INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN COMMUNICATION

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Introduction to Human Communication
CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN COMMUNICATION

On a daily basis human beings, regardless of who they are or where they come from, all take part in interpersonal communication. Often we are unaware of our participation in an interpersonal communication interaction because these actions have become such an ingrained part of our daily lives that we go about them mindlessly and automatically—in the same fashion our bodies go about automatically keeping our hearts beating.

We argue with our roommates and family members over who ate the last of the favorite cereal in the morning. We make comments about the weather with the individuals on the bus, in the elevator or at the coffee shop. We email professors for clarification on assignments and text friends to find out what’s going on later that night. These are things that may seem ordinary and mundane, but are all acts of interpersonal communication.

At this point you may be asking, “If I am already an expert on interpersonal communication due to my life time of experiences, why then should I spend time learning more about it from a textbook?” The simple answer is that though we may “do” interpersonal communication on a daily basis, the majority of us aren’t actually that good at it. Interpersonal communication creates the foundations for the majority of the things in life that bring us the greatest of happiness and the worst of sorrow. Therefore, we should all take time to get good at it.

This textbook will help you to understand what interpersonal communication is and how it works. Once we have a greater understanding of the processes of interpersonal communication, we can apply that knowledge to our personal situations. We can work towards a level of interpersonal communication competence that limits the times of sorrow and increases the times of happiness.

In order to understand the concept of interpersonal communication we must first have an understanding of communication in general.

DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNICATION

Definitions of human communication range from “speech is the great medium through which human cooperation is brought about”1 to the more specific definition of the American College Dictionary, “the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs.”
Though there are many definitions of communication, they all seem to agree that ideas must be shared before communication can exist. Communication should be thought of as a process, not simply as a transfer of meaning from one mind to another. There is something necessarily mutual about human communication; each party influences the other. Communication is a truly dynamic process.

Communication involves common experience and mutual influence. Real communication is very difficult if there is not at least some small opportunity for two-way influence. Whether we know it or not, we communicate hoping to influence others to respond as we want them to respond. This process has no beginning or end and is ever changing, dynamic, and mutual. The vast numbers of definitions of communication are very similar. For the purposes of this book, communication will be broadly defined as the use of verbal and nonverbal messages to create ongoing mutual influence.

COMMUNICATION MODELS

It is often best to look at a visual simplification of the complex relationships involved in communication through models of communication. We will discuss three prevailing models of communication and introduce you to a fourth to help gain insight into our definition of communication and to work towards a better understanding of how interpersonal communication fits into this definition.

We will start with the oldest and most simple model of communication: the linear communication model. This model is based on the idea of one-way communication in which a message is simply sent from one person and received by another. This model appears to be quite simple, yet it captures a large part of what is going on in communication.

Linear Model of Communication

The linear model of communication includes several concepts used in later, more complex models. (See Figure 1.1.) The sender is the source or originator of the message. The message is a verbal (spoken) or nonverbal (behavior or gesture) transmission of ideas. The sender goes through a process of encoding to translate ideas and emotions into a code (in our case verbal or nonverbal symbols). The message
is then passed to the **receiver** or the intended target of the message. The receiver goes through a process of **decoding** to interpret the translated ideas of the sender. The passing of the message travels through a **channel** or pathway of communication. The channel can be anything from a text message to a face-to-face discussion to sky writing. Anything that interferes with the transmission of the message is considered **noise**. Noise consists of anything that physically or psychologically gets in the way of the message being received and understood. **Physical noise** is any outside or external stimulus that makes the message difficult to understand by the receiver. An example of physical noise could be a police siren that drowns out the voice of the sender. **Psychological noise** is any internal stimulus that makes the message difficult to understand by the receiver. An example of psychological noise could be not understanding a message because you are too busy wondering if you remembered to turn off your stove.

To apply this model to your life, think about being out to dinner with a friend. You taste your potatoes and realize they are a bit bland and could use a dash of salt. You notice that the salt is on the other side of the table next to your friend. You ask, “Would you please pass the salt?” You have acted as the **sender/encoder** of a message (verbal transmission of your need for the salt) through the **channel** of your voice to the **receiver/decoder** (your friend next to the salt). As long as the server doesn’t drop a tray next to your table (physical noise), and your friend is not daydream-
ing or not paying attention (psychological noise), this should be a fairly simple linear exchange of communication.

As we discussed while defining communication, we communicate hoping to influence others to respond as we want them to. Given the dinner table example, you are hoping to influence your friend to pass the salt. The success of your influence would be determined by the act of your friend actually passing the salt. Based on the one-way linear model of communication you really don’t have any way of knowing the success of your influence. You don’t even know if your message ever reached your friend based on this model because it is essentially linear; that is, it goes from a source to a destination. There is no clear representation of a circular response, and no clear explanation of the ongoing mutual influence involved in our definition of communication. The need for a way to measure if communication actually took place (if the influence even happened) leads to a more complete model of communication called the interactional model of communication.

Interactional Model of Communication

The interactional model of communication contains all of the concepts of the linear model and adds the concept of feedback. Feedback is a response from the receiver to the sender about the message. The addition of the concept of feedback makes the linear model become more circular (See figure 1.2).

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**FIGURE 1.2  INTERACTIONAL MODEL OF COMMUNICATION**
Wilbur Schramm is one of the early theorists to demonstrate the model of communication as circular (see Figure 1.2). The decoding of a message by the receiver starts that person’s process of encoding—hence, the complete circle.

