

Communication management and beyond

3rd edition

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Sample pages



TABLE OF CONTENTS

How to Use This Custom Book	v
Introduction	vii
Communication and learning; two sides of the same coin Chapter 1, <i>Communication Management and Beyond</i> , Mlcek, Moorhead, Morrissey and Norris	
Chapter 1: Introduction to Communication Management	1
Introduction to Communication Management, Chapter 1 <i>Communication Management</i> , Kaye	
Chapter 2: Contemporary Perspectives of Human Communication	21
Contemporary Perspectives of Human Communication, Chapter 2 <i>Communication Management</i> , Kaye	
Chapter 3: Communication Management Competence	43
Communication Management Competence, Chapter 3 <i>Communication Management</i> , Kaye	
Chapter 4: The Use of Language	65
The Use of Language, Chapter 4 <i>Communication Management</i> , Kaye	
Chapter 5: Nonverbal Communication	91
Nonverbal Communication, Chapter 5 <i>Communication Management</i> , Kaye	
Chapter 6: Listening and Assertiveness	123
Listening and Assertiveness, Chapter 6 <i>Communication Management</i> , Kaye	
Chapter 7: Conflict Management, Negotiation and Resolution	147
Conflict Management, Negotiation and Resolution, Chapter 7 <i>Communication Management</i> , Kaye	
Chapter 8: Thinking Reflectively; Being Curious; Doing Kindness	175
<i>Ignatius Chida, Susan Mlcek, Garth Norris</i>	
Chapter 9: Managerial Applications	193
Managerial Applications, Chapter 9 <i>Communication Management</i> , Kaye	
Chapter 10: Personal Effectiveness in Communication	213
Personal Effectiveness in Communication, Chapter 10 <i>Communication Management</i> , Kaye	

Chapter 11: Adult Communication Management: Future Directions	233
Adult Communication Management: Future Directions, Chapter 11 <i>Communication Management, Kaye</i>	
References	253
Name Index	267
Subject Index	271

Sample pages

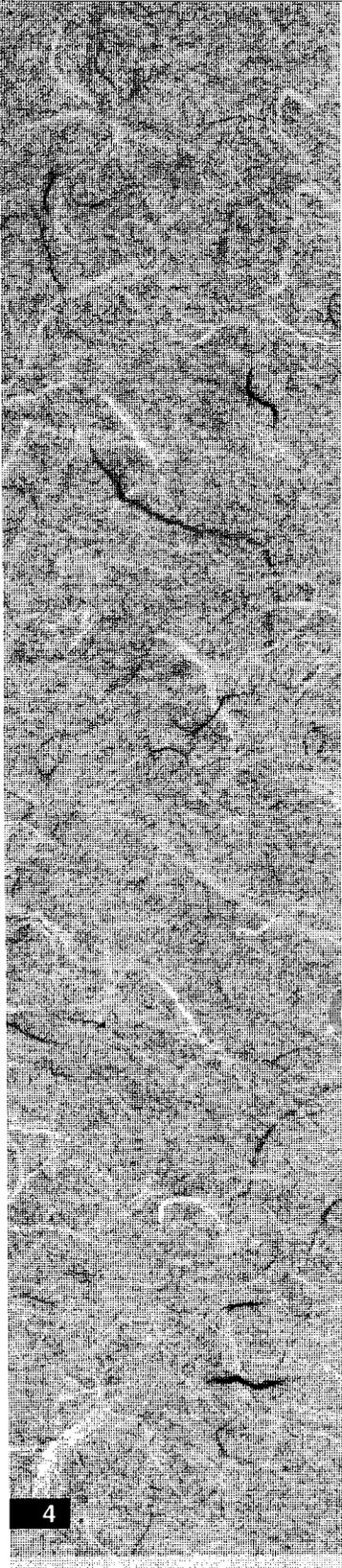
Introduction to Communication Management

Communication is something so simple and difficult
that we can never put it in simple words.

T. S. Matthews

Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee,
and just as hard to sleep after.

A. M. Lindbergh



What is communication? Why do people communicate? How do we learn to understand each other so that we can live and work in harmony with others? These are just some of the questions that will come to mind as you read this chapter. You will be introduced to the idea that communication is a process. Our ability to relate well to other people corresponds with our ability to understand and manage this communication process. We will explore one way of explaining this communication process by referring to the self, to **people-in-systems**, to communication as the building and sharing of meanings, and to **communication competence**. These elements combine to make a framework for the concept of **adult communication management**. This concept is our reference point throughout this book, as we examine different ways we can communicate successfully with others.

