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MODUL PEMBELAJARAN : KOM 5111 COMMUNICATION THEORY disediakan dalam 
bentuk bahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran kendiri di bawah program Pendidikan Jarak Jauh, 
Universiti Putra Malaysia. Sebarang pertanyaan dan cadangan untuk memperbaiki gaya penyampaian 
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KOM 5111

Communication Theory
A Study Guide
Course Outline

Contact Procedures

Inquiries concerning the teaching of the course and administration of your enrolment can be obtained by following the procedures below:

Academic Inquiries

Any question concerning the course can be made by contacting:

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Enrolment Inquiries

For information regarding administration, fees and grades please contact the Student Administration office at 039486101 ext. 1130/1137/1138.

Distance Education Student Liaison Officer

For all other inquiries regarding Distance Learning please contact IDEAL Help Desk:

Phone : 039486101 ext. 2935/2936
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Mailing Information

This course has three sets of mailing materials:

1. Course outline
2. Course materials (Sections 1, 2 and 3)
3. Students' evaluation of the course
Module Writers

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Course Outline

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Department of Development Communication
Faculty of Human Ecology
Universiti Putra Malaysia
Other course taught: Introduction to Mass Communication, Communication Technology and Development Communication.
Introduction and Course Overview

"Mr. Mat was approaching the stage to deliver his speech as Chairman of the Parents Teachers Association. Along the way he felt his stomach rumbling and his legs shaking. When he reached the stage and stood behind the rostrum, the audience could see sweat on his face, he looked tense, his body was stiff and he was holding on to the mike and standing very firmly. Poor Mr. Mat! Why was he experiencing such severe anxiety?"

How could we explain such communication phenomenon? What would be the consequence of his anxiety?

Enrol in Communication Theory Course and you will discover how to explain this phenomenon and many more phenomena in interpersonal, group, organisational and mass communication contexts.

Course Aim

This course is about communication theory. The aim of the course is to equip you with knowledge and understanding of communication theories and how theories can be used as a basis to understand, explain and predict human behaviour. It will help you broaden your understanding of human behaviour in various contexts and make you a better individual whether as a member of an organisation or an informal group or a family member.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course you will be able to:

1. recognise the role and function of communication theory.
2. identify the characteristics of a good communication theory.
3. understand the use of communication theory in research and training.
4. apply communication theory to explain communication situations or phenomena.
Course Outline

Course Content

The key topics covered by the course include:
1. definition of theory and communication
2. definition and characteristics of communication theory
3. development of communication theory
4. interpersonal communication theory
5. group communication theory
6. organisational communication theory
7. mass communication theory

Resource Material

Required Texts


Recommended Readings

For more information regarding research pertaining to a particular topic please refer to current journals in communication such as Mass Communication Review Yearbook, Communication Research, Human Communication Research, and Journal of Communication.
Course Outline

Course Format/How to Use Notes

The module is divided into three sections:

Section 1: Foundation of Communication Theory
Section 2: Interpersonal, Group and Organisational Communication Theory
Section 3: Mass Communication Theory

Presentation of the Module

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Assessment

Aims of the assessment

The assessment is designed to ensure that you successfully complete your background reading and acquire a basic understanding of the various topics covered in this course. By working on them you will gain the necessary knowledge that will help you with the revision of the material for the final examination.

Terms

There will be three assignments and one final examination. The assignments will help you to consolidate the study materials and prepare you for the final examination. Feedback from the assignments will help you to monitor your progress on the course.
SECTION 1

FOUNDATION OF COMMUNICATION THEORY
Contents

Your Learning Objectives
Readings and Text References
Commentary

Topic 1
Introduction, Definition of Theory, Definition of
Communication, Definition of Communication Theory

Topic 2
Development and Perspective of Communication Theory

Topic 3
Nature and of Functions of Theory

Topic 4
Criteria for evaluating Theory

Summary
Review Questions
Section 1: Foundation of Communication Theory

Your Learning Objectives

After studying this module you should be able to:

1. define the concept of theory, communication and communication theory
2. explain the process of theory development
3. discuss the perspective of communication theory
4. briefly discuss the nature of theory
5. identify the functions of theory
6. identify a good theory based on the criteria for evaluating theory

Readings and Text References


Commentary

Understanding this section of communication theory is essential, as such you must ensure that all required texts are read. If you face any problem while going through the texts please contact the course lecturer. If you do not have a communication background and have problem understanding what is communication, it might help if you read more about communication.
Section 1: Foundation of Communication Theory

Topic 1

Introduction, Definition of Theory, Definition of Communication, Definition of Communication Theory

What is the importance of communication theory in the contexts of understanding human behaviour? This question can be answered by first understanding the concept of theory and the concept of communication.

Among others a theory is an attempt to explain or represent a phenomenon. It is an important base to understanding other aspects of human behaviour within different contexts. Since communication is one of the main components of human behaviour an understanding of communication theory is essential towards understanding human as an individual; as a member of a formal or informal group; as a member of the community; as a member of the organisational set-up; or as actor or consumer of mass communication.

Definition of Theory

A theory can be considered as the followings:

- an attempt to explain or represent a phenomenon
- someone's conceptualisation of an observed set of events
- a clear statement of what is believed to be happening in the environment
- ideas that guide us in making decisions and taking actions
- the educated guesswork of laypersons
- the scholars construction of what an experience is like, based on systematic observation
- the scholars' best representation of the state of affairs at any given time
- involved a great deal of focused observation, hypothesising, and revision.

The above definitions are some attempts at defining theory. These definitions are given in most theory books and in Littlejohn pages 6-9.
Section 1: Foundation of Communication Theory

Definition of Communication

Communication is complex and multidisciplinary in nature. It tends to be abstract and have multiple meanings. Definitions of communication can be obtained from most communication books. Littlejohn on pages 6-8 has summarised the concepts of communication according to Dance conceptual components.

These includes symbols/verbal/speech; understanding; interaction/relationship/social process; reduction of uncertainty; process; transfer/transmission/interchange; linking/binding; commonality; channel/carrier/means/route; replicating memories; discriminative responses/behaviour modifying; stimuli; intentional; time situation; power.

Definition of Communication Theory

Communication theories are theories that contain explicit or implicit definition of communication. It contains variables that indicates relationships to explain communication phenomena. Relate the definitions of theory and communication and form a definition of communication theory.

Importance of Theory

Understanding of communication theories allows us to be more competent and adaptive in dealing with others. Knowledge of communication theory will result in a better understanding of the communication process or what happens during communication. This will help increase our ability to adapt to circumstances. Since communication process is related to human behaviour, an understanding of communication theories will result in our understanding of human beings. Theories provides us with a set of useful conceptual tools that will help us interpret communication experiences in more flexible, useful and discriminating ways.

Please read Why Study Communication Theory on page 3 of Littlejohn.
Section 1: Foundation of Communication Theory

Topic 2

Development and Perspective of Communication Theory

Theory is an abstract representation of reality but it is not purely abstract since it is grounded in actual experience. The two concepts are interrelated in the sense that experience affects theory and theory affects our view of the experience.

Theory ranges from an observation or just hunches about certain events to more reliable rules or laws about communication phenomena. A theory may be develop from our hunches which are then tested and reformulated. A continuous process of hypotheses formulation, gathering empirical evidence and reformulating the hypotheses based on the evidence obtained is commonly known as the research process. Thus the process of theory development includes:

1. investigating facts considered significant
2. testing the theory’s predictive power
3. further developing the theory.

Theory may grow in three different ways, that is by extension, intensification and revolution. Growth by extension indicates that knowledge is added piece by piece, new concepts are added to old concepts. By the process of intensification a more precise understanding of individual concepts are made. On the other hand growth by revolution indicates the discovery of an extraordinary case that is counter to the assumptions of the theories in use. This will result in the development of new theoretical approach. The new theory which is different in outlook will emerge. As the revolutionary theory is accepted by those in the field it becomes the new approach or theory. Read Theory Development and Change on pages 30-31 of Littlejohn.

Perspective of Theories

Fisher’s view of perspective is a point of view or a way of conceptualising an area of study. Since theories are abstractions and constructions, therefore the configuration of theories will depend on the perspective of the theorists. The perspective will guide the theorists to select their focus; to explain the process; and to conceptualise what is observed. So depending on the theorists perspective, concepts that is considered not important by one may be the focus of another.

Four major perspectives are behaviouristic, transmissional, interactional, and transactional.
Section 1: Foundation of Communication Theory

Behaviouristic perspective which originates from the behavioural school of psychology places great emphasis on stimulus and response. This perspective tends to emphasise the ways individuals are affected by messages.

Transmissonal perspective indicates communication as the transfer of information from source to receiver. A linear model indicating movement from one location to another stresses communication media, time, and sequential elements.

Interational perspective accepts that communication is a reciprocal response to another. This view can be represented by the circle. Key concepts are feedback and mutual concepts.

Transaction perspective emphasises sharing. Communication involves active participation of all concerned. Context, process, and function are important concepts in transactional process. Thus communication is highly situational, dynamic process that can fulfil individual as well as social functions.

Please read Philosophical Issues in the Study of Communication from pages 32-37 of Littlejohn.
Topic 3

Nature and of Functions of Theory

Theories can be generalised as any conceptual representation or explanation of a phenomenon. Communication theories in the most general form consists of attempts by scholars to represent the process of communication. Two generalisations about theories are abstractions and constructions. Abstractions indicate that each theory is not a complete communication process but only a partial view with certain aspect being left out. No single theory can explain the complete communication process.

Theories are created by people. It represent various ways in which observers see the environment. Theories are not reality and reality cannot be seen in one or two theories.

Please read Littlejohn pages 22-23 for Nature of Theory. It might increase your understanding of the topic if you read further Basic Elements of Theory from pages 23-29.

Functions of Theory

Theory serves several functions. Littlejohn on pages 21-22 listed nine functions of communication theory. They are:

1. Organising and summarising
2. Focus
3. Clarifying
4. Observational
5. Predictive
6. Heuristic
7. Communicative
8. Control
9. Generative

For explanation of functions of communication theory please refer to Littlejohn Function of Theory on pages 31-32.
Section 1: Foundation of Communication Theory

Topic 4
Criteria for evaluating Theory

In order to compare one communication theory with another a few criteria can be used. Five criteria used by Littlejohn are: theoretical scope, appropriateness, heuristic value, validity, and parsimony. Please refer to pages 38-41 of Littlejohn.

Please remember these criteria and know how to use these criteria to evaluate theories that you will encounter when discussing specific theories later in the module.

Summary

As you remember this section consists of four topics which introduces you to communication theory. You should be able to explain the meaning of theory, communication, and communication theory. Communication theory plays an important role in your understanding of communication phenomena. Theories will provide you with a set of conceptual tools that will enhance your understanding of human communication phenomena and help you interpret those experiences.

In order to have a wider view of communication theories you should be aware of the four major perspective of theories – behaviouristic, transmissional, interactional, and transactional. This knowledge will help you form your views of communication theories at the end of the course.

After going through the readings certainly you should be able to explain the nature of theories and identify the elements which made up the theory. A knowledge of the function of theory should enable you to use communication theory as a basis in your studies as well as in your daily encounter.
Section 1: Foundation of Communication Theory

Review Questions

These questions will help you navigate through the first section of the module on communication theory. As you recall this section deals with foundation of communication theory. After reading the required texts please answer all the review questions in your own words.

1. Why is it important to study communication theory?
2. Give five (5) definitions of communication theory.
3. Explain what you understand by this definition of theory: a scholar’s construction of what an experience is like, based on systematic observation.
4. Define the term communication. Why are there numerous definitions of communication?
5. Indicate the stages in theory development.
6. How does theory develop?
7. What do you understand by perspective of communication theory? Explain major perspective of communication theory.
8. What are the two generalisations about communication theory? What do you understand by the term abstraction and construction?
9. What are the functions of communication theory? Explain the terms heuristic, predictive and focus as they relates to the function of communication theory.
10. Why must we evaluate communication theories? What are the criteria that should be use for the evaluation? Why must we select a theory that is parsimonious to explain a communication phenomenon?
SECTION 2

INTERPERSONAL, GROUP AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION THEORY
Content

Your Learning Objective
Reading and Text References
Commentary

Topic 1
Interpersonal Communication Theory

Topic 2
Group and Organisational Communication Theory

Review Questions
Section 2 : Interpersonal, Group and Organisational Communication Theory

Your Learning Objectives

After studying this section of the module you should be able to:

1. Identify the major theories of interpersonal communication, group communication and organisational communication.
2. Describe and explain the major theories of interpersonal communication, group communication and organisational communication.
3. Apply the major theories of interpersonal communication, group communication and organisational communication in research and training.
4. Analyse the strength and weaknesses of the major theories of interpersonal communication, group communication and organisational communication.

Reading and Text References


Through this section of the module the first book is referred to as Infante and the second book is referred to as Littlejohn.

Commentary

This section of the module requires students to read the assigned chapters from the text book in order for the students to comprehend and understand the topic being discussed. Keeping up with the weekly reading will help students in meeting the expectation of the course.

Additional Readings

There is no additional reading assigned for this section. However, the students are encouraged to read any material related to interpersonal, group and organisational communication which is of interest to the students.
Topic 1

Interpersonal Communication Theory

Before we examine the major interpersonal communication theories, first let us review the concept of interpersonal communication and history of the field. Then we will discuss why we do research and theorizing in interpersonal communication, and examine some selected (influential) interpersonal communication theories.

What is interpersonal communication?

Communication always occur in context and the nature of communication depends on this context. One of the contexts of communication is dyadic, one-on-one interaction. The general definition of interpersonal communication is face to face interaction between two individuals or two individuals interacting directly and personally. It can be a formal interaction or an informal interaction. Communication theorists have defined interpersonal communication in a number of ways. Although there are several definition of interpersonal communication, there are commonalties in these definitions. They are (1) face to face interaction, (2) verbal and non-verbal message exchange, (3) high degree of involvement and feedback, and (4) communicator share the role of sender and receiver and in their interaction they create meaning and understanding. At the same time it is important to note that interpersonal interaction take place between persons who have a clearly established relationship.

If we analyse our communication experiences, a large portion of our communication is dyadic communication. At home we interact with our wife, our children. At work, on individual basis, we interact with co-worker, supervisor and subordinate. Any episode of interpersonal communication involve at least three elements - the communicators, their discourse, and their relationship. We communicate with other individual for various reasons, such as to share feelings, opinions and facts, to motivate and/or persuade others, and to establish interpersonal relationship. How two individuals create understanding, form relationship, and manage and strategize their interaction are of interest to communication scholars. This section will help you understand the processes and the factors that facilitate or inhibit interpersonal communication and relationship development.
The history of interpersonal communication study

Interpersonal communication is the oldest field in the communication discipline. Its history can be traced back to the classical period. It originates from the study of rhetoric. Prior to 1970s few communication scholars are engaged in research and theory development in interpersonal communication. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, research and theorising in interpersonal communication were conducted primarily by social psychologist and sociologists. The focus of research during this period was not on the communication process, but the focus was on how attitudes, belief, and values could be altered via mass communication messages. By mid 1970s, scholars in the communication discipline was heavily involved in researching and theorising about interpersonal communication and relationship development. The field of interpersonal communication was legitimised with the formation of interpersonal communication division in communication associations. As the field began to grow, greater emphasis was placed on understanding the dynamic of dyadic interaction the impact of communication on social relation. With the rigorous research and theorising, many theories of interpersonal communication and relational development had been formulated.

What do interpersonal communication theories try to explain? What are their focus?

Before answering the above question let us first answer this question: Why do we do research and theorising in interpersonal communication? This is a basic question. We do research and theorising in interpersonal communication in order to understand the process and dynamic of dyadic interaction. Recall in the preceding section, theory provides explanation of a communication phenomenon. The knowledge and understanding of the process and dynamic of interpersonal communication would helps us improve our interpersonal communication and relationship.

Theories had been developed to explain various aspect of interpersonal communication process. However in this topic you will be exposed to the theories that deals with relational development and processes.

Theories explaining relational development

A good and established theory explaining personal process in interaction is Berger’s Uncertainty Reduction Theory (read Infante chapter 9, page 272-279). The core concept of Berger’s theory is uncertainty reduction. This theory explains why and how individual seeks information during interaction. Berger’s posited several theorems describing the factors that influence interpersonal communication. Berger also suggests a variety of strategies in reducing uncertainty. For further information regarding this theory read Littlejohn pages 268-272.

You should also try to relate this theory in your everyday life.
Section 2: Interpersonal, Group and Organisational Communication Theory

Theories explaining relational processes in interpersonal communication

Virtually all interpersonal communication involve two parts: the content and relationship or relational dimension. Interpersonal communication functions to establish, maintain, and change relationships. The relationship itself determines the nature of interpersonal communication. The relationship message is largely non-verbal. Communicators’ perception of the relationship depend in large measure on the non-verbal elements of the interaction. Littlejohn (read Littlejohn chapter 12, pages 257-267) provides an overview of theories of interpersonal communication in relationships.

Several theories have been formulated to explain the process of relationship development. Three groups of theories have been identified, as classified by Littlejohn, i.e. (1) theories of interpersonal attraction, (2) theories of social penetration, and (3) theories of relational dissolution— which roughly correspond with the three phases of relational development.

Balance theory, and social exchange theory are two examples of influential theories of interpersonal attraction. The theoretical question posed by this line of inquiry is: Why people are or are not attracted to one another? Various factors have been used to explain and predict interpersonal attraction. In social exchange theory by Thibaut and Kelly, the theory says that interpersonal relationships are evaluated by the person in terms of the value of the consequences. Social exchange theory deals with the idea that people generally try to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. Thibaut and Kelly explain the theory in terms of rewards and costs. Individuals initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships on the basis of real and perceived rewards and costs associated with the relationship. Another theory which belong to the same family with social exchange theory is equity theory. Equity theory also centered on costs and rewards (read Infinite chapter 9, pages 281-286). This theory can also be used to explain why employee perform the way they do. After reading the required text, you should be able to identify and describe some theories that seek to explain how interpersonal attraction work.

An extension of social exchange theory is Altman and Taylor’s social penetration theory. This theory explains the nature of communication as relationships develop. According to this theory, as communication develop, communication moves from relative shallow, nonintimate level (i.e., cultural and sociological information being communicated) to deeper, more personal ones (i.e., exchanging psychological information). Further, this theory states that the greater the perceived rewards relative to cost, the more penetration will occur and the greater the rate of penetration. From the reading can you identify the factors that enhance and inhibit social penetration.

Relationships not only develop, but it may also deteriorate or dissolve. Duck’s theory of interpersonal relationship dissolution and Baxter’s theory of relationship disengagement are two excellent theory that explain the process of relational deterioration and dissolution (read Littlejohn chapter 12, page 266-268). Duck’s theory explain the process by which dissolution is accomplished. Baxter’s theory explain how people use communication to accomplish disengagement. From the reading you should be able to identify the phases in relationship dissolution or disengagement and the key concepts of the theories. Try to relate and apply what you have gained from the readings to your daily lives, at home and at work.
Section 2: Interpersonal, Group and Organisational Communication Theory

Review Questions

1. What is interpersonal communication?

2. Briefly describe the history of the study of interpersonal communication.

3. Why do we study the process of interpersonal communication?

4. What are the categories of interpersonal communication theory? How do they differ in focus?

5. Describe Berger’s theory of uncertainty reduction. What are the focal concepts of the theory? How would you apply this situation when interacting with a co-worker?

6. Describe Kelly’s attribution theory. What is your comment on this theory?

7. What theory would you use to examine and understand persuasion processes in one-on-one situation? Describe the main idea of this theory.

8. What do social exchange theory seek to explain? What is your assessment of this theory?

9. Describe equity theory. How can it be applied in your organization?

10. How does social penetration theory differ from theory of social exchange and balance theory?

11. Describe Baxter’s theory of relationship disengagement. Be sure to identify the key concepts and possible disengagement strategies.
Section 2: Interpersonal, Group and Organisational Communication Theory

Topic 2

Group and Organisational Communication Theory

Introduction

Communication within groups and organisations consists of interpersonal communication processes and relationships. A group consists of two or more people who interacts with one another in such a manner that each person influences and is influenced by the other. You might know that a small group may have 10 members or less and some scholars define a small group as consisting between 5 to 12 people. However a group is characterised by other characteristics than mere numbers.

