INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE

Defining Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is a crucial part of your everyday life, yet you probably rarely think about the way in which you interact with other individuals. DeVito defines interpersonal communications as "communication that takes place between two persons who have an established relationship; the people are in some way 'connected'" (p. 4).[1] Thus, as interpersonal communication can occur between romantic partners, business associates, doctors and patients, etc., it permeates our lives. Often, you devote your interpersonal interactions to attempts at influencing the other individual in some way.

The Role of Perception in Interpersonal Influence

Perception is "the process of experiencing your world and then making sense out of what you experience" (p. 68).[2] In interpersonal interactions, both parties engage in the process of perception. Thus, while a fundamental component of the interpersonal communication process, you have relatively little control of the process; it tends to be somewhat automatic. An individual's perception of you shapes what s/he thinks about you and how s/he interacts with you and vice versa. Most interpersonal communication research views perception as a three-part process:[3]

1. **Selection** – the stage in which you determine the stimuli on which you will focus
2. **Organization** – the stage in which you place stimuli into patterns
3. **Interpretation** – the stage in which you assign meaning to your observations

While the above explains the process of perception, there are several explanations of how we actually process this information in our brains.

- *Implicit personality theory* argues that we develop a list of associated qualities that we attribute to the individuals with whom we interact. This allows us to make guesses about an individual's personality based on whatever information we currently have about him or her.[4] For example, if someone tells you that your new boss is intelligent, you may infer that s/he is dedicated, hardworking, punctual, outgoing, etc., even though you have no basis for these inferences. Most individuals tend to group positive characteristics together (halo effect) and negative characteristics together (horn effect).[5,6]

- *Impression formation theory* says that we form impression about others based on their physical qualities and behaviors, information they tell us about themselves, and information third parties tell us about them. Proponents of this perspective argue that the information we first learned about the

1 DeVito, J. A. (2004). *The interpersonal communication book*, 10th ed. Boston: Pearson-Allyn & Bacon.

2 Beebe, S. A., Beebe, S. J., & Redmond, M. A. (2005). *Interpersonal communication: Relating to others.* Boston: Pearson-Allyn & Bacon.

3 Ibid.

4 Bruner, J. S., & Tagiuri, R. (1954). The perception of people. In G. Lindzey (Ed.) *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Vol. 2, 634–654. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.

5 Dion, K., Berscheid, E., & Walster, E. (1972). What is beautiful is good. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 24*, 285–290.

6 Riggio, R. E. (1987). *The charisma quotient*. New York: Dodd, Mead.

individual and the information we learned most recently about the individual are most important in forming our perceptions.[7] This is known as the primacy effect and the recency effect.[8] For example, you might remember what your boss wore the first day you met him or her and use it to judge how formal/casual an individual s/he is.

- *Attribution theory* argues that we attempt to assign motive or cause to the behavior of another individual.[9] Specifically, we have three options in determining the cause of another's actions: the circumstance, a stimulus of some sort, or the person himself or herself.[10] Individuals raised in the United States often attribute causes to internal factors, while individuals from other cultures may attribute others' behavior to external factors more often than internal factors.[11,12]

- *Standpoint theory* states that everyone sees the world differently because s/he views it from a different position from everyone else.[13] Thus, because your experiences are different from everyone else's, you have a unique position through which you view the world. Your sex, age, religious background, education, nationality, etc., all influence your perceptions of others.

- *Politeness theory* posits that individuals across all cultures have a universal desire for others to be polite to us. Thus, our perceptions of individuals who are polite to us will be more positive than our perceptions of those who are impolite.[14]

It is important to consider that these theories describe processes that occur in your brain, of which you are often unaware. Further, you need to consider that these processes work together. Expectations of politeness may be associated with the implicit personality characteristics your have in a given situation.

Intercultural Communication and Interpersonal Relationships

Communicating across cultures creates many challenges for effective interpersonal communication. Differing cultures and languages increase your chance of miscommunicating. Given these difficulties, Gudykunst offers a special definition of effective communication in cross-cultural settings. He states, "communication is effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to the message that is relative similar to what was intended by the person transmitting it" (p. 289).[15] However, your inability to achieve perfect understanding should not deter you from engaging in cross-cultural communication. For Gudykunst, the best way to achieve effective communication is through mindfulness, or thinking about your communication and continually working to change it in order to be more effective. The best advice for cross-cultural communication is simply: think as you do it.

