases. Relational bullying is particularly problematic because it is very painful for victims, but cannot be readily observed. One might wonder what a teacher or parent/guardian might do when two friends suddenly begin to exclude a third friend. The rejection is so painful, but it seems nearly impossible to require adolescents to continue liking and including the rejected child. An interesting finding in relation to this type of bullying is that females are more likely to engage in this form of bullying.⁴⁹

Verbal Bullying

The third type of bullying is **verbal bullying** and includes threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdown, or sarcastic comments.⁵⁰ This form of bullying is easily observed as well and can be prevented by authorities and peers. The effects of this form of bullying are similar to the impact of physical and relational bullying.



Figure 14.6 Consequences of Bullying

The negative consequences of childhood bullying have driven communication scholars to develop educational tools to provide to teachers and other authority figures. Researchers developed a model to assist teachers in discerning playful, prosocial teasing from destructive bullying.⁵¹ The Teasing Totter Model outlines behaviours that range from prosocial teasing to bullying and offers recommendations for responding to each. Teasing in a prosocial manner is usually done among friends, laughter is involved and even affection. Bullying, on the other hand, is a repeated negative behaviour in which the victim is visibly distressed. There is a clear power difference in size, age, or ability.

Cyberbullying

The inherent ease of using the Internet and communicating via the Internet has created an excellent and convenient venue for bullying. **Cyberbullying** is intentional harm inflicted through the medium of electronics that is repeated over time.⁵² Cyberbullying affects victims academically and socially with 20% of victims reporting Internet avoidance.⁵³ When using electronic communication technologies, young people are exposed to interpersonal violence, social aggression, harassment, and mistreatment.⁵⁴ Cyberbullying includes behaviours such as flaming, which involves posting provocative or abusive posts, and outing where personal information is posted.⁵⁵ Cyberbullying is so prevalent that social media such as Facebook have policies to help users avoid this phenomenon. Consider how often you engage with your peers through social media versus your counterparts who were teenagers/young adults in the 1980s. Opportunities for communicating with peers were limited to FtF or via landline phones. Thus opportunities for bullying could be confined to school or landline phones such that bullying was limited to eight hour school days and phone calls that could be ended immediately upon becoming uncomfortable. Now, there is no end to when bullying can take place. Cyberbullying can take place 24/7, and the only way to avoid it is to cut off a major from of staying connected with one's world via cell phone or Internet. Researchers are just now beginning to understand the impact of cyberbullying, and some speculate that cyberbullying is worse than traditional bullying, but research shows mixed results on this assertion.

Discovering Self-Concept – Who are you?

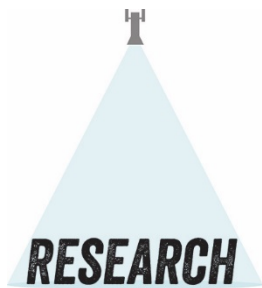
What should I do if I'm being bullied, harassed or attacked by someone on Facebook?

Facebook offers these tools to help you deal with bullying and harassment. Depending on the seriousness of the situation:

- Unfriend — Only your Facebook friends can contact you through Facebook chat or post messages on your Timeline.
- Block — This will prevent the person from starting chats and messages with you, adding you as a friend and viewing things you share on your Timeline.
- Report the person or any abusive things they post.
- The best protection against bullying is to learn how to recognize it and how to stop it. Here are some tips about what you should — and shouldn't — do:
- Don't respond. Typically, bullies want to get a response — don't give them one.
- Don't keep it a secret. Use Facebook's Trusted Friend tool to send a copy of the abusive content to someone you trust who can help you deal with the bullying. This will also generate a report to Facebook.
- Document and save. If the attacks persist, you may need to report the activity to an ISP and they will want to see the messages.

Visit Facebook's Family Safety Center for more information, tools and resources. <https://www.facebook.com/help/116326365118751/>

Research Spotlight



In 2013, Anke Görzig and Kjartan Ólafsson set out to determine what makes a bully a cyberbully. They recruited 1,000 Internet-using children aged 9–16 in 25 European countries. The researchers also interviewed at least one of the children's parents for the study. The total sample size was 25,142.

The questionnaire the researchers used was translated into 25 different languages. The interviews took place in the children's home. Any sensitive questions were asked on a private questionnaire. As you can see, this project was a massive undertaking.

Of the 25,142 participants, 2,821 admitted to engaging in behaviours either online or FtF that could be labelled as bullying.

The researchers found that “cyberbullies (all else being equal) were at least four times as likely to engage in risky online activities and twice as likely to spend more time online as well as finding it easier to be themselves online.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, the researchers found that girls were more likely to engage in cyberbullying than FtF bullying when compared to their male counterparts.

Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K. (2013). What makes a bully a cyberbully? Unravelling the characteristics of cyberbullies across 25 European countries. *Journal of Children & Media*, 7(1), 9-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2012.739756>

Workplace Bullying Typology

Though it is hard to imagine among adults, bullying continues in the work environment. Bully can lead to loss of employment, poor attendance and depression. There are several typologies of bullying. In research conducted with nurses, a typology of bullying was created that is particularly comprehensive.⁵⁷ The typology of these researchers includes the bullying behaviour and related tactics. **Workplace bullying behaviours** involve those seen in Table 14.2. As you can see, workplace bullying behaviours involve a wide range of tactics.

Behaviours	Tactics
Isolation and exclusion	Being ignored
	Being excluded from conversation
	Being isolated from supportive peers
	Being excluded from activities
Intimidation and threats	Raised voices or raised hands
	Being stared at, watched and followed
	Tampering with or destroying personal belongings
	Compromising or obstructing patient care
Verbal threats	Being singled out, scrutinized and monitored
	Being yelled at or verbally abused
	Being stood over, pushed or shoved
	Belittlement and humiliation
	Verbal put-downs, insults or humiliation
	Spreading gossip
	Being given a denigrating nickname
	Blamed, made to feel stupid or incompetent
	Suggestions of madness and mental instability
	Mistakes highlighted publicly
Damaging professional identity	Public denigration of ability or achievements
	Questioning skills and ability
	Being given demeaning work
	Unsubstantiated negative performance claims
	Spreading rumours, slander, and character slurs
	Questioning competence or credentials
Limiting career opportunities	Denial of opportunities that lead to promotion
	Being overlooked for promotion
	Excluded from committees and activities
	Exclusion from educational opportunities
	Rostered to erode specialist skills
Obstructing work or making work-life difficult	Relocation to make job difficult
	Removal of administrative support
	Excluded from routine information
	Work organized to isolate
	Removal of necessary equipment
	Given excessive or unreasonable workload
	Sabotaging or hampering work
	Varying targets and deadlines
	Excessive scrutiny of work
Denial of due process and natural justice	Denial of due process in meetings
	Denial of meal breaks
	Compiling unsubstantiated written records
	Denial of sick, study or conference leave

Behaviours	Tactics
	Unfair rostering practices
	Economic sanctions
	Roster to lower-paid shift work
	Limiting the opportunity to work
	Dismissal from position
	Reclassifying position to lower status

Table 14.2 Bullying in the Workplace: Behaviours and Tactics

Communicating Effectively

Relationships involve work! Media portrays relationships as romantic endeavors, and the darker side of relationships remains buried. In real-life, individuals may be inclined to hide relationship difficulties, which further perpetuates the notion that relationships simply happen and that everyone lives happily ever after.