What are the necessary ingredients for a gathering of people to qualify as a group? An important element of a group is constant communication between its members. Other characteristics are: exists for a considerable time period; members must have a common and shared goals; and possess an interactional structure, i.e. its possible for members to interact among themselves.

What then differentiate an organisation from a group since both are made up of individuals? Well you might say that members in an organisation are involved in a co-operative relationship. You are right. Other characteristics of organisations are: it is formal in nature; usually have a set of goals that might be bigger than the goals of group; functions according to a set of policies, procedures and regulations; hierarchical in nature; may consists of many people; and usually lasts longer than a human lifetime. Perhaps it is clearer now that groups and organisations as contexts in which communication occur are closely related. You might recall that groups and organisations consists of individuals, as such interpersonal theories which you come across earlier in this section may help you understand theories related to group and organisational communication.

As you are aware communication processes within organisations may consists of interaction between group leaders and members; superior and subordinates; and others. Thus the components of this section are really interrelated, therefore make sure you observe the relationship between interpersonal, group, and organisational communication theory.

You must be familiar with the concept of system. According to various experts system means something that contains:

1. objects/parts/elements/members
2. attributes/qualities/properties
3. internal relationships among objects, which indicates interdependence as well as constraint
4. environment or surroundings in which the system exist.
Section 2: Interpersonal, Group and Organisational Communication Theory

All systems, whether biological, psychological, or socio-cultural have common characteristics. You may have come across this concept in the earlier section of this module. However, always remember that examples of systems include an organisation, a family, or any such groupings. Read Littlejohn Chapter 3 on system theory to understand fully the concept of system.

We will now look at a few theories of group and organisational communication. These are some of the theories that you should understand as part of your effort to understand group and organisational processes within those contexts. However, you may read other theories discussed in Littlejohn or Infante.

Group Communication Theory

Collins and Guetzkow Organizing Model

This model explains how people relate to groups, specifically regarding the impact of group on individuals. Read Littlejohn, pages 282-284. It can be called a theory of interpersonal effects in group. You should take note of concepts like syntality traits, internal structure, and population traits. Emphasis of the theory is on how people with different personalities and traits work together to achieve their goals efficiently. You should also take note of the concepts of synergy, effective synergy, group maintenance synergy. How are the three concepts related? You will notice that the effective synergy of the group will be higher if members have similar attitudes towards certain issues or objects.

Janis Groupthink Theory

This theory relates to adequacy of decisions made by groups. Read Littlejohn, pages 286-288. You will note that this theory is normative and applied in nature. You should understand the definition of groupthink as the deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgement of a group as a result of in-group pressures. You should also recognise the negative outcomes of groupthink. Recognise also the seven symptoms of groupthink. Take note also of the effect of cohesiveness in group. From your experience, you might say that group cohesiveness is something good, but according to this theory cohesiveness may result in groupthink. Janis suggested steps to prevent groupthink. Read and deliberate on the suggestions. Try to relate the theory to actual events within your experience. Note also the multidisciplinary view of the theory.
Hirokawa Faulty Group Decision Making

This is a theory that looks at the sources of error in group decision making. Read Littlejohn, pages 284-286. You should take note that there are six steps involved in decision making. Do remember the steps because according to the theory faulty decisions are made due to errors that may occur anywhere along the six steps. Recognise that errors may be due to improper assessment of problems, inappropriate goals and objectives, improper assessment of positive and negative qualities; inadequate information base; and faulty reasoning from information base. It is important to take note that errors at the first step will carry over through the remaining five steps. You should be aware of group members’ influence especially at the beginning of the decision making process. Note also that this theory is normative in nature.

Organisational Communication Theory

Integrative theory/structural-functional theory

According to the proponents of this theory, Farace, Monge, and Russel, an organisation is a system of at least two people with interdependence, input, throughput, and output. The organisation system is characterised by constant communication and co-operation among and between its elements or parts, to produce end products by using energy, information and materials. Information which is considered as the reduction of uncertainty is an important resource within organisation. Within the context of this theory communication is the reduction of uncertainty using information. And communication according to these experts is the use of common symbolic forms that refer to mutually understood referents. Check this definition of communication with other definitions that you have noted. Is it consistent with any that you know?

Read page 303 of Littlejohn and you will come across the dimensions of this theory. It consists of three dimensions:

1. Systems level which can be broken down into individual, dyadic, group, organisational.

2. Function of communication at each level:
   i. production - direction, co-ordination, and control
   ii. innovation - generation of changes and new idea
   iii. maintenance - individual values and interpersonal relationships

3. Structure or patterns in transmission of messages.

Key concepts that you need to understand at the individual, dyad, group, and organisational level is communication load which can result in underload or overload.
Section 2: Interpersonal, Group and Organisational Communication Theory

At the dyadic, group and organisation level the concept of rules is important. Note that rules patterned expectations among dyad, and it is the communication policy of the organisation. Read Littlejohn pages 304-307 and note the concepts such as micronetwork, macronetwork.

What are some criticism of the theory? Recall the criteria for evaluating theory in Section 1. Can you apply those criteria for this theory? What are your evaluation of this theory? This theory is also discussed in Infante, pages 325-326.

Likert’s Four Systems

This theory focuses on the human factor in the organisation. Read Littlejohn pages 308-312 and you will note that it is possible to categorise organisation according to organisational function as exploitative-authoritative, benevolent-authoritative, consultative, and participative. The role of communication according to this theory is as an intervening variable. You might notice that this theory is more prescriptive rather than explanatory. Please note Figure 14-2 (page 309, Littlejohn), Figure 14-3 (page 310) and Table 14-1 (page 311). Try to relate the concepts given to actual situation that you might encounter.

Weick’s Theory of Organising

Another way of looking at organisation is to consider it as activities rather than structure or people. Read Littlejohn, pages 314-316. You should take note that organising activities is necessary to reduce equivocality (ambiguity or uncertainty) within organisation. The importance of communication can be seen from the purpose of interaction as to achieve common meaning among members. You will note that the elements of Weick’s theory are the environment, equivocality, enactment, selection, retention, choices, assembly rules, behaviour cycles, and equivocality removed. Try to understand what each of the concepts mean within the context of this theory. You might notice that this theory is quite abstract.

You might like to read Infante, pages 318-322 on Weick’s Theory of Organisational Information.

Poole and McPhee Theory of Structuration.

This theory represents another view of organisation. The theorists look at organisation as consisting of structure and climate. Read pages 317-320 of Littlejohn and you will note that the structure will define the organisation. Note the two types of communication in the formal structure. Try to differentiate between indirect communication and metacommunication. Another important concept you need to understand is organisational climate. What is organisational climate? How does it develop? And how does this concept affect organisation?
Section 3: Interpersonal, Group and Organisational Communication Theory

Review Questions

1. Explain the difference between groups and organisations.

2. What is a system? Why is the system’s approach important in understanding group and organisational communication theory?

3. What are the differences and similarities between Weick’s Theory of Organising and Poole & McPhee Theory of Structuration in Organisation?

4. Likert Four is an organisational theory that focuses on the human factor. To what extent is the categorisation of organisation based on function be applied to actual situation?

5. Janis Groupthink Theory, and Hirokawa Faulty Group Decision Making deal with decision making in groups. What are the strengths of each theory in understanding group processes?
SECTION

3

MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY
Content

Your Learning Objectives
Readings and Text References
Commentary

Topic 1
Introduction to Mass Communication Theory

Topic 2
Normative Theories of Mass Communication

Topic 3
The Media Effects Theories

Topic 4
Social Learning and Violence Theories

Topic 5
Theories of Active Audience

Topic 6
System Theories of Communication Processes

Summary
Review Questions
Your Learning Objectives

After studying this section you should be able to:

1. Recognise the major mass communication theories.
2. Identify the components and characteristics of the major mass communication theories.
3. Apply the major communication theories in research and training.
4. Understand the development of the major mass communication theories.
5. Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the major mass communication theories.

Readings and Text References

This section of the module uses a text book:


Throughout this section this text book is referred to as Baran's.

Commentary

This section requires students to read the assigned chapters from the text book. In order for the students to better understand the topic being discussed, please take note on the salient points mentioned in each reading. Keeping up with the weekly readings will help students in meeting the expectation of this course.

Additional Readings

There is no additional reading assigned for this section. However, the students are encouraged to read Baran's entire book and any other materials related to mass communication theory.
Section 3: Mass Communication Theory

Topic 1
Introduction to Mass Communication Theory

For this topic, students are required to read Barzai’s Chapter 1, Introduction on page 2 to page 18 and Chapter 2, Mass Communication Theory on page 20 to page 30. Please pay special attention to the “Three Questions about Media” starting on page 7, “Four Eras of Media Theory” starting on page 9 and “Emergence of a Scientific Perspective on Mass Communication” starting on page 12. Besides this, please take note of the scholars who pioneered the studies in the field of communication.

Before we discuss the mass communication theory in detail, let us review the concept of mass communication. Usually, mass communication refers to activities or processes of transmitting messages involving mass media which originates from a source and directed to the audience of many scattered in many places. We can classify a communication activity as mass communication when it involves the followings:

1. The source is either owned by the government or big business institution.
2. The audience are many, scattered and heterogeneous.
3. The audience has very little control or say in the contents of the mass media.
4. There is limited feedback from the audience to the source.
5. There are a lot of capital and manpower needed to run the mass media.

Examples of mass communication are television and radio programs broadcast by the government or business organisation; newspapers and magazines circulated in the country; and movies or films. Television and radio are popularly known as broadcast mass media, whereas newspapers and magazines are called print mass media. Newsletters or closed-circuit television found in an organisation are not mass media because the audience of these media are specific and confined within the boundary of the organisation. With the advancement of technology, mass media has expanded to include direct broadcast satellite, cable television and Internet. These new mass media are more ‘powerful’ as they are not confined to one country and see no national boundaries. Furthermore, these new media have brought about new perspectives about mass communication as the audience can interact with the media more readily.
Section 3: Mass Communication Theory

In the past, research on mass communication has been focused on the effects, functions and norms of the mass media. As such, early theories of mass communication were related to the effects, functions and norms of the mass media and they are still being researched and tested. At the same time, with the maturity of the field of mass communication, other mass communication theories have been developed. This section will look at several mass communication theories. Specifically, the following theories will be covered: 1) Normative theories of mass communication; 2) The media effects theories; 3) Social learning and violence theories; 4) Theories of active audience and 5) System theories of communication process.
Section 3: Mass Communication Theory

Topic 2

Normative Theories of Mass Communication

For this section, students are required to read Baran’s Chapter 5, Normative Theories of Mass Communication on page 74 to page 103. Please pay special attention to “The Origin of Normative Theories of Media” starting on page 77, “Social Responsibilities of the Press: A Post-war Compromise” starting on page 93 and “Other Normative Theories” starting on page 100.

As stated in page 27, the normative theory explains how ideal media ought to operate within a specific system of social values. As such, different countries might adopt a different kind of normative theory. In general, there is no such thing as a particular normative theory adopted by a country is better or superior than another normative theory practised by another country. Each country has her own right on how to operate and regulate her mass media system. From the reading suggest what kind of normative theory is being practised by our country.
Topic 3

The Media Effects Theories

For this section, students are required to read Baran’s Chapter 6, Limited Effects Theory on page 107 to page 122, Chapter 7, Attitude Change Theory on page 126 to page 150, and Chapter 8, The Limited Effects Paradigm Emerges on page 156 to page 180. Please pay special attention to “Important Terms” at the end of each chapter. After each reading, students should be able to elaborate on these terms.
The effect of mass media is one of the most researched areas in the field of mass communication. Three concerns of research on the effects of media have been on the knowledge, affect or attitude and behaviour of the audience. Until now communication scholars are still debating whether the mass media have direct effects on the audience or the mass media act as a mediating effect. Furthermore, there is also uncertainty whether the effect is long lasting or just as a temporary change. In the reading please try to find the different views on these issues.
Topic 4

Social Learning and Violence Theories

For this section, students are required to read Baran’s Chapter 9, Social Learning and the Violence Theories on page 184 to page 209.

Basically, these theories originated form the media effect theory. However, they are treated differently because research related to the topics have been numerous and as such that it is possible to isolate them from the general media effect theory. Do you think we can learn from the mass media? If so, what kind of social learning can take place?
Section 3: Mass Communication Theory

Topic 5
Theories of Active Audience

For this section, students are required to read Baran's Chapter 10. Using media: Theories of Active Audience on page 210 to page 246.

In the past, mass communication researchers have made a general assumption of passive media audience. However, with the development of communication technology and availability of many kinds of mass media force the audience tend to be more selective. Lately, mass communication scholars have made a distinction between media functions and media uses. This means that how the media function in a community does not necessarily reflect the way the audience use the media. In the reading please take note of the following theories: uses and gratification, play theory, media system dependency theory, agenda-setting, and the spiral of silence.
Topic 6

System Theories of Communication Processes

For this section, students are required to read Baran’s Chapter 11, System Theories of Communication Processes on page 247 to page 275.

It has been well accepted that communication is a process involving at least two parties - the source and the audience or receiver. Also, it has been noted that communication could not take place in a vacuum. There should be an environment or a system within communication occurs. Thus, this topic discusses how system theory explains communication process as a whole. Please take note on the following: mathematical theory of communication, knowledge model, social-political marketing theory, information processing theory, and information processing model.

Summary

This section of the module (Section 3) discusses the mass communication theory. The text book for this is section is Baran and Davis (1995). Specifically, Chapters 1 to 11 have been marked as assigned readings. Nevertheless, students are encouraged to read the entire book.

Altogether, six topics are presented in this section. The first five topics are: (1) an introduction to mass communication theory, (2) normative theories of mass communication, (3) media effect theory, (4) social learning and violence theory, and (5) theories of active audience. Topic (6) somewhat summarises the section with a discussion on system theories of communication process. Within each topic students are required to read certain chapters from the text book and their readings is guided with major points that had been identified by the instructor.
Section 3: Mass Communication Theory

Review Questions

1. Please list all the scholars (from your readings) who can be considered to be responsible in developing, responding to or criticising the mass communication theories.

2. For each name you have identified in 1, please indicate which theory or areas of mass communication that he or she was most associated with and in what manner i.e. as the theory developer or as the one who criticises the theory?

3. Identify some theories that are more appropriate for television, radio, newspapers, direct broadcast satellites, Internet and why you choose those theories.

4. As you might have noticed all mass communication theories were developed in the West. Do you think they are applicable in our country? Please verify your answers with concrete reasons.

5. Describe the four eras of media theory.

6. What do normative theories of mass communication try to explain?. Describe the normative theories listed in Chapter 5 and please explain the normative theory adopted by our country.

7. Do media really have an effect on the audience? Which theory tries to explain the phenomenon?
KOM 5111

Building Communication Theory
Chapter 1

Introduction to Studying Communication

When you take your first course in a discipline, you sometimes are almost totally unfamiliar with what the discipline studies. In your first chemistry course you learned such things as the periodic table, covalent and ionic bonding of elements, and structural formulas which you probably were not aware of prior to taking the class. In other courses, you are very familiar with the subject matter although you might not really understand it. For instance, if you took a course in meteorology, you would certainly be aware of the basic subject matter: weather, climate, storms, etc. You would take such a course to understand why familiar phenomena occur. You might learn that an unusually harsh winter was caused by a stationary high pressure system in the Pacific Ocean which directed the jet stream northward. Understanding such subject matter is useful and important not only for local forecasts but also for economic decisions such as the line of goods to stock in a store or the likely sales volume in weather-dependent businesses such as vacation resorts. Increased knowledge in one area allows us to build our understanding of other areas.

Your first course in communication is also one in which you are very familiar with the subject matter of the discipline. Because of your personal interactions and what you have experienced through the mass media, there are few if any communication behaviors which seem unfamiliar. As in our meteorology example, there is probably a great deal to learn about the "whys" of phenomena. For instance, what can induce people to resist being persuaded? What predispositions influence how people communicate? How can you reduce your level of speech anxiety? What are the characteristics of a person...
who is seen as a good conversationalist? How does the image people have of us influence how they react to our messages? How does your gender influence your verbal behavior? What nonverbal messages do we send to others?

Understanding these and many other concepts in this book will be achieved through the examination of theories. A theory is a set of related statements designed to describe, explain, and/or predict reality. As we shall observe in the next chapter, there are several types of theories of communication, and all are useful in providing explanations. It is important to realize that theories are useful not only on a very abstract level, but also as a basis for practical application. That is, theory guides practice. For instance, a theory of communication in organizations might imply that superiors should be trained to communicate in a certain style and that subordinates should be encouraged to communicate in other ways in order to make the organization more productive.

Defining Communication

There have been numerous attempts to define communication (Dance, 1970). In fact, nearly every book on communication offers its own definition. No author seems satisfied with other authors’ definitions, and the proliferation goes on and on. Why is this? You would think if we knew what communication is, we should be able to agree upon a definition. A reason for this predicament is there is no single approach taken to the study of communication; there are many (Fish, 1978). Definitions differ on such matters as whether communication has occurred if a source did not intend to send a message, whether communication is a linear process (a source sending a message in a channel to a receiver who then reacts), or whether a transactional perspective is more accurate (emphasizing the relationships between people and how they constantly influence one another). Another factor in the lack of agreement on definitions is that the study of communication is not a precise science.

Measurement in communication research, as well as in other social sciences, is inexact. In sciences such as chemistry there is very little error in measurement. In the measurement of weight, accuracy can be achieved to 1/10,000 of a gram, which is equivalent to about 14,500,000 of a pound. Such accuracy is not the case in the measurement of persuasion. We simply do not know enough to be able to predict, for instance, the precise impact a certain television commercial will have on buying behavior.

Some theorists believe that, since people have free choice and active minds, predicting human behavior is qualitatively different from predicting the weather. These theorists believe that we will never be able to make predictions about communication behavior that are as accurate as predictions about the physical world, no matter how sophisticated our theories become or how accurate our measuring instruments are. These theoretical differences will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

What this discussion means in terms of defining communication is that people disagree on definitions of communication because they disagree on the nature of communication. This seems to be an unavoidable condition when a science is less precise. If something is clearly understood, it is possible to formulate a universally accepted definition. For instance, a triangle is an enclosed straight, three-sided figure with three internal angles whose sum equals 180 degrees. Students of human behavior would assert that there is little hope of achieving an understanding of communication which equals the clarity of our understanding of the triangle. Communication has more properties than the triangle. Thus, an understanding of communication must be vastly more complex. The prospects for a universally accepted definition of communication are not good, at least not in the immediate future.

The fact that we have no universally accepted definition of communication is not a debilitating problem. Such a state of affairs is to be expected given our current level of understanding. What is important is that we continue studying communication and learning as much as we can about this very significant set of human behaviors. The more we learn, the more precisely we will be able to define communication. Studying a phenomenon allows us to define it. It is not true that to study something we must be able to define it. If at any time in our study of a phenomenon we stop and define it, the definition would simply represent our present thinking. As we learn more, we would surely change our definition. As you read this text, you might try defining communication at the end of each chapter. The chances are you will feel a need to re-define communication as you finish each chapter. The more you learn, the more you will see the inadequacies in your earlier definitions. As we said at the beginning of this section, a large number of definitions of communication have been formulated by writers. Table 1.1 presents some of those definitions. For the purposes of discussion, we have chosen to define communication as the stimulation of meaning through the exchange of shared symbols.