The roles of encoder and decoder are interchangeable. Thus, each person in the communication process is encoder and decoder. This circular model also suggests the interesting notion that these functions can go on simultaneously. While you are talking, your listener is not only breaking your code and trying to make sense of it (decoding), but he or she is also considering his or her next transmission (encoding). In the case of nonverbals, messages may already be encoded and on their way. For example, when someone is saying something with which you disagree, but you don’t want to interrupt him/her, you continue listening silently (decoding) while shaking your head back and forth in a “no” motion (encoding).

Schramm also suggests that the sender and receiver can perform their functions only in terms of their own fields of experiences. Thus, both the receiver and sender are limited by their experience. Nevertheless, there must be some experience common to both in order for the communication to be useful and for the intended message to be conveyed. For example, if you were asking someone that did not speak the language you speak to pass the salt you would most likely make a shaking motion over your plate of food, point to them, and then point to yourself hoping the other individual has had some common experience of shaking salt on food. If the receiver comes from a culture where salt is
not used for shaking on food and you don’t share any common words that express your desire for salt, you may be communicatively out of luck, leaving you with bland potatoes.

We may sometimes have to build bridges or overlaps before we can have communication. Furthermore, for your messages to be most effective, they must somehow fall in the area of overlap. Two people from completely different cultures with different languages and no common experiences may find that communication becomes nearly impossible without help from a third party such as a translator. Even then, barriers are everywhere. The first priority would be to identify common ground. Common ground or mutual understanding is important in communication and essential for interpersonal communication.

**Transactional Model of Communication**

The *transactional model of communication* more accurately reflects a real-world model of interpersonal communication by illustrating that people communicating act simultaneously as the sender and receiver in a cooperative fashion. This cooperation makes the sender and the receiver responsible for the effectiveness of the communication. The transactional model displays communication interactions as ongoing negotiations of meaning. As mentioned earlier, it is very difficult for two people coming from completely different cultures with different languages and no common experiences to take part in this negotiation of meaning. Individuals come to a communication interaction with their own *field of experience*. This includes things like personal culture, history, gender, social influences and past impacting experiences. Your field of experience is the frame of reference you bring to each situation you experience. At times, individuals’ fields of experiences overlap and they share things in common. Other times, individuals’ fields of experiences do not overlap; and because they share no common past experiences, it is difficult to negotiate meaning. (See Figure 1.3)

**An Instructional Model: The Ross Model**

The Ross Model focuses on the *human organism* and particularly human sign-symbol behavior. In interpreting this model remember that we are capable of being both sender and receiver at the same time; we are *transceivers.* The frame of the
Ross Model attempts to show everything, including the world in which this communication takes place. The picture frame suggests the importance of situation, mood, context, and psychological climate.

The **situation** is the reason the interaction is taking place and could range from a date to a simple exchange of homework information. Situation could then make a real difference. **Mood** refers to feelings of the moment. At different times our mood might be happy, angry, tense, and so on. Our mood can greatly affect what we say or hear and how we say or hear something. **Context** is the framework into which your situation fits. Note how the word *paper* changes in the following contexts: The paper was late today (newspaper); the paper is crooked (wallpaper); it is an A paper (homework). If we used the phrase “the paper is crooked” in the context of a newspaper we may perceive some sort of corrupt management by the editor. Different contexts bring out different meanings. **Psychological climate** is a lot like weather or physical climate. Just as our weather might be bitterly cold, so too might the psychological climate of
a classroom, a meeting, or a date. An unhappy, impersonal (cold) psychological climate would hinder rather than help communication. Sometimes climate is the most important part of a message.

Let’s assume that the person on the left side of the model in Figure 1.4 is a woman who wishes to communicate a message (a concept or an idea) to the other person. The idea is represented by the star inside her brain. Let’s suppose the concept is an abstract one, such as love. The fan projecting from each brain represents our twelve billion brain cells. In this woman’s brain are stored her knowledge and past experience, her feelings, attitudes, emotions, and many more things (her frame of reference) that make her the person she is.
The brain, composed of 12 billion working parts, has enough storage capacity to accept 10 new facts every second. It is conservatively estimated that the human brain can store an amount of information equivalent to 100 trillion different words (which would mean acquiring one word per second continuously for 1,000,000 years). In a lifetime of 70 years, a human being may store information roughly equivalent to a mere trillion words.

Our sender now sorts through and selects from her storehouse of knowledge and past experience, choosing items that help her define and refine what she is trying to say. She has to have a basis upon which to perform this operation—a program, if you will. We can think of the brain in some ways as a computer. The forebrain, for example, becomes a kind of input regulator into which we feed the program. This woman’s program had better include at least three questions, or she is already in trouble! These are: (1) What do I have stored under love? (2) What do I know about the other person? (3) What do I have filed for this particular situation and context? You can almost visualize the program in action—assessing, accepting, rejecting, cross-referencing, and synthesizing the information in the storehouse—in short, selecting and sorting the appropriate knowledge, past experience, and so on.

Although there is some confusion among scholars as to exactly how and, in particular, when the encoding takes place, it is useful, if only for instructional purpose, to think of it as a sequence. Our sender must now choose her codes, and she should apply at least the same program or questions discussed previously. More will be said of this critical process of managing meaning in Chapter 3. The sender now transmits the message that, let’s assume, is mainly oral (along with some critical nonverbals). Let’s also assume that there is no unusual distraction or noise and that the sensory abilities of each person are adequate. Since our message concerns love, the situation itself may be fairly critical, to say nothing of the characteristics of the other person.

Finally (and this whole operation may last but seconds), the message is received by the other person. The resulting sensations experienced by the receiver are the first part of human perception; the second part, as discussed previously, is the interpretation of those sensations in this particular situation.

