Interpersonal communication

Communication is critical for family adaptability, cohesion & functionality.
There is a common communication pattern in each culture; each family develops its own communication pattern.
People develop communication skills within the family system; learning both the cultural patterns & the specific family styles & rules.

A symbolic transactional process involving creating & sharing meaning through consistent patterns.
Assumptions:
- COMMUNICATION is transactional (exchange of information/thought/ideas)
- It is impossible to not communicate

The structural elements of communication
- The communicator
- The message
- The medium
- The recipient
Technology is an adjunct to one or more of these elements.
More focus on the message & the medium; often neglecting the communicator & the reaction of the receiver.

The message
- Is the heart of communication
- Units of information transmitted between sender & receiver.
- May contain feelings, thoughts, ideas, suggestions or commands
- After preparing (encoding) the message, the sender decides whether the message needs to be:
  - Explained, disguised, censored, or made appropriate to the receiver/situations.
- Message is sent to the receiver who will decode the info as an input for the individual system.

Figure: Parts of communication process system
Messages are thought of in terms of words
Words are actually signs or symbols
We are now in a more semiotic age = visual symbolic communication (image symbols)

THE MEDIUM
- Is the WAY a message is presented to the receiver
- Influences the “meaning”
  - TV ads. Are costly; messages are short; aiming for quick impressions through sounds, colors, movements, images, few words which are normally “powerful”

THE RECIPIENT
- The receiver of the message.
- Communicator must understand the receiver & be aware of the context of the message being received.
- Different words or gestures can give different meanings to recipients who have different perceptions from those of the sender.
- “Interpretations” lead to reactions.
  - Example: table manners; “specific jokes”, slangs etc
- Responses to communication are either visible physiological appearances or through technological devices (i.e. testing biofeedback - body temperature, brain waves, stress levels etc)
- Our cultural background influences our perceptions; so do our socializations agents & contexts (family, friends, teachers)
- Place & space add to contextual meanings & influence our interpretations & understandings of a message (whispering = scared or shy?)

Communication Patterns Influence Family Meanings
- Meanings come through continuous interpretations of and response to messages.
- The sensitivity of our basic senses serve as the first filters in communication.
- Our perceptions are also filtered through our family system & social system through:
  - Language.
  - Accepted ways of seeing & interpreting things.
  - All socially-agreed upon conventions that standardized our world.
- Through the filtering process we assign general meanings to verbal and nonverbal symbols.
- General experiences are shared with many people we encounter.
- Specific and unique experiences are gained within one’s family.
The language that we use often limits the shape and meanings we can ascertain.

Individual characteristics can uniquely influence one’s interpretations.

After functioning in a family system - comfortable with ability to handle the language symbols, can interpret them at all levels for their systems “pattern”

Communication pattern:

- Is both verbal and nonverbal
- Is specific to the relationship within the system
- Is reciprocal & interactive
- Is often predictable
- Contain both content & feeling messages
- Defines relationships
- May be changed by forces within the systems
- Mays stimulate changes in that system

Factors that influence the creation of meanings in communication:

- Family of origin influences.
- Family communication rules.
- Gender and communication.
- Communication framework.

Family of Origin

- The family that we are “born into” – known as “family of orientation”.
- Family as our first socialization context - specific experiences within the family reflect a unique combination of personalities.
- Will influence later experiences in life - one’s own “family of procreation” i.e. “family secret”, “in the honor of the family”

Family Communication Rules

- Rules are relationship agreements that prescribe and limit a family’s behavior over time.
- Family system has its own “administrative” system that forms a structure which serves as guidance for the family.

We may not realize some of the rules since many are not told but are learned through repeated interactions (a range of explicit implicit rules).

- Family rules developed over time.
- It set predictable patterns that regulate behavior.
- It involved expectations.
- Unknown rules may create conflict.
- Communication rules: what, how, to whom
GENDER & COMMUNICATION

- GENDER may influence:
  - the way people communicate
  - meaning of the messages perceived and received by people involved.
- Socio-cultural influences dictate which behavior is gender appropriate.
  - big boys don’t cry..
- Contextual influence:
  - office setting vs. non-formal setting
  - male-female in private vs. in public

FAMILY COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORKS

- Family members communicate in order to form a group that can share information.
- This is arranged through a communication framework.
- Family members establish certain channels for information flow, share the meanings through interactions & by a prescribes path through the family communication framework.
- Vertical vs. horizontal communication

The family communication framework reflect power structure in the family.
- Some structures promote dominance, others encourage sharing.
- It helps to maintain the roles and rules operating within the system.

COMMUNICATION PATTERN

- Show flow of information and verbal exchanges within one's family.
- All patterns have their strengths and weaknesses.
  - may work well for one family at one specific time
  - while for others it may not work at all
- Types of communication pattern: horizontal chain, vertical chain, Y pattern, wheel pattern, gap pattern and all channel network.

Communication pattern

- Horizontal chain - negotiable rules
- Vertical chain - non-negotiable rules
- Y pattern
- Wheel pattern
- Chain pattern:
  - Show hierarchy of power.
  - There is an authority figure.
  - Members rely on one person for information.
- The Y & Wheel patterns:
  - There is one pivotal person who monitors the information flow.
  - Wheel allows more exchange of information.
- A gap pattern depicts lack of info exchange.
- All channel network pattern:
  - Describes a 2-way communication channels between members.
  - Communication flows in every direction.
  - Members have equal chance to discuss issues.