Characteristics of Communication

The Symbolic Nature of Communication

There are some issues about the nature of communication which emerge from these definitions. One important question is, “What makes human communication so powerful and distinctive?” If theorists can determine the answer, they can agree on what topics communication scholars should study. Crompton (1986) presented a cogent case for the communication discipline as one which focuses upon “human symbolic activity.” A sign is something which stands
Table 1.1
Some Definitions of Communication

“Communication is the discriminatory response of an organism to a stimulus.” (Stevens, 1950)

“the transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc., by the use of symbols—words, pictures, figures, graphs, etc.” (Berelson & Steiner, 1964)

“the eliciting of a response through verbal symbols.” (Dance, 1967)

“communication has as its central interest those behavioral situations in which a source transmits a message to a receiver(s) with conscious intent to affect the latter’s behaviors.” (Miller, 1966)

“Human communication has occurred when a human being responds to a symbol.” (Cronkhite, 1976)

.......

for another thing. One type is a symptom; a cough, for example, is a symptom that one may be sick. Another type of sign is a symbol. Symbols are different from symptoms in that symbols are deliberately created to represent something. Once people realize what a symbol stands for, the symbol may be used by one person to cause another person to think of the thing represented by the symbol.

Cronkhite (1986) maintains human symbolic activity defines the very nature of communication. Other academic disciplines are interested in human symbols. However, the communication discipline is the only one which focuses primarily upon the activity of using symbols. He also includes a “gray” area, ritual activities, as long as a proportion of the activity is symbolic. A ritual is a third type of sign. It is one which is not entirely “natural,” as in the case of a symptom, and not entirely created or arbitrary, as with a symbol. Instead, it is a bit of each. An example would be a growl to show that you are angry. Growling is natural in that it is a symptom of an emotional state which may have had its origin in our evolutionary past. However, it is somewhat symbolic because when we do growl, we do it, not in any haphazard way, but so that it does not sound too primitive. Such stylization represents symbolic activity.

The Intentional Nature of Communication

Another issue which arises from the list of definitions above is, “Has communication occurred if the source, the message sender, had an intention to influence the receiver of the message?” Let us say Jan overhears Joe telling someone to take a particular course because Professor Smith is interesting. Jan then registers for that course. Should we say communication occurred between Jan and Joel? Certainly, meaning was stimulated in Jan’s mind by the verbal behavior of Joe. But does communication always occur whenever meaning is stimulated? If Jan told Professor Smith that Joe mentioned how interesting the class was, and Smith then approached Joe and said, “Thanks for talking so favorably with Jan about my course,” Joe would probably be very puzzled and would think, “I don’t remember talking with Jan about the course.” Suppose you read research which suggests the amount of pupil dilation indicates how favorably a person feels about another. You then approach someone of the opposite sex. As you are talking, you notice the person’s pupils are dilating. (Let us assume you do not know there is controversy among researchers as to the meaning of pupil dilation.) Should you assume the other person sent you a message communicating attraction? Once again, meaning was stimulated. But was it stimulated intentionally? Clearly no in this case because pupil dilation is an involuntary response. Intentionality seems necessary to identify behavior as communication behavior. If intentionality is not required to designate behavior as communicative, then mere existence is all that is needed. Thus, if you were to observe a patient lying in a hospital bed in a deep coma, we would have to say you were “communicating” with the person.

It has been argued by several authors that if a message is sent, then communication has occurred even though the person might not have intended to send the message specifically to you. However, the issue is whether there actually is a message. If you ask the person to repeat the “message,” you would get only a puzzled look. When the other person is unaware he or she is influencing you, is this a case of what has been called “intrapersonal communication” (where you encode a message and then decode it)? If you read a message into another person’s unintentional behavior, could it be that you are both the message creator and message consumer?

This issue illustrates a trend by some people to claim “everything is communication.” Certainly communication is pervasive, but is it everywhere, all of the time? Somehow that view dilutes the significance of communication. There is an old saying that if something is everything, it is nothing. Such exuberance in stating out territory is not necessary. If we consider communication to occur when humans manipulate symbols to stimulate meaning in other humans, enough territory is claimed to justify a field of study. Humans unknowingly stimulating meaning in other humans is interesting, yet it is not the same as humans knowingly doing so. Why call the two the same thing?

This view is not too narrow or restrictive. It allows for the complexity of human interaction but avoids the task of accounting for unintentional behavior. An important point is that we are not claiming it is always possible to determine intentionality. At times we cannot tell whether Sue sent a message to Anne...
Communication As Planned Behavior

A conceptualization of communication plans provides a way of dealing with the issues raised in the previous section as to intentionality, what constitutes a message, and when symbols are actually manipulated. Viewing communication as planned behavior, in essence, makes it clear that intentions are a necessary element of the communication process. The notion of communication plans defines when behavior represents communication and when it does not.

A plan is a set of behaviors which the person believes will accomplish a purpose (Cronkhite, 1976, Miller, Galanter, and Pribram, 1960). A general plan you might have is to graduate from college, to get a good job, to raise a family, and to retire comfortably. Some plans are more specific: take the car to the garage the first thing tomorrow, tell the mechanic to check the ignition system, etc. Plans are hierarchically arranged (Cronkhite, 1976). "If I don’t graduate from college, I will work in my father’s store." The plans we form are controlled by our beliefs, attitudes, and values (Cronkhite, 1976).

There are two types of communication plans: verbal plans and nonverbal plans. A verbal plan is what you plan to say in a specific or general communication situation. A plan for a specific situation might be: "When Joan congratulates me on my award, I will tell her she helped me greatly." A plan for a general situation could be: "Whenever people congratulate me, I will act humble and thank them for whatever assistance they provided." This assumes human communication behavior is volitional. People say what they plan to say. Some verbal plans are formed well in advance of the utterance while others are created and spoken immediately. For example, you may decide what to say when asked about your future profession years before you actually talk about it. However, you may form a plan about how you feel toward a particular presidential candidate only seconds before you speak. A verbal plan may be in the form of a topical outline where only the main ideas are specified. For instance, "Generally, I will say this proposal for property tax restructuring is unfair to low-income families and will lead to numerous problems at the state level." Or, a verbal plan may contain a complete specification of every desired word. For example, "The next time John loses his temper I will say, 'You're acting like a jerk again; I'm leaving.'"

Verbal plans also vary in terms of how frequently they are used. Some are used only once or a few times. Others are used habitually in recurring situations. For a large portion of our communication behavior, we use the same verbal plans, again and again. They work well, so we continue to use them. You can probably identify a large number of verbal plans which you use habitually. When someone asks you what you think about college you probably have a standard reply. This involves determining a verbal plan, executing it, deciding it accomplishes the desired purpose, and keeping it for use in future situations with slight modification as you see necessary. We revise verbal plans from time to time. What we say in a given situation usually represents a verbal plan that has evolved over a period of time. For instance, you may have a verbal plan for telling another person you do not want to date him or her again. After using it, you decide, "Well, I could have said that better." The next time you are in a similar situation you will revise your original plan and will "break the news" differently.

Nonverbal plans are another type of communication plan. Sometimes nonverbal plans precede or follow execution of verbal plans, but usually they are formed along with our verbal plans. An example of a nonverbal plan preceding verbal behavior might be, "I’ll get that person to come over and meet me by looking engaging." Many nonverbal plans are formed along with verbal plans: "When she talks to me, I’ll get a real pleasant expression on my face and look interested in her," or, "When I talk with my boss today, I’ll look calm and confident." As with verbal plans, nonverbal plans can be general or specific, formed well in advance or formed at the moment, used once or habitually, revised or unrevised.

According to this concept, human communication represents the execution of the individual’s most recently adopted communication plan. This means that to understand and predict communication behavior, it is necessary to understand and predict the person’s communication plans. Research indicates that people learn to associate and anticipate consequences regarding their plans. How these consequences are perceived by the person permits a prediction of what the person will say.
The idea of communication plans provides a way to address the issue of whether communication has occurred if one person is unaware that his or her behavior is stimulating a response in another person. In terms of the communication plans framework, we would say communication has occurred if the individual's behavior may be traced to a plan. If it cannot be, communication did not occur even though meaning may have been stimulated in another person's mind. The individual does not have to be conscious at the moment that he or she is in the process of executing a communication plan. For instance, a woman might decide to change the color of her hair to platinum blond because she thinks that would communicate a glamorous image. Let us suppose that a male admirer sees her (she is unaware of him) and says to himself, “She is a glamorous looking woman.” According to the communication plan perspective, that would be an example of communication. When it is not possible to attribute behavior to a communication plan, we would say no communication has occurred—meaning, perhaps—but no communication. Of course, it is not always easy to determine whether a communication plan stimulated behavior. Plans, like other forms of knowledge, are usually discoverable; the only limitations are the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the researcher.

According to this conception, messages are symbolic behaviors which are molded and energized by communication plans. This definition emphasizes the intentional and hence not accidental nature of human communication. Messages are expressed with verbal and nonverbal symbols. Plans, of course, are also composed of symbols. However, the symbols in a plan are not necessarily the same ones that will appear in a message. Human judgment and volition transform plans into action. Plans may be modified and adapted to the given situation. For instance, suppose you have a plan for refusing to drink beer when it is offered to you. What you say might vary according to the situation. You could say it is “sinful” when talking with religious people or “unhealthy” when talking with physical fitness enthusiasts. The transformation process allows for revisions of a communication plan. This complex human ability presents a formidable obstacle for attempts to simulate human communication through the use of computers.

According to a communication plans framework, communication does not always entail a great deal of thinking by the people involved. If we do not have a plan for a situation, then substantial thinking is involved. However, much of our communication behavior is habitual in the sense that we prefer to place ourselves in familiar situations where we have communication plans that are very dependable—they always seem to work for us. Life would be difficult if we had to examine each situation thoroughly to determine what to say. Instead, we form plans which are as robust as possible and cover as many circumstances as feasible. It is easier to talk if we have reliable plans.

This notion is similar to Langer's (1978) concept of “mindlessness.” The idea is that people prefer to avoid cognitive activity because rest is desired more than expending effort. Thus, people like situations which they find familiar because they have plans which worked in similar past situations. Having a dependable plan means the person may go on “automatic pilot” and not have to think much in experiencing the situation. This analysis suggests that much human behavior is not unique or novel, but repetitive and hence predictable. If Langer is correct, this would call into question those theories of human behavior and awareness which depict people as always alert, forever thinking, and cognitively active as opposed to passive. Indeed, most of the theories may be subject to this criticism. Moreover, this conception challenges one of the most accepted ideas in the communication field, Berlo's (1960) notion of communication as process. Berlo's idea is that communication is a continual stream of unique behavior which is unrepeatable. The concepts of plans and mindlessness suggest that such a dynamic depiction of communication may be misleading. According to Berlo's model, predicting communication seems nearly impossible. However, in view of the framework in this section, much communication may be highly predictable because it is based on plans that people use and reuse, even if each situation itself is unique.

The Transactional Nature of Communication

The fact that communication is planned helps us recognize that communication is a transactional process. By that we mean communication involves people sending each other messages which reflect the motivations of the participants. People expect others to react to their messages and in turn expect to respond to the messages of others. When we communicate, we attempt to affect our environment; we understand that others also communicate to exert such influence. We anticipate a “give and take” in communication—an interaction of human motivations. One segment of an interpersonal relationship may be described as a linear process. “Please lend me a quarter for the candy machine” is an example of a simple one-thing-leads-to-another description, which is seldom adequate for communication. “I asked for a quarter and got only a frown” does not say much about the communication in that situation. Suppose the person you asked for money recently learned you had tried to date his girlfriend, but you did not know this. You thought you had been perfectly discreet. The frown would be understandable as a reaction in light of the additional information. We could present more details, but the point should be clear. Communication is a process of mutual influence in which participants' motivations interact. A simple linear process does not adequately explain the communication situation. Often, a linear description does not even identify the most important meaning in a communication situation. Not getting the quarter certainly was not the most important meaning present in that communication situation. To identify a single message source, a single message receiver, and a single effect of a message may be accurate, at best, for a very limited period of time. The thinking of the people involved in a
communication situation, their characteristic traits, the factors in the physical
and social environments, and how all these things interact are necessary for
a more complete understanding of communication in the particular situation.

This transactional nature of communication means each communication
situation is unique to a degree. A communication situation occurs with
particular people, in particular physical and social circumstances, and during
a particular period of time. Since what a person wants changes from one point
in time to the next and since the physical and especially social environments
are rarely if ever the same, we recognize that each of our communication
experiences is at least fairly unique. We are able to distinguish among com-
munication situations, even though the people and place may be the same.

Communication involves both content and relationship dimensions
(Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). When we communicate, we not only
present information and points of view, we tell the other person about the
relationship we perceive between us and him or her. We do not always use
words to specify the relationship dimension. Often, we use our tone of voice,
gestures, posture, or physical situation to carry the relationship message.
For instance, the relationship message in “please sweep the floor” is different
depending upon whom you are addressing. If you were a supervisor talking
to a subordinate, the relationship would be different than if a wife asked her
husband to sweep the floor. With the subordinate the unspoken relationship
part of the message would be “do this because I am your boss,” while with
the husband the message would be “do this because we are equals and it’s
your turn.” Sometimes there is conflict between people not because of the
content of a message but because of disagreement on the relationship
dimension. For example, your subordinate may agree the floor needs sweeping
but may not want to do it because he or she may believe you are going beyond
your authority by issuing orders about floor sweeping.

The Contextual Nature of Communication

Another fundamental concept is that communication is contextual. A com-
munication context is a type of situation in which communication occurs.
Communication in one context will have different characteristics than commun-
ication in another context. For instance, there is much more feedback in family
communication than in mass media communication. Of course there are basic
components of communication which are present regardless of the context:
message creator, message, and message receiver. The idea of communication
and context is that the nature of the source, message, and receiver is different
according to the situation. Thus, communication is distinctive to a degree
because of where it occurs. This means, among other things, that the meaning
derived from a message in one context can be substantially different from what
is experienced in another context. For example, a story told in an interpersonal
context such as a cocktail party may be viewed as very humorous. In another
context such as a TV talk show, the very same story told by the same person
with the same people from the cocktail party in the audience might be seen
as not at all funny, in poor taste, and reflecting hostile, anti-social attitudes
of the storyteller.

The idea that communication is contextual is a widely accepted idea in com-
munication theory. There also is rather extensive agreement on the contexts.
Generally, the contexts considered are:
1. Interpersonal (communication between two people)
2. Small Group (communication involving several people)
3. Organizational (communication within and between organizations)
4. Public (a speaker addressing a large audience)
5. Mass (communication which is mediated by electronic or print media)
6. Intercultural (communication between people of different cultures)

The acceptance of this typology is particularly evident in contemporary com-
munication theory books. Nearly all have separate chapters on the nature of
communication in the various contexts. You will find that to be the case in
this book. The final four chapters examine communication theory building
in the contexts where communication occurs.

The Functions of Communication

The last fundamental question concerns the uses or functions of commu-
nication. The great ancient Roman orator Cicero said the basic purposes of a
speech are to entertain, to inform, and to persuade. In recent times the purpose
to stimulate has been added. The distinction made between persuading and
stimulating is that persuading involves changing a listener from pro to con
or con to pro regarding the speaker's proposal, while stimulating means moving
a person who is pro, for example, to become even more intensely pro. These
purposes have been applied mainly to public speaking. Some contemporary
theorists have developed further ideas on the functions which communication
fulfills for humans.

Clark and Delea (1979) believe there are three basic objectives which operate
in any communication situation. Instrumental objectives pertain to the com-
municator's goal. An example would be to have another person sign a petition.
Interpersonal objectives are concerned with forming and maintaining relationships
with other people. Thus, in a communication situation an interpersonal
objective for a message source might be to motivate the message receiver to
want only a professional and not a personal relationship with the source.
Identity objectives involve the desired image which the person wants to com-
municate. For instance, a person might want to be seen as a very concerned
citizen, always interested in helping poor people. Clark and Delea (1979)
In a given situation, one objective might be more important than another objective. Dance and Larson (1976) suggest that human communication has three functions which are realized without conscious effort. The functions are inherent, operating automatically for the individual. The first has been termed the linking function. This means communication is used to establish relationships between the individual and the environment. People use symbols to create a desired image to facilitate this linking to the environment. Thus, individuals might be very friendly in order to encourage others to include them in activities.

The mention function means communication stimulates the development of higher mental processes. Mental growth is enhanced by communication. For example, using symbols encourages the development of displacement, the ability to move mentally from the present moment and circumstances to the future, to the past, or to solve problems in the immediate situation by going to a higher level of abstraction. Displacement is a higher mental process which stimulates the child to move from egocentric (seeing self at the center of everything) to non-egocentric speech. Manipulating symbols may encourage the individual to see self with respect to other elements in the environment. Selecting symbols which are appropriate for a given receiver causes the source to consider the perspective of the other, an activity which is decidedly non-egocentric.

The regulatory function develops as the individual is influenced by persons and other things in the environment. During this period of dependency, the child internalizes the ways of regulation, and this internalization constitutes learning. As a result the child learns how to regulate personal behavior. Later these methods are used to influence the behavior of other people. Thus, we have a need to influence our environment, and communication fulfills this need well. When we feel we are not able to influence events satisfactorily, a sense of helplessness can develop which can have very serious consequences in terms of mental health.

The Importance of Communication

In Creating Cooperation

Because communication performs the functions discussed above, it plays a vital role in each of our lives. Humans are very interdependent. The arrangement of society is such that each of us depends upon the rest to provide what we need. Communication is very important in enabling people to coordinate their efforts and to produce a variety of goods and services which would be impossible if people were to work independently (Cronkhite, 1976). Beyond this macroscopic view, there are many examples in our individual lives when we use communication to enlist the cooperation of others. We ask people to take a stand on a controversial issue. We suggest a division of work for a task to our colleagues. It is probably fair to say that we do not live a day without asking for the cooperation of others and also cooperating with requests made by others.

Of course, some people get more cooperation than others. Communication skill is an obvious factor to explain this discrepancy. If people do not cooperate with us as much as we would like, it may be that our communication behavior is at fault. We have a need for control in our interpersonal relations (Schutz, 1958). If this need is not satisfied, we tend to feel powerless and view ourselves as relatively helpless, dependent upon the whims of others. It is possible to desire too much control. When this happens, others view us as burdensome and would rather not cooperate. We can ask too much of people. To be well adjusted interpersonally, we must learn what it is reasonable to ask of others and what we should reasonably give.

Erich Fromm's (1947) theory of character provides insights into certain kinds of cooperative communication behavior. There are four nonproductive character orientations. Each views cooperation differently and will communicate in distinctive patterns to enlist cooperation. The receptive orientation describes individuals who believe that good things are only received from others. Since this type of person depends on others to receive what is worthwhile and does not feel he or she has anything of value to give, relationships are rather one-sided. This person behaves pleasantly and acts favorably to maximize the chance that others will cooperate, but he or she is unable to reciprocate. If you were dealing with such a person, you would feel you were giving but not receiving. In a romantic relationship, you would feel you were not loved in return for the love you were giving. While the receptive orientation looks for gifts, the exploitative orientation thinks it is necessary to take things from others by force or cunning. Individuals with this orientation generally employ subtle or even overt threats when asking for cooperation. Deception is also a common tactic. The person may misrepresent a situation in order to get something from you. The hoarding orientation changes the focus for receiving what is good. This type of person believes he or she possesses what is good and wants to save, hoard, and protect it. Such individuals value orderliness and security above all. They will cooperate if they believe cooperation will help fortify their position and will not involve intrusion. They will ask for cooperation and give it on matters which involve restoring order or putting things back in their proper place. The marketing orientation also centers around the belief that the individual possesses what is good. Unlike the hoarding orientation, this person views himself or herself as a commodity with exchange value. An engaging personality and attractive physical appearance are prized because such characteristics make an effective package for the "product." This individual's communication behavior about cooperation reflects a desire to barter, or to get ahead by "delivering the goods."
When you ask such an individual to cooperate with you, you may get the feeling that you are going into debt and that the person will later expect something of you. As we said earlier, these four character types are seen as unproductive (Fromm, 1947). More desirable and satisfying cooperative communication behavior would indicate sincere respect and concern for the other person, a desire to realize one's potentialities, and an awareness of how one's behavior will enhance his or her environment. Productive character orientation will be discussed in more detail in the section on entertainment below.