Communicating Anger

Research repeatedly demonstrates that how emotion is communicated will affect the outcome of the communication situation. Relationship partners are more satisfied when positive emotions are communicated rather than negative emotions. Four forms of anger expression have been identified.⁵⁸ The four forms of anger expression range from direct and nonthreatening to avoidance and denial of angry feelings. Anger expression is more productive when the emotion is communicated directly and in a non-threatening manner. In most circumstances, direct communication is more constructive.

Form of Expression	Explanation of Form
Assertion	Direct statements, non-threatening, explaining anger
Aggression	Direct and threatening, may involve criticism
Passive Aggression	Indirectly communicate negative affect in a destructive manner – “the silent treatment”
Avoidance	Avoiding the issue, denying angry feelings, pretending not to feel anything

Table 14.3 Forms of Anger Expression

Affirming Communicator Style

When communicating with one's relational partner, adopting an affirming communicator style may lead to positive outcomes. The affirming communicator style was initially conceptualized to involve friendly, relaxed, and attentive behaviours.⁵⁹ The friendly communicator style involves encouraging others, acknowledging others' contributions, and being tactful in communication with others. The relaxed style involves being calm and collected while avoiding nervous mannerisms that indicate that one is tense. Being attentive involves listening carefully to others and demonstrating an empathic approach to others. Research has demonstrated that the affirming communicator style causes receivers to perceive that there is less verbal aggression.⁶⁰

Deception

One final aspect of the dark side of interpersonal communication to be considered is deceptive communication. We are all familiar with the concept of lying and deception. We are taught from a young age that we should not lie, but we often witness the very people instructing us not to lie engaging in “little white lies” or socially acceptable lies. As communication scholars, we must distinguish between a lie that is told for the benefit of the receiver and a lie that is told with more malicious intent. Lies told with more malicious intent are referred to as deception and are the focus of this section. Judee Burgoon and David Buller define deception as, “a deliberate act perpetrated by a sender to engender in a receiver beliefs contrary to what the sender believes is true to put the receiver at a disadvantage.”⁶¹ Deceptive communication can exist in any type of relationship and in any context. H. Dan O'Hair and Michael Cody discuss deception as a common message strategy that is used in a manner similar to other forms

of communication.⁶² They state that deception is often purposeful, goal-directed, and can be used as a relational control device. We will begin our discussion of deception by exploring three types of deception. This discussion will be followed by exploring the work of Jennifer Guthrie and Adrienne Kunkel, who discussed why romantic partners use deception and how often.⁶³

Types of Deception

Three types of deception are discussed in the field of communication: falsification, concealment, and equivocation.⁶⁴ Falsification is when a source deliberately presents information that is false or fraudulent. For example, the source of deception may state, “I did not drink when I went out last night,” even though the source did drink. Researchers have found that falsification is the most common form of deception.

Concealment is another form of deception in which the source deliberately withholds information. For example, if two partners are living in two different states and one partner is offered a job in the same state as the other partner, but the job offer is not revealed to the other partner, then concealment has occurred. Consider the consequences of concealment in this situation. By failing to reveal the job offer, the source is preventing the receiver from operating with all of the known facts. For example, a decision to remain in a long-distance relationship might be affected if one partner is not willing to take a job that will mean living in the same state.

The third form of deception is referred to as equivocation. This form of deception represents a moral grey area for some because some see equivocation as a clear lie. Equivocation is a statement that could be interpreted as having more than one meaning. For example, you ask your romantic partner if she talked to her ex-boyfriend last night, and she says, “no, I didn’t talk to him,” but she did text with him, then an equivocation has occurred. Technically, the statement, “I did not talk to him” is true, but only technically because communication did occur in a different form. Consider how the answer may have been changed if the question was, “Did you communicate with your ex-boyfriend last night?” Now that we have discussed what deception is and several types of deception, we can examine how deception functions in romantic relationships.

Lies in Romantic Relationships

Jennifer Guthrie and Adrienne Kunkel explored the reasons why romantic partners engage in deception in their article titled “Tell Me Sweet (And Not-So-Sweet) Little Lies: Deception in Romantic Relationships.”⁶⁵ The researchers asked 67 college students to record their deceptive communication in diaries for seven days. At the end of seven days, the students returned their diaries. The researchers counted the deceptive communication acts in all of the diaries and determined that the 67 students produced 327 deceptive acts in a seven-day period. The results of this part of their study showed that 147 of the deceptive acts were lies, 61 were exaggerations, half-truths accounted for 56 of the deceptive acts, 35 of the deceptive acts were diversionary responses, 26 were secrets, and two uses of deception were not able to be categorized due to lack of detail in the diary. On average, each participant engaged in 4.88 deceptive acts in seven days.

In addition to studying how often participants lied, Guthrie and Kunkel⁶⁶ were interested in why the students lied. The students provided 334 reasons for the 327 deceptive acts that they reported. The researchers were able to place the 334 reasons into six overarching motives for lying: engaging in relational maintenance, managing face needs, negotiating dialectical tensions, establishing relational control, continuing previous deception, and unknown. In the table that follows, each motive for deception is broken down further.

Overarching Motives	Individual Motives
Managing Face Needs	Supporting Positive Face
	Supporting own and/or partner's positive face (protecting partner's feelings and self-presentation)
	Supporting Negative Face
	Supporting own and/or partner's negative face (avoiding unwanted activities and/or imposition)
Negotiating Dialectical Tensions	Balancing Autonomy/Connection
	Balancing the need for independence versus the need for togetherness
	Balancing Openness/Closedness
	Balancing the need for open communication versus the need for privacy
	Balancing Novelty/Predictability
	Balancing the need for spontaneity versus the need for routine or expected behaviours
Establishing Relational Control	Acting Coercive
	Ensuring partner behaves or feels how partner wants them to
Continuing Previous Deception	Participants indicated that they had lied about something in the past and the particular act of deception was a way of continuing or maintaining the lie
Unknown	Participants reported that they could not identify their motives for using deception

Table 14.4. Deceptive Acts

Through this exploration of the frequency of lies and motives for doing so, Guthrie and Kunkel uncovered an important finding. The students in the study responded positively to examining their deceptive acts. They also discovered that students held inaccurate perceptions of their use of deception and either under-reported or over-reported how often they engaged in deception. The researchers concluded that reflecting upon deception will allow individuals to understand how deception impacts relationships in both positive and negative ways. Awareness seems to be key to managing deception in romantic relationships.

Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence

“Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behaviour as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and emotional/psychological abuse.”⁶⁷ The Center for Disease Control (CDC) expands upon this definition and labels domestic violence as “intimate partner violence.”⁶⁸ These include sexual violence, stalking, physical violence, and psychological aggression. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), an intimate partner is described as a romantic or sexual partner and includes spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, people with whom they dated, were seeing, or “hooked up.”

According to the *NISVS 2015 Data Brief*, one in three were victims of contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime.⁶⁹ One in four (30 million) women and one in ten (12.1 million) men reported intimate partner violence-related impact which includes being fearful, concerned for safety, injury, need for medical care, needed help from law enforcement, missed at least one day of work, missed at least one day of school, any post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, need for housing services, need for victim advocate services, need for legal services and contacting a crisis hotline.