The model suggests that our receiver now decodes the signs, symbols, and language of the sender, sorting through his or her storehouse of knowledge and experience and selecting those meanings that will allow him or her to create a message concerning love. To the extent that this re-creation is similar to the sender’s intended
message, we have communication. This reconstructed idea is then dependent upon a person's prior knowledge and experience.

An understanding of how people receive, decode, and assign meaning to messages is critical to our understanding of communication. The receiver, or perceiver, makes hypotheses regarding the meaning of the message. He or she then accepts or rejects the hypotheses on the basis of personal constructs based on prior learning and experience. More will also be said about this in Chapter 3.

The term feedback in the model requires a moment of important consideration. In engineering, feedback refers to some of the transmitted energy being returned to the source. The automatic pilot used in airplanes is an example of self-correcting machinery that uses feedback. For speech purposes we may think of feedback as useful in a self-correcting or adaptive sense. As our transmitted signal
is “bounced off” our receiver, it feeds back information that allows us to correct and refine our signal. A quizzical look, a frown, a yawn, the sound of our own voice—any of these may cause us to reevaluate and recode our signals. For now, let’s think of feedback as something that we should make work for us.

As stated earlier, the model shows that communication assigns meaning and that it works well when the person receiving a message interprets it in the same way that the sender intends. It is clear that human communication is not simply a transfer of meaning at all. Earlier in this chapter we broadly define communication as the use of verbal and nonverbal messages to create ongoing mutual influence. Based on the four communication models presented we can more accurately define communication as a process of sorting, selecting, and sending symbols in such a way as to help a receiver find in his or her own mind a meaning similar to that intended by the sender. We communicate hoping to influence others to respond as we want them to. That we seldom have perfectly clear communication, and probably should not expect it, now seems obvious. This more concrete definition of communication, in general, lays the foundation for understanding the most common type of communication used on a daily basis, interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is a distinctive, ongoing, ever changing transactional form of human communication that involves mutual influence—usually for the purposes of relationship management. This definition will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter when we talk about the principals of interpersonal communication.

**CONTEXT INTERRELATIONSHIPS**

Interpersonal communication is mostly a dyadic or a one person-to-one person interaction. The context of the interaction can range from face-to-face, to telephone, to text messaging, to email. This kind of basic relating and interacting goes on in many different types of organizations, groups, settings, and even in the media.

**Hierarchy of Contexts**

According to Stephen Littlejohn these various contexts all overlap, and they should be viewed “… as a hierarchy of nested contexts in which the higher level includes
the lower but adds some additional constraints and qualities.” His diagram illustrates how interpersonal communication cuts through, or is a diminishing part of, the larger contexts. (See Figure 1.5.)

Interpersonal communication is clearly a large part of what goes on in small-group interactions. The diagram that follows (Figure 1.6) suggests that 80 percent of such contexts may be interpersonal communication. Most small groups are face-to-face, interactive, oral exchanges.

Organizational contexts are thought to be largely involved with small-group communication. The pyramidal structure of most organizations is thought to be one of overlapping or “linking” group memberships. The superior in one group is a participating subordinate in the next. The structure has been referred to as a “linking pin” arrangement as diagrammed in Figure 1.7.

Since interpersonal communication is a large part of group communication, it is clearly a major part of all organizational contexts. We suggest that it is 50 percent of organizational contexts with some trepidation since organizations vary widely in their goals, size, importance, and the like. A large part of organizational communication is quite obviously dependent upon special knowledge in areas such as planning, organizing, accounting, contracting, and so on. Nevertheless, managing is basically a process of getting work done through people, and that takes interpersonal communication.

The last context shown in Figure 1.6 is public communication or “relating to audiences.” A public speech to a large audience is obviously quite different from an
FIGURE 1.6  INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CONTEXTS

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION
20% Interpersonal

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION
50% Interpersonal

GROUP COMMUNICATION
80% Interpersonal

DYADIC COMMUNICATION
100% Interpersonal

FIGURE 1.7
intimate, dyadic interaction. However, most of the basic speech communication processes are involved. Language is still critical (sometimes more critical). Voice is special; so are all of your nonverbals. Listening (especially if you’re in the audience) is involved; so are all the problems of messages, attitudes, perception, attraction, and so on. Audience participation contexts may call for applications of interpersonal practice as well as integrations of interpersonal theories and processes. Public-speaking texts find dyadic communication models valuable instruction devices for the same kinds of reasons just discussed.

**SETTINGS AS CONTEXT**

Reacting and interacting must occur within some place, at some level, and in some context or setting. The place in which a communication, and its ritual, occurs is important for it affects both the senders and receivers of messages. We may not always like or approve of certain settings, but sensitive human interaction demands that we take them into account. We should take the setting into special account when we evaluate a person’s social adjustment. A “nut” may not be a “nut” when he or she is out of the special setting you are observing. A berserk football fan may be calm and collected when we find him or her in church.

**Place and Ritual**

Communication at any level is often limited by where we are. Some settings may restrict communication, whereas others may aid it. In addition, settings may have a ritualistic aspect. Much of our communication is dictated by the place and ritual alone. Observe the impact of a place of worship, an elevator, a commuter bus, a 400-seat Boeing 747 on communication; study their rituals to see how people communicatively behave with in each place.

Now let’s illustrate the often awesome impact of place. Visualize an impressive place of worship complete with stained-glass windows, exquisite statues, and a high arched ceiling. In it we may feel close to our creator. There is a temptation to whisper. People seem to alter their voices, their language, and their dress to meet the communication requirements of this powerful setting. The ritual associated with this setting also dictates much of the verbal as well as the nonverbal
communication. Even an empty place of worship is a powerful communication setting, and we adjust our signals accordingly.