In Acquiring Information

The second key role of communication is to help us acquire information. Information or knowledge is probably our greatest possession. Humans have continuously accumulated information. Knowledge is power, and there may be no stronger example of this than at the International level where the nations which have the most information also have the most economically and militarily. Information is no less important on the more microscopic level. For various reasons we need a vast amount of information in our lives. Much of this information is useful. We want facts about candidates to reach a decision on who to vote for. Information about the weather affects our plans for the day. The principles of gardening are necessary to produce vegetables in our backyard. If we want to be bankers, we need a knowledge of finance. However, other information simply satisfies our sense of curiosity with no apparent utility value. We read about the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert because we are interested in extraordinary examples of survival. We listen to a lecture about black holes in space because we find the idea fascinating. We read a biography about a composer simply because we liked his or her music. The cliché states that people thirst for knowledge; that the thirst is unquenchable seems to be a permanent condition of being human.

Communication plays a very important role in acquiring information. Other than direct experience with our physical environment, information without communication is probably rare. Here's an example of purely physical information which you could acquire without communicating with other people. Let us say that you have just moved to another region of the United States and you wish to know where to catch a lot of fish. To do this independently you would have to roam the countryside and search for lakes and streams. Stay off highways because they contain signs, do not ask anyone about fishing waters, and do not consult a map, since all of these involve communication. Suppose you succeed in locating twelve lakes in a 15-mile radius from your new home without the benefit of communication. Would you have accomplished your goal which was to catch a lot of fish? No, and you would be very far from it. All bodies of water do not contain an ample fish population.

In fact, few do.

Suppose you realize this and decide to communicate just once to find out which of the lakes contains the most fish so that you do not have to spend years finding this information for yourself. You ask a local expert; he names the best lake. Can you now proceed to accomplish your goal without further communication? Perhaps, but if the lake is large, you could spend the entire year there and still not catch many fish. Even if you found the productive part of the lake, there is still the matter of how to catch the fish. What bait, lures, and techniques work on this lake? You might catch a lot of fish without any human assistance. However, unless you are unusually lucky, it would take a very long time. Communication would not make the task easy, but it would make it simpler. Just find an experienced local fisherman and talk! Communication is vital in acquiring whatever information you need.

In this process of acquiring information, we have learned it is necessary to have a system of beliefs about the sources of information. According to Rokeach (1960), we have a set of beliefs about which sources are credible (believable) and which are not. Since we need information, we must know whether information is dependable. We have positive beliefs about highly credible sources and negative beliefs about sources with low credibility. Consider the following piece of information: "Evidence indicates that Russia has been instrumental in manipulating the supply of oil in order to ruin the economies of free nations." Whether you believe that information will depend heavily upon its source. If it is announced by Dan Rather on the CBS evening news, and if Rather is a positive source for you, you probably would see this as a very plausible explanation for the energy problem. However, if the source is an extreme right-wing group you dislike greatly, you probably would dismiss the idea as highly implausible and as further proof of the "conspiracy mentality" of extremists.

In Self-Concept Formation

The third area in which communication is useful is in forming our self-concepts. A well-accepted principle of communication is that how we perceive ourselves greatly influences our communication behavior. You have heard the adage, "What you say is what you think you are." A more accurate rendition of this idea might be, "What you say is what you think you are." If you believe you are worthwhile and a success, you say this in many ways and on many occasions. Your verbal messages reflect optimism and an unpretentious confidence in yourself. Nonverbally, your posture, gestures, tone of voice, and facial expression say you have positive beliefs about yourself. People sometimes exude too much self-confidence and seem overly poised. This communication behavior also reveals something about self-perception. This type of individual is probably uncertain about his or her self-worth and is attempting to convince others that he or she is productive and valuable. This attempt at social influence may be termed an ego-defensive set of communication behaviors. The person finds his or her unfavorable self-concept psychologically uncomfortable and seeks to remedy the condition by obtaining
esteem from others. “My fears about myself must be wrong; how could I be a failure if people treat me like I am a success?” Of course, such self-deception is seldom sufficient to convince the individual of his or her worth, so the exaggerated communication behavior continues. This is not the only pattern of behavior which suggests an unfavorable self-concept. Other people say quite clearly in their verbal messages that they are pessimistic about their future, that they are helpless in their environments. Nonverbally, their facial expressions say they are depressed; this depression is also revealed by their tone of voice as well as in posture and gestures.

We say what we think we are. However, does communication play an additional role? Does communication influence what we think we are? That is, how does communication operate in the formation of our self-concepts? One theory claims our self-concept is a reflection of how we see ourselves in the responses of others to us (Cooley, 1902). We communicate. Others observe our communication behavior and react to it. We observe these reactions, and they become the basis for deciding who we are. Hence, our communication behavior and the communication behavior of others control our self-concept. All of this is a very hopeful perspective about the idea of self-concept. It means we are partially responsible for the way we view ourselves because we stimulate the responses of others that resulted in our particular self-concept. There is hope because we can continue to communicate with people and obtain responses from them. People are discriminating. They respond differently according to the stimulus.

This is another way of saying you can change people’s responses to you. You are partially responsible for and in control of your interpersonal world. This perspective says it is not valid for you to claim, “People do not show an interest in me, or in what I am doing, so I must not be an interesting person.” Instead, this orientation to self-concept would want you to conclude, “People do not show an interest in me because I do not encourage them to do so. I do not show an interest in them.” The explanation for this would lie in your communication behavior. You probably do not ask many questions about others’ interests when you talk. You give little if any positive verbal and nonverbal reinforcement to others when they show an interest in you. What could you do, according to this perspective? You could ask sincere questions about the interests of others and show positive reactions to their responses to your questions. When people reciprocate by inquiring about your interests, you could show them that you are happy they asked. This should become an ongoing pattern in your interpersonal relations and not something you try only once.

The point we are trying to make is that communication has been important in the formation of your self-concept, and communication can be used to change your self-concept. We can change our communication behavior, and that will cause people to react differently to us. The new responses toward us will cause us to perceive ourselves differently. There is considerable reason for adopting this “communication orientation” to self-concept. We are happier in life if we have a favorable self-concept. We are not happy if we believe others have not treated us fairly or have not given us what we deserve. We are happier when we believe in the communication process, that communicating to the best of our ability will produce results. They may not always be exactly what we wanted, but they will be satisfying nevertheless because of our sincere involvement in the process.

In Entertaining

The previous discussion of the importance of communication gives the impression that humans are totally serious, goal-oriented; information-seekers who proceed through life in search of a kind of sober happiness. As we know, humans and other advanced animal species have a strong inclination towards entertainment. Once basic survival needs like safety and nourishment have been satisfied, it seems quite natural to occupy our time with less serious matters. Sometimes this sequence of survival-then-entertainment is not followed exactly. Some college students, for example, have even been known to place entertainment before survival in college. Some of our students have said if it were not for entertainment, they could not survive in college. The point is that entertainment is necessary.

Recall the discussion above of Fromm’s (1947) unproductive and productive character orientations. Fromm said the productive character orientation involves a pattern of alternating between work and rest. We are more productive if we learn how to relax away from our work. Our diversions may be related to our work. For instance, if you are a comedian, you might enjoy going to night clubs when you are not working. The important issue is to find an enjoyable balance between work and play. Fromm emphasizes the idea of balance; if either work or play becomes disproportionate, the individual will not be as happy as when the two are in balance.

Communication is vital in this entertainment side of the productive character orientation. True, some of our diversions seem to involve no communication. We might paint in a private place and never discuss our paintings with anyone. However, most entertainment involves communication. Movies, plays, books, and magazines are some obvious examples. It has been said that entertainment is the main purpose of the mass media. While that claim may be debated, there seems little doubt that mass media provide us with much of our entertainment.

We sometimes find entertainment in the way a person communicates. We often watch a particular TV talk show not so much for the guests, but because we like listening to and watching the host. For instance, Johnny Carson’s nonverbal behavior—the way he moves his eyes after a line and uses his voice to give additional meaning to words—adds to the entertainment value of the actual words he speaks. We like the way he says things and do not tire of his
verbal and nonverbal manners. It is not so much the jokes told by comedians but the way they are told that entertains us. Often leaders seem to be selected because of the way they express their ideas, even though the ideas may be rather commonplace.

Although communication behavior may be the main component in our working day, we often turn to communication for our entertainment. This is almost like a commercial fisherman going into a fishing on his days off. Social communications represent one of the most common ways we are entertained by communication. For many of us, this is our chief form of entertainment. We enjoy talking with people. Such conversations may have no serious purpose. We may not want to accomplish anything other than to enjoy ourselves. The topics may be trivial and the talk may be shallow because the purpose is not rational dialogue but pleasant diversion.

Somatics rational dialogue is entertaining. Some of us find arguing a source of entertainment. We perceive an argument over a controversial issue as an exciting intellectual challenge, a verbal game of chess. The issue argued may not be important to us; what matters is the activity. If you are a surfer, a good wave is a good wave, whether it is in California, Hawaii, or even Ohio. (Although "surf's up" is not what you commonly hear on Lake Erie beaches)

Returning to Fromm's conception of the productive character orientation for a moment, we should emphasize further the importance of balancing work and rest. If all of our communication behavior is task oriented, we are conveying a less than desirable impression of ourselves. Most people feel uncomfortable with someone who is totally production oriented. People also find it difficult to rely on someone who takes the opposite extreme, a preoccupation with entertainment. We may instinctively realize the validity of Fromm's notion that the healthy, productive person is one who alternates between work and rest.

Our more favorable impressions are probably formed of people who have such an orientation.

In a Democracy

Our discussion has mainly emphasized that communication is important to the individual. We will now take a broader perspective and explore the significance of communication in a free society such as ours. What is unique about a free society? One distinguishing characteristic has been termed the "marketplace of ideas." People who have ideas are free to express them. If the ideas have merit, they will survive in competition with other ideas. This means freedom of speech is highly prized and protected from any possible erosion. It is assumed that people in the marketplace have the ability to select the best idea. Freedom of speech is crucial in order to assure that there will be a wide variety of ideas available. This increases the probability that a very good idea will be present in the group of available ideas. As in biological evolution, if there is no variety in a species, there is little chance of survival when the environment changes drastically (Cronkrite, 1976).

Communication is particularly prominent in selecting an idea from the marketplace of ideas. Aristotle believed that communication, especially persuasion, enabled people to discover what was good for society at a particular time and place. An example today might be whether or not nuclear power should be more strictly regulated. Public deliberation occurs with advocates and opponents for the various ideas or proposals attempting to persuade people. A major problem is that if all proposals are not represented by competent advocates, the best proposal may not survive. The superior proposal in a group of proposals is not always selected. The consequences of proposals must be clearly understood if the best decision is to be made. Advocates of an inferior proposal may deceive the audience by misrepresenting the superior proposal's advantages or potential disadvantages. If there were no competent spokesperson for the superior proposal, it would not be unusual for the audience to select the inferior proposal. People will do their best to make a good decision on an important matter. If their awareness of the issues has been reduced by deception or incompetence, even the best ideas will go unnoticed. This is why effective communication is so important in our society. People will select the best candidate, approve worthy issues by referendum, and support good changes in the status quo if the communication is of such a quality that the significant issues are understood. This idea of course is not new. It was central in the thinking of both Aristotle and the writers of our Constitution. A major goal of the field of communication has been to prepare students to be effective participants in a democracy. The study of communication is more extensive in the educational system of the United States than in any other country in the world. This is no accident. It is difficult to find a country which has more freedom of expression than the United States. Our very existence depends upon people making good decisions. As we have said, that is very unlikely without effective communication.

Despite the fact that our society is so advanced, we have not achieved complete equality of opportunity. Although there may be greater opportunity in the United States and discrimination is contrary to the law, your sex, race, religion, or national origin may affect your achievements. Even though this may be true, it does not mean that you as an individual must necessarily have less opportunity. Our society rewards people who are effective communicators; communication ability is an "equalizer." For example, doors open for members of minority groups that would have remained closed if it were not for communication skills. Our society is not perfect, but that does not mean you cannot succeed in it. One reason the communication discipline is exciting is that we commonly observe people "getting ahead" because of improvements made in their communication skills. As you study the material in the rest of this book, it is important to keep in mind the vital role of communication in our private
and public lives. Because communication is so important, building the best possible communication theories and models is perhaps the most important activity scholars in our discipline can undertake.

Descriptive Models Of Communication

In studying this book, it will become clear that there is no single comprehensive theory of the domain called communication. Not only is there no overall theory of communication, but there is no agreement as to what should and should not be included in such a theory. What we do have are numerous theories about the communication process. There are, for example, theories about how people persuade one another; the initial stage of interaction in an interpersonal relationship; the communication apprehension that people experience; group communication and problem solving; and television. This book will introduce you to many of these theories which might be thought of as “partial theories” of communication since they deal with parts of a whole.

Although there are no comprehensive theories of communication to provide us with an overall view of the communication process, there are several descriptive models of communication which permit at least a “peek” at the overall process. The major difference between a descriptive model and a theory is that a theory provides not only a description of the area of interest but also an explanation for what occurs. This allows prediction about what will happen if certain conditions are created. Descriptive models do not provide an explanation or predictions. Instead, descriptive models identify relevant components of the process and attempt to describe how they operate. Often, the model only identifies the relevant parts. Despite the fact that they are extremely limited in what they tell us about communication, several models are worth examining because they help us begin thinking critically about communication, which is a necessary early step in theory building.

Some Basic Components and Concepts in Communication Models

In this section, we will discuss some of the components and concepts found in a large number of communication models. While these are by no means all the components found in communication models, their extensive recurrence makes their understanding a valuable guide to interpreting the communication models presented later in this chapter.

Source. A source in the context of communication models designates the originator of a message. Some communication scholars have differentiated between the concepts of “source” and “sender.” A sender is one who transmits messages but does not necessarily originate them. An example of a sender could be a radio announcer reading an ad for the program sponsors. A source could be a single person, a group of people, or even an institution.

Message. A message is the stimulus which the source or sender transmits to the receiver. A message may be verbal, nonverbal or both. Tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions are all examples of nonverbal messages. Usually, both verbal and nonverbal messages are conveyed in human communication transactions.

Channel. A channel is the means by which the message is conveyed from source to receiver. Channels may be air waves, light waves or even laser beams. Berlo’s Source-Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR) model of communication (discussed below) makes use of the five senses of human perception as channels in the communication process. The number of channels being used by an individual can affect the accuracy of a given message. For example, in which case could a job applicant present more information about himself or herself—on a telephone or in a face-to-face interview? Obviously the latter since the applicant would be using more sensory channels in conveying his or her message, and the interviewer would be doing the same in receiving that message. Using more than one channel in conveying a message increases the redundancy or repetition and, to a point, the accuracy of that message. When two messages partly overlap in meaning (B builds on A, reinforces A, or is a replication of A), redundancy is said to be present. Excessive redundancy or repetition, on the other hand, could be viewed by the receiver as an insult to his or her intelligence. When there is conflicting information presented over the verbal and nonverbal channels during a communication transaction, people may place a greater emphasis on the nonverbal cues. We will discuss this in greater detail in later chapters.

Receiver. The “receiver” is the destination of a given message. The receiver decodes and interprets the message which is sent (whereas the source/sender encodes a message and transmits it). In human communication transactions, it is important to note that all individuals function as source and receiver. Since humans perform both the functions of encoding and decoding, they have been labeled “transceivers.”

Noise. Noise is any stimulus which inhibits the receiver’s accurate reception of a given message. Noise is often classified as physical, psychological or semantic. Examples of physical noise would be the thunder of a jet airplane overhead, car horns blowing, or the blaring of a stereo system next door. Psychological noise occurs when an individual is preoccupied with thinking and therefore misses or misinterprets the external message. As you are sitting and listening to a lecture in class, you may be thinking of what you are going to eat for dinner or about the “lovers’ quarrel!” you had this morning with your boyfriend or girlfriend. If this activity prohibits the accurate reception of the professor’s lecture, then psychological noise has occurred. Semantic noise occurs when individuals have different meanings for symbols and when those meanings are not mutually understood. For example, semantic noise occurs when you do not understand a particular word being used by another communicator or when the particular word or symbol used has many
denotative or connotative meanings. When one of the authors moved to the midwest and ordered "soda," he was given an ice cream soda, rather than the plain carbonated beverage he thought he had ordered! Semantic noise occurred here. It is important to note that some elements of noise are always present in human communication transactions.

Feedback. Like all communication messages, feedback may be verbal or nonverbal, or both. Feedback is often called positive or negative. Positive feedback consists of those responses which are perceived as rewarding by the speaker, such as applause or verbal/verbal agreement. Negative feedback consists of those responses which are perceived as punishing or not rewarding. In public or interpersonal communication situations jeers, catcalls and frowns are examples of negative feedback. Even a complete lack of response on the part of the receiver could be perceived as negative feedback, since the source would have no cues by which to gauge the effects of the message produced. Thus, without feedback, a source would have no means of assessing how a message was being decoded, and subsequent inaccuracies might never be corrected. Since negative feedback implies that changes should be made, it is especially useful in helping us to send messages more effectively.

The Schramm Model of Communication

In 1954, Wilbur Schramm created his model of the communication process. It is a non-linear model, and it is diagrammed in Figure 1.1. Schramm's key point in this model of communication is the concept that we as communicators act as both source and receiver, encoder and decoder, in a given communication interaction. Encoding is defined as the process of taking an already conceived idea and getting it ready for transmission. Decoding, on the other hand, is the process of taking the stimuli that have been received and giving those stimuli meaning through your own individual interpretation and perception. In human communication transactions, the stimuli are signs and symbols.

Employing Schramm's model of communication, Person A encodes and transmits a message to Person B, who then decodes it, interprets its signs, symbols and meanings, and encodes another message as a result of Person A's initial transmission. Person A then acts as the receiver and decoder, and the entire system repeats itself. The message from Person B to Person A we call feedback. Feedback is included in the Schramm model of communication because we, as communicators, act simultaneously as both source and receiver. His model depicts the concept of communication as a process more accurately than some earlier models. The inclusion of feedback helps illustrate this process of communication.

While Schramm has contributed some new elements, his model is too simplified for us to fully understand human communication as a process. In addition, while he identified many key variables, he also neglected some. The
the individuals and the context at hand. However, noise is not explicitly labeled in this model, and feedback is also absent. Since Berlo's book stresses that communication should be viewed as a process, the omission of feedback is especially troubling. At a minimum, the model should have included a feedback loop (an arrow going from receiver back to source).

The McCroskey Model of Communication

The McCroskey model (1968) expands the concept of noise to include it in the encoding and decoding process, in the source and receiver, in the primary channel, and in the feedback channel. The McCroskey model also notes that noise may be evident prior to the communication act and after the communication act. This concept is often referred to as intrapersonal noise. The McCroskey Model of Communication is represented in Figure 1.3. The McCroskey model shows the intentional aspect of human communication and includes the terms feedback and "feedback-induced adaptation." Feedback-induced adaptation means that a source can adapt to a receiver's feedback by altering his or her subsequent messages and responses. In comparison to earlier models, the McCroskey model represents a more complete model of the communication process.
The process of communication for Ruesch and Bateson occurs at the same time at four different levels of analysis. Level 1 represents the intrapersonal level, or communication within the individual; Level 2 represents the interpersonal level, or communication between two people; Level 3 is the group interaction level between many people; and Level 4 is the cultural level, which joins large groups of people. The Ruesch and Bateson Model of Communication is found in Figure 14.

One of the most important functions of the Ruesch and Bateson model is that it shows overlapping fields of experience. Any one person can, and usually does, operate on more than one level of communication at any one time. Think of the classroom situation. You are sitting in class and you are thinking to yourself about some material just described by the instructor. This is an example of Level 1 in the model. Something about that material puzzles you, so you turn to your classmate on the left and ask her about it. Level 2 is the model is representative of this type of interpersonal communication. Finally, the entire class tries to discuss the concept, and there is great interaction between the class members. This is represented by Level 3 in the model, the group interaction level. Thus in this example, the communication process was represented by three different levels of analysis.

The Wesley-Maclean Model of Communication

The Wesley-Maclean model of communication (1957) was designed specifically to deal with the process of communication in a mass communication context. However, the model of communication designed by Wesley and Maclean can also be adapted to explain communication in other contexts as well. The model is diagrammed in Figure 1.5.