Learning Objectives

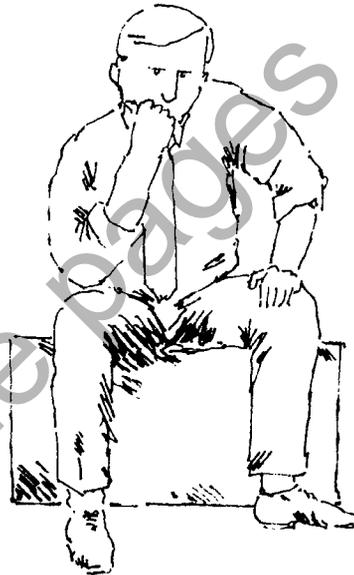
After studying the ideas, arguments and suggestions presented in this chapter you should be able to do the following:

- Explain why communication is inevitable and important in our lives.
- Describe in your own words the meaning of 'communication management'.
- Explain the relationship between *communication management* and *communication competence*.
- Define human communication as a process of building meanings between people.
- Distinguish between *communication* and *communications*.
- List seven assumptions about human communication.

Sample pages

1.1 The Importance and Inevitability of Communication

We live in a world of people. Although at times we feel the need to be alone, we cannot avoid the inevitability of interpersonal encounters. Much of what we do and think is governed by what others do and think and by what we believe others think of us. Our own behaviour is also determined by what we think of others. There are probably very few situations where the influence of other people would count for little.



Our reflection creates hopes, expectations and visions.

When we are alone we may be reflective, fantasising, imagining or planning our future. Our reflection creates hopes, expectations and visions which regulate how we act and react toward others. It is often difficult to separate our private from our professional concerns. For example, our domestic problems may take high priority; once they affect how we function with colleagues, we realise that we are multifaceted creatures subject to various forces operating simultaneously upon us. To this extent, we cannot easily separate our professional selves from our spiritual selves or from our non-worldly selves. Just like James Thurber's character Walter Mitty, we try to be heroic figures, but our circumstances bring us down to earth very quickly.

The several forces acting upon us at any point of time make us what we are. Depending on the intensity of any one of these forces, we become risk-takers or cautious conservatives. In short, we respond to the dominant force of the moment. Our images of ourselves are largely the product of the

rationalising adaptive mechanisms we use to manage this force—we become polite when we would rather be retributive, or we feign satisfaction when we really feel dissatisfied or annoyed.

To others who experience us, our observable actions and behaviour communicate our intentions, which are perceived as friendliness or hostility, acceptance or rejection, dominance or submissiveness. *Much of what we intend to communicate is not articulated verbally.* Our nonverbal cues express something of ourselves, particularly our emotions. We are, therefore, ambivalent creatures, often maintaining a semblance of expected conformity whilst we grapple with our personal conflicts. Individually, we are enigmatic and unpredictable. We are constituted of a maelstrom of inner urges and outward manifestations of socialised behaviour. What we communicate of ourselves to others is an image compounded of this mixture. What others glean are mostly the surface qualities we project—those we wish to exhibit. Those who know us well may infer intent beyond the observable realm.

Regardless of others' insights, we persist in moulding images of ourselves for others to decodify. Our words as well as our nonverbal cues are our 'currency' for developing, stabilising, or terminating relationships with others. Even when we prefer to have nothing to do with someone else, we cannot escape communicating our intentions. Unless we live in total isolation from others, we are forced to be communicators. As Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) have suggested, 'one cannot *not* communicate'.

The critical significance of communication in the present world is underscored by the depersonalising effects of new technologies that are interactive and 'user-friendly'. Facsimile and computerised work-stations have superseded people as information resources; we can now obtain information without other people being physically present. In some areas, artificial intelligence is supplanting real intelligence, and many people seem to get their work done without other people. Social interaction is becoming limited to lunch breaks and other out-of-work times.



New technologies can depersonalise the workplace

What we must realise is that the heart of communication is not in the surface message but in the meanings or interpretations that we ascribe to the message. When the message is presented in person, interpretations of the message are also affected by how it is presented. This interaction of message, presentation and interpretation shapes the unique character of the communication process. Our meanings—interpretations of stimuli—thus form the bases for our communicative actions and intentions towards others. These bases have been called ‘strategic choices’ by Delia, O’Keefe and O’Keefe (1982). It is clear that we cannot escape the need to communicate, and so we owe it to ourselves and to others to manage our communication competently.

The concept ‘communication management’ suggests that the ability to communicate well is not one we are born with, but something we can learn and improve on. For example, we can learn to be more capable communicators in interviews, meetings or public forums. The learning process involves more than obedience to a set of predetermined, mechanical procedures; it also requires an awareness of the process variables that may affect the quality of the dialogue taking place. ‘Communication management’ is thus an umbrella term for conceptualising the range of variables that may contribute to the co-ordination of meanings between people. Such variables include the ways we construe meanings, the strategies we use to infer others’ intentions, and our preferred styles of communicating our reactions to other people.

As individuals, of course, we also exhibit differences which can affect the ways we construct meanings about others. For instance, as a male I may react negatively to a female who is avowedly affirmative-action; or my ethnic origins may alienate me from people of other cultures—at least in my own mind. Again, if I am a modest wage-earner, I might believe that my supervisor or immediate superior who earns a much higher salary is unfairly capitalising on my expertise. Individual differences, therefore, may also explain why we communicate with others in a certain way. On this basis, it is now appropriate to examine more closely a process view of communication management.