Sexual violence is a specific form of domestic violence that may be experienced by women and men and includes rape, which can consist of being forcibly penetrated (or penetrating) someone else, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact.⁷⁰

The CDC considers an individual to be a stalking victim if they “experienced multiple stalking tactics or a single stalking tactic multiple times by the same perpetrator and felt very fearful, or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed as a result of the perpetrator’s behaviour.”⁷¹

The following behaviours are considered to be stalking by the CDC:

- Unwanted phone calls, voice or text messages, hang-ups
- Unwanted emails, instant messages, messages through social media
- Unwanted cards, letters, flowers, or presents

- Watching or following from a distance, spying with a listening device, camera, or global positioning system (GPS)
- Approaching or showing up in places, such as the victim's home, workplace, or school when it was unwanted
- Leaving strange or potentially threatening items for the victim to find
- Sneaking into the victim's home or car and doing things to scare the victim or let the victim know the perpetrator had been there
- In follow-up questions, respondents who were identified as possible stalking victims were asked about their experiences with two additional tactics:
- Damaged personal property or belongings, such as in their home or car
- Made threats of physical harm

Sally Fiona Kelly explored aggression concerning violent sentiments.⁷² In her study, she sought to understand why individuals engaged in violent behaviour. Her study demonstrates that individuals who have committed violent acts in a relationship believe violence is acceptable and are prepared to use violence. This finding suggests that one approach to reducing violence is to focus on changing beliefs and thoughts associated with violence. Strategic communication scholars can create campaigns to target beliefs related to violence. In a similar study, participants predicted that women would become more aggressive while watching videos of males and females in conflict. When watching videos of "fighting" couples, males predicted the conflict would lead to increasing levels of aggression more often than females. Male participants also recommended the use of more aggressive behaviours during conflict.⁷³ Thus this study underscores the change perceptions of the acceptability of aggressive behaviour. This same study assessed participant's perceptions of the likelihood of conciliatory strategies on the part of the individuals in fights. Participants in the study believe the chance of forgiveness and resolution decreased as conflict increase. In light of this finding, relational partners should apologize and forgive earlier in conflict to reduce escalation that may increase the chance of violence.

Being Mindful

Gaining an awareness of destructive communication behaviours in relationships may help avoid the emotional consequences of destructive communication as well as the loss of a relationship. Individuals engage in information seeking strategies to gain insight into the current state-of-the-relationship. As discussed earlier in this chapter, one such strategy is secret testing. This strategy ranges from the not so secretive "direct" secret test to the entrapping "triangle test." Other secret tests involve endurance, indirect suggestions, public presentation, separation, and third-party testing. Although secret tests may allow relationship partners to understand their relationship through subtle and sometimes overt information seeking, the direct approach seems to be the one that relationship partners use when they wish to maintain the relationship.

Relational aggression is a harmful form of behaviour that serves to either withhold friendship or manipulate the social relationships of another individual. This form of behaviour is particularly prevalent among females and begins in early childhood and continues into the workplace. The consequences of relational aggression are emotional pain and withdrawal.

Verbal aggression is a communication strategy in which the self-concept is attacked rather than arguing about the issues of a controversial topic. The impact of verbal aggression can be lessened if the communicator used an affirming style of communication. Bullying is similar to verbal aggression and relational aggression. Bullying is a destructive form of communication in which the aggressor targets an individual who is weaker either in strength, size, or ability. The effects of bullying can range from relatively mild (hurt feelings) to devastating (successful suicide attempts).

One cannot wholly escape the possibility of becoming a victim of the darker side of communication. Still, individuals can work to avoid engaging in the behaviours associated with the dark side of communication. To do so, consider adopting an affirming style of communication, focusing on the topic during arguments rather than the self-concept of others, and working to prevent bullying when it is observed in others. Also, relational aggression can be avoided by refusing to engage in the behaviour and refusing to participate when others are doing so. In particular, we should not simply accept that relational aggression is a natural occurrence among

females. Finally, talk with your partner about their beliefs concerning aggressive behaviour and violence to make sure your partner does not believe violence is an acceptable means of dealing with conflict.

Key Takeaways

- Relational Aggression is a hurtful form of communication which manipulates relationships and social standing.
- The consequences of bullying range from lowered self-esteem to suicide attempts, which may or may not be successful.
- Verbal aggression attacks the self-concept of others rather than attacking an issue.
- Intimate partner violence is pervasive with male and female victims.
- Know your partner's beliefs about the acceptability of aggression and violence.
- There are several ways individuals can attempt to diffuse and downplay the effects of the dark side of interpersonal communication. First, people can learn how to communicate anger effectively. Second, people can develop an affirming communicator style. Lastly, people can learn how to be mindful of their own communicative behaviour.

Exercises

- Relational aggression results in hurt and lowered self-esteem. Design a plan to help a child who may experience or enact relational aggression.
- Verbal aggression is a negative form of communication in which the self-concept of another is attacked. Describe a situation in which you engaged in verbal aggression. How will you avoid verbal aggression in future interactions? If you are the target of verbal aggression, how will you approach the perpetrator of this behaviour?
- Once entering the workplace, you may become a manager of people, or you may already manage people. How will you help your colleagues and subordinates avoid bullying? If you discover that bullying has occurred, what will you do to correct the situation?

Key Terms

bullying

Form of aggressive behaviour in which a person of greater power attempts to inflict harm or discomfort on individuals and the behaviour is repeated over time.

confrontational behaviours

Specific behaviours associated with *confrontation* or direct behaviours, involves name-calling, cruel teasing, ridicule, and verbal rejection directed at the target.

directness

The least secretive of the strategies and involves asking the relational partner about his/her feelings toward the relationship and commitment to the relationship. Alternatively, an individual might disclose their feelings about the relationship with the hope that the relationship partner will reciprocate.

endurance test

Form of secret testing in which the partner is tested by engaging in actions that the partner might perceive to be a cost in the relationship.

indirect suggestions

Joking or hinting about more serious stages of a relationships such as marriage or having children.

intimate partner violence

Includes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression.

internet characteristics

Internet characteristic that influence Internet relationships such as speed, reach, interactivity, and anonymity.

internet infidelity

Sexual energy of any sort—thoughts, feelings, and behaviours—outside of a committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship, and pretending that this drain in energy will affect neither one's partner nor the relationship as long as it remains undiscovered.

nonconfrontational behaviours

Behaviours include spreading rumours, gossiping, and social manipulation.

physical bullying

Involves hitting, kicking, pulling hair, strapping a female's bra strap or giving a "wedgie."

presenting the relationship to outsiders

Form of secret testing in which the partner publicly declares their relationship status to gauge a partner's response.

reasons for relational aggression

Women's explanations for relational aggression: (a) girls will be girls; (b) venting; (c) blaming the victim; (d) minimizing their role; and (e) regret

relational aggression

Behaviours that harm others. Harm is created through damaging social relationship or feelings of acceptance.

relational bullying

The manipulation of social relationships to inflict hurt upon another individual.

secret tests

Indirect strategies individuals use to assess the state of their relationship.

separation test

Creating physical distance to test the strength of the relationship.

third-party testing

Involving a third party such as friend or family to gain insight into the relationship.

triangle test

Manipulating a third party to gain information about the nature of the relationship.

types of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying involves isolation and exclusion, intimidation and threats, verbal threats, damaging professional identity, limiting career opportunities, obstructing work or making work-life difficult, and denial of due process and natural justice.

verbal bullying

Includes threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdown or sarcastic comments

Chapter Wrap-Up

"But beware of the dark side. Anger, fear, aggression...the dark side of the Force are they, easily they flow... If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny. Consume you, it will..." —Yoda