Ceremonial settings such as weddings, funerals, initiations, and graduations are important influences on interpersonal communication wherever they are held. Weddings are held in gardens, living rooms, and woods, as well as in places of worship. Graduations may take place inside, outside, in a gym, in an auditorium, and so on. Part of the influence of such an occasion comes from its obvious purpose, but much of the influence is also tradition and ritual, which seem to go beyond the obvious. Human communication in such settings is somehow different.

Think about the last wedding you attended and consider your total verbal exchange. It probably concerned the bride and groom, their families, their apparel, and the wedding arrangements. Being present at the wedding had a strong impact
on what you said. The same holds true to an even greater extent at funerals. However, once you are out of the setting, the controlling aspect of place and ritual disappears.

Even the dinner hour is a rather formal setting for some families. It is a time for prayer and thanksgiving and not a time for deep conversation or heated argument. You can test this idea of setting when you are a dinner guest where you can very easily break the ritual; and, therefore, much of the communication that that would have normally taken place might no longer be possible.

Visualize yourself at a football game. We live in a spectator world, often finding ourselves jammed into a stadium watching our favorite team. In this interaction context we may find ourselves talking to total strangers, but not about dress styles, war, or elections. Our communication usually takes the form of amazement at an impressive play, disgust at the end of a rally, or second-guessing the management on some trade or maneuver. Our nonverbal communication is often affected by the press of the crowd, our empathy with a goal-line stand, or our ecstasy over a circus catch. Once we leave the setting, however, the effect of the place and ritual ends. We may no longer even exchange pleasantries and observations; the influences of the sports arena setting are removed, and we usually adjust our interpersonal communication with strangers accordingly.

The lesson is clear. Time, place, and ritual have a tremendous influence upon human communication; and we are well advised to take them into account.

Purpose

In some settings the purpose or the agenda is so important that it has a greater impact on interpersonal communication than the place. If the purpose is strictly social, the political advocate may be poorly received. If a person’s communication purpose is to obtain reassuring messages from you, all the jokes in the world are not apt to be received very well. A few of the many general purposes of communication interactions are discussed below.

SOCIAL Many times we get together for sheer joy, fellowship, and fun. Perhaps the setting is a party. In this instance we get together primarily to have
a good time (however, a party could be a disguise for another purpose). After the party we usually evaluate the time spent in terms of fun. “Did you enjoy yourself?” “Was it fun?” “Why don’t we get together more often?” “That was a dull party.” “Those two loud men were arguing about politics.” Party topics are predictably uncontroversial, such as sports, weather, or current gossip. The communication pattern is without clear direction or agenda; many discussions may occur at the same time. If we tire of one subject, person, or group, we may not have as many communication options or as many people with whom to talk. However, watch for some ritual even in principally social communication settings.

VENTILATION Another reason we interact is to unload grievances and generally express pent-up feelings—to unwind. In this situation we are usually looking for a sympathetic ear. We are not interested in having our statements and viewpoints challenged, at least not critically.

Have you ever been misunderstood by family or friends when your purpose was really simple ventilation? You’re trying to blow off some steam, but your listener misinterprets the situation and proceeds to give you some point-by-point arguments on all the gross generalizations you’ve blurted out. All you really wanted was a quiet, sympathetic listener, and now you’ve committed yourself to an emotional argument you really didn’t need or want. Responsibilities run both ways in these ventilation situations. Take care when ventilating; hear your friend out to discover his or her real purpose.

SEEKING HELP AND INFORMATION In the previous category, we were seeking a listener who did not interfere continually as we complained, vented our emotions, and otherwise used him or her as a release for accumulated strong feelings. This category leads us to a more specific call for help—a call for a response, for information, support, and reinforcement. There are many such situations, ranging from the simple request for time, date, or directions to asking a person to assume a more emotionally complex, supportive role. Once again, the why is the influencing factor. Some call these types of purposes therapeutic in that we are seeking a cure or answer for a difficulty. It is quite important and sometimes diffi-
cult for a receiver to really know when someone wishes help and support or when he or she prefers only a sympathetic ear.

Have you ever asked one of your classmates a simple question, only to receive a lecture on transcendental hermeneutics? Your classmate may honestly have misunderstood the intent and scope of your question or may have simply found a victim on which to try out some new learning! That’s not all bad either; communication is often a compromise of purposes and intentions.

Sometimes the real help we seek is a nonverbal presence, not talk at all. When the play is awful, the team has fumbled near the goal line, or you’ve flunked the exam, you may just prefer silent, miserable company—unless you’re ventilating. Misery does love company, especially people with the same problem.

**BARGAINING** Still another purpose that greatly affects interpersonal communication is bargaining—working out differences together. This purpose is sometimes evident, as with known, honest differences of opinion. However, it may also operate quite subtly, sometimes by design and sometimes quite by accident. In bargaining, the response to a statement often determines the next response. A statement may contain a specific intent unknown to the receiver. This intent may be concealed in some code or message intended to have a persuasive effect on the receiver. Notice the bargaining influence in the communication when you are buying a used car or a motorcycle. The seller may suggest $5,000 as an asking price. You are interested in determining just how low in price the seller is really willing to go. In this special kind of setting there is often a hidden motive and a payoff (which we expect as part of the game). The setting is sometimes called a game because of this payoff aspect. Unless you recognize this purpose and adjust accordingly, you may come off second best in the negotiation without really having played the game.

Bargaining among unions and employers is a similar communication interchange, except that it is much more formal. Most of these bargaining situations are worked out cooperatively. We usually hear about the few that are deadlocked as if they were typical.