Impression Management in Interpersonal Relationships

Much of the work related to impression management in interpersonal relationships focuses on maintaining face. Face is "a metaphor for our public self-image, the way we want others to see us and treat us"

7 Wegner, D. M., & Vallacher, R. R. (1977). *Implicit psychology: An introduction to social cognition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

8 Asch, S. (1946). Forming impressions of personality. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 41*, 258–290.

9 Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations.* New York: Wiley.

10 Kelly, G. A. (1955). *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Norton.

11 Matsumoto, D. (1994). *People: Psychology from a cultural perspective.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

12 Aronson, J., Cohen, J., & Nail, P. (1998). Self-affirmation theory: An update and appraisal. In E. Harmon-Jones & J. S. Mills (Eds.). *Cognitive dissonance theory: Revival with revisions and controversies,* 127–147. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

13 Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from women's lives.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

14 Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

15 Gudykunst, W. B. (2005). An anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory of effective communication: Making the mesh of the net finer. In William B. Gudykunst (Ed.). *Theorizing About Intercultural Communication,* 71–92. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

(p. 440).[16] Facework is "specific verbal and nonverbal messages that help to maintain and restore face loss, and to uphold and honor face gain" (p. 190).[17] One of the major tenets of this research is that the importance individuals place on face differs across cultures. Although many Westerners think this notion is primarily a concern of Asian cultures, research indicates that face is a concern for all cultures. In any interpersonal interaction, you have concern for your own face as well as concern for the face of the other individual in the interaction. These two concerns yield four options for facework:[18]

- **Mutual-Face Protection** – In this condition, you will try to preserve face as well as to help the other individual in the interaction preserve face because your concern for your face and your concern for the other's face are both high. Simply, you want to look good and you want your partner to look good as well.

- **Self-Face Defense** – In this situation, your goal is to save face. You have little concern for the other individual; thus, self-face concern is high and other-face concern is low. Here, you don't care how your partner looks as long as you look good.

- **Other-Face Upgrade** – This situation is one in which you will work to help the other individual preserve face or gain face because your concern for self-face is low and your concern for other face is high. With this condition, you allow yourself to look bad so that your partner can look good.

- **Mutual-Face Obliteration** – In this setting, you have low concern for self-face and low concern for other-face; thus, you are not working to maintain face for either individual in the interaction. Here, you are okay with both individuals in the interaction looking bad.

Interpersonal Influence

While much of your interpersonal communication is often implicitly attempting to influence other individuals, there are times when you want to make an explicit request. Two common request strategies are:

- **Foot-in-the-door** – This strategy involves making a small request of the receiver, which the receiver then grants, and then making a larger request of the receiver (the larger request is actually the goal of the interaction). The idea behind this strategy is that once you "get your foot in the door" with the small request, the individual whom you are trying to influence will grant the target/actual request.[19,20]

- **Door-in-the-face** – The door-in-the-face strategy is essentially the opposite of the foot-in-the-door strategy. This strategy involves making a large request designed so that the receiver will turn it down. Then the persuader makes a smaller request which the receiver grants (the smaller request is the goal of the interaction). The idea behind this strategy is for the initial request to be reasonable, but involved enough that most individuals will reject it. This makes the smaller/target/actual request much more doable and increases the likelihood that the receiver will comply.[21]

16 Griffin, E. (2006). *A first look at communication theory*, 6th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

17 Ting-Toomey, S., & Kurogi, A. (1998). Facework competence in intercultural conflict: An updated face-negotiation theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 22*, 187–225.

18 Ting-Toomey, S. (2005). The matrix of face: An updated face-negotiation theory. In William B. Gudykunst (Ed.). *Theorizing About Intercultural Communication,* 71–92. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

19 Freedman, J. L., & Fraser, S. C. (1966). Compliance without pressure: The foot-in-the-door technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 4*, 195–202.

20 DeJong, W. (1979). An examination of self-perception mediation of the foot-in-the-door effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37*, 2221–2239.

21 Cialdini, R. B., Vincent, J. E., Lewis, S. K., Catalan, J., Wheeler, D., & Darby, B. L. (1975). Reciprocal concessions procedure for inducing compliance: The door-in-the-face technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 31*, 206–215.

Establishing Credibility in Interpersonal Interaction

Credibility is critical to interpersonal influence. O'Keefe defines credibility as "the judgments made by a perceiver (e.g., a message recipient) concerning the believability of a communicator" (p. 181).[22]

O'Keefe argues that there are two major components of credibility:

1. **Competence** – perceptions of an individual's intelligence, expertise, and knowledge on a subject

2. **Character** – perceptions of an individual's sincerity, trustworthiness, and concern for others

Types of Credibility

We listen to individuals we judge to be credible and tend to question those who we judge to be not credible. McCroskey[23] proposes three types of credibility:

- **Initial Credibility** – the credibility an individual has before he or she begins to speak – this type of credibility may be the result of the speaker's position, expertise, or simply the fact that s/he was asked to speak.