The concept of "the dark side" stems from the struggle between good and evil put forth by George Lucas in Star Wars back in 1977. The metaphor of "the dark side" has been used by communication scholars to look at a range of interpersonal relationship behaviours that are highly problematic and destructive. We started this chapter by examining a few destructive interpersonal behaviours: secret testing, Internet infidelity, and hurtful messages. We then switched our focus to the highly destructive world of interpersonal aggression. We looked at both how interpersonal relationships can be both verbally and physically destructive. If you find yourself in a verbally or physically destructive interpersonal relationship, please seek help. No one deserves to be belittled, demeaned, or assaulted.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Carrie's daughter, Diana, had only been at Birmingham School Junior High School a few months when she formed a friendship with three girls: Lisa, Lucy, and Kristen. The girls were great friends, and spent a significant amount of time on the phone and at the mall on the weekends. The girls graduated from 8th grade and moved on to high school. During their freshman year, Diana took a disliking to Lisa and began campaigning against her. At some point, Diana decided that the group should no longer include Lisa. When spending the night with Kristen, Diana asked Kristen to call Lisa to get her to talk about her behind her back. She planned to confront Lisa if she talked about her. She plotted with Lucy and Kristen to get them to ignore Lisa when she came to sit with them at lunch. In a final act to eradicate Lisa from the group, she coaxed Lucy into writing a note Kristen to say that she didn't want to be friends with Lisa anymore. The plan was for Diana to "find" the note and then give it to Lisa so that she could see how Kristen and Lucy felt about her. The girls moved forward with their plan to write the note and give it to Lisa. After Lisa received the note, she went to Kristen to find out what was going on. She was devastated and crying. Kristen felt terrible for her, but she didn't betray her friendship with Diana. Later, Lisa's mom called Carrie to talk about the situation and determine what could be done.

1. What term describes the behaviour demonstrated by the girls in the scenario?
2. Is it reasonable to expect Kristen and Lucy to stand up to Diana?
3. What, in your opinion, caused Diana to exclude Lisa?
4. When Carrie found out about her daughter's behaviour, what was her responsibility?
5. Was it acceptable for Lisa's mom to call Carrie?
6. What would you do in this situation?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Which form of secret test involves physical distance?
 - a. endurance
 - b. separation
 - c. third party
 - d. public presentation
 - e. triangle test
2. Verbal aggression is defined as
 - a. attacking the self-concept of others
 - b. attacking the topic in an argument
 - c. manipulating social relationships of others
 - d. using one's power to intimidate others
 - e. isolating the target of communication
3. Relational aggression is best defined as
 - a. manipulating the social relationships of others
 - b. attacking the self-concept of others
 - c. attacking the topic in an argument
 - d. using one's power to intimidate others
 - e. isolating the target
4. Which of the following is not a form of workplace bullying?
 - a. Damaging professional standing

- b. Limiting the ability to complete work
 - c. Obstructing due process
 - d. Verbal threats
 - e. Providing counselling through human resources upon reports of bullying
5. Which of the following is not included in playful teasing?
- a. Parties are Friends
 - b. Repeated occurrences of the same behaviour
 - c. Signs of affection
 - d. Parties smile and laugh
 - e. Parties are using teasing to broach difficult topics

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Glossary

"you" statements

Moralistic judgments where we imply the wrongness or badness of another person and the way they have behaved.

abstract

Refers to words that relate to ideas or concepts that exist only in your mind and do not represent a tangible object.

abstraction ladder

A diagram that explains the process of abstraction.

accent

Nonverbal communication that emphasizes a portion of a message or word rather than the message as a whole.

accidental communication

When an individual sends messages to another person without realizing those messages are being sent.

acting with awareness

Purposefully focusing one's attention on the activity or interaction in which one is engaged.

action model

Communication model that views communication as a one-directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver.

active friendships

Type of stabilized friendship where there is a negotiated sense of mutual accessibility and availability for both parties in the friendship.

affect

"Any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling, and from the most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions. Often described in terms of positive affect or negative affect, both mood and emotion are considered affective states."

affect displays

Kinesics that show feelings and emotions.

affectionless psychopathy

The inability to show affection or care about others.

affective orientation

An individual's recognition of their own emotions and the emotions of others and reliance on these emotions during decision making processes.

affiliation

A connection or association with others.

agape

Selfless love in which the needs of others are the priority.

agentic friendships

Friendships marked by activity.

alexithymia

A general deficit in emotional vocabulary—the ability to identify emotional feelings, differentiate emotional states from physical sensations, communicate feelings to others, and process emotion in a meaningful way.

ambiguous language

Language that has multiple meanings.

analyzing

This is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker's message.

androgynous

A person having both feminine and masculine characteristics.

anonymous CMC identity

People in CMC interactions can communicate in a manner where their actual identity is simply not known.

anxious shyness

The fear associated with dealing with others face-to-face.

appreciative listening

The type of listening you engage in for pleasure or enjoyment.

appropriate communication

Communication tactics that most people would consider acceptable communicative behaviors.

argument

A verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects.

argumentativeness

Communication trait that predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues, and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues.

ARPANET

The U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, which was the precursor to what is now known as the Internet.

Artifacts

Items we adorn our bodies or which we carry with us.

assertiveness

The degree to which an individual can initiate, maintain, and terminate conversations, according to their interpersonal goals during interpersonal interactions.

asynchronous communication

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are not concurrently engaged in communication.

attending

The act of focusing on specific objects or stimuli in the world around you

attention

Factor of mindful practice that involves being aware of what's happening internally and externally moment-to-moment.

attitude

Factor of mindful practice that involves being curious, open, and nonjudgmental.

attraction

Interest in another person and a desire to get to know them better.

attribution error

The tendency to explain another individual's behavior in relation to the individual's internal tendencies rather than an external factor.

authoritarianism

A form of social organization where individuals favor absolute obedience to an authority (or authorities) as opposed to individual freedom.

autonomy

An individual's independence in their behaviors and thoughts within a marriage relationship.

avoidance

Conflict management style where an individual attempt to either prevent a conflict from occurring or leaves a conflict when initiated.

avoiding

The stage of coming apart where you are creating distance from your partner.

Behavioral CQ

The degree to which an individual behaves in a manner that is consistent with what they know about other cultures.

belief

Assumptions and convictions held by an individual, group, or culture about the truth or existence of something.

bias

An attitude that is not objective or balanced, prejudiced, or the use of words that intentionally or unintentionally offend people or express an unfair attitude concerning a person's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or illness.

biased language

Language that shows preference in favor of or against a certain point-of-view, shows prejudice, or is demeaning to others.

bonding

The stage of coming together where you make a public announcement that your relationship exists.

bullying

Form of aggressive behavior in which a person of greater power attempts to inflict harm or discomfort on individuals and the behavior is repeated over time.

buzz word

Informal word or jargon used among a particular group of people.

career strategizing

The process of creating a plan of action for one's career path and trajectory.

catfishing

Deceptive activity perpetrated by Internet predators where they fabricate online identities on social networking sites to lure unsuspecting victims into an emotional/romantic relationship.

channel

The pathways in which messages are conveyed.

Chronemics

The use of time to communicate.

circumscribing

The stage of coming apart where communication decreases. There are more arguments, working late, and there is less intimacy.

cliché

Expression that has been so overused that it has lost its original meaning.

co-culture

Regional, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or other cultural groups that exerts influence in society.

co-present interactions

When people are physically occupying the same space while interacting with one another.

coercive power

The ability to punish an individual who does not comply with one's influencing attempts.

cognitive complexity

The psychological characteristic that indicates the difficulty or simplicity associated with mental demand.