Sometimes we bargain without knowing it. Asking to use big brother’s car may really be more bargaining than a simple request for help. If this is so, your
initial purpose may be to seek information. You may then shift to an expression of feelings as you attempt to establish common ground. You may next prepare to move into the bargaining stance. Whatever your line may be, you must be aware that in this type of context the receiver may not always give you the specific answer you want (that’s part of the game, too). If after several exchanges you sense that your goal is not likely to be achieved, you may decide to offer more in exchange, modify your time requirement, or do whatever is possible to work out the bargaining together. That bargaining is often unsuccessful is another fact of life. Most bargaining would probably be more successful if the participants knew more about the process and recognized a bargaining situation when they were in one. We will have more to say about interpersonal persuasion later.

EVALUATION Even in giving feedback about something relatively trivial, such as spelling errors (which would not be trivial in the setting of an English class) or minor arithmetic mistakes, you may be surprised at how threatening this purpose and setting is to some people. If you are in a position of giving negative feedback—such as an umpire, referee, traffic officer, or teacher—and everyone expects this kind of discipline or feedback from you, it is one thing. When you offer such advice freely in a different setting and with a less specific purpose, it is quite another thing!

The evaluative or negative-feedback setting is never easy, even for professional counselors and skilled teachers. When our purpose is to direct negative feedback at someone else, we must work especially hard at being our best self, our most sensitive self. When you ask for evaluation or feedback, prepare yourself for some blunt remarks. Most people will be quite honest, but not always objective, and rarely as kind as you think they should be.

Do not be too eager to evaluate others. The great counselor and psychologist Carl Rogers was known to say, “The older and wiser I get, the less eager I am to rush in to fix things.” Objectivity is critical to sensitive feedback situations, and so is tact.

THE PSYCHO-ENVIRONMENT AS CONTEXT

A near poverty-stricken family finds happiness, high morale, and a certain amount of self-realization. How can this be in view of their physical environment? Because a
poverty-stricken physical environment need not be a poverty-stricken psycho-environment, any more than a rich physical environment necessarily leads to a rich and happy psycho-environment. This is not to deprecate the importance of creature comforts and the physical environment, but rather it is to make clear that the psychological climate is, in most things, a more critical context than the physical climate.

Psychological climate refers to all of the influences that affect any of the purposes and settings discussed above. It includes all of the environmental dimensions, both physical and psychological, and particularly those human aspects of climate variously described as accepting, understanding, facilitating, and so on. These aspects could also be negative—that is, strongly judgmental, evaluative, defensive, dogmatic, and the like.

All human communication and interaction take place in some kind of psychological climate. Our surroundings and our involvement with them may or may not lead to motivation and better human relations. The attitudes people hold about their organizations and the style of leadership they encounter (or express) are critical to the communication climate. The subtlety and importance of appropriate human interactions and transactions are often lost in a sea of organizational or environmental requirements.

Elton Mayo and F. J. Roethlisberger taught the lessons of the psycho-environment and human relations years ago. Too few of our organizational leaders, they argued, were alert to the fact that it is a human social, and not an economic, problem which they face.8
It took the Hawthorne studies of the 1930s, starting out in quest of knowledge about physical environment, to make very clear that it was the human environment that offered most in terms of motivated effort and moral conscience. The widely growing industrial unions of the thirties made quick note and quick demand for not only wage adjustments, but also for human considerations. Today the fringes are truly misnamed psychologically as well as economically.

Horrendous amounts of pseudosophisticated, naive, and sometimes opportunistic manipulating of human relations and the work environment have undoubtedly slowed the emergence of a unified theory of human relations and the psycho-environment. In any event, it is now clear that a person’s motivation depends to a large extent upon how he or she relates to his or her organizational environment and the important people in it—those people and arrangements that affect a person’s life, attitudes, and perception of the psychological climate.

**Human Relations Theory**

It is doubtful that any efforts parallel in human relations impact the studies done from 1924 to 1932 at the Chicago Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company. Mayo and his Harvard associates did not join the Western Electric team until 1927. In 1924, Hawthorne, in collaboration with the National Research Council, initiated a study with the purpose of determining the relationship between illumination intensity, or lighting, and worker efficiency as measured by production or output. The results were to confound the engineers, delight the social psychologists, and usher in a new age of human relations and involvement.9

The assumption of this early study was that the better the lighting, the better the production of induction coils. With one group of workers the light intensity was held constant. With the experimental group the light intensity was varied, first made higher and then made lower than with the control group. When the lights went up production went *up*; when the lights went down production went *up!* To confound things even more, in the control group with which the lights remained constant the production also went *up!* In near desperation the lights were brought down even more. It was not until near moonlight that production slipped even a modicum. Obviously, something more than lighting was operating here. The re-
searchers did not rule out a relationship between work and light, of course, but they did become dimly aware of another variable running wild in their experiment. They labeled it *psychological*. They then devised an expectation study with light in which they replaced bulbs of equal, rather than more, wattage. The workers, living up to expectations, commented favorably on the increased illumination. These early researchers were disturbed by the extraneous psychological variables and attempted to design a way of eliminating them. They thought they might isolate and control some of them, such as fatigue, rest periods, equipment, and the like. It was decided that if a small group of workers could be isolated in a specially partitioned-off room and asked to be their normal selves, then some of these psychological variables would be suppressed. Output could finally be correlated to physical conditions. At this point, Mayo and others from the Department of Industrial Research of the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration became involved. Earlier studies by Mayo in a Philadelphia textile mill had prepared him for assessing the psychological and human variables. He had found that it was not so much rest periods that helped production, morale, and turnover as it was the workers’ *involvement* and attention in *scheduling* the rest periods.