1.2 A Process View of Communication Management

human systems

Networks of communicating people that range from units as small as nuclear families to large organisations, communities and neighbourhoods.

‘Communication management’ implies the optimal use of human and technological resources to promote dialogue between people. Egan and Cowan (1979) and Egan (1985, 1988a, 1988b) proposed a people-in-systems model of organisational development. The model consists of two parts. Model A is a comprehensive tool for mapping the strengths and weaknesses of **human systems**. A human system may be something as general as a community or neighbourhood, or as specific as an institution, or family group. In essence, Model A is diagnostic—it determines whether

people and other resources in systems or organisations are being used to best effect. Egan also suggests that good communication among people is critical for the efficient functioning of human systems. Thus, Model A helps us to see organisations and other human systems from a human communication perspective.

Model B focuses on the strategic management of change in human systems. It consists of a set of organisational decision-making procedures and is a development tool for making appropriate changes. At present, Model A is more fully developed than Model B; it incorporates a range of design, human-resource and situational variables and has an accomplishment orientation.

One important implication to emerge from Model A is that the competent management of communication processes in human systems is crucial to their maintenance and development. This suggests that people in systems should see themselves as managers of the communication processes which characterise professional and personal relationships between members. Good communication managers need all the human communication skills that are relevant to their systems.

Some of these skills, such as active listening or assertiveness, are the special concern of those who study interpersonal communication competence. Other skills, like chairing meetings or public speech-making, are more usually associated with the field of group or mass communication. The importance of these skills varies; for example, questioning skills are vital for interviewing, negotiation skills are crucial in labour management disputes, and problem-solving and conflict-resolution abilities are especially important for counselling.

On their own, skills are hit-and-miss entities, especially without a sound rationale. We can, for example, learn how to be leaders without knowing much about the theories or research on leadership. There are now many leadership training packages. Some of them are soundly based on contemporary research and theory, but others attract disciples simply because their practical usefulness is assumed to be readily demonstrable.

Effective skills are well grounded in theory. Skills can be seen as the evidence of a more complex set of theoretical principles that have been systematically examined and applied by the performer, and communication skills are no exception. They rely just as heavily on research and theory as more familiar psychomotor skills do. Regardless of the performance domain, skills require a strong conceptual foundation. The term 'competency' is perhaps intended to convey more than the term 'skill' since competent people not only know how to do something but also why it should be done a certain way. Skilled people, on the other hand, may not necessarily have an understanding of the reasons for particular procedures or actions. 'Competency' and 'competence' are often synonymous in applied communication scholarly literature. From an adult communication management perspective, 'competence' is equated with general ability and is preferred to 'competency' which is closer in meaning to 'skill'. When pluralised, 'competence' is usually read as 'competencies' and not as 'competences'. Peter (1975), for example, argued that skills constitute only one category of competencies. The major domains of learning, identified by

Bloom (1956) as the cognitive, affective and psychomotor, roughly correspond to the more recently identified competency areas of knowledge, attitude and skill. Practitioners today, in human resource fields such as training and development, tend to use the latter, more pragmatic classifications. However, competencies may be conceptualised at either a professional or technician level. According to Peter (1975:78):

At a professional level, competency includes understanding the processes involved as well as having performance skills and an academic and theoretical background. This generally accepted concept of professional competence is the basis for differentiating between a professional and a technician. The technician's training emphasises performance skills whereas the professional's preparation includes more theoretical background, academic content, and higher-level abstractions.

The position taken in this book is intended to be consistent with Peter's. Competency approaches aimed to promote effectiveness in communicating with others are described in later chapters within the framework of communication management-as-process.

In this book, communication management applies essentially to the ways adults relate to each other. For this reason, it is appropriate to distinguish adult from non-adult or child communication management. My model of adult communication management is analogous to the Russian matouschka dolls which are encased within progressively larger dolls. Four different sized dolls make up this model. See Figure 1.1 for a diagrammatic representation.

The smallest doll, the innermost part of the adult communication management model, represents the 'self'. Knowing and understanding one's self is a necessary step towards effective self-management. In turn, self-awareness serves as a sound basis for self-analysis and self-examination, particularly when people consider how they affect others through their speech and actions. Thus, the 'self' doll is the intrapersonal component of the adult communication management model.

Encasing the 'self' doll is the 'interpersonal' doll. At this point the focus is on how the 'self' relates to 'the other' (or others). This interpersonal element is best explained in terms of constructivist theory which holds that communication is a process where interacting individuals create meanings about each other and about the nature and state of their relationship. The interpersonal doll draws our attention to the way communicating adults can affect each other and bring about changes in themselves or in those interacting with them.

The third doll is the 'people-in-systems' doll. Here, our concern is with how the human systems or organisations in which people work or function can have an effect on how those people will communicate with others in those systems. This doll also presupposes that people can influence the way these systems or organisations will develop or deteriorate. At this point of the adult communication management model, attention is largely given to understanding and managing the culture of human systems or organisations. In this connection, 'culture' refers to both the 'overt' and the

'covert' rules, norms, values and practices which give those human systems their distinctive characters.