Cognitive CQ

The degree to which an individual has cultural knowledge.

cognitive dispositions

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people respond and react to the world around them.

collective self-esteem

The aspect of an individual's self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups.

collectivism

Characteristics of a culture that values cooperation and harmony and considers the needs of the group to be more important than the needs of the individual.

collegial peers

Type of coworker with whom we have moderate levels of trust, self-disclosure, and openness.

colloquialism

Informal expression used in casual conversation that is often specific to certain dialects or geographic regions of a country.

commemorative friendships

Type of stabilized friendship that reflects a specific space and time in our lives, but current interaction is minimal and primarily reflects a time when the two friends were highly involved in each other's lives.

communal friendships

Friendships marked by intimacy, personal/emotional expressiveness, amount of self-disclosure, quality of self-disclosure, confiding, and emotional supportiveness.

communication

The process by which we share ideas or information with other people.

communication apprehension

The fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.

communication competence

Communication that is both socially appropriate and personally effective.

communication dispositions

General patterns of communicative behavior.

communication motives

Reasons why we communicate with others.

communication needs

Shows us how communication fulfills our needs.

comparison level

Minimum standard of what is acceptable.

comparison level of alternatives

Comparison of what is happening in the relationship and what could be gained in another relationship.

Compassion

The sympathetic consciousness for someone who is suffering or unfortunate

compatible

Able to exist together harmoniously.

complement

Nonverbal communication that reinforces verbal communication.

complementary

When one person can fulfill the other person's needs.

compliance

When an individual accepts an influencer's influence and alters their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

comprehension listening

Listening for facts, information, or ideas that may be of use to you.

concept-orientation

Family communication pattern where freedom of expression is encouraged, and communication is frequent and family life is pleasurable.

conflict

An interactive process occurring when conscious beings (individuals or groups) have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations, resources, and/or values.

confrontational behaviors

Specific behaviors associated with confrontation or direct behaviors, involves name-calling, cruel teasing, ridicule, and verbal rejection directed at the target.

connotation

What a word suggests or implies; connotations give words their emotional impact.

connotative definitions

The emotions or associations a person makes when exposed to a symbol.

contact frequency

This is how often you communicate with another person.

content level

Information that is communicated through the denotative and literal meanings of words.

contextual dialectics

Friendship dialectics that stem out of the cultural order where the friendship exists.

contradict

Nonverbal communication conveying the opposite meaning of verbal communication.

converge

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be similar.

conversations

Interpersonal interactions through which you share facts and information as well as your ideas, thoughts, and feelings with other people.

cost escalations

A form of relational disengagement involving tactics designed to make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship.

critical listening

To analyze what the person is saying based on known facts and evidence.

cross-group friendship

Friendship that exists between two individuals who belong to two or more different cultural groups (e.g., ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality, etc.).

cultural intelligence

The degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations.

culture

A group of people who, through a process of learning, can share perceptions of the world, which influence their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior.

culture as normative

The basic idea that one's culture provides the rules, regulations, and norms that govern a culture and how people act with other members of that society.

cyberbullying

Intentional harm inflicted through the medium of electronics that is repeated over time.

denotation

The dictionary definition or descriptive meaning of a word.

denotative definitions

Definitions for words commonly found in dictionaries.

depersonalization

A form of relational disengagement where an individual stops all the interaction that is not task-focused or simply avoids the person.

depression

A psychological disorder characterized by varying degrees of disappointment, guilt, hopelessness, loneliness, sadness, self-doubt, all of which negatively impact a person's general mental and physical wellbeing.

describing

Being detailed focused on what is occurring while putting it into words.

deviant workplace behavior

The voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and practices or threatens the wellbeing of the organization and its members.

dialectical tension

How individuals deal with struggles in their relationship.

differentiating

The stage of coming apart where both people are trying to figure out their own identities.

directive support

The factor of Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership model that involves a leader overseeing the day-to-day tasks that a follower accomplishes.

directness

The least secretive of the strategies and involves asking the relational partner about his/her feelings toward the relationship and commitment to the relationship. Alternatively, an individual might disclose their feelings about the relationship with the hope that the relationship partner will reciprocate.

disagreement

A difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people.

discourse

Spoken or written discussion of a subject.

dismissing attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who see themselves as worthy of love, but generally believe that others will be deceptive and reject them in interpersonal relationships.

distributive conflict

A win-lose approach, whereby conflicting parties see their job as to win and make sure the other person or group loses.

diverge

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be drastically different.

dogmatism

The inclination to believe one's point-of-view as undeniably true based on insufficient premises and without consideration of evidence and the opinions of others.

dominant culture

The established language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs of a society.

dormant friendships

Type of stabilized friendship that "share either a valued history or a sufficient amount of sustained contact to anticipate or remain eligible for a resumption of the friendship at any time."

Dunning-Kruger effect

The tendency of some people to inflate their expertise when they really have nothing to back up that perception.

duration

The length of time of your relationship.

dysfluencies

Speech problems that keep your speech from being as smooth and flowing as it could be.

ease of opportunity

When romantic workplace relationships happen because work fosters an environment where people are close to one another.

effective communication

Communication that helps an individual achieve a desired personal outcome.

emblems

Kinesics that are clear and unambiguous and have a verbal equivalent in a given culture.

emoticon

A series of characters and/or letters designed to help readers interpret a writer's intended feelings and/or tone.

emotional awareness

An individual's ability to clearly express, in words, what they are feeling and why.

emotional blackmail

Trying to influence someone's behavior or persuade them to do something by making them feel guilty or exploiting their emotions.

emotional intelligence

An individual's appraisal and expression of their emotions and the emotions of others in a manner that enhances thought, living, and communicative interactions.

emotional loneliness

Form of loneliness that occurs when an individual feels that he or she does not have an emotional connection with others.

emotional vampires

A colloquial term used to describe individuals with whom we interact that use more of our emotional resources when interacting with people, which often causes an increase in our levels of stress.

emotions

The physical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment.

empathic listening

Attempting to put yourself in another person's shoes or to provide a supportive listening environment.

empathizing

This is used to show that you identify with the speaker's information.

empathy

The ability to recognize and mutually experience another person's attitudes, emotions, experiences, and thoughts.

endurance test

Form of secret testing in which the partner is tested by engaging in actions that the partner might perceive to be a cost in the relationship.

environment

The context or situation in which communication occurs.

eros

Romantic love involving serial monogamous relationships.

ethics

The judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just.

ethnocentrism

The degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating different cultures according to their own culture's preconceptions often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior.

euphemism

Replacing blunt words with more polite words.

evaluative listening

Listening for a speaker's main points and determining the strengths and weaknesses to formulate a rebuttal or present important points that may not have been covered.

excuse-making

Any time an individual attempts to shift the blame for an individual's behavior from reasons more central to the individual to sources outside of their control in the attempt to make themselves look better and more in control.

experimenting

The stage of coming together "Small talk" occurs at this stage and you are searching for commonalities.

expert power

The ability of an individual to influence another because of their level of perceived knowledge or skill.

expressive

Roles that are relationship-oriented.

expressive communication

Messages that are sent either verbally or nonverbally related to an individual's emotions and feelings.

external locus of control

The belief that an individual's behavior and circumstances exist because of forces outside the individual's control.