In this special room partially described above, the now famous “Relay Assembly Room” experiment was started. In the spring of 1927 six women were chosen as average representative workers of the 100 persons who assembled telephone relays. Moving these six workers into the test room made it possible to accurately tabulate the number of relays produced literally from one moment to another. Records were kept from 1927 to 1932. The plan was to get a normal output number and then vary payment, rest breaks, days off, and company lunch and quitting times to see the effect of each under these controlled conditions. To keep things scientific, a very attentive observer was also present to maintain records and counsel with the women.

The results made the dimly emerging lesson of the lighting experiment much brighter. In brief review of a mountain of data, the following general findings can be reported: when wages were varied production went up; when breaks were varied production went up; free snacks, production went up; variations in quitting time, production went up. After eighteen months of this the researchers decided to take away all of these special conditions and go back to the first day in the special test room—let output return to normal, as it were. No
one was quite prepared for the result! Production set an all-time high! It was also found that the usual fatigue curve did not pertain, nor did the one for absenteeism. Everything was better. Perhaps this is what Thomas Wolfe meant when he wrote, “You can’t go home again,” or what Heroclites meant when he said, “You can’t step in the same river twice.” No one could ever go back to day one; “Nothing, nothing is the same.”

The research staff saw the light. People had begun to feel important. Stuart Chase’s interpretation of what happened, first written in 1941, goes a long way toward defining human relations in its very best sense.

What was this X? The research staff pulled themselves together and began looking at it. They conferred, argued, studied, and presently they found it. It wasn’t in the physical production end of the factory at all. It was in the girls and their group. By segregating them into a little world of their own, by asking their help and co-operation, the investigators had given the young women a new sense of their own value. Their whole attitude changed from that of separate cogs in a machine to that of a congenial team helping the company solve a significant problem.

They had found stability, a place where they belonged, and work whose purpose they could clearly see. And so they worked faster and better than they ever had in their lives. The two functions of a factory had joined into one harmonious whole.10

Psychological Safety

A healthy communication climate might be described as a cohesive context and environment in which the discussants, through interaction, achieve a mental state of relative psychological safety and freedom. According to Shepherd, cohesion refers to the forces that bind members of a group—the degree of closeness and warmth they feel for one another, their pride as members, their willingness to be frank and honest in their expressions of ideas and feelings, and their ability to meet the emergencies and crises that may confront them.11

Interaction, in this context, is communication behavior directed toward another person or persons when their reactions or mutual behavior are taken into account. It pertains directly to our interpersonal responsibilities in communication.
What is being discussed is obviously a large part of the psychological climate. If we are faced with bad news, deserved criticism, necessary evaluation, or generally unhappy feedback, some cold or even defensive psychological climate is perhaps unavoidable. This is precisely the time when we must be our very best communicative selves, or we may make an already difficult psychological climate really impossible.

“Left lane, Jane. Left lane! Left lane, Jane!! Damn, we make left turns from the left lane. That’s three bad mistakes.” If you remember your driver training, you probably recall at least a few bad days during which criticism of your driving behavior seemed harsh (to you) or threatening, however necessary it may have been in the name of highway safety and your own driving skill. The way in which such criticism is given, as well as taken, is what is known as psychological climate.

If an English professor objectively criticizes a bad essay of yours line by line (as he or she is paid to do), it is easy to become defensive in a subsequent one-to-one encounter. Human interaction is, of course, a knife that cuts both ways. Someone may lack sensitivity as a message sender, but be too sensitive as a receiver. If on a given day someone is feeling super defensive about race, national origin, or some other large dimension of personality, his or her communication partner may find communication very difficult indeed. At this point the receiver has a considerable communication obligation to avoid being overly sensitive in his or her role as a receiver and to strive to reestablish a healthier communication climate. It is as if we must have both thick and thin skins at exactly the same time. We need to develop a tolerance for conflicting information, beliefs, and perceptions, as well as a general tolerance for doubt and uncertainty.

The climate and both persons’ assessments of and contribution to it are truly essential to how each learns, communicates, and grows. A flippant, sexist, or cute remark is sometimes all it takes to put your foot in your mouth (or worse).

We probably feel less safe psychologically in communication settings pertaining to evaluation than in social conversations or loving relationships. Where there is good rapport and basic respect for one another, a person may achieve a kind of psychological freedom, a happy climate in which the person’s status is not unreasonably threatened, in which he or she feels accepted as a person, and in which he or she has the freedom to be wrong and to become involved. Both psychological safety
and freedom involve being accepted as an individual of some worth in a climate in which the individual is not persistently evaluated as a person.

When the setting is tense and angry, emotional voices are heard and we are put to a real communication test. When our feelings are out of sync or out of balance with our beliefs, we are apt to ruin the psychological climate. Our emotions may affect the way we think in a given situation or communication episode, but the reverse is also true—the way we think affects the way we feel. If we think someone is going to ridicule or insult us, we are probably going to feel angry or defensive. If we think our relational partners really intend to threaten the relationship, wouldn’t we feel fear and apprehension?

COMMUNICATING INTERPERSONALLY

Importance of Interpersonal Communication

We define interpersonal communication as a distinctive, on going, ever changing transactional form of human communication that involves mutual influence usually for the purposes of relationship management. The key word here is relationship. Most humans have a desire for long-term, satisfying relationships. You can’t build and manage relationships without interpersonal communication. As we all know, communicating in close relationships can be challenging. Just imagine how much more peaceful and productive your life would be if you could improve your listening skills, learn to use sensitive and nondefensive language, and learn to accurately place responsibility for feelings in your interactions. Understanding interpersonal communication can actually enhance our emotional, psychological, and physical well-being.