A key concept which the Wesley-Maclean model includes is the intermediary in the communication process. Between the original source of the communication (A) and the ultimate receiver of the communication (B), there is often another person or persons (C) who might intervene or intrude on the communication process and encode the original source’s communication for the receiver. The intervening person or persons in this process are referred to as gatekeepers. An example of a gatekeeper in mass communications is the editor of a newspaper or news show who intervenes between the reporter and the ultimate audience of the newspaper or news show. The editor may alter the story in some manner by intensifying certain parts or by deleting other parts. The editor thus fulfills the role of the gatekeeper or "filter" between the reporter covering the story and the ultimate receivers of the story. Examples of gatekeepers in interpersonal contexts include the neighborhood gossip who relays the news of the day to a friend or the person we ask to relay bad news to a third party.

The variable of feedback in the Wesley-Maclean model is extremely important. There is a feedback channel not only between the ultimate receivers (B) and the gatekeeper (C), but also between the gatekeeper (C) and the source (A), as well as between the receivers (B) and the source (A).

An important concept becomes apparent in the model. Between the ultimate receiver of communication and the objects of orientation in one's sensory field, a constant process of filtering and abstraction occurs. Communication is always being shaped and altered due to individuals' own perceptions of reality, their attitudes, beliefs and values, and their past experiences and biases. We all saw...
The Wesley-MacLean Model of Communication

1. Objects of orientation (X₁, ..., Xₖ) in the sensory field of the receiver (B) are transmitted directly to him/her in abstracted form (X₁* ..., Xₖ*) after a process of selection from among all Xᵢ such selection being based at least in part on the needs and problems of B. Some or all are transmitted in more than one sense (X₃₁₀, for example).

2. The same Xᵢ are selected and abstracted by communicator A and transmitted as a message (Xₖ*) to B, who may or may not have part or all of the Xᵢ in his/her own sensory field (Xₖₚₐ). Whether purposely or non-purposively, B transmits feedback (Fₖₚₐ) to A.

3. What X₁ B receives may be due to selected abstractions transmitted by a non-purposive encoder C, acting for B and thus extending B’s environment. C’s selections are necessary based in part on feedback (Fₖₚₐ) from B.

4. The messages C transmits to B (Xₖ*) represent higher selections from all messages to him/her from A (Xₖₚₐ) and C’s selections and abstractions from X₁ in his/her own sensory field (X₃₁₀, Xₖₚₐ), which may or may not be in A’s field. Feedback moves not only from B to A (Fₖₚₐ) and from B to C (Fₖₚₐ) but also from C to A (Fₖₚₐ). Clearly, in the mass communication situation, a large number of Cs receive from a very large number of As and transmit to a vastly larger number of Bs, who simultaneously receive messages from other Cs.


Summary

This chapter functioned as an introduction to the study of human communication by presenting several ideas which provide an orientation for the remainder of the book. Studying communication means acquiring an understanding of familiar phenomena. This is accomplished by examining theory building. Communication was explained as a transactional process which involves both content and relationship dimensions: Reasons for the lack of a precise definition of communication were reviewed. The symbolic nature of communication is a key feature which unites many communication theorists. The issue of intentionality in defining communication was raised, and the position was taken that communication involves humans manipulating symbols to stimulate meaning in other humans. The issue of intentionality was addressed by considering communication as planned behavior. A conception of communication plans was explained to clarify this idea. Verbal and nonverbal plans were discussed along with the purposive and also habitual nature of communication.

The contextual nature of communication means that the nature of communication is influenced by the situation. The contexts usually considered are: interpersonal, small group, organizational, public, mass, and intercultural. The functions of communication have been viewed in several ways: as purposes of public speeches (inform, entertain, stimulate, persuade), as basic objectives of any communication (instrumental, interpersonal, identity), as inherent functions of speech communication (linking, mention, regulatory). The importance of communication was covered with respect to creating cooperation, acquiring information, self-concept formation, entertaining, and living in a free society.

Descriptive models of communication were reviewed because they provide an overall view of the communication process. Basic components of the models were: source, message, channel, receiver, noise, and feedback. Five descriptive models, which varied in how these components were depicted, were examined.
Questions To Consider

1. Why is it difficult to define communication in a way that is widely accepted?
2. According to the authors’ definition, what is not recognized as communicative behavior? Why is it excluded?
3. Do you agree or disagree with the authors’ definition? What is your personal definition of communication? Why have you chosen it?
4. What are the types of signs? How do they explain what is and is not communication?
5. What is the role of intentionality in communication? Do you agree with the authors’ position? Why?
6. What does it mean to say that communication is a transactional process?
7. What are the important communication contexts? How does the context affect communication?
8. What functions does communication fulfill for human beings?
9. Why is communication important to humans?
10. What views of communication are provided by the descriptive models of communication? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each model?
11. Which model do you like best? Why? What does your personal model of communication look like?

References


Introduction, Part I: The Concept of Communication

Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Points of View About Theory

While the discussion of communication in Chapter 1 might have seemed quite familiar to you, questions about what theories are, why scientists create and modify them, and how theories may be compared and evaluated probably appear to be completely new topics for you to study. In fact, this is not the case. Each of us uses an unsophisticated type of theory building in our everyday lives. By comparing what you read about scientific theories to your own theory building processes, you will form a deeper awareness of the value of theory in understanding, predicting, and ultimately controlling communication in everyday life.

We shall define a theory as "A set of inter-related propositions that suggest why events occur in the manner that they do" (Hoover, 1984, p. 38). Propositions or hypotheses (relatively untested and tentative propositions) are statements about the relationships between concepts. In many ways, a hypothesis is a type of educated guess. If you have ever been puzzled about someone's behavior and tried to figure out the cause of it without directly asking the person, you probably formed a hypothesis to do so. Suppose you saw a friend walking across the street a short distance ahead of you. You called her name, but she did not respond. That event probably puzzled you. Normally we expect our friends to respond when we speak to them, especially if we address them by name. When your friend ignored you, you probably had several alternative hypotheses in mind: (a) Perhaps she deliberately ignored you because she was angry at you. (b) Perhaps she was worried and
Four Functions of Theories

(1) Theories Organize Experience

First, theories help scientists to organize a wide variety of experience into relatively few propositions. A theory of persuasion, for example, allows a scientist or persuasive speaker who knows the theory to summarize observations from many different persuasive situations instead of having to think about what persuaded the Rotary club to fund a scholarship last year, what persuaded you to vote for a political candidate in the last election, what persuaded a friend to help you research a term paper, and what was effective in countless other persuasive situations, a theory focuses attention on common features of these situations. The theory might suggest, for example, that for a well-educated audience, you should use comparatively more evidence than with a less-educated group. Quoting sources the audience members find to be highly credible or believable will be persuasive for both groups. The theory is a convenient way to focus our attention on some features of the environment—credibility of sources quoted in the speech, amount of evidence used, and the audience's educational level—while distracting attention from other features. In this case, our theory ignores such factors as the size of the audience, their age, race, gender, and the types of persuasive appeals used. The theory indicates which features of the environment we should pay attention to and, by their omission from the theory, which we can dismiss as irrelevant. Since no theory can include every possible environmental feature or variable, there is always a danger that potentially important variables may be overlooked. Nevertheless, in constructing the theory, we have considered certain features of the audience, the speaker, and the situation to be unimportant, either through testing them or by making assumptions, and have chosen to ignore these features in order to concentrate our attention on others.

Because theories focus our attention on some details and away from others, they may be compared to maps or fishing nets or sunglasses with different colored lenses. Like a map, a theory is a symbolic construction. No one map can show every possible feature of the territory it describes. If we want to drive to a new city, we use a different map from the one a geologist might use. Our indicates highways; the geologist's probably omits highways, but indicates changing elevations of the land, bodies of water, and forests. Neither map can be described as "true" or "false." Each is more or less useful and adequate in portraying relevant features of the territory. A danger of using theories is that we forget they are maps and treat them as if they were the actual territory itself.

A friend of one of authors invented a story to illustrate this mistake. A small scouting team of soldiers during World War II had difficulty reporting back to their main unit. They had been given a map which indicated their rendezvous point on the other side of a large lake. Traveling at night, they were
never able to locate the lake. Finally, more than eight hours past the rendezvous
time, they came upon the rest of their unit. They angrily confronted the
intelligence officer who had given them the map and berated him for indicating
a lake that was not present. In the daylight, however, it soon became apparent
that the blue area on their map was not the indication of a lake, but merely a
spilled blob of ink. They had mistaken the map for the territory (Korzybski,
1958). They had such confidence in their map that they never questioned its
accuracy or paid attention to its possible defects. Since no map can be identical
to the territory—a map of Massachusetts, for example, would have to be the
same size as the state itself to indicate every rock and ripple in the shoreline—
every map reduces the richness of the actual territory to a few important details
to serve the purposes of the user. The map is inherently incomplete and
different from the territory.

The same is true of a theory. Because a theory consists of symbols—words
or mathematical symbols, for example—it is never constructed of the same
reality as the events it attempts to describe. Even though we communicate
using words, a theory of communication uses different words than the
persuasive speeches described above. In addition, the theory condenses the
richness of many different persuasive episodes, each with a unique audience,
context, purpose, speaker, and message, into a few highlights that are sufficient
to explain why persuasion occurs and to predict the conditions under which
it will occur in the future. It is overreductionistic. It reduces all the
verbal and nonverbal cues of a real communication encounter to a few
propositions that are general enough to apply to a variety of situations.
If we forget that every theory has advantages and disadvantages, highlights
certain variables and ignores others, we are in danger of mistaking the map
for the territory. We are likely to confuse the usefulness of the theory with
the reality of the communication episodes it purports to explain or predict.

Since scientists constantly test and refine their theories, treating the theory
as though it were the communication event being studied would imply that
the event changed every time a theory was modified.

This, of course, is not the case. Take, for example, the Babylonian theory
of the universe, which taught that the earth rode through the sky on the back
of a turtle. This view was rejected in favor of Ptolemaic astronomy, which stated
that the sun orbited around the earth. Now we accept the Copernican theory
that the earth revolves around the sun. When those theories changed, the earth
did not suddenly jump off the back of the turtle or switch from being orbited
by the sun to being the sun's satellite. What changed were human explanations
of empirical events observed by astronomers. Perhaps one day the Copernican
theory that the earth orbits the sun will seem as ridiculous as the turtle theory
seems to us. After all, only forty years ago students were taught in school that
the atom was the smallest particle of matter and that it could not be split.
Yet today scientists routinely investigate sub-atomic particles. What changed
was not the atom, but our understanding of it and our theories about it. Later

in this chapter we will explore the ways in which theories are tested, modified,
and replaced. The point for now is that the theory is just a symbolic
representation of the reality it attempts to describe and explain.

A similar point is made by Stephen Toulmin when he compares a theory
to a fishing net (1966). Suppose you are fishing for commercial tuna with nets
that have webbing five inches apart. It follows that you will catch no fish smaller
than five inches in diameter. Yet it would be foolish to conclude that no small
fish existed in the ocean you were tawling. Your net can only catch the fish
for which it was designed. Of course, you could use a net with very small
mesh, but that would result in much wasted effort. If you are fishing for tuna,
you use a tuna net, not a net that will catch thousands of minnows. Otherwise,
you would spend all your time emptying the net so that it would not break
when the heavy tuna swam into it. Catching every possible fish of any size
would be almost as frustrating as catching no tuna after a hard day's work.
The danger lies in forgetting the size of your net. If your persuasion theory
does not say anything about gender differences, it would be a mistake to
conclude that there are no male-female differences in persuasion, unless you
had found no such differences through previous investigation. Because a
theory is a symbolic construction which focuses our attention on some variables
and away from others, every theory has weak points. It is important to remember
what the theory's weaknesses are and to be aware that they are features of
the map, not the territory; that they are characteristics of the fishing net you
are using, not necessarily characteristics of all the fish that swim in your
theoretical ocean.

Toulmin also refers to theories as "intellectual spectacles" (1966, p. 104).
Like a pair of sunglasses with blue lenses, the theory used by a layperson
or scientist tints the world that is observed. Someone who has sunglasses with
brown lenses will see a slightly different world. The world itself appears to
change color when you change pairs of glasses, but in reality the color change
is caused by the change in your observational tools. Using a different theory,
like using a different map or net, will focus the scientist's attention differently
and perhaps cause him or her to see different phenomena or to catch different
fish.

Students in our classes frequently provide excellent models for discussion.
One student, Lee, believed that being assertive was the most effective way
to communicate in job interviews. However, Lee was not completely confident
about the theory because of contradictory advice. Some authors of books on
the subject suggested taking control of the interview to make sure important
points were covered. Other authors advised letting the interviewer lead, so
as not to appear too aggressive. Lee became quite excited about conducting
a research project to discover the best presentation style for job interviews,
what was the appropriate level of assertiveness for being invited for a second
interview or being offered the job.
The rules theorist would attempt to understand the communication behavior as experienced by the audience members, who are assumed to be intentional, purposeful beings rather than merely reactors to stimuli or events. The rules theorist would then make predictions for people who interpret the message in a certain way.

A distinction made by sociologist Schutz (1967) is helpful at this point. Schutz said that human behavior can be explained by two types of motives which he called in-order-to-motives and because-motives. We may apply these terms to the covering laws and rules perspectives. Because-motives are related to past events, while in-order-to-motives are related to goals you hope to accomplish in the future. According to Schutz, a because-motive is a reason for some action based on an event that happened in the past. For example, a child may run from dogs after having been bitten by a dog in the past. The motive for the behavior rests in some past event that influences present behavior. This type of motive is very much like a covering laws explanation; the child runs from the dog (subsequent behavior) because of some previous event (precedent condition).

The rules perspective emphasizes the second of Schutz’s explanations for behavior, the in-order-to-motive. Schutz says that human beings are goal-oriented. They behave in ways that will best enable them to reach the goals that they strive for. An in-order-to-motive is the mental picture of a goal that someone wants to attain. Schutz says that we think of such goals in the future. Thus, if your goal is to graduate from college, you think of the goals as already having been completed. That is, you might picture yourself in cap and gown at graduation, or applying for your first job with degree in hand. So you are taking college or university classes in order to graduate from college. You consciously choose your actions in order to reach a particular goal.

It is interesting to notice that the same event can be explained by both types of goals, a reason why we claim that the rules and laws perspectives may sometimes indicate different approaches to the same question. For example, think about why you decided to attend college in the first place. Was it because your parents had instilled in you a respect for education? That would be a because-motive; you went to college because of a past influence by your parents. Or you might have chosen a particular college because your friends were going there and you wanted to be with them. That’s an in-order-to-motive.

As you sent in your forms, you probably pictured yourself enjoying future activities with your friends. Even though a behavior may be explained by both past influences (because-motives) and future goals (in-order-to-motives), the covering laws and rules perspectives tend to have different emphases. The covering laws perspective emphasizes the effect of previous experiences, while the rules perspective emphasizes the importance of goals for the future. Thus, under covering laws, the individual is seen as reacting to prior stimuli; under the rules or human action perspective, the individual is seen as proactive, choosing actions in order to accomplish goals.

No communication scientist operating under the covering laws perspective would deny that individuals are goal-oriented. Rather, a covering laws researcher believes that the majority of human behavior is heavily influenced by past events or previous stimuli, and that understanding those events and stimuli is the best way to predict behavior. A rules researcher does not deny that past experiences influence behavior but feels that the influence of goals is even stronger. A rules researcher would point out that two people with the same negative experience may react to the experience very differently. The rules researcher deliberately chooses to de-emphasize the past event itself in order to focus attention on the individual's interpretation of that event and the way it fits into the individual’s goals for the future.

Scientists adopting human action perspectives believe that subjective experience describes the true nature of reality. What is important, then, is not what actually happens, but what individuals perceive happened, because we behave as though our perceptions were reality. After all, if you feel people have deliberately told lies about you, you will treat them as though they had spread false rumors, whether or not they actually did. Your behavior is based on what you believe happened. So your behavior is not based on “absolute reality” but on your perceptions of what is real.

Theorists taking human action perspectives believe that human behavior can be predicted because people make purposeful choices about their actions. In order to understand behavior, we must examine the goals which led the person to choose to behave a certain way. People are persuaded because they deliberately choose to change their minds, not because the speaker happened to use the “right” tactic. The speaker’s persuasive tactics influenced the audience, but the audience controlled that influence, not the speaker. If behavior is chosen by individuals to help them reach their goals, you must ask them what goals led them to act as they did. A rules study of persuasion might conclude that a persuasive speech was effective because people felt that to stop smoking now would help them live longer. The fear appeals made them afraid of getting lung cancer. However, suppose the researcher’s interviews with the audience indicated it was the new information—stop smoking.
reduces the proximity of getting lung cancer even for former smokers—that led the audience to decide to quit. The fear appeals played little part in their decision.

The hypothetical study above provides clues about the research tools that rules theorists use. They use methods which will allow them to investigate individual experience and interpretation of events. Some examples of these tools are questionnaires, interviews, and descriptions of what someone would say in response to a certain situation. Participants in a study might be asked to write a persuasive speech or to write what they would say if a romantic partner made a certain type of statement. A rules researcher would then try to understand what goals the participant tried to accomplish or why he or she used certain persuasive tactics. The key point is that the rules or interpretive researcher tries to understand the subjective reality of people in order to explain and predict their behavior.

According to the rules perspective, these choices are made by following individual or social rules for decisions. Following these rules is assumed to be a freely-chosen act that allows people to accomplish their goals. For example, there is an unwritten rule in most college classes regarding attendance. Some professors even write their attendance requirements on the syllabus. If the requirement is not written and is not made clear orally in class, you may have to figure out what the professor’s attendance rule is. You would probably do so by asking students who have had the class before, talking to a teaching assistant if there is one, reading the course description in a department or university handbook, or by asking other students in the class what they have heard. After you have learned the rule, either by hearing or reading it or by figuring out for yourself what the professor considers a reasonable number of absences, you then decide whether or not to obey it.

This type of choice or decision is precisely what rules researchers find interesting and valuable in understanding human behavior. Realize that you really do have a choice. There may be negative consequences if you fail to follow the rule, but you may decide to accept them. This is not to imply that you have a great mental debate each day to decide whether or not to attend class. Some choices are made so frequently that we are rarely conscious of making them. The point is that we have control over our actions and can choose to follow or to break rules. Rules theorists are interested in the reasons why we make a particular choice. They are also interested in how people create rules and why they create particular rules rather than others.

We now turn to two examples of theories which follow the assumptions of the human action perspective. One example is an interpretive theory and the other a rules theory. While these theories share common assumptions about human beings, they are quite different in the types of communication behavior which they study. The first to be discussed is Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Theory, which has come to be known in the field of communication as Constructivism.

**Personal Construct Theory, or Constructivism**

Kelly believed that all humans act like naive scientists, trying to understand, predict, and thereby control their environments. By this phrase, Kelly meant that we are always trying to understand things which happen to us so that we can cause good events to occur and avoid bad ones. Let us examine how an ordinary street beggar acts as a naive scientist. If you have observed the behavior of panhandlers, you may have noticed that they do not approach everyone who passes by. Since it is painful to be rejected over and over, they try to approach people who are most likely to give them money. How can they tell who will give and who will not? Kelly says they use perceptual categories called constructs to help them make this prediction.

Imagine that a panhandler classifies passersby as “generous—not generous.” Based on individual experience, he has discovered that people dressed in business suits are not generous, while people with children usually give him money. Similarly he has learned that people in military or police uniforms do not give, while people wearing habits, clerical collars, or other clothing with religious connotations usually do give. Just possibly he has discovered that people with dark hair are more likely to respond to his appeals than are blondes and redheads. The panhandler then has a personal construct, a pair of opposite mental categories expressed by the labels “generous” and “not generous,” that is described below:

### Panhandler One's Construct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generous</th>
<th>Not Generous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>religious clothing</td>
<td>police or military uniforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dark hair</td>
<td>lighter hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with children</td>
<td>without children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casual clothes</td>
<td>business suits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The panhandler will use his “generous—not generous” construct to predict and control his environment. He will “size up” approaching passersby and decide whether or not to ask for money based on his personal construct system. (Realize that your authors are unaware of any scientific evidence predicting generosity on the basis of hair color.) The connections made by the panhandler are not scientific facts so much as patterns repeated in his experience and influenced by what others might have told him. In fact, another panhandler may have had just the opposite experience.
You may find this example naive (or risky given the importance of employment interviews), yet it is a case in which a real individual tried to explain, predict, and control a job search using a real theory. Perhaps your theory of how to impress interviewers is different; your theory may focus on being a good conversationist, appearing poised and relaxed, having a strong resume, or being a persuasive speaker. In any case, the categories highlighted by your theory are those that you have chosen to highlight, not categories that are “dictated” by the real world. The fact that your theory of interviewing involves behavior that is more commonly perceived as beneficial than the theory of taking control of the interview does not in itself make your theory better than Lee’s. The categories serve as the color of your sunglasses lenses or the size of the webbing in your net. Different categories will cause the theorist to be interested in different facets of behavior and to behave in different ways to get a job. We will use this interviewing example later to illustrate how theories may be compared, evaluated, changed, and even rejected.