Finally, the fourth doll which encases all the others is labelled the 'competence' doll. It is important to understand that in this model 'competence' is not just seen as an outer layer or casing—communication management competence can occur at any other level of the model. Thus, people are intrapersonally competent when they acquire a realistic understanding of their 'self' and develop some measure of 'self-control' or 'self-management'. People can also be seen to be 'competent' when they construct, coordinate and clarify meanings with other interacting individuals. Lastly, people can be judged 'competent' when they display an ability to change either the systems in which they operate or other people within those systems.

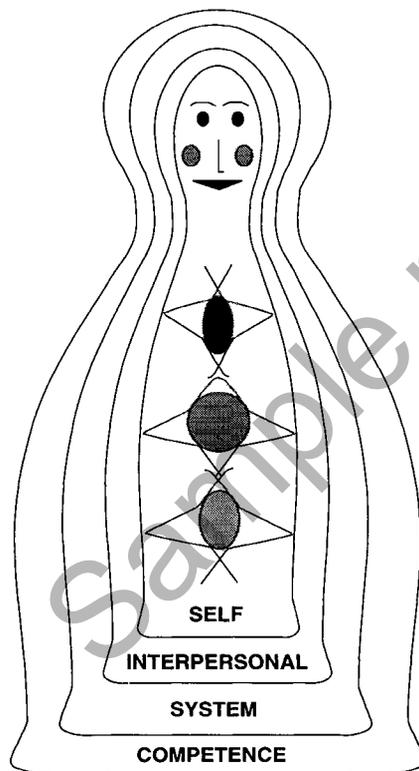


FIGURE 1.1

The Adult Communication Management Model

It is suggested that this model of adult communication management may serve as a useful reference point for determining current levels of communication competence and, ultimately, for devising strategies to bring about desired changes in people or the systems in which they exist or work. At appropriate parts of this book, it will be revealed how this model of communication management differs from other more traditional or existing conceptions. For the present, we will focus our attention more directly on the way in which communication management links with the notion of communication competence.

1.3 The Relationship Between Communication Management and Communication Competence

Since the core of communication management is, for our purposes here, the process of co-ordinating the interpretations or meanings construed by interacting people, the term 'communication competence' suggests that interacting people have understood each other's viewpoints and frames of reference. Penman (1985) went a step further, urging that communication competence be viewed in terms of interpersonal *relationships*. The term 'communication' conveys the idea of a sharing of meaning or reciprocity between people. Irwin (1985; 1988) has suggested that 'conceptualisations of interpersonal competence have included relational dimensions for some time'. Communication management therefore involves both understanding and negotiating two or more individuals' meanings.

In certain instances, meanings are rule-bound and literal. For example, in a court of law, evidence is deemed admissible or inadmissible according to that court's rules of admissibility. In meetings, chairpersons following established guidelines assume responsibility for ensuring that relevant information or messages are exchanged.

Real meanings, of course, are personally construed. It was, I think, Dr Seuss's character, Horton the elephant, who said 'I know what I mean and I mean what I say ...' when he declared his determination to be faithful. Nevertheless, whilst meanings are individually constructed, the intentions underlying them are often misconstrued by others experiencing the same event or behaviour. For example, two people hearing the Treasurer's Budget speech may form quite discrepant impressions of his or her sincerity or trustworthiness. Such impressions are influenced by values, beliefs and attitudes previously acquired. Thus, preferences for particular political ideologies may serve as a regulatory mechanism for either accepting or rejecting the message being presented. Our memories of broken or kept promises, especially in connection with a personal or professional concern, may also filter certain messages.

It seems, therefore, that communication management requires us to develop receptive as well as expressive abilities; in other words, to decode and encode intended meanings accurately. These general abilities to express and receive depend in turn on one's possession of critical communication microskills such as non-evaluative listening, empathic or reflective responding, interpreting and expressing nonverbal cues, and using language that is unprejudicial and inoffensive. At the interpersonal level, these constitute a range of self-management skills, so communication management is very much a matter of self-management through the judicious application of communication microskills.

An important point should be made here: competence does not necessarily imply excellence. Relatively recent studies have tended to reify

the ideal of excellence (McLagan, 1983; Peters and Waterman, 1984; Peters and Austin, 1989), but apart from a few outstanding communicators, people do not, in general, communicate with consistent excellence. The adage 'to err is human' applies in this context.

Individual communication competencies probably vary from one situation to another. Hence, people display differing degrees of competence depending upon a range of relevant variables operating at given moments. The term 'excellence' is probably highly idealistic; people communicate as best they can under the prevailing circumstances. No textbook, manual or training program can guarantee to transform poor communicators into excellent ones. People can, however, become more aware of their own patterns of communicating with others. Such awareness enables people to recognise the need, if any, for change.