extraversion

An individual's likelihood to be talkative, dynamic, and outgoing.

eye gaze

The act of fixing your eyes on someone.

face

The standing or position a person has in the eyes of others.

family

Two or more people tied by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice; living together or apart by choice or circumstance; having interaction within family roles; creating and maintaining a common culture; being characterized by economic cooperation; deciding to have or not to have children, either own or adopted; having boundaries; and claiming mutual affection.

fearful attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who see themselves as unworthy of love and generally believe that others will react negatively through either deception or rejection.

feedback

Information shared back to the source of communication that keeps the communication moving forward and thus making communication a process.

feelings

The responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality.

feminine

Cultures focused on having a good working relationship with one's manager and coworkers, cooperating with people at work, and security (both job and familial).

followership

The act or condition under which an individual helps or supports a leader in the accomplishment of organizational goals.

formal language

Specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar that uses complex sentences, full words, and third-person pronouns.

gender

The psychological characteristics that determine if a person is feminine or masculine.

genogram

A pictorial representation of a family across generations that can be used to track generations of family interactions, medical issues, psychological issues, relationship patterns, and any other variable a researcher or clinician may be interested in studying.

goals

Expectations about how the relationship will function.

group

Three or more people interacting together to achieve a common goal.

haptics

The study of touch as a form of communication.

hearing

A passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through an ear.

hedge

To use words or phrases that weaken the certainty of a statement.

heuristic function

The use of language to explore and investigate the world, solve problems, and learn from your discoveries and experiences.

high-context cultures

Cultures that interpret meaning by relying more on nonverbal context or behavior than on verbal symbols in communication.

hyperpersonal

CMC interactions that exceed those possible of traditional FtF interactions.

ideal-self

The version of yourself that you would like to be, which is created through our life experiences, cultural demands, and expectations of others.

identification

When an individual accepts influence because they want to have a satisfying relationship with the influencer or influencing group.

ideology of traditionalism

Marriages that are marked by a more historically traditional, conservative perspective of marriage.

idiom

Expression or figure of speech whose meaning cannot be understood by looking at the individual words and interpreting them literally.

illustrators

Kinesics that emphasize or explain a word.

imaginative function

The use of language to play with ideas that do not exist in the real-world.

immediacy

physical and psychological closeness

importance to identity

The degree to which group membership is important to an individual.

impression formation

How we present ourselves to others through our online persona.

impression management

"The attempt to generate as favorable an impression of ourselves as possible, particularly through both verbal and nonverbal techniques of self-presentation."

independents

Marital definition where couples have a high level of interdependence, an unconventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement.

indigenous peoples

Populations that originated in a particular place rather than moved there.

indirect suggestions

Joking or hinting about more serious stages of a relationships such as marriage or having children.

individualism

Characteristics of a culture that values being self-reliant and self-motivated, believes in personal freedom and privacy, and celebrates personal achievement.

individuality

Aspect of Murray Bowen's family system theory that emphasizes that there is a universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward separateness, uniqueness, and distinctiveness.

indulgence

Cultural orientation marked by immediate gratification for individual desires.

inflection

Changes in vocal pitch.

influence

When an individual or group of people alters another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors through accidental, expressive, or rhetorical communication.

informal language

Specific writing and spoken style that is more colloquial or common in tone; contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations; and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays.

information peers

Type of coworker who we rely on for information about job tasks and the organization itself.

informational power

A social agent's ability to bring about a change in thought, feeling, and/or behavior through information.

initiating

The stage of coming together where a person is interested in making contact and it is brief.

instrumental

Roles that are focused on being task-oriented.

instrumental function

The use of language as a means for meeting your needs, manipulating and controlling your environment, and expressing your feelings.

integrating

This is the stage of coming together where you take on an identity as a social unit or give up characteristics of your old self.

integrative conflict

A win-win approach to conflict, whereby both parties attempt to come to a settled agreement that is mutually beneficial.

intensifying

The stage of coming together where two people truly become a couple.

intensity

The volume of your speech; how loudly or softly you express yourself.

intention

Factor of mindful practice that involves being aware of why you are doing something.

interaction model

Communication model that views the sender and the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication.

interaction variability

The ability to talk about various topics.

interactional dialectics

Friendship dialectics that help us understand how communicative behavior happens within friendships

interactional function

The use of language to help you form and maintain relationships.

interdependence

When individuals involved in a relationship characterize it as continuous and important.

interdependent

A relationship in which people need each other or depend on each other in some way, and the actions of one person affect the other.

internal locus of control

The belief that an individual can control their behavior and life circumstances.

internalization

When an individual adopts influence and alters their thinking, feeling, and/or behaviors because doing so is intrinsically rewarding.

internet characteristics

Internet characteristic that influence Internet relationships such as speed, reach, interactivity, and anonymity.

internet infidelity

Sexual energy of any sort—thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—outside of a committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship, and pretending that this drain in energy will affect neither one's partner nor the relationship as long as it remains undiscovered.

interpersonal communication

The exchange of messages between two people.

interpreting

Interpretation is the act of assigning meaning to a stimulus and then determining the worth of the object (evaluation).

intimacy

Close and deeply personal contact with another person.

intimate partner violence

Includes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression.

intrapersonal

Something that exists or occurs within an individual's self or mind.

intrapersonal communication

Communication phenomena that exist within or occurs because of an individual's self or mind.

introversion

An individual's likelihood to be quiet, shy, and more reserved

jargon

The specialized or technical language particular to a specific profession, occupation, or group that is either meaningless or difficult for outsiders to understand.

Johari Window

A model that illustrates self-disclosure and the process by which you interact with other people.

kinesics

The study of visible means of communicating using body language such as eye behavior, facial expression, body posture and movement, and hand gestures.

language

A system of human communication using a particular form of spoken or written words or other symbols.

language adaptation

The ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner

language awareness

a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language.

launching stage

Period in a family life cycle when late adolescents leave the parental home and venture out into the world as young singles themselves.

leader-member exchange

Theory of leadership that explores how leaders enter into two-way relationships with followers through a series of exchange agreements enabling followers to grow or be held back.

legitimate power

Influence that occurs because a person (P) believes that the social agent (A) has a valid right (generally based on cultural or hierarchical standing) to influence P, and P has an obligation to accept A's attempt to influence P's thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

linguistic determinism

The perspective that language influences thoughts.

linguistic relativity

The view that language contains special characteristics.

listening

A complex psychological process that can be defined as the process of physically hearing, interpreting that sound, and understanding the significance of it.

locus of control

An individual's perceived control over their behavior and life circumstances.

loneliness

An individual's emotional distress that results from a feeling of solitude or isolation from social relationships.

long-term orientation

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the future and not the present or past.

love

Love is a multidimensional concept that can include several different orientations toward the loved person such as romantic love (attraction based on physical beauty or handsomeness), best friend love, passionate love, unrequited love (love that is not returned), and companionate love (affectionate love and tenderness between people).

love style

Love style is considered an attitude that influences an individual's perception of love.

low-context cultures

Cultures that interpret meaning by placing a great deal of emphasis on the words someone uses.

ludus

Love in which games are played. Lying and deceit are acceptable.

Machiavellianism

Personality trait posed by Richard Christie where cunningness and deceit are exalted as a means of attaining and maintaining power to accomplish specific, self-centered goals.

mania

Obsessive love that requires constant reassurance.

masculine

Cultures focused on items like earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Theory of motivation proposed by Abraham Maslow comprising a five-tier, hierarchical pyramid of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization.