Studies show that communication skills, particularly interpersonal communication skills, are paramount for employability.\textsuperscript{12} Without solid interpersonal communication skills you will not only have a hard finding a job in today’s market, you may also have trouble keeping it. Communication skills are closely linked with ability to be productive.\textsuperscript{13}

Interpersonal communication skills are also linked with high academic performance. Studies show that students that have the ability to interact with peers and instructors productively are able to increase their learning experience, are more
motivated, and find class much more satisfying. All of these things lead to increased academic performance.\textsuperscript{14}

Another benefit of studying interpersonal communication is that it can help us become the best person we can be. The process of being the best we can be is called \textbf{self-actualization}. This idea comes from psychologist Abraham Maslow.\textsuperscript{15} In order to become self-actualized we must be able to gain information about ourselves. Once we come to know our assets and weaknesses we can work on enhancing the assets and eliminating the weaknesses. One of the ways we are able to gain this vital information about ourselves is through interaction with others.

Regardless of which benefit of interpersonal communication seems most appropriate to your individual situation, it is safe to say that interpersonal communication is a necessary tool for building a happy and successful life.

\section*{ETHICS: RESPONSIBLE RELATIONSHIPS}

\subsection*{Lies and Mental Reservations}

A communicator is morally responsible for telling the truth and for the social consequences that result if the truth is not told. This critical statement is meant to include not only our words but all the nonverbals as well. “He tells a lie who has one thing in his mind and says something else by words or by any signs whatsoever.” (St. Augustine) To some moral philosophers the natural end of speech is to communicate our thoughts, and a lie is evil because it frustrates the very end and purpose of speech.

Being honest and fair to the facts are obvious moral obligations. We must play by the game rules and obey the law. Using outright lies, manufactured facts, and “dirty tricks” are clearly unethical. Even here we encounter some problems.\textsuperscript{16} Prudence is a virtue. Can the ethical person be honest without being unkind? Can he or she be both tactful and forthright?

Are some broad mental reservations allowed? Yes, say the ethicalists, in the same way that a defendant pleads not guilty, or a doctor, questioned about professional secrets, replies “I don’t know.” Yes, they say, because there were fair and sufficient \textit{clues} within the special contexts and situations. A courtroom would not allow for
any kind of mental reservation (a very special context). According to moralists, the common good is at stake here superseding the private good of the individual.

A strict mental reservation without any clue is a lie in any context. So, too, are all communications that are grossly unfair to the facts, or so subtle that they give the receiver no clue about possible alternatives. The clue is important, as is the context.

Honest clues protect the receiver’s fundamental right of choice. Even in social compliance situations there is usually some choice. When choice is minimal, at least there are some alternatives (the courts when necessary). The ultimate decision of how to behave, act, interpret, or believe must in some way, however small, be left to the receiver. That choice must be a viable one.

**Special Situations**

If moral law permits some concealing of the truth, to what situations does this pertain? What are some guidelines? First, some generalizations with wide ethical acceptance in a democracy are the following:

- We have a right to do what is necessary or helpful to preserve our own personal dignity and independence.
- We have a right to keep our private affairs secret.
- We should do that which promotes mutual trust among men. (Doctors, lawyers, and others should not reveal secrets except in extraordinary circumstances in which the common good demands it.)

All of these generalizations deal with situations in which trust and some kind of secret put us in a double bind.

Joseph Sullivan, S.J. deals forthrightly with the ethical principles that should govern the keeping or revealing of secrets. We offer them for your consideration.

**Definitions**

*Secret*—is a truth which the possessor may (right) or ought (duty) to conceal.

*Natural Secret*—is a truth, which *from its own nature* gives the possessor said right or duty.
For example: One’s own or one’s neighbor’s private affairs, the revelations of which, at least in ordinary circumstances, would cause reasonable offense or injury.

**Secret of Promise**—is a truth, which because of a promise made, the possessor has a duty and, therefore, a right to conceal.

**Secret of Trust**—is a truth, which, because of the fact that it was confided to one by another on the express or tacit agreement that having been communicated for a serious purpose it be held in trust, the possessor has a duty and right to conceal.

For example: Knowledge communicated to a lawyer or doctor, or even in some circumstances to a mere friend can be kept secret.

**At times permits**—i.e., man sometimes has the right to keep a secret.

**At times command**—i.e., man sometimes has more than a right, he has a duty.

Question: When are these times?

Answer: a) Man has a duty to keep:

1) A natural secret—as long as
   a) the truth is not made common property by some one else;
   b) he cannot reasonably presume the leave of those concerned, to reveal it;
   c) concealing the truth works no serious harm to a community;
   d) he is not questioned about the matter by legitimate authority;
   e) it can be kept without serious inconvenience to himself or another.

2) A secret of promise as long as a, b, c, d, as above.
   a) It can be kept without serious inconvenience to himself or another and, even at the cost of such inconvenience, if he has expressly promised to do so.

3) A secret of trust—as long as
   a) revelation is not necessary to avert serious and impending harm from
      1) the community,
      2) the holder of the secret,
3) a third and innocent party who is endangered by the person who has
carried the secret in another.
4) the one who confided the secret.

The reason why the obligation of keeping a secret, even of promise, ceases in
the circumstances mentioned above is because even when assuming obligations of
a strict contract, no man can reasonably be thought to intend to bind himself in
such circumstances. Cf. approved authors in Moral Theology.

b) _Man has a right_ to keep all secrets
1) in all the above-named cases where he has a duty;
2) in some of the cases mentioned where he has no duty.