The position we take in this book is that individuals cannot be taught to be competent unless they willingly learn, develop and monitor their own changes. Putting this another way, you will not communicate better simply by reading this book. It is what you think and do after studying this field that determines whether you attain excellence or not. Self-management is therefore the key, and the first step in self-management is self-awareness and an awareness of others. Unfortunately, the frantic pace of many modern urban lifestyles has limited our opportunities to reflect on the quality of our relationships with others.

Developing communication competencies to enhance our communication management processes thus requires a quantum leap in our thinking about our associations with others on both a personal and a professional basis. We can hardly resist the rapid tide of social and technological change characterising the world today, but it is imperative that we do not lose sight of our humanity. The mechanisation of society need not mean a corresponding robotisation of people. For this reason alone, the connection between communication competence and the process of communication management is vital and needs to be understood.

The Nature of Human Communication

1.4

There is much debate over what human communication is all about. Dance (1982) edited a collection of essays on different perspectives of human communication, including rules-based, meaning-centred and other theoretical perspectives. At present, the field of human communication theory offers no definitive view or definition that is recognised as superior to others: there is ample scope for investigation.

The theoretical foundation of this book is firmly based on a meaning-centred view of human communication. However, no extant theory provides a totally comprehensive framework for understanding the process of communication management. Perhaps the most rigorous of

constructivism

Theory of communication as the reciprocal construction of meaning; it views communication as an interpretive process in interpersonal relationships.

interpersonal construct system

A person's set of constructs to form an image or impression of another person.

contemporary theories is the one expounded by Delia, O'Keefe and O'Keefe (1982). This theory, **constructivism**, argues that individually constructed meanings constitute the basis of one's actions towards and interactions with others. Constructivists maintain that people interpret others' intentions on the basis of individually developed **interpersonal construct systems**.

The interpersonal construct is central to our meaning-centred view of human communication. According to Kelly (1955), a pioneer of contemporary constructivist theory, a construct is a bipolar adjective (e.g. tall-short, friendly-unfriendly) by which people determine their impressions of others, and each person uses their own individual construct system.

Constructs may be either physical or psychological. A physical construct refers to an observable feature (e.g. fat-slim, blue-eyed or brown-eyed). Psychological constructs, on the other hand, involve inferred qualities such as sincere-insincere, honest-dishonest and so on. The problem with psychological constructs, of course, is that they are not derived from overtly demonstrable data. From our knowledge of people in certain situations, we can only assume that they are happy or sad, fearful or brave, and so on.

How people communicate is essentially the product of both surface and undetectable information. Most of what we observe of someone is just the tip of the iceberg; the substance of their personality lurks beneath the surface, along with the unobservable urges and impulses that prompt their behaviour. Our communication with others greatly depends on information that is incomplete; we construe others' intentions from data filtered through individual frames of reference which are built from personal or interpersonal construct systems. The key to constructing accurate meanings resides in our sensitivity to levels of consciousness within and without ourselves.

There is no easy answer to the question of how this sensitivity can be developed. Whilst communication can be described as an exercise of the mind, the human mind certainly has its limitations. It does not fully interpret unpredictable emotional behaviour, even in familiar situations. People sometimes exhibit certain moods, for example, for physiological reasons not readily discernible from their behaviour. A person suffering from stress might display all the characteristic symptoms of stress, but it would be difficult to tap their subliminal regions to assess accurately why they feel as they do. In short, the receiver has to rely on cues that are symptomatic rather than explanatory of someone else's condition.

At present there is no certainty about how people decide why others communicate or behave as they do. Current research methodologies focus on methods of observation, direct and indirect, and introspection. Tapping mental and emotional complexities by clinical hypnosis, for example, remains in the avant-garde realm of the unexplored. Human communication has not yet emerged as a totally intelligible phenomenon. At best, present methods of research provide approximations of the motivations that govern people's behaviour.

For the present, it is expedient to accept the notion that, on the basis of our construct systems, we attribute meaning to the intentions, actions and personalities of others. Within the limitations of the cognitive structures which

characterise the individual ways we form impressions of others, we make sense of our world. Communication, therefore, is very much a matter of the mind.

Of course, in practical terms, everyday communication is a comparatively straightforward set of acts or events and communicating individuals are often unaware of how others will react to their intended messages. As a manager, for example, I may instruct my staff with a memo, but my message may not be received as I would want it to be. Some of my staff may decide that it should be relegated to the wastepaper basket and ignored.

Much of our everyday communication takes the form of transmitted messages, which are not necessarily acted upon in the way we intend them to be. From a process perspective, therefore, situations of this kind are more a case of miscommunication. Meanings become discrepant rather than shared. Of course, some messages do find their mark, but a process-oriented view of communication cannot be based simply on the notion of message transmission, especially when not all the communicators' meanings are reciprocated.

A generic view of communication allows for signs and symbols that are not only linguistically determined but also idiosyncratically constructed in nonverbal ways. Many of our meanings cannot be readily expressed in words, particularly when what we say represents an acceptable statement rather than our true feelings. Since a good deal of people's meanings are conveyed nonverbally, a comprehensive view of human communication should perhaps be a nonverbal one.