Maternal Deprivation Hypothesis

Hypothesis posed by John Bowlby that predicts that infants who are denied maternal attachment will experience problematic outcomes later in life.

mediated communication

The use of some form of technology to facilitate information between two or more people.

membership esteem

The degree to which an individual sees themselves as a “good” member of a group.

message/bulletin boards

Online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages.

metacognitive CQ

The degree to which an individual is consciously aware of their intercultural interactions in a manner that helps them have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures.

metamessage

The meaning beyond the words themselves.

microculture

Cultural patterns of behavior influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization.

mindful awareness

To be consciously aware of your physical presence, cognitive processes, and emotional state while engaged in an activity.

mindful communication

The process of interacting with others while engaging in mindful awareness and practice

mindful practice

The conscious development of skills such as greater ability to direct and sustain our attention, less reactivity, greater discernment and compassion, and enhanced capacity to disidentify from one's concept of self.

model

A simplified representation of a system (often graphic) that highlights the important components and connections of concepts, which are used to help people understand an aspect of the real-world.

motivational CQ

The degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to differing cultural environments.

narcissism

A psychological condition (or personality disorder) in which a person has a preoccupation with one's self.

netiquette

The set of professional and social rules and norms that are considered acceptable and polite when interacting with another person(s) through mediated technologies.

noise

Anything that can interfere with the message being sent or received.

nonconfrontational behaviors

Behaviors include spreading rumors, gossiping, and social manipulation.

nonjudging of inner experience

Being consciously aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes without judging them.

nonreactivity to inner experience

Taking a step back and evaluating things from a more logical, dispassionate perspective.

nonverbal vocalization

A type of paralanguage that consists of sounds, noises, and behaviors that are often accompanied by body language.

norms

Informal guidelines about what is acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture.

observing

Being aware of what is going on inside yourself and in the external environment.

oculesics

Communication involving eye behavior such as eye contact, gaze, and avoidance.

olfactics

The use of scent to communicate.

organizing

Organizing is making sense of the stimuli or assigning meaning to it.

ostracized

Excluded or removed from a group by others in that group.

paralanguage

Voice characteristics and nonverbal vocalizations that communicate feelings, intentions, and meanings.

paraphrase

To restate what another person said using different words.

perception

The process of acquiring, interpreting, and organizing information that comes in through your five senses.

personal function

The use of language to help you form your identity or sense of self.

personal responsibility

An individual's willingness to be accountable for how they feel, think, and behave.

personality

The combination of traits or qualities such as behavior, emotional stability, and mental attributes that make a person unique.

physical attraction

The degree to which one person finds another person aesthetically pleasing.

physical bullying

Involves hitting, kicking, pulling hair, strapping a female's bra strap or giving a "wedgie."

pitch

The placement of your voice on the musical scale; the basis on which singing voices are classified as soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, or bass voices.

platonic

A close relationship that is not physical.

postmodern friendship

Friendship where the “participants co-construct the individual and dyadic realities within specific friendships. This co-construction involves negotiating and affirming (or not) identities and intersubjectively creating relational and personal realities through communication.”

power

The degree that a social agent (A) has the ability to get another person(s) (P) to alter their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

power distance

The degree to which those people and organizations with less power within a culture accept and expect that power is unequally distributed within their culture.

pragma

Love involving logic and reason.

preoccupied attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who do not perceive themselves as worthy of love, but do generally see people as trustworthy and available for interpersonal relationships.

presenting the relationship to outsiders

Form of secret testing in which the partner publicly declares their relationship status to gauge a partner’s response.

private collective esteem

The degree to which an individual positively evaluates their group.

procedural disagreements

Disagreements concerned with procedure, how a decision should be reached or how a policy should be implemented.

profession

An occupation that involves mastery of complex knowledge and skills through prolonged training, education, or practical experience.

professionalism

The aims and behaviors that demonstrate an individual’s level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession.

proxemics

The use of space to communicate.

pseudonymity CMC identity

Identity that someone takes on that is beyond themselves in the creation of CMC messages.

public collective self-esteem

The degree to which nonmembers of a group evaluate a group and its members either positively or negatively.

public communication

Form of communication where an individual or group of individuals sends a specific message to an audience.

racism

Bias against others on the basis of their race or ethnicity.

racist language

Language that demeans or insults people based on their race or ethnicity.

real-life CMC identity

When our CMC identity and our FtF identities are congruent.

reasons for relational aggression

Women's explanations for relational aggression: (a) girls will be girls; (b) venting; (c) blaming the victim; (d) minimizing their role; and (e) regret

receiver

The receiver decodes the message in an environment that includes noise.

referent power

A social agent's (A) ability to influence another person (P) because P wants to be associated with A.

regulate

Nonverbal communication which controls the flow of conversation.

regulators

Kinesics that help coordinate the flow of conversation.

regulatory function

The use of language to control behavior.

rejection sensitivity

The degree to which an individual expects to be rejected, readily perceives rejection when occurring, and experiences an intensely negative reaction to that rejection.

relational aggression

Behaviors that harm others. Harm is created through damaging social relationship or feelings of acceptance.

relational bullying

The manipulation of social relationships to inflict hurt upon another individual.

relational dispositions

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people view and organize themselves in relationships.

relational maintenance

Degree of difficulty individuals experience in interpersonal relationships due to misunderstandings, incompatibility of goals, and the time and effort necessary to cope with disagreements.

relationship

A connection, association, or attachment that people have with each other.

relationship dialectic

Tensions in a relationship where individuals need to deal with integration vs. separation, expression vs. privacy, and stability vs. change.

relationship level

The type of relationship between people as evidenced through their communication.

relationship maintenance

Strategies to help your relationship be successful and satisfying.

relative language

Language that gains understanding by comparison.

repeat

Nonverbal communication that repeats verbal communication, but could stand alone.

representational function

The use of language to represent objects and ideas and to express your thoughts.

responsiveness

The degree to which an individual considers other's feelings, listens to what others have to say, and recognizes the needs of others during interpersonal interactions.

restraint

Cultural orientation marked by the belief that gratification should not be instantaneous and should be regulated by cultural rules and norms.

reward power

The ability to offer an individual rewards for complying with one's influencing attempts.

rhetorical communication

Purposefully creating and sending messages to another person in the hopes of altering another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors.

rhythm

Variation in the flow of your voice created by differences in the pitch, intensity, tempo, and length of word syllables.

richness

The potential information carrying capacity of data.

right-wing authoritarians

Individuals who believe in submitting themselves to established, legitimate authorities; strict adherence to social and cultural norms; and the need to punish those who do not submit to authorities or who violate social and cultural norms.

romantic relationships

Romantic relationships involve a bond of affection with a specific partner that researchers believe involves several psychological features: a desire for emotional closeness and union with the partner, caregiving, emotional dependency on the relationship and the partner, a separation anxiety when the other person is not there, and a willingness to sacrifice for the other love.

romantic workplace relationship

When two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association.

rules

Explicit guidelines (generally written down) that govern acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

A theory that suggests that language impacts perceptions. Language is ascertained by the perceived reality of a culture.

secret tests

Indirect strategies individuals use to assess the state of their relationship.

secure attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who believe that they are loveable and expect that others will generally behave in accepting and responsive ways within interpersonal interactions.