(2) Theories Extend Knowledge

The examples above bring us to the second function of a theory (Shaw & Costanzo, 1970): it enables us to go beyond the data observed and extend our knowledge to events which we have not yet encountered. While a theory is based on what we observe, it allows us to go beyond observation and to gain new insights into specific behavior. Astronomers, for example, imagined that there were black holes before data consistent with the presence of a black hole had been observed. Their theories led them to expect to observe something which no one had yet experienced. Predicting the future is a byproduct of the fact that a theory allows us to extend our knowledge beyond what we have actually observed.

Another aspect is that the relationships between propositions that make up the theory may tell us something about the event that we could have observed but never looked for before. Since prediction refers to foretelling or making statements about the future, this function of theory is not really a predictive one. Instead it has to do with relationships between variables. The persuasion theory developed above, for example, predicts a relationship between the level of education of the audience and the amount of evidence used. We might directly observe this relationship by presenting a speech with a great deal of evidence to separate audiences, one of educated and one of relatively uneducated people, and observing the difference in how many of the audience members were persuaded to agree with us. Or we might observe the effect of other variables on educated and uneducated audiences, observe the effects of evidence on only educated audiences, and hypothesize a different relationship for uneducated groups given other effects we have experienced. Suppose we have observed that uneducated audiences are more likely to be persuaded by emotional appeals and that educated audiences are unlikely to be persuaded by emotional appeals but very likely to be persuaded by the use of evidence. We may infer the relationship between the use of evidence and uneducated audiences, then predict the outcome of some future experiment, and test that prediction to see if the relationship we have inferred from propositions already tested is correct. If an interviewer tells you that the only person with whom she ate lunch today just received a speeding ticket and a friend tells you he has just had lunch with the interviewer, you can infer that your friend received a speeding ticket, even though that information was not contained in either of the spoken statements.

(3) Theories Stimulate and Guide Further Research

The second function of theory, that it allows us to see implications that are not evident from individual observations (Shaw & Costanzo, 1970), leads to the third function—there is evidence stimulating and guiding the direction of further research. For example, the fact that educated and uneducated audiences are persuaded by different amounts of evidence might suggest that there are other differences in what is persuasive to these two types of audiences. If evidence makes a difference, organization might also be an important variable in persuasion. Predictions indicated by the theory may be tested by further research. The findings of this research may support the theory, or may indicate that the theory should be rejected or modified.

This function of stimulating future research is often called the heuristic function of a theory. The English word “heuristic” comes from the Greek word eureka, literally translated into English as, “I have found it!” When California miners exclaimed “Eureka!” they meant they had found gold. A theory leads to “gold” for researchers because it points the way to look for further knowledge and explanations. A theory that is particularly fruitful in leading to additional research is known as a heuristic theory. We shall discuss this characteristic of theories later in the section about how theories are compared and evaluated.

(4) Theories Perform an Anticipatory Function

(Mandler & Kessen, 1959)

Because theories indicate relationships and lead to predictions and, thus, to further research, they allow us to anticipate events we may never have encountered (Shaw and Costanzo, 1970). For example, theories of physics and of gravity allow scientists to calculate the gravity of planets never explored by humans. An intercultural communication theory might predict, for instance, how you should greet a visitor from outer space, even though no scientist has yet entertained such a visitor. In the words of Shaw and Costanzo (1970), “In a sense, we may say that theory provides a bridge to something ‘out there’ and thus makes our world seem more logical, reasonable, and organized (p. 9).”
HOW DO Theories Develop and Change?

The discussion above about the heuristic function of theories clearly indicates that theories are not static; theories are constantly growing and changing. Scholars have identified three types of changes. During "normal" times (Kuhn, 1970), theories grow by extension and intensification. When a theory grows by extension, it adds knowledge and expands to include more concepts. For example, the persuasion theory in which we compared the factors that lead to persuasion in educated and uneducated audiences grew by adding the concept of organization to the original variables of amount of evidence and source credibility. The theory relating assertiveness to successful interview might grow in the same way. Suppose Lee finds that both being assertive and following the interviewee's lead are equally effective in getting him second interviews if he is relaxed and wears a "lucky" tie. The theory has grown by extension through the addition of two variables: being relaxed and type of tie.

A theory that grows by intensification grows by developing a deeper understanding of the original concepts and variables. Thus, if we found through investigation that our category of educated vs. uneducated audiences was rather imprecise, we might improve the ability of our theory to predict persuasion by further dividing our concept of audience education. Originally our variable of audience education consisted of two categories: educated and uneducated. Suppose we refined our variable to include six levels of audience education: (1) those who have not completed grade-school, (2) grade-school graduates, (3) technical school graduates, (4) high school graduates, (5) college graduates, and (6) those with some graduate school education. Perhaps further research would lead to a finding that audiences of high school graduates (level 4) were more likely to be persuaded by large amounts of evidence than audiences with less than a high school education (levels 1 and 2), but that persuasion of audiences with some graduate education (level 6) depended more on the type than on the amount of evidence. Our theory would have grown by intensification, exploring more fully variables already contained in the theory.

The third way in which theories grow is suggested by Thomas Kuhn (1970) in his famous book entitled The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. In studying the history of science, Kuhn found that sometimes a theory that everyone accepted as useful is rejected for a theory containing a new metaphor. In other words, people stop fishing with one kind of theoretical net and exchange it for another. They change from deciding which style of blue-lensed sunglasses is most attractive and opt for a completely new color of lens. Kuhn terms this type of theoretical growth a scientific revolution. Scientific revolutions constitute a type of major change in which long-accepted theories are rejected in favor of theories that indicate new metaphors, new concepts, or other new ways of knowing.

A scientific revolution often comes about when some problem in a field cannot be solved by current theories or paradigms. Just before a scientific revolution occurs, some scientists become dissatisfied with the current theories. They believe that there are important questions the accepted theories fail to answer. They pose questions that may not previously have been considered important, or introduce new concepts to explain puzzling phenomena. Often the new theories or paradigms are developed to help scientists account for anomalies, unexplained events or findings resulting from research under the old paradigm. As advocates of the new theory persuade other scientists to accept their questions and explanations as important, a group of supporters of the new paradigm begins to grow. The supporters of the new paradigm engage in argument with defenders of the old paradigm's scientific explanation system. The defenders may believe the new theories are inaccurate and the questions they answer rather unimportant. They believe the old questions are the most important ones, and the old paradigm is superior because it best answers the old questions. The new paradigm may even make predictions which contradict predictions made by theories of the old paradigm. Supporters of the new paradigm and defenders of the old one conduct debates (often heated debates) in the scientific literature and at conventions. It may take several years, even several generations, for scientists to abandon the old paradigm. During this time, increasing support is found for the new theory. Finally, the new paradigm gains enough support to become the majority view.

This is the type of change that occurred when the Babylonian theory that the earth rode on the back of a turtle was rejected by the Ptolemaic theory that the sun revolved around the earth. Another revolution occurred when astronomers accepted Copernicus's theory that the earth revolved around the sun. As we pointed out above, obviously the earth did not jump from the turtle's back, then change its orbit. What changed was the picture of reality propped up by the theory. You can imagine that scientific revolutions, like political revolutions, result in sweeping changes since all science in the field is that point has been conducted with the assumption that the basic theory was a very accurate representation of reality. When astronomers came to accept the Copernican theory, they had to re-evaluate not only their hypotheses about the sun and earth, but also all their propositions about the relationships of the other planets and the moon. A whole way of thinking, or family of theories, was rejected in favor of a new one. In Chapter 3, we will discuss three families of perspectives on theory that communication scientists have used to build communication theories.

How Are Theories Tested?

The fact that theories perform certain key functions and that they change in the three ways indicated above should lead you to ask how theories are evaluated. How may theories be compared and judged? What is the basis for accepting one theory and rejecting another? You will recall that we began the
chapter with the argument that the goal of theory is to explain, predict, and
ultimately control behavior. These are the properties of theory that are tested
and judged. Competing theories may be compared to see which explains better
or which predicts more accurately. Some scientists will prefer a theory that
has clear implications for controlling behavior, like our earlier persuasion theory
that provides information about how to approach educated and uneducated
audiences. The three goals of explaining, predicting, and controlling are the
primary standards against which theories are tested and evaluated.

In the social sciences, theories are tested by using empirical research that
is, research that depends on observation or experiments. Thus, scientists test
the phenomena and hypothesized relationships by observing them or by
conducting an experiment which is expected to give the hypothesized result.

1. The first step in empirical research is to form a hypothesis. Recall our
earlier example about Lee who wanted to discover how assertive to be in job
interviews. For example, suppose Lee hypothesizes that one needs to be
more assertive if the job is more competitive in order to obtain a second
interview or a job offer.

2. The second step is to decide how the concepts and relationships in the
hypothesis may be observed. Suppose Lee divides possible job interviews
into two groups, high and low levels of competitiveness. In order to confirm
the categories assigned to the jobs, Lee checks with friends. After finding
a high rate of agreement about a particular job's desirability, Lee must decide
what will count as relatively more or less assertive behavior. Asking
questions will be the general behavior category. Alternating asking questions
with the interviewer will count as more assertive behavior, waiting to ask
questions until the end of the interview will count as less assertive. Again
Lee checks with friends and professors to make sure that they agree with
the judgments about the different levels of assertiveness. A scientist would
want to use a large sample of interviewees and also different interviewees
to test the force of the relationship. However, since this experiment was
designed to measure interviewers' reactions to one student, Lee will be
the only interviewee. Flipping a coin will determine whether to schedule
interviews with more or less competitive jobs first so that personal
preference does not influence the experiment. The coin toss indicates the
first interview should be for a less competitive job. Lee places in a hat the
names of five companies which offer jobs in this category, then randomly
selects a name.

3. The third step is to carry out the experimental procedure. Lee signs up
for an interview at the campus placement center, prepares answers to likely
questions, then dresses appropriately and arrives on time for the interview.
The same procedure is repeated—alternately interviewing more assertively
for more competitive jobs and less assertively for less competitive jobs—
until all ten companies on the list have been covered. The number of
rejections and acceptances from each group (more and less competitive
positions) are then tallied.

4. The fourth step is to interpret the meaning of the observations in deciding
whether to accept or reject the hypothesis. After the hypothesis has been
tested, the theorist must explain what the results mean in terms of the theory.
Those results may lead to theoretical revisions, extensions, or to new
hypotheses.

An important point to note here is that a theory or hypothesis cannot be
"absolutely proven." We accept as "true" the statement, "All cats have four
legs." Yet at the same time we realize that it is not absolutely true. We are
probably aware of cats that, because of a birth defect or accident, have three
or even five legs. Yet we consider them exceptions to the rule, not disproof
of it. Why? Because the number of cats that have four legs is so overwhelmingly
large, we consider "four legs" to be a typical property of "catness"; anything
else is an anomaly. What would we have to do to prove the statement true
beyond a shadow of a doubt? Conduct an empirical investigation, an attempt
to observe events directly. One way to test our theory would be to try to confirm
our hypothesis by "proving it to be true." To do this, we would have to examine
all cats in the world. Yet even that, if we could manage it, would not be enough,
because our proposition does not specify a particular time. Therefore, to prove
absolutely, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that all cats past, present and future
have four legs, we would have to examine all cats that have ever lived or ever
will live, in addition to those presently alive. Obviously this task is impossible.
A similar logic may be extended to the "proof" of any scientific hypothesis
or theory. Since we have just established that it is absolutely impossible to
prove any theory beyond a shadow of a doubt, the word "proof" is placed
in quotation marks. The more accurate scientific term is "confirm" or
"support."

If it is futile to try to confirm a theory absolutely, what can we do? We can
seek to disconfirm it. Instead of looking for four-legged cats, we look for cats
that have some other number of legs; any other number will do to disconfirm
our hypothesis. As stated above, doubtless we would find some cats without
four legs, but we would find such a small number that we would consider
them anomalies. Scientists differ on the number of "exceptions," necessary
to disconfirm or disprove a theory. Since everyone agrees with our hypothesis,
"All cats have four legs," it would be easy to persuade people that three-legged
or five-legged cats are exceptions, not indications that the theory is wrong.
In the case of scientific research, if a theory is new and relatively untested,
sometimes one example that counteracts the theory's prediction is enough
to falsify the theory. There is no certain number of "negative" or counter-
examples required in order for scientists to reject the theory. The number
depends on the consensus of scientists in that particular field of science. This
Because of this logic of disconfirmation, we do not speak of a theory as “true” or “false,” any more than we declare a pair of blue-lensed sunglasses to be “true” and brown-lensed ones “false.” Rather, theories are stronger or weaker (and sometimes rejected), more or less valuable for our particular purposes, just like the different pairs of sunglasses or nets of different sizes. Every theory has advantages and disadvantages. No theory can be proved beyond a shadow of a doubt. Therefore, it is very difficult to judge the merit of a particular theory.

Let us return to our experiment involving assertiveness and job interviews. Recall our hypothesis, “The more competitive the job, the more assertive the student must be to obtain it.” Suppose Lee finds that none of the companies offer a job. What does that result indicate about the hypothesis? Should it be rejected? Perhaps, but it is also possible that Lee was not assertive enough. Perhaps the experiment should be repeated with a change to the greeting and handshake before the interviewer does. Perhaps waiting until the end of the interview to ask questions was too passive. A better test of the hypothesis might be to give the interviewer first and to ask questions halfway through the time period. What about the opposite result—all the companies offer jobs. Does that mean the hypothesis should be rejected? That result certainly might indicate that assertiveness is irrelevant in obtaining jobs, but it might also indicate that some degree of assertiveness is essential. Perhaps Lee picked just the right degree of assertiveness, so that both parts of the hypothesis are true. What conclusion does Lee draw if, as most often happens, the results are mixed: some companies in both groups offer jobs? Is the hypothesis correct or incorrect? Was assertiveness essential or irrelevant? Were the types of behavior inappropriate, were there “inside” candidates, or were there other reasons unrelated to the experimental hypothesis why the job was not offered? Lee has not really designed the experiment clearly enough to test the hypothesis.

Either the hypothesis must be revised, or, if the problem lies in the experiment, it must be redesigned to test the hypothesis more effectively. Lee should identify an additional group of relatively less and more competitive jobs, then behave less assertively in all the interviews, asking questions about halfway through the scheduled time. Again, there are several possible results:

1. If only the less competitive employers offer jobs, the data will support the hypothesis. However, one experiment is usually not sufficient to confirm a hypothesis that is complicated. To convince scientists that interviewing assertively is the most important variable in obtaining jobs, the results of this experiment must be replicated. It would be highly desirable for someone not associated with the theory, someone relatively more objective, to conduct a similar study and to repeat the results. Perhaps then the theory might be seen as a real alternative to currently accepted theories of interviewing.

2. If all the employers offer jobs, Lee should revise his hypothesis to focus on some variable other than assertiveness or be even less assertive than before.

3. If none of the companies offer jobs yet assertiveness still seems to be a factor, Lee should find some way of communicating that is mild enough to influence the less competitive companies but not so assertive as to induce the more competitive employers to offer jobs. Or perhaps Lee should accept the evidence as disconfirming the hypothesis. Variables other than assertiveness may be more important. Interviews with employers who have both accepted and rejected Lee in the past would reveal what factors influenced their decisions. This information about what communication behaviors are effective in interviews could lead to the development of a new theory which includes variables other than assertiveness.

Two concepts discussed above lead us to a discussion about how theories are comparatively evaluated. In situation 1 above, when the data appear to confirm the hypothesis, we suggested that having additional independent researchers repeat the experiment would lend strong support to the theory. The experimental results would then be judged reliable. Experimental findings are reliable if they can be repeated so that anyone who follows the same procedure will achieve the same results. Reliability, or repeatability, is an important criterion, for example, in medicine. A vaccine should work against the disease no matter who administers it so long as that person is trained. If the vaccine works only when administered by its developer, it is of relatively little use because the number of people who may be helped would be severely limited. Such a situation would also cause scientists to wonder whether the cure was the result of the vaccine or of some psychological effect the particular scientist had on patients.

Situation 3 above suggests that scientists are also concerned about the validity of a theory or experiment, the ability to measure what the theory purports to measure. For example, both the validity and reliability of polygraph machines used as lie detectors have been questioned. The machines actually measure nervous arousal through skin temperature, pulse, and the like. Critics of lie detectors point out that the machine does not measure directly whether or not someone is lying. In fact it measures how nervous someone is. The theory behind the machine predicates it will detect the increase in nervous arousal experienced when someone who has been telling the truth tells a lie. By comparing readings when the person being investigated tells a known lie and known truth with readings obtained when the person is questioned about the
suspected behavior, the polygraph operator can detect whether or not the person is lying. In fact, some pathological liars do not become more aroused when they lie than when they tell the truth, and some very nervous suspects may become even more nervous as the questioning proceeds, causing them to appear to be lying when they are not. While the polygraph may provide a valid measure of nervous arousal, it does not give a valid measure of truth-telling. The reliability of polygraph readings is also doubtful. A great deal of training is necessary to read a polygraph accurately, and operators may interpret the readings differently. Two different operators often reach opposite conclusions about the truthfulness of witnesses, especially if they have different levels of training and experience. Critics charge that the instrument's readings are so difficult to interpret that the polygraph is unreliable in determining truthfulness in criminal investigations. Because of validity and reliability problems, the results of polygraph examinations are often not admissible as legal evidence.

The above analysis indicates the interactive relationship between theory and research. Research is used to test and revise theories, and theories are needed to indicate what variables and relationships should be examined. The chapter in the appendix discusses research methods in more detail. A summary of the concepts above is sufficient for our purposes here. Theories are tested by a four-step process:

1. Hypotheses are formed.
2. Scientists design appropriate methods of observing the variables and relationships posited by the theory.
3. The observations or experiments are conducted and results obtained.
4. The results are interpreted as offering support or disconfirmation of the theory. Often the results are ambiguous, and the research methods must be redesigned or the theory revised in light of the new data.

This section has presented two important criteria for good research: validity and reliability. In the section which follows, we shall examine how the relative merits of theories may be compared.

How Are Theories Evaluated and Compared?

As you might expect, different scientists have different criteria for what makes a "good" theory. We have chosen to discuss nine criteria which are typical (Shaw & Costanzo, 1970). Different scientists view some of these as essential and others as desirable but not absolutely essential; there is general agreement that these criteria are the important ones to discuss. Since there is disagreement, we shall try to indicate theories which fail to meet the criteria but are generally accepted. After you finish reading this section, you should become aware of

how often scientists disagree about theories, and how personal the choice of a good theory is. Remember, too, that these criteria reflect the three goals of theory presented at the beginning of the chapter: to explain, predict, and control reality. In a sense the criteria below are scientists' answers to the question, "How can you decide which theory does the best job of predicting, explaining and enabling scientists and laypersons to control reality?"

Necessary Criteria

Shaw and Costanzo (1970) believe only three qualities are necessary for a good theory; the other six are desirable but not essential. In fact, as we shall see, these three are debatable, but your authors believe the list to be a good one. The, logically consistent. First, a good theory must be logically consistent. It may not contain contradictory propositions. One must not be able to make opposite predictions from the same theory. For example, a theory that allowed us to predict that well educated audiences are most likely to be persuaded by large amounts of evidence and indicated, in another part of the theory, that well educated audiences are most likely to be persuaded by small amounts of evidence would be contradictory. Obviously the audience cannot be most likely to be persuaded by both large and small amounts of evidence. A theory with internal contradictions would be rejected by scientists.