- **Derived Credibility** – the credibility an individual creates through what s/he has to say – this type of credibility may stem from the speaker's ability to communicate, the speaker's ideas, or the information s/he uses to support his or her position.

- **Terminal Credibility** – the credibility an individual has when s/he finishes speaking – this type of credibility is often a result of the other two types and influences the impact of the message (i.e., will the listeners adopt a long-term change).

In order to ensure that individuals with whom you interact see you as credible, you need to first examine the amount of information they have about you. If you are attempting to influence an individual who has limited information about you (potentially a situation in which you have low initial credibility), it may be useful to provide him or her with information about your competence and/or credibility. Suppose you are attempting to influence an individual who knows you, but in a different context (i.e., a friend who recently began working for your organization). You may need to think about how you can derive credibility in this situation by conveying your competence at work.

Effective Public Speaking to Gain Influence in Organizations

Numerous factors contribute to an effective public speech. The following is a list of suggestions from the most popular university-level public speaking text on the market designed to help you improve your public speaking:[24]

CHOOSE APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

- avoid terminology with which your audience is unfamiliar unless you explain it

- avoid stereotyping sex-roles, sexual orientation, etc.

- avoid use of male terms to refer to both men and women

- avoid information that is not germane to the topic

- use labels individuals/groups use to identify themselves[25]

22 O'Keefe, D. J. (2002). *Persuasion: Theory and research*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

23 McCroskey, J. A. (2006). *An introduction to rhetorical communication,* 9th ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

24 Lucas, S. E. (2007). *The art of public speaking.* Boston: McGraw-Hill.

25 Maggio, R. (1997). *Talking about people: A guide to fair and accurate language*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.

VOCAL QUALITIES

- vary your inflection – it is difficult to listen to monotone presentations

- choose appropriate volume – too loud equals annoying and to soft means no one will hear you

- use pauses wisely – a well-timed pause can be very powerful, but consistent pauses and/or pausing too long will distract the audience

- select an appropriate rate – fast is not necessarily bad, neither is slow – you need to select a rate appropriate for the occasion, the topic, and the audience

- pronounce words correctly – mispronouncing words may damage your credibility

- articulate/enunciation – clearly form all words; don't run words together; don't chop off the endings of words; don't mumble

USE APPROPRIATE NONVERBAL BEHAVIORS

- avoid nonfluencies such as "uh," "um," "like," and "you know" – these are distracting, decrease your credibility, and may make you appear deceptive[26]

- dress appropriately – you may need to do some research to find out what appropriate means

- perfect your posture/movement – good posture contributes to good vocal qualities – all movement should have purpose and usually should be kept to a minimum

- make eye contact – eye contact engages your audience and provides you with important feedback about your presentation; however, different cultures have different rules about eye contact[27]

- use appropriate gestures – gestures should enhance the presentation rather than detract from it

RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

- research your topic – this is essential for preparing your remarks and for your credibility

- research your source materials – this is especially important if you want to persuade your audience – the credibility of your information is just as important as your credibility

- research your audience – knowing your audience will help you tailor your presentation – demographic information is a good starting point, but you will often want to know about audience members' life experiences

- research yourself – be aware of how nervous you are, what you look like giving a presentation, and seek objective insight into what people think about your public speaking abilities

PRACTICE

- Effective public speaking requires practice!

- be familiar enough with your presentation that you can go "off" your notes if necessary

- audiotape/videotape yourself or speak in front of a mirror to see where you need to improve

- prepare answers to questions you think you might be asked about your presentation

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26 O'Keefe, D. J. (2002). *Persuasion: Theory and Research*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

27 Knapp, M. L., & Hall, J. A. (2002). *Nonverbal communication in human interaction*, 6th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

CommGAP

The **Communication for Governance and Accountability Program (CommGAP)**, a global program at the World Bank, seeks to confront the challenges inherent in the political economy of development. By applying innovative communication approaches that improve the quality of the public sphere – by amplifying citizen voice; promoting free, independent, and plural media systems; and helping government institutions communicate better with their citizens – the program aims to demonstrate the power of communication principles, processes and structures in promoting good and accountable governance, and hence better development results.

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