Nilsen challenges interpersonal communicators to take into account the spe-
cial circumstances, the intent, the feelings behind questions, and to combine hon-
esty with respect for sensitivities. He goes on to say,

Morally good communications are those which best preserve the integrity of the ego,
contribute to personal growth, and harmonize relationships. These ends are served by
communications, which, in addition to providing the information needed in a given sit-
uation, permit and encourage the expression of thought and feeling, and reveal respect
for the person as a person.19

**Culpable Ignorance**

The intent of the sender is, of course, critical to an evaluation of the morality
of his or her message. Equally important is the _role, or status, _of the sender. A
person qualified to serve and serving in a leadership role has special ethical ob-
ligations. We expect our political and religious leaders and our professional
people to be responsible, regardless of intent. A doctor convicted of malprac-
tice rarely _intended_ to do harm. An incompetent teacher may have _good inten-
tions_. We judge such people harshly and hold them ethically responsible, even
though their intent may have been good. Our laws accommodate this notion
not just for professionals but for political leaders, as well. Senators, congress-
men, and other public figures have less protection from libel and slander than
does the average citizen. (They, of course, do have their protective immunities,
however.)
All of us have some ethical obligations beyond intent. Many people have been hurt by those who “meant well.” All of us have some obligation to get our facts straight before sending messages that might capriciously misinform or injure the receiver. Moralists call this culpable ignorance—that is, ignorance usually from carelessness deserving blame.  

Most often we have an ethical responsibility to rhetorically analyze our receivers. For one not to care how people are apt to decode a message borders on immorality. A child may decode a message quite differently from a mature adult. How a particular person will interpret a particular message is an ethical consideration. 

Let us not forget our ethical responsibilities as receivers. As receivers we have a moral obligation to give fair hearing once we have committed ourselves to some legitimate interest in the issue. We must make an effort to understand the sender’s biases and intent. We should show tolerance and work at understanding intent. Fair hearing replaces force in a free society. 

To give fair hearing we must also analyze our own range of acceptance. Are we really stuck with a “hard” attitude? Is there some latitude in our position? To give a fair hearing also means allowing the other person some chance to talk. Ethical interpersonal communication doesn’t outlaw aggressive arguing, but it does outlaw excessive monologue; it does necessitate giving the sender some chance to make and explain his or her point. Fair hearing also calls for fair fighting. Sandbagging or setting people up for an obvious embarrassment borders on unethical entrapment. Dragging in every superfluous issue to deliberately confuse is another question of ethics. These unfair interpersonal conflict techniques will be discussed in later chapters. We have a moral obligation to ourselves and the society we represent to stubbornly protect our own independence and dignity. 

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**SUMMING UP**

Interpersonal communication is largely a face-to-face or voice-to-voice thing. It goes on in all kinds of organizations, groups, and settings. Reacting and interacting always occur somewhere, at some level, in some context or setting. Some settings restrict communication while others aid it. Interpersonal communication cuts through all of
the larger contexts. Some of these are mass, organizational, group, and public communication. Various levels of communication in ascending order are described by some as intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and cultural. A model is shown.

The instructional model we have used (Figure 1.4) includes an idea or concept, selecting and sorting, encoding, transmitting, receiving and decoding, selecting and sorting, and a reconstructed idea or concept. Feedback is information being returned from receivers, and it is vital to the correction and refining of the signals we send. Communication is a process of sorting, selecting, and sending symbols in such a way as to help a receiver find in his or her own mind a meaning intended by the sender. Current definitions seem to agree that ideas must, in some way, be shared before communication can exist and that communication should be thought of as a process—not simply as a transfer of meaning from one mind to another. Communication involves common experience and mutual influence. Real communication is very difficult if there is not at least some small opportunity for two-way influence. Whether we know it or not, we communicate hoping to influence others to respond as we want them to. This process has no beginning and no end; it is ever changing, dynamic, and mutual.

Much of our communication is dictated by the setting. Time, place, ritual, and purpose have great influence on communication. Some general purposes for communicating are: social, ventilation, seeking help, bargaining, and evaluation.

Motivation depends, in large part, upon how we relate to our psycho-environment, our organizations, and the important people in them. Human relations theory teaches us that a would-be leader is poorly trained if he or she is unaware of the informal communications and social units that develop within the environment of any formal organization. The spirit of such groups should be a communication and leadership objective.

A healthy communication climate is a cohesive context in which interactants achieve a state of psychological safety and freedom. The climate and the interactants’ assessment of and contributions to it are essential to how they each learn, grow, and communicate. Psychological freedom is a climate in which our status is not unreasonably threatened, in which we feel accepted, and in which we have the freedom to be wrong and to become involved.
Interpersonal communication has great importance. Good interpersonal communication can heighten our emotional, psychological and physical well being. It can increase our chances of getting and keeping a job, help individuals to become better students, and allow us to reach a state of self-actualization or being the best we can be.

Ethics involves moral responsibility in our interactions with others. A communicator is morally responsible for telling the truth and for the social consequences that result if the truth is not told. If mental restrictions are involved, fair and sufficient clues must be present regardless of context. Honest clues protect the receiver’s fundamental right of choice. “Morally good communications are those which best preserve the integrity of the ego, contribute to personal growth, and harmonize relationships.”

The intent of the sender is critical to the morality of his or her message. Equally important is the role or status of the sender. A person qualified to serve and serving in a leadership role has special ethical obligations. We expect such people to be responsible regardless of intent. We should show tolerance and an effort at understanding intent. If we are involved at all, we have a moral obligation to give fair hearing. As senders all of us have some obligation to get our facts straight before encoding messages that might capriciously misinform or injure the receiver. Moralists call this culpable ignorance—that is, ignorance from carelessness deserving blame.

NOTES