In fact, the last statement is not absolutely true. Currently, in physics, for example, two incompatible theories are used to explain the behavior of light. For some purposes light is conceptualized as traveling in waves. For other purposes, physicists describe light as composed of particles. These two theories require different assumptions and posit different properties about light. Until one unifying theory can be found to explain the apparently contradictory properties of light, physicists accept two incompatible theories; they have no other alternative.

2. Consistent with accepted facts. Second, during "normal science," i.e. not during a scientific revolution (Kuhn, 1970), a theory ought to be consistent with known data. We shall define data or facts as statements generally accepted as true by the scientific community. For example, if someone invented a theory of water that predicted water would freeze at 50 degrees Fahrenheit (F), that theory would be rejected as inconsistent with the fact that water freezes at 32 degrees F. and remains liquid at 50 degrees F. The currently accepted facts are assumed to be true until proven otherwise.

The "normal science" limitation on this criterion is an important one. During scientific revolutions, the new theory or paradigm will likely be inconsistent with facts that support the current theory. For example, the "fact" that the earth revolves around the sun (contained in the Copernican theory) is inconsistent with the "facts" of the Ptolemaic theory of the universe, which had long been accepted as "true" before Copernicus advanced his competing theory. Thus, during normal science, Copernicus's theory would have been rejected as
Inconsistent, it required a scientific revolution to overturn established ways of viewing the world and to allow a new set of "facts" to be accepted. A theory that would be rejected during a period of normal science might prevail and come to be universally accepted as the result of a scientific revolution.

3. Testable. A third essential criterion suggested by Shaw and Costanzo (1970) is the criterion of testability. A good theory must be testable, that is, able to be disproved or falsified. Notice that the preceding sentence does not imply that the theory has been disproven, only that scientists could conceive of a situation which would constitute disproof and possibly lead to rejection of the theory. Shaw and Costanzo present psychoanalytic repression as a theory which is unable to be tested or disproven (1970, p. 13). The theory of repression predicts that people may deal with traumatic events by forgetting, or repressing, their memories. For example, victims of violence or sexual abuse may not be able to remember the incident. They are repressing the memory of the trauma in order to protect themselves from recalling painful events. However, the theory does not specify that traumatic events will always be repressed, nor even when they are most likely to be repressed. Thus, if a victim cannot remember the incident, that fact counts as an example of the theory of repression. If a victim does remember, that fact does not disprove the theory because the theory does not say memory will always be repressed. Both remembering and its opposite, not remembering, count as "proof" for the theory.

An example of such a theory in the field of communication is cognitive dissonance. Cognitive Dissonance Theory states that holding two contradictory or inconsistent beliefs leads to psychological discomfort. Someone who (a) believes that he is handsome but also (b) believes that others find him physically repulsive will experience dissonance, or psychological tension. According to Festinger (1957), people have a psychological drive to reduce dissonance. Thus, the man described will attempt to resolve the tension in some way. Festinger's research suggests many methods for reducing dissonance. We shall mention just four. (1) First, the man might change one of the cognitive elements, a or b above. He might decide that he is not handsome after all, or might believe that others also believe him to be handsome. (2) Second, he might devalue the elements, deciding that his attractive personality is much more important than his appearance. (3) Third, he might distort or misinterpret information about the beliefs, perhaps believing that others are only teasing when they tell him he is ugly. (4) Fourth, he might seek information which agrees with his own position, perhaps asking his parents for confirmation that he is handsome. Notice that virtually any cognitive readjustment the man performs counts as evidence in favor of dissonance theory: If he changes his mind, he confirms the theory. If he maintains his current beliefs, he also confirms it. If he lies to himself by distorting incoming information, interpreting insults as jokes or believing that people mean the opposite of what they tell him, his behavior still serves as evidence confirming the theory.

The theory is used to persuade others by showing them that they simultaneously hold two inconsistent beliefs, or by persuading them to believe something inconsistent with their present beliefs. For example, a speaker might try to persuade an audience that believes strongly in the Ten Commandments and also in capital punishment that capital punishment violates the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." The speaker would indicate to the audience that they should change their minds and oppose capital punishment, thus resolving the psychological tension. If the audience members change their minds after hearing the speech, their action confirms the theory because changing one's mind is one way that dissonance can be reduced. However, notice that not changing their minds also counts in favor of the theory. If the audience members seek consonant information, information consistent with their current beliefs, by talking afterwards with friends about their reasons for favoring capital punishment, this behavior also confirms the theory. Any action taken by the audience is predicted by the theory: Nothing they could do would count against the theory. Thus, this theory, which has been widely used for thirty years by scholars in psychology, communication studies, political science and other fields, is not testable.

Cognitive dissonance fails to meet Shaw and Costanzo's essential criterion of testability, yet many scientists find it a very useful explanation of some psychological forces underlying the persuasion process. It is an example of a circular, or untestable, theory that has had a long life and is still used by scientists, despite its disadvantages, because of its supposed explanatory power. We shall examine dissonance theory further in Chapter 6.

As we have seen, all three criteria that Shaw and Costanzo (1970) claim are mandatory have been or are currently being violated by one branch of science or another. When no theory that meets all three criteria is available, scientists must make do with the theoretical choices they have. This situation has led to the simultaneous acceptance of the particle and wave theories of light. The purposes of a theory—to explain, predict, and control behavior—are so important that a theory may make up for a weakness in one of the areas by its strength in another. This is the case with Cognitive Dissonance Theory and many others. The six criteria which follow are desirable, but Shaw and Costanzo (1970) do not view them as mandatory; many theorists would agree that these six are less essential than the first three criteria.

Desirable Criteria

1. Simple. Hoover (1984) argues that, "Social knowledge, if it is to be useful, must be communicable, valid, and compelling. In order to be communicable, knowledge must be in clear form" (p. 7). Shaw and Costanzo (1970) argue that a good theory is one that is as simple as possible. The principles of the theory should be stated clearly so that they can be communicated to other scientists. Predictions from the theory should be straightforward.
2. Parsimonious. Similar to simplicity, the concept of parsimony implies simplicity of deductive structure. In other words, a parsimonious theory contains as few propositions as possible. A theory that relies on ten variables and their relationships to explain attitude change is to be preferred to one that takes twenty steps. In order to save time and energy, and because some scientists find an elegance in simplicity, theories that are open, explanatory and predictive power, parsimonious theories are to be preferred to complex ones.

3. Consistent with related theories. This criterion for a good theory is similar to requirement 2 above, that a good theory must be consistent with known data. The difference is that criterion 3 is concerned with theoretical, not empirical, consistency. Again, this criterion is likely to be violated during times of scientific revolution. Even during normal science, theories may be inconsistent with one another. As you read above, this is the case with the wave and particle theories of light in physics. Physicists are seeking one theory that would explain the wave and particle discrepancy. It is possible that such a theory might rely on a new metaphor, indicating that light travels in both particles and waves. If so, this new theory might be inconsistent with current theories yet be accepted because it helps to solve a problem that puzzles scientists.

Suppose that someone were to invent a theory of interpersonal communication which implies that trust is unimportant. The theory discusses the development of relationships with no mention of trust and no need for the concept. Since trust is considered to be a keystone of interpersonal relationships and self-disclosure (the degree to which you reveal information about your self-concept to others), the new theory would be viewed with much skepticism. Scientists would expect it to have a low probability of being confirmed because it contradicts a widely accepted component of many current theories.

4. Interpretable. As we have emphasized throughout this chapter, the purpose of a theory is to help us to explain, predict and control behavior. The process of theory building often begins with a description of the nature of reality, for example, the stages through which interpersonal friendships normally progress or what happens when someone is persuaded by a speaker. If a theory is difficult for scientists to relate to the real world, the theory has little value. Since the purpose of communication theory is understanding, predicting, and controlling everyday communication events. As Kurt Lewin wrote, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Cited in Thayer, 1982, p. 218). The idea that a theory should be practical may surprise you, many people view theory as mysterious and of little use to ordinary people. Nothing could be further from the truth. Recall the earlier discussion of the functions of theory. Theories are necessary to direct scientific research. A theory indicates which features of the phenomenon under investigation should be paid attention to and which ignored. For example, Leu's theory of interviewing and assertive communication stresses being assertive rather than preparing better answers or maintaining eye contact in order to be heard. If a theory cannot easily be connected by scientists to the real world, it will have lost a major part of its usefulness and will be difficult to test or disprove.

5. Useful. Theories should be useful, not only in explaining and guiding behavior as noted above, but also for the advancement of science. This is the heuristic function of theory discussed earlier. It's ability to stimulate further research and hypotheses. Even though cognitive dissonance was criticized earlier as a theory that cannot be tested and disproved, many scientists praise its heuristic power for its heuristic power; it has stimulated research in many different fields of social science for the past thirty years.

6. Pleasing to the Mind. Stephen Toulmin (1969), in Foresight and Understanding, his important book on the philosophy of science, concludes that, "...we can never make less than a three-fold demand of science: its explanatory techniques must be not only (in Copernicus' words) consistent with the numerical records; they must also be acceptable—for the time being, at any rate—as 'absolute' and 'pleasing to the mind'” (p. 115). As we mentioned earlier, scientists disagree on what criteria are essential for a good theory, and Toulmin's last criterion is certainly an interesting one. Some scientists argue that theories that are parsimonious, that explain a large number of events with relatively few principles, are inherently beautiful and elegant. This inner beauty and simplicity somehow strikes a chord for theorists. Many physicists evaluate Einstein's theory of relativity as especially elegant in this way. Regardless of the form of the theory, there is something mysterious and personally compelling about the impact of theory on the mind of a scientist. Scientists try not to be so caught up in their personal biases that they lose objectivity, or at least intellectual subjectivity, the ability to find "truths" that other scientists will also recognize as "true." Nevertheless, a scientist or theorist has a personal involvement with theory building.

Polanyi (1958) has discussed a concept that addresses the mystical "resonance" that scientists sometimes feel from a theory. This feeling that the theory is somehow "right" or "true." Polanyi terms "personal knowledge." As the term implies, personal knowledge is a subjective experience on the part of the scientist, yet Polanyi argues that it is not the result of bias nor blindness to disconfirming evidence. Rather, personal knowledge is a feeling that the scientist has that one theoretical path rather than another is the right road to take. Once the theory has been developed, the scientist uses traditional research to demonstrate its strength to other scientists. Personal knowledge is a type of "evidence" found within the scientist's intellectual and emotional response to the theory that causes him or her to pursue a particular direction with confidence that the path will lead to important discoveries.

While personal knowledge is an individual phenomenon, scientists as a group may also have a special feeling about a particular theory. The judgment of a group of scientists that a theory is unusually elegant or "right" seems to be what Toulmin means when he says that a theory must be "pleasing to
scientists share a common culture and values. As a result of those shared values, the truly inexplicable impact of a theory upon the community of science may result in the common judgment that the theory is exceptionally pleasing or intellectually satisfying. Conversely, if a theory does not "feel right," chances are that it will not be accepted for very long; a better theory will be found to take its place, in part because of scientific dissatisfaction with the original theory.

What Should Be the Criteria for a Good Communication Theory?

Disagreement over what a good theory would look like also extends to the field of communication. Two important points of controversy will be presented below. As you read them, try to form your own criteria for a good communication theory. Imagine what an ideal theory of communication would look like. Decide on your answer to the two questions posed below. Then review the "necessary" and "desirable" criteria for theories presented above. Which do you believe are truly necessary? This exercise will be useful, in part, because you will then be able to compare your ideal theory with important communication theories currently discussed by scientists and presented in later chapters of this book.

What should be the scope of a good communication theory?

In Chapter 1 you read a discussion about the characteristics of human communication and learned about some disagreements over the definition of communication and its characteristics. Some theorists are searching for a communication theory which will apply to many different communication contexts; for example, a theory that would describe interpersonal, group, and public communication. Such a theory must be fairly general because of the obvious differences between, say, television news and going on a date. The Sender-Message-Receiver model we presented in Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 is typical of such theories. A major theoretical family or paradigm that focuses on common features across contexts is systems theory, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Other scientists believe that a theory that covers many communication contexts will overlook key features of the different types of communication. For example, a communication theory that accurately portrays the key features of both the mass communication and interpersonal communication contexts would have to combine such important concepts as technology and mediated communication with key interpersonal variables such as trust and relationship formation. Many, perhaps most, scientists believe the contexts in which communication occurs are so varied and so individually important that it is best to focus theory building on only one particular context. This scientific disagreement is a disagreement about what is the most desirable scope of a communication theory. The scope of a theory refers to the number of different kinds of behaviors that the theory attempts to explain (Shaw & Costanzo, 1970, p. 11). As Shaw and Costanzo emphasize, there is no reason to assume that a theory with broader scope is better than a narrower theory, one that focuses on only one communication context. Each theory must be judged on its own merits. The preference for a theory of broad or narrow scope is one on which scientists differ. Which would you prefer: a general theory of communication that explains all types of communication or several specific theories that explore the particular features of different communication contexts separately? If you prefer the latter, realize that the result might be a situation like that in physics with the wave and particle theories of light; communication scholars might find themselves with theories that are contradictory or at least incompatible. On the other hand, perhaps communication contexts are so varied that a unified theory is an impossible dream. At present, this is a matter of speculation and debate.

Is it more important for a communication theory to explain or to predict behavior?

By now you should be familiar with the goals of theory: to explain, predict, and control. In fact, there is an even more basic goal. Since the social scientific study of communication is comparatively new, many theories of communication at present are merely descriptive. They identify what variables or concepts are important in a particular communication event. Some are best referred to not as theories, but as models, like the ones you read about in Chapter 1. Models are generally mathematical or pictorial representations of events. Theories may or may not contain models, but they are usually distinguished from models in that theories attempt not only to identify key concepts and the relationships between them, but also to indicate why the particular relationships occur. So, for example, a theory of interpersonal communication might not only indicate that there is a reciprocal relationship between trust and self-disclosure, but also explain why trust increases self-disclosure and self-disclosure increases trust. There is general agreement that a minimum requirement for a good communication theory is that it describe phenomena.

The explanation and prediction functions of theory, while often compatible, are not always so. The Babylonian theory of astronomy accurately predicted lunar eclipses and new moons because the Babylonians had carefully observed nature and performed mathematical calculations that led to these predictions (Toulmin, 1963). Yet the Babylonians had no understanding of why the events occurred. "To discover that events of a certain kind are predictable—even to
develop effective techniques for forecasting them—is evidently quite different from having an adequate theory about them, through which they can be understood,” writes Toulmin (1961, p. 30). Toulmin contrasts Babylonian astronomy, which predicted well but did not explain, with Newton’s theories of physics. Toulmin believes, “No scientific theory has ever provided a more striking advance in our understanding of Nature than Newton’s” (1961, p. 30).

Yet Newton’s theory, which explained why eclipses, but not earthquakes, can be precisely forecast was incorrect in many of its annual forecasts of eclipses. It did not accurately predict.

Scientists are in agreement that the best communication theories should both explain and predict, but rarely do communication theories do both. As the example shows from physics illustrates, many theories do a better job of one function than the other. If you could not have both, which would you prefer? A theory that predicts without adequate explanation? Such a theory, by making accurate predictions, might lead to further insight and discoveries about the causes of the regular patterns the theory has identified. On the other hand, a theory that adequately explains gives a scientist understanding that the scientist might be able to refine to make future predictions. In fact, there is debate over what constitutes an adequate explanation. Some scientists believe that identifying regular patterns of cause and effect in nature constitutes an explanation. So, for example, identifying the mutually reinforcing relationship between trust and self-disclosure counts as a sufficient explanation according to some theorists. Others, however, want to know why the relationship exists in terms of why individuals choose to self-disclose more to those whom they trust and vice-versa. What the first scientist might consider an adequate explanation, the second would reject as superficial. The difference in the level of preferred explanation reflects a difference in the assumptions that theorists make.

As we shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, theories in communication and other fields tend to cluster in paradigms, or families. These theories are grouped together because they reflect the same perspective on communication; that is, they adopt the same assumptions about what is important and how it can best be discovered. In some sense, these theories are like fishing nets made of different material but with the same size mesh, or sunglasses with different style frames but the same color of lenses. As Chapter 3 explains, some families of theories are better at explaining and others at predicting. Some scientists would argue that we have relatively few theories that both predict and explain because our field is relatively new. Others claim that predicting human choice can never be as precise as predictions in physics, for example, and that explanation should be our primary goal. This debate goes to the heart of what the fundamental nature of human communication is all about, and we will explore the controversy in detail in the next chapter.

Summary

Like any other theory, a communication theory is a symbolic creation designed to explain why phenomena occur in the patterns we observe. The three basic goals of theory are to explain, predict and control. Theories have four major functions: they organize experience, extend knowledge, stimulate and guide further research, and allow scientists to anticipate events they may not yet be able to observe. During normal scientific times, theories develop by extension, growing to encompass more variables; and by invention, further refining their explanations of the variables included. Scientific revolutions may also occur. During such times theories that have long been confirmed are rejected in favor of theories which use new metaphors and perhaps contradict accepted “facts.” Theories cannot be proven; they can only be disconfirmed when scientists discover that evidence does not support hypotheses generated by the theory. The scientific method allows scientists to test theories so that conclusions are reliable and valid.

Scientists disagree on the criteria which distinguish good from inadequate theories. We have suggested three essential criteria for a good theory: logical consistency, consistency with accepted facts, and testability. Desirable criteria include: simplicity, parsimony, consistency with accepted theories, interpretability, usefulness, and the indescribable quality that a theory be pleasing to the mind. After reading the chapter, you should have formed your own opinion about what an ideal theory of communication would be like. How broad should its scope be? If it does not both explain and predict, which criterion is more important to you? If you can answer these questions, you will be able to compare your ideal theory with the actual theories discussed in Parts II and III. Before reading about specific communication theories in detail, you should understand more about the theoretical perspectives currently used by communication researchers and the research methods scientists use to test their theories. These topics will be presented in Chapter 3. More detail about research methods is available in the Appendix.
Paradigms and Communication Theory

In Chapter 2 we introduced the concept of paradigms. Paradigms are "grand models" or sets of theoretical assumptions shared by many theories. Individuals use paradigms as guides to develop and to test questions about the phenomena they are studying. Usually scientists, including communication scientists, tend to favor one paradigm over another. Because paradigms are "world views" which are generally accepted by the scientific community at large, a given scientist is somewhat limited in his or her choice of paradigms from which to operate. When a communication scholar adopts a particular paradigm or theoretical perspective, that paradigm will help define not only the questions to be asked but, to a large extent, the methods of discovering answers to those questions. To a lesser, although significant degree, the theoretical perspective chosen may also help define what are acceptable answers to the questions posed.

At times in the history of science, scholars and scientists have been limited in their choice of paradigms. A particular theoretical perspective would be so well developed and enjoy such widespread support that the vast majority of researchers would employ that paradigm. When a sufficient amount of evidence accumulated to question the core assumptions of that paradigm, new paradigms were introduced to try to account for discrepancies. If enough evidence was found for the superiority of one model over another, a paradigm...
shift took place. One paradigm eclipsed another in adoption and support. Soon, the “new” paradigm became the dominant one.

Contemporary communication scientists, researchers and theorists are working in a period of time when several paradigms are operating simultaneously. Each model has its own set of assumptions which provides questions to ask about communication behavior, methods to try to discover answers to those questions, and even some “established” answers. Although each of the theory building perspectives we will explore has a different set of assumptions which guide research activity, none of the paradigms has achieved total dominance in our field. Because human communication is such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, contemporary communication scientists seek the theoretical perspective which they believe will best help them answer a specific research question. While communication scholars may have a preference for one paradigm over another when they conduct their research, the critical review process of our field encourages researchers to be open to several perspectives when conducting scientific inquiry.