For some time the process view of communication has played a relatively minor part in communication theory-building, overshadowed by the more popular and pragmatic message transmission approaches. Message-centred views of communication developed over the past few decades were essentially elaborations of the one-way model, developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949), whereby messages passed from source to receiver via some medium, in a unidirectional fashion. The assumption is that the receiver understands the message as the sender intended. Later versions such as Berlo's (1960) Source-Message-Channel-Receiver (S-M-C-R) model introduced new concepts of medium and channel. Some conceptualisations of communication also began to feature feedback loops from receiver to source.

All these explanations lacked a consistent, firm commitment to a crucial point: messages acquire meaning only through encoding and decoding people's interpretations of them. McLuhan and Fiore (1967), for example, emphasised the medium as the major force that shaped meanings in messages. But meanings do not reside solely in messages. New information entering our perceptual field can be acquired and interpreted at a literal level, but it rarely remains there. Repeated experiences of the same information allow us to construe personal meanings. The failure of many writers and practitioners, including teachers of communication, to grasp this simple fact may be partly due to the prevailing trend to reduce 'communication' to a practical utility. One example of this tendency has been the persistent definition of communication as a noun so that it is seen less as an activity and more as a product. How often have we heard people say 'I've sent a communication' (e.g. a letter, a telephone message)?

The study of messages, therefore, is probably more aptly termed 'communications'. On the other hand, the study of processes affecting interacting people would more appropriately be termed 'communication'. Some writers (e.g. Mohan, McGregor and Strano, 1992; Taylor, Rosegrant, Meyer and Samples, 1989) have gone so far as to use the word 'communicating' in their book titles to underscore the active, process nature of the phenomenon.

Confusion over what communication means has also been caused by diverse, often incompatible disciplines attempting to focus on a range of common problems and concerns. Like education, 'communication' is preferably described as a field of study consisting of a loosely defined set of issues and unanswered questions. It is probably also true that the field is multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary. For example, applied psychologists addressing certain communication problems are unlikely to draw upon terminology and concepts from outside their own discipline. The result is that the present field of communication studies consists of a variety of perspectives, sometimes contradictory, on similar content or subject-matter. Potentially, this is a healthy and promising state of affairs, since the wide scope of the communication field permits inquiry from scholars of many fields. In practice, however, the co-existence of diverse, contradictory perspectives has occasioned contentious debate resulting in a decided lack of consensus on certain issues.

Naturally, theoretical opposites are not easy to resolve, even by zealots trying to unify the field; one of their ploys is to devise a highly selective set of assumptions that excludes other legitimate but non-complementary stances. Some scholars, for example, try to 'psychologise' the field, others draw heavily on sociological theories. The future direction of communication studies depends on whether theorists and researchers are prepared to broaden their narrow disciplinary outlook. Holistic approaches to the study of communication must reflect a spirit of eclecticism and tolerance by contemporary investigators. This is not to suggest that scholars have to compromise their ideals, principles or theoretical commitments in order to promote unity, but to urge investigators to remain open minded. New visions and insights will have some chance of being realised once scholars adopt a more adventurous attitude to multifaceted study, and appreciate the contributions of anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, linguists, mathematicians, economists, artists, and actors as a unique set of resources for the development of a useful theory of communication.

The preceding comments suggest that the quintessential truth about human phenomena is somewhat elusive, since scholars typically design their investigative approaches within their disciplines. Scholarly thinking, therefore, is often confined to concepts central to specific fields of study. The observations above also suggest that such truth will be easier to discover if scholars broaden their thinking beyond their disciplinary confines to newer interdisciplinary perspectives. An example of this kind of broadening is Hofstadter's (1979) cryptic, metaphorical synthesis of musical, mathematical and visual art perspectives to elucidate the concept of infinity. In music, infinity is represented by what Hofstadter describes as the perfect form of musical writing—the canon. Visually, Escher's never-

ending staircase is an artistic example of infinity. The science of mathematics has a special symbol for infinity. Thus, infinity can be understood from three different perspectives. Whilst infinity has been traditionally understood from particular disciplinary vantage points, Hofstadter examined three fields in his search for common, complementary themes. His approach exemplifies the one recommended to those studying communication from an adult communication management perspective.

Undoubtedly the present field of communication study contains complementary themes and concepts, but their potential to unify the field has not yet been taken up as a serious challenge since contemporary scholars are usually reluctant to cross the traditional boundaries of interpersonal, speech, organisational and mass communication. The fashionable trend to develop applied theories of communication has also locked investigators into specific needs-dominated contexts: some business communicators, for example, focus on managerial and personnel concerns; and there are communication education specialists who concentrate on explaining and improving instructional practices.

This book, therefore, makes no apology for departing from 'conventional' communication theories to gain insights from other fields. I have, for example, drawn on fiction sources, especially where they have helped to unlock doors to greater understanding.

If a truly comprehensive, practical theory of communication is possible, it should be applicable regardless of context. Whilst this text does not present a fully articulated new world view of communication, it intends to move in that direction. Inevitably, it is based upon several assumptions about the nature of human communication.