Self-Compassion

Being touched by the suffering of others, opening one's awareness to others' pain and not avoiding or disconnecting from it, so that feelings of kindness toward others and the desire to alleviate their suffering emerge.

Self-compassion

Being touched by and open to one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness. Self-compassion also involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience.

self-concept

An individual's relatively stable mental picture of him or herself.

self-conscious shyness

Feeling conspicuous or socially exposed when dealing with others face-to-face.

self-disclosure

The process of sharing information with another person.

self-esteem

An individual's subjective evaluation of their abilities and limitations.

self-image

The view an individual has of themselves.

self-monitoring

The theory that individuals differ in the degree to which they can control their behaviors in accordance with the appropriate social rules and norms involved in interpersonal interaction.

self-worth

The degree to which you see yourself as a good person who deserves to be valued and respected.

separates

Marital definition where couples have low interdependence, conventional ideology, and low levels of conflict engagement.

separation test

Creating physical distance to test the strength of the relationship.

sex

The biological characteristics that determine a person as male or female.

sexism

Bias of others based on their biological sex.

sexist language

Language that excludes individuals on the basis of gender or shows a bias toward or against people due to their gender.

sharing

The process of revealing and disclosing information about yourself with another.

short messaging service (SMS)

Communication technology allowing for the exchange of short alphanumeric messages between digital and mobile devices found in phones, the Web, or in mobile communication systems (commonly referred to as "text messaging").

short-term orientation

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the past or present and not in the future.

shyness

Discomfort when an individual is interacting with another person(s) in a social situation.

sibling hostility

Characteristic of sibling relationships where sibling behaviors as causing trouble, getting into fights, teasing/ name-calling, taking things without permission, etc.

sibling warmth

Characteristic of sibling relationships where sibling behaviors such as sharing secrets, helping each other, teaching each other, showing physical affection, sharing possessions, etc.

silent listening

This occurs when you say nothing and is appropriate for certain situations.

similarity

When romantic workplace relationships occur because people find coworkers have similar personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc....

slang

The nonstandard language of a particular culture or subculture.

social attraction

The degree to which an individual sees another person as entertaining, intriguing, and fun to be around.

social loneliness

Form of loneliness that occurs from a lack of a satisfying social network.

social penetration theory

Theory originally created by Altman and Taylor to explain how individuals gradually become more intimate as individuals self-disclose more and those self-disclosures become more intimate (deep).

social presence

The degree to which we, as individuals, perceive another as a real person and any interaction between the two of us as a relationship.

social support

The perception and actuality that an individual receives assistance, care, and help from those people within their life.

social-personal dispositions

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people socially relate to others or view themselves.

socio-orientation

Family communication pattern where similarity is valued over individuality and self-expression, and harmony is preferred over expression of opinion.

sociocommunicative orientation

The degree to which an individual communicates using responsive or assertive communication techniques.

source

The person initiating communication and encoding the message and selecting the channel.

special peer

Type of coworker relationship marked by high levels of trust and self-disclosure; like a “best friend” in the workplace.

spin

The manipulation of language to achieve the most positive interpretation of words, to gain political advantage, or to deceive others.

stagnating

The stage of coming apart where you are behaving in old familiar ways without much feeling. In other words, there is lost enthusiasm for old familiar things.

state-of-the-relationship talk

A form of relational disengagement where an individual explains to a coworker that a workplace friendship is ending.

static evaluation

Language shows that people and things change.

stereotype

A set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group.

storge

Love that develops slowly out of friendship.

substantive disagreement

A disagreement that people have about a specific topic or issue.

substitute

Nonverbal communication that has a direct verbal translation.

support

The ability to provide assistance, aid, or comfort to another.

supportive leadership behavior

The factor of Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership model that occurs when a leader is focused on providing relational support for their followers

symbol

A mark, object, or sign that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention

symmetrical relationship

A relationship between people who see themselves as equals.

synchronous

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are concurrently engaged in communication.

system

Sets of elements standing in interrelation.

task attraction

The degree to which an individual is attracted to another person because they possess specific knowledge and/or skills that help that individual accomplish specific goals.

temperament

The genetic predisposition that causes an individual to behave, react, and think in a specific manner.

tempo

The rate of your speech; how slowly or quickly you talk.

temporal regularity

The degree to which a couple sticks to a consistent schedule in their day-to-day lives.

terminating

This is a summary of where the relationship has gone wrong and a desire to quit. It usually depends on: problems (sudden/gradual); negotiations to end (short/long); the outcome (end/continue in another form).

the hookup

When romantic workplace relationships occur because individuals want to engage in casual sex without any romantic entanglements.

third-culture

When a couple negotiates their cultural background with the cultural background of their partner essentially creating a third-culture or hybrid culture between the two.

third-party testing

Involving a third party such as friend or family to gain insight into the relationship.

timbre

(pronounced "TAM-ber") The overall quality and tone, which is often called the "color" of your voice; the primary vocal quality that makes your voice either pleasant or disturbing to listen to.

time

When romantic workplace relationships occur because people put in a great deal of time at work, so they are around and interact with potential romantic partners a great deal of the average workday.

togetherness

Aspect of Murray Bowen's family system theory that emphasizes the complementary, universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward relationship, attachment, and connectedness.

tolerance for disagreement

The degree to which an individual can openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted.

traditionals

Marital definition where couples are highly interdependent, conventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement

transactional model

Communication model that demonstrate that individuals are often acting as both the sender and receiver simultaneously.

triangle test

Manipulating a third party to gain information about the nature of the relationship.

types of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying involves isolation and exclusion, intimidation and threats, verbal threats, damaging professional identity, limiting career opportunities, obstructing work or making work-life difficult, and denial of due process and natural justice.

uncertainty avoidance

The extent to which cultures as a whole are fearful of ambiguous and unknown situations.

uncertainty reduction theory

The tendency of human beings to eliminate unknown elements of individuals whom they have just met. Individuals wish to predict what another person thinks and how another person behaves. Strategies for reducing uncertainty include passive, active, and interactive.

undifferentiated

A person who does not possess either masculine or feminine characteristics.

undifferentiated space

The degree to which spouses do not see her/his/their ownership of personal belongings as much as they do ownership as a couple.

uses and gratifications theory

Theoretical explanation for why people use the types of mass media they do.

values

Important and lasting principles or standards held by a culture about desirable and appropriate courses of action or outcomes.

verbal aggression

The tendency to attack the self-concept of individuals instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication.

verbal bullying

Includes threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdown or sarcastic comments

verbal surrogates

The sounds humans make as they attempt to fill dead air while they are thinking of what to say next (e.g., uhh, umm).

versatility

The degree to which an individual can utilize both responsiveness and assertiveness that is appropriate and effective during various communication contexts and interpersonal interactions.

vocabulary

All the words understood by a person or group of people.

vocalics

Vocal utterances, other than words, that serve as a form of communication.

willingness to communicate

An individual's tendency to initiate communicative interactions with other people.

workplace bullying behaviors

Workplace bullying involves isolation and exclusion, intimidation and threats, verbal threats, damaging professional identity, limiting career opportunities, obstructing work or making work-life difficult, and denial of due process and natural justice.

workplace socialization

The process by which new organizational members learn the rules (e.g., explicit policies, explicit procedures, etc.), norms (e.g., when you go on break, how to act at work, who to eat with, who not to eat with), and culture (e.g., innovation, risk-taking, team orientation, competitiveness) of an organization.