Throughout this book, the major assumptions regarding the nature of human communication are:

- *Human communication is fundamentally a social activity, and therefore mainly concerned with how people relate to, interact with and influence each other.*
- *Human communication is also a matter of how people construe images of themselves and of others. It is affected by how people form impressions of themselves and of others. These impressions result from individual mental interpretations or information processing. In general, communication involves exercising the mind, either consciously or sub-consciously. Communication involves meaning-making.*
- *Human communication is a two-way process. The Latin derivative 'communis' means 'togetherness' or 'reciprocity'. During the 1950s and 1960s, many human communication researchers regarded the source of the message as the only active agent and the receiver of the message as essentially passive. However, receivers are also active as constructors of meaning and, therefore, as communicators. Meaning is not merely an act of decoding but an assignment, by perceivers, of value, importance and interpreted thought to messages received. Effective communication,*

therefore, occurs when intended messages and receivers' interpretations of these intentions are consistent and reciprocated.

- *Human communication is situational and thus subject to the influence of intervening variables.* Individuals differ in the way they send and receive messages. Many of these individual differences are characteristics which cannot be observed. Our inferences about the motivations of others are, at best, educated guesses based on familiarity and experience. People do not, of course, act in the same way in every situation. They tend to be assertive when they are confident, less so when they are apprehensive.

Intervening variables include sender and receiver characteristics such as gender, age, intelligence, cognitive style, and personality. They may also be contextual, and include working climate, reward systems, and responses to leadership. The single most confounding variable is **arationality**, the set of unwritten rules that affect role clarity and, therefore, the quality of relationships in organisations (Egan, 1985).

arationality

The unpredictable and undiscussable communication and interpersonal behaviour that characterises the shadow side of organisations and systems. Often associated with organisational politics.

- *Human communication is emotional as well as logical.* Surface meanings are usually articulated in words. I might say to someone 'I love you' without really meaning it. A message is made convincing by nonverbal cues. The way I touch that person may convey my affection more persuasively than my words. My tone of voice and my vocal emphasis may also express something about the value I place on the relationship. For example, if I say 'I love you', I emphasise my importance as the lover. If I say 'I love you', I am reinforcing my feeling for that person. If I say 'I love you', you are the sole object of my affections.

In general, people trust nonverbal messages more than verbal ones. Sometimes our messages are contradictory: these are called 'double-bind' messages. For instance, if I say to my students 'That's an interesting question' and glance at my watch as I say it, my words say that it is an interesting question, but looking at my watch suggests that I am impatient to conclude the class session. At least, that's how some of the students may perceive it. Overall, it is reasonable to suppose that our feelings have an appreciable impact on how we communicate with others. We are rarely devoid of feeling about what we are doing and seldom react to others with clinical detachment.

- *Human behaviour is complex.* Reductionists—for example, of mechanistic or certain behaviouristic persuasions—attempt to split behaviour into convenient observable segments. Some aspects of human behaviour can be isolated, such as reflex actions. What we are and what makes us tick, however, is not accurately indicated by specific cues or words. We are 'whole' beings whose observable actions constitute only a part of our total capacity to communicate and act. The essential difficulty, of course, is that we cannot easily distinguish the mental or emotional processes that motivate our actions, so the accurate interpretation of human communication is complicated by the interplay of unobservable intervening variables. Most studies of human communication are still simplistic since they address surface rather than deep structures of meaning.

- *Human communication is inevitable.* Although much of our communication with others is conscious and deliberate, we also communicate aspects of ourselves to others without consciously intending to do so. For example, the way we groom ourselves and the clothes we wear indicate something of how we see ourselves and how we would like others to see us. Goffman (1959) referred to this communicative function as self-presentation. More recently, Argyle (1976) identified self-presentation as one of three functions central to nonverbal communication.

Much as we may think it possible, it is simply inconceivable, as was intimated earlier, that we cannot not communicate when we enter another person's physical, mental or emotional life-space. True, some people operate in a private 'twilight zone' and fail to attend to observable or nonverbal cues from someone else. Many established relationships have deteriorated for this very reason. Insensitivity has much to do with communication failure since it may generate apprehension or uncertainty. Take the case of a doctor attending to a dying patient. Although the doctor closely monitors the patient's condition, his or her manner in communicating the patient's state to anxious friends or relatives may seem clinically detached, or offhand, and even if the doctor is sympathetic about their feelings, such detachment does little to reduce their apprehension. To this extent, sensitivity is an integral component of human communication competence.

In summary, therefore, the process view of human communication throughout this book is grounded on the seven theoretical assumptions described in this section, although of course these are not the only possible positions. They constitute the philosophical view to which I am committed. The reader is recommended to read Dance's (1982) excellent anthology of various alternative and representative perspectives on human communication theory.

Overview of the Book

1.5

This book is divided into four sections. Part I, consisting of Chapters 1, 2 and 3, focuses on the theoretical foundations of adult communication management. Chapter 2 is primarily concerned with exploring contemporary perspectives on human communication and examines four representative approaches to the process view of communication management outlined earlier in this chapter. The vantage points of relationship, competence, social influence and meaning are analysed in terms of their potential to explain, predict and control communication at both conscious and subliminal levels of awareness. This analysis owes much to the iceberg analogy drawn from the work of Freud, whose pioneer work on the human theory of personality continues to serve as a conceptual model for many contemporary practising psychiatrists.

Chapter 3 details the theoretical foundations of communication management competencies. The notion of self as agent of change is presented here as a basis for the identification and development of personal and professional competencies. In the context of organisation development and change, relationships between communication competence and managerial roles are examined for their potential to improve communication management in work settings.

Part II provides a detailed exposition of critical human communication skills. Chapter 4 focuses on the use of language, especially on the role it plays in meaning-construction and meaning-interpretation. Miscommunication is examined according to common kinds of perceptual and linguistic filters, and the close association between language and thinking is highlighted. Finally, social functions of language are identified, especially current concerns such as managerial etiquette.

Chapter 5 outlines the nature and functions of nonverbal communication. The various subsystems of the nonverbal domain are treated as a field of study in its own right, rather than as a small component of the interpersonal communication field. The chapter explains contemporary views on facial expression, paralanguage, kinesics, proxemics, touching behaviour and the role of clothing in nonverbal communication. It includes a section on the ethics of researching nonverbal communication for those wishing to consolidate the theoretical principles and assumptions developed in this chapter.

Chapter 6 describes listening and assertiveness in terms of the 'Yin-Yang' concept and stresses the importance of empathy, feedback, and the suspension of judgment in listening. The features of assertive, non-assertive and aggressive behaviour are then discussed. Chapter 6 concludes with the generation of strategies for effective listening and assertive behaviour.

Chapter 7 focuses on negotiation and conflict resolution, investigates the origins of interpersonal conflict, and describes the psychological mechanisms that people use when communicating defensively. Methods of overcoming defensive communication (negotiation skills) are suggested, along with strategies for resolving or preventing conflict. The point is also made that conflict is not necessarily counter-productive; it is the essence of a dramaturgical view of human interaction, and an important basis for a problem-solving approach to human communication management.

In Chapter 8, the human communication skills previously outlined are applied to contexts relevant to managers—especially situations requiring equality of opportunity policies. The chapter also emphasises the importance of intercultural variables and how these can be controlled by human communication skills. The increasing rate of technological development is examined in relation to the potential contribution from the human resource development sector of organisations. The remaining sections of Chapter 8 are devoted to practical applications of human communication skills in oral and written presentation.

Part III deals with managerial and personal communication. In Chapter 9 the roles and competencies of human resource managers are examined in relation to day-to-day functions such as interviewing and conducting

meetings. Particular attention is paid to the prevention of communication failure by strategies that manage irrationality in organisations, and to the concept that a positive organisational climate depends greatly on an awareness of unwanted hidden agendas.

Chapter 10 focuses on issues of personal effectiveness in communication from a human developmental perspective. It analyses the nature of human relationships, the development of interpersonal relationships, and the particular implications of 'culture' at individual and social levels. The unique character of individual 'cultures' and their specific values, attitudes, beliefs, standards and rules are analysed in relation to psychosocial crises, developmental tasks and self-actualisation. Strategies for effective personal growth are also suggested.

Part IV concerns the future. Chapter 11 focuses on understanding, managing and forecasting change. The subliminal aspect of communication management, mentioned in Part I, is reintroduced. In conclusion, the book reinforces the notion that the consideration of people and their needs is crucial for successful communication in organisations.

Summary

1.6

This chapter introduced the concept of adult communication management and, in particular, the importance and inevitability of communication in our daily lives. It proposed a process view of communication management as a basis for establishing a relationship between communication management and communication competence. Finally, the nature of human communication was explained in terms of cognitive processes involving the construction and interpretation of meaning.

Discussion Questions

1.7

1. Describe three occasions when your ability to communicate with others (or another person) was crucial. What would have happened in each instance if your communication management behaviour was unsuccessful?
2. What was your view of communication and communication management before reading this chapter? Has your perspective now changed? If so, how?
3. Are there any deficiencies or weaknesses you would like to bridge as a communication manager? Write them down. How would you redress them?

1.8 Activities

1. Experiment: When you are with someone, try *not* to communicate with that person. Write a brief report on whether you managed this or not. Give reasons for your result.
2. List your strengths as a communicator and next to each item indicate the situations in which these strengths are most obvious.
3. List the situations in which you feel diffident or lack confidence as a communicator. Devise a plan to increase your level of confidence.
4. Select at least one book from the following reading list and read at least the introductory chapter.

1.9 Key Terms

Communication competence
Communication management
Constructivism
Human systems
Interpersonal construct systems
People-in-systems

1.10 Recommended Reading

- DeVito, J. A. (1981) *Communication: concepts and processes*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
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