Three theory building perspectives currently enjoy widespread popularity and acceptance in communication research. Each of these perspectives will be described and examples of communication research illustrating the three models for inquiry will be presented. As you examine each perspective, you may find that one particularly appeals to you. Remember that each paradigm outlined has been used by communication scholars to generate much outstanding research, each has strengths and weaknesses, friends and enemies. Each model has helped provide answers to very complex questions about human communication behavior. The three paradigms are: the covering laws perspective, the human action perspective (including the rule approach), and the systems perspective.

The Covering Laws Perspective

This perspective, sometimes referred to as the classical model or the logical positivist model, is the oldest and most frequently employed in contemporary communication theory and research. The covering laws approach became the dominant method of inquiry in the communication arts and sciences when our discipline incorporated a behavioral science orientation during the early 1960s. This pattern of discovery has also been widely used in other social science disciplines such as psychology. The laws perspective did not originate in the social sciences. Theorists and researchers from the physical sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry, physics) employed the covering laws model (logical positivist thought) well before psychologists and communication scholars embraced it.

To understand fully the covering laws perspective, we should examine its underpinnings in logical positivism. Logical positivism represents one particular

“way of knowing.” It asserts that we can only “know” something in two ways: (1) we can see, taste, touch, smell, or hear it; or (2) we can discover it through some type of logical derivation. Thus, according to the logical positivists we come to “know” something if we can gather information about it through our senses or if we can discover it through logical examination or mathematical modeling. For example, physicists and astrophysicists used high level mathematical modeling to discover the forces that create weightlessness long before we had the capacity to experience the effects during space travel. The concept of “weightlessness” was uncovered through this logical discovery and modeling process before anyone actually felt the effect.

A third crucial premise of logical positivism suggests that there are certain regularities in nature which can be observed and/or discovered. These regularities are called “laws.” Laws are universal. Once established, that law transcends time and space. The physical sciences have provided us with many law-governed regularities such as, “At 100 degrees Celsius, water will boil,” or, “With the proper velocity, mass, acceleration and wind, an airplane will fly.” The laws of thermodynamics derived from physics have helped us discover how to make aircraft fly. Of course, these law-governed regularities do not eliminate the possibility that human error might create havoc with our plans.

We will address this point again later in the chapter.

As with the examples above, the underlying structure of a law generally follows this form:

If X, then Y

If X (some antecedent condition) exists, then Y (some consequent effect) will occur. The existing law predicts that X will cause Y.

We have now articulated a concept that is crucial to our understanding of the covering laws model, causation or causality. An inherent assumption of the laws approach to communication suggests that we can understand human communication behavior if we uncover those antecedent conditions which cause consequent effects. The laws approach emphasizes cause and effect relationships. People communicate the way they do because some prior condition caused them to respond in a certain way. Advocates of the covering laws model of communication are continually seeking to discover what preceding conditions will cause people to respond in various ways. If we discover those conditions, then we can re-create them and have people respond the way the law governed generalization indicates they will. In this way, we can better explain our environment, predict outcomes, and ultimately control our environment.

Prediction is another important characteristic of the law-governed perspective in human communication. Advocates of this approach try to use their knowledge about antecedent conditions to predict how people will respond or behave in communication situations. Researchers in the fields of advertising and marketing are particularly interested in discovering the conditions under which people will buy a certain product.
cause people to react to packaging and advertising. If research had found that the color red is more eye-catching than other colors and that red creates more psychological arousal, then we could predict with accuracy that people would generally be more responsive to a product packaged in red.

We have just made a law-like proposition involving human behavior. Stating it another way, if X (packaging is red), then Y (the product may be more easily seen and more psychologically arousing). In addition, we have alluded to another important aspect of the covering laws perspective, the generalizability of law-like statements. Proponents of the laws approach probe for law-like generalizations which hold true across many situations and many different time periods. This is what we meant when we stated that laws transcend time and space if an antecedent condition is found to be the cause of a consequent effect today, the law predicts the same effect will occur a month from today, a year from today, perhaps even several decades from now! In addition, if the law-like generalization holds true for one group of people, then it should also hold true for many different groups of people as well.

Earlier in this chapter we mentioned one of the law governed generalizations regarding an airplane’s ability to fly. The laws of physics predict that given a certain velocity, mass, acceleration, wind and wing span, an airplane will take off and fly. This law governed statement has been found to be true—barring the possibility that human error may alter the situation. Notice that this introduces a qualifier into the prediction. There are certain conditions which would falsify our other example, as well. Water will boil at 100 degrees Celsius if we have the water at sea level. If we are at the top of a very high mountain, the water might have to be heated several degrees above 100 degrees Celsius before it would boil. What we are suggesting is that laws exist under certain conditional constraints.

The Positivist versus The Probabilistic Conception of Laws

According to the framework of the logical positivist tradition, laws cannot be broken. That is, if certain antecedent conditions cause a certain consequent effect, once those conditions have been introduced, the consequent effect will always result. Every time X occurs, Y will always follow. In fact, the logical positivist approach believes that the consequent effect will occur 100 times out of 100 if the antecedent conditions are in effect. Under the appropriate environmental conditions, every time a sodium (Na) atom is introduced to a chlorine (Cl) atom, they will join to form NaCl or salt. This result will be observed 100 times in 100 trials. The “laws” of chemistry prevent any other consequent effect from occurring. The sodium and chlorine atoms are not free to choose whether they want to be joined (bonded) in any given situation.

The strict logical positivist or mechanistic approach to laws works quite well in the fields of chemistry and physics.

While we trust our lives to the laws of physics that an airplane will always take off and fly, many communication theorists and scholars would agree that human beings do not act in the same fashion as atoms or molecules. Most contemporary communication theorists would admit that the human being differs from those particles because we have some choice in how we respond to stimuli in our environment. Human beings have volition and can, to some degree, exercise their choices even in the presence of certain antecedent conditions which have a strong causal relationship to some consequent outcomes.

Communication theorists who advocate this particular view of laws and causality are called probabilists. Miller and Berge (1978) have suggested that most communication theorists advocating the covering laws approach to building communication theory today have rejected the strict mechanistic view of laws and have opted for a probabilistic orientation. The probabilistic view of laws asserts that given a certain antecedent condition (X), outcome or consequent effect (Y) will occur with (P) degree of probability, under certain conditions. Let us consider an example of a communication “law” regarding the use of evidence in persuasive communication. Stated in its most basic law-governed fashion, “Using evidence in a persuasive message will cause listeners to accept that message more than they would a persuasive message without evidence.” The probabilistic view of laws might suggest that using evidence in a message will produce more persuasion “70 percent of the time.”

Further, probabilistic law-governed communication theory would establish certain conditions that must exist in order for that law to hold true even 70 percent of the time. In the example above, they might state that the evidence must be timely and current because extremely old evidence might be more harmful than no evidence at all. Second, they might suggest that the evidence must be new to the listeners. Third, they might suggest that the evidence should come from sources that are believable to the audience because of expertise and trustworthiness. Probabilistic law-governed communication theorists recognize that human beings do have choice or volition even when confronted by extremely strong causal relationships. These scholars also recognize that some laws or regularities in nature regarding communication behavior exist only under certain specific conditions.

Discovering Certain “Laws” of Communication

For the last thirty years, communication theorists and scholars have attempted to uncover some “laws” or regularities involving human communication behavior. Much of this research activity has centered around the area of persuasion or attitude change. One of the earliest attempts was conducted at Yale University by Howland, Janis and Kelley (1953). Some of the major research findings of the Yale Studies in Communication will be detailed in Chapters 4 and 6 of this text.
The Yale communication research team was essentially interested in discovering certain conditions which would make individuals more susceptible to the persuasive influence of others. The use of propaganda in World War II and the Korean War, the introduction and rapid diffusion of commercial television, and the world-wide increase in advertising focused attention on persuasion and social influence. Through a series of systematic research studies, Howland and his associates sought to discover the many source, message, channel and receiver characteristics which would enhance such influence. They found that certain characteristics of a message source increased that source's persuasive impact on an audience. The higher the source's perceived credibility (believability, expertise, trustworthiness), the more likely an audience member would be persuaded. They also observed that physical appearance affected persuasion. In general, the more physically attractive the message source, the more the source persuaded the audience.

Regarding characteristics of the message itself, the Yale communication researchers discovered that well-organized messages were more persuasive than disorganized messages. Messages with more evidence or testimony had more impact than other types of messages. Messages containing modest amounts of information designed to frighten a receiver into believing or doing something the persuader wanted (fear appeals) had more impact than messages which did not contain any fear-arousing information.

Characteristics of an audience were also investigated. Educational level, sexual composition, and level of self-esteem were a few of the audience characteristics that received research attention in the Yale Studies on Communication. One interesting finding that emerged was that two-sided messages (messages that contain both your position and a few arguments from the opposing side which you refute) worked best with more educated audiences.

More recently, certain law-like generalizations have been discovered in the area of interpersonal attraction. The question of what makes people like each other has received considerable attention from theorists in communication and social psychology (see Chapter 9). Certain factors have been discovered which contribute to attraction or liking between people: attitudes in common, similar backgrounds, and physical resemblance. Examples of law-like generalizations in the area of interpersonal attraction might include: "People are more likely to be attracted to others with similar rather than different attitudes" and "Physically attractive people are more likely to develop relationships with others who are also physically attractive." Several studies (Berger, 1977; Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Huston, 1974) have indeed found that relationships between two people, one of whom is highly attractive and the other is highly unattractive, are unusual. There are many more law-like generalizations that have been discovered in the area of interpersonal attraction and relationship development during the last several years. These findings will be presented in Chapter 9.

The "Tools" of the Law-Governed Communication Researcher

As we have stressed, the concept of causality is central to the law-governed approach to communication. In an effort to demonstrate causal relationships between communication variables, researchers use a very important method or set of tools, the experimental model. The experimental model is used by researchers to create controlled situations in order to test the effect of antecedent conditions on subsequent outcomes. The experimental model is the only method researchers can use to establish causal relationships between communication variables. The research methods chapter in the Appendix details concepts central to the experimental model such as variables, experimental design, and control.

To illustrate the use of the experimental paradigm, let us consider a person's general tendency to argue or to defend his or her beliefs—trait argumentativeness. Two of the authors decided to explore this topic. They wanted to investigate whether individuals who like to argue would behave differently when arguing with people who hesitate to voice their opinions than with people who quickly express their opinions. Similarly, would individuals who avoid argument behave differently when talking to people who like to defend their beliefs versus people who try to avoid disputes?

Four experimental situations were created. In one, individuals high in argumentativeness were led to believe that they would have to argue informally with another person who was also very argumentative. In the second, high argumentatives thought they were going to argue with an opponent dissimilar to themselves, a low argumentative individual. The third experimental condition participants were low argumentatives who thought they were going to argue with someone similar to themselves. In the fourth condition, low argumentatives thought they would argue with someone dissimilar, a highly argumentative adversary. The results of this experiment revealed that high argumentatives were more motivated to argue than low argumentatives. In addition, it was discovered that highly argumentative individuals were most motivated when they expected to argue with another high argumentative. This experiment demonstrated that motivation to argue is influenced not only by a person's own underlying tendency, but also by expectations about the adversary. Highly argumentative individuals were especially likely to be influenced by expectations about their partner.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Laws Perspective

While the covering laws approach to building theory has enjoyed widespread support and adoption in the communication arts and sciences, it has also recently received criticism. Some of the major strengths and weaknesses of the laws approach to communication follow.
Strengths of the Laws Perspective

1. The laws approach to communication seems especially useful in helping us make predictions about human communication behavior. The laws approach to communication has uncovered many causal relationships between communication variables. For example, the findings of the Yale Studies on communication continue to receive support. The use of evidence to help persuade an audience under certain conditions (see Chapter 7) is one such relationship.

2. Advocates of the laws approach suggest that theory building in communication is strengthened by utilizing findings from studies conducted using this perspective. Our understanding of communication apprehension (fear or anxiety associated with communication), for example, has been greatly enhanced by nearly two decades of effort by McCroskey and his associates (e.g., Daly and McCroskey, 1984). They have continuously tested the many factors associated with this trait and have painstakingly constructed new predictions based on previous results. Our knowledge about this subject increases with each additional effort.

Weaknesses of the Laws Perspective

1. Critics suggest that the laws approach, especially the positivist tradition, does not place enough emphasis on human choice, free will and interpretation of stimuli. They suggest that the primary tool used in laws research, the experimental model, is best left to researchers and theorists in the physical sciences who do not have to be concerned with issues of human choice and interpretation.

2. The laws approach can help us make predictions about how people will behave in general. Critics state that the laws approach cannot, with any degree of certainty, help us predict how any single individual will behave. For example, using research that suggests that including messages designed to frighten an audience slightly (moderate fear appeals) in a persuasive speech is effective, you might conclude that some percentage of one hundred audience members will change their minds and vote for your proposal. However, the laws approach will not help you know who the particular people are who will change their minds. The focus is on the group, not the individual.

3. Other critics of the laws approach maintain that breaking down communication events into separate parts does not contribute to theoretical advancement. They claim that this method, often referred to as variable analysis, oversimplifies human communication. Jesse Della says variable analysis “fails to reflect the interwoven texture of the processes participating in human communication” (1975, p. 2). These critics suggest that communication is so complicated that studying only one variable at a time misleadingly reduces a very complex event to a very simple one.

Human Action Perspectives

The human action perspective encompasses the rules approach and was developed in reaction to some of the more extreme followers of the covering laws perspective. Philosophers of science such as Winch (1958) argued that human beings cannot be studied using models developed for the physical sciences because humans are qualitatively different from natural events. Predicting whether water will or will not freeze at a given temperature is very different from predicting whether or not a marriage between two people will succeed. Throughout this book, we shall refer to the rules perspective as typical of the philosophical assumptions held by scientists who adopt the human action perspective about theory building.

For the covering laws perspective, the true nature of reality is contained in regular patterns that occur in nature. Followers of the rules and other human action perspectives believe that the true nature of reality is subjective experience. In order to understand a communication event, you must understand the individual’s perception of that event, not just the event itself. Scientists adopting the rules perspective try to predict behavior by grouping together people who understand or interpret events similarly, or who make choices for similar reasons.

For example, suppose you want to persuade your classmates to stop smoking. You realize that the American Cancer Society often tries to frighten television viewers through its commercials, and you wonder whether a fear appeal will be persuasive in a classroom situation. If you turn to previous research using fear appeals, you will find many studies concerning the level of fear appeal used in the persuasive message: high, moderate or low. In an experiment using dental hygiene as the topic of the persuasive message, a low fear appeal might consist of a mild speech mentioning the dangers of getting a cavity. A moderate fear appeal might mention tooth decay and show pictures of decayed teeth. A strong fear appeal would mention tooth decay and gum disease and include very graphic pictures of badly diseased gums—such as those you probably avoid looking at in your dentist’s office.

A rules or interpretive theorist would caution that in order to understand the persuasive effects of low, moderate, and high fear appeals, the scientist must ask the audience how they interpreted the message. It is not enough to know that test audiences rated the three messages as mild, moderately and strongly threatening. One must know how members of the target audience for the experiment viewed the message in order to interpret the results. The rules or human action perspective’s “way of knowing” is to understand the
We can imagine a female panhandler who has the construct described below:

**Panhandler Two’s Construct**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generous</th>
<th>Not Generous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td>men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gray hair</td>
<td>not gray hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without children</td>
<td>with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in uniform</td>
<td>not in uniform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both panhandlers try to control their environments—maximize money received and minimize insults and rejections—by using their constructs to predict which passersby are most likely to give and by approaching only those people. Notice that there may be inconsistencies in their constructs. How would the second panhandler respond to a man in uniform without children? Would she ask for a handout because two of the three relevant characteristics—walking alone and being in uniform—indicated generosity? What would the male panhandler do in the case of a red-haired priest?

In part, this difficulty may be resolved by understanding that constructs are hierarchically organized; that is, some are more important than others. Perhaps both panhandlers have discovered that the most important distinction in assessing the generosity of givers is hair color. Thus, the male panhandler would not approach the red-haired priest because, in a case when two predictions conflict, hair color has been his most reliable predictor in the past. We all have many, many constructs, and our construct systems cannot be completely consistent even when we organize our constructs at different levels of importance. According to the rules perspective, human behavior can never be absolutely predictable because of the element of individual choice involved. People may behave differently depending on their moods and on the situation. At times beggars may be so hungry that they approach everyone who passes by. Even though our constructs are imperfect and human behavior is complicated and puzzling, we still use personal constructs to guide our actions toward the accomplishment of our personal goals.

The above discussion of panhandlers has probably left you feeling slightly uncomfortable because of the way we used the terms generous and not generous. (We deliberately avoided making the opposite of generous to be stingy.) Perhaps your personal constructs of “generous” and “not generous” are completely unrelated to giving handouts to street beggars. You might label such giving as saintly/foolish, or even foolish/stainful (if you believe it supports alcoholism, for example). Your individual idea of generosity may be related to behaviors such as helping out needy friends with a loan, giving to charitable causes, or always picking up the check when dining with friends. The example is designed to show that each of us creates our own constructs and construct systems. We are influenced by our families, by society and culture, and by past experiences, but each of us has a unique set of constructs because our experiences and interpretations of them are different from anyone else's. It is easy to see the importance of cultural influences on constructs. If you are from a country such as Japan where almost everyone has dark hair, you probably do not connect hair color with either generosity or stinginess since you have seen people with the same hair color behave in both ways.

A final interesting characteristic of constructs is that they change. Some of the changes come naturally as we grow from childhood to maturity. Our constructs become more abstract, dealing with personality not just with physical appearance, for example. They become more differentiated as we learn that not all males or females behave the same way; some individuals are generous and some are not. Constructs may change not only with increasing maturity but also in response to our experiences. Suppose you had decided that everyone who is intelligent is also shy because all the very intelligent people you had known were bashful. Then you met another very intelligent person who was extroverted. You might have taken shy off your list of connections with the construct intelligent-unintelligent because of one startling exception or because you frequently found exceptions to this mental rule. In part, the fact that constructs change explains how we can overcome stereotypes through personal experience with members of the stereotyped group.

Researchers have extended Kelly’s psychological theory to the field of communication. In one study of persuasion, Clark and Delia (1976) demonstrated that children with more fully developed construct systems were able to construct more advanced persuasive messages than children with simple, relatively unconnected constructs. Clark and Delia believed that people who had many constructs related in many different ways would be better persuaders than people who possessed simple constructs with few connections between them. They believed that “cognitively complex” children would be better able to imagine how the person they wanted to persuade understood the world and, therefore better able to present a persuasive message that would appeal to their target audience.

During the experiment, Clark and Delia asked their participants to imagine that they had found a puppy which they could not keep. They were told to tell the female experimenter what they would say to a female stranger to convince her to take care of the puppy for them. The researchers developed categories for coding the children’s tape-recorded messages. As their theory predicted, Clark and Delia found that the older children—those with more mature and complex construct systems—used the most advanced persuasive strategies. The least sophisticated messages indicated only the request: “Would you please keep the puppy?” The next level of sophistication revealed only the child’s perspective: “Please keep the puppy. I want you to keep it.” The
From the United States negotiator's perspective, the conversation occurs in a context called business negotiations. The American views the negotiation as a business transaction. During this type of conversational episode, it would be appropriate to state one's business, make offers and counter offers, use negotiating tactics to gain as much as possible, then return home. Topics of conversation such as family, hobbies, religion and politics would be out of place in this context, although brief inquiries about family or sports might be used as small talk to "break the ice." The American is especially eager to return home soon to save the high hotel bills and other costs of doing business in Japan.

The Japanese executive also views the negotiation as a business transaction. However, for the Japanese, business transactions are an extension of one's social and family life. One would not do business with strangers, so much time should be spent developing personal relationships before one discusses contracts. You can probably guess the ways in which the two different contexts will influence the conversation! Here is the discussion:

- AMERICAN: Well, it's nice to meet you. Let's get down to business.

- JAPANESE: Fine. I thought we might go out to dinner tonight, then to the Kabuki tomorrow. I want to show you my country since this is your first visit.

After several days composed primarily of social activities during which the American executive is growing increasingly impatient and the Japanese executive is feeling increasingly rushed by the American's insistence on discussing the contract, they begin the contract talks. The conversation below takes place after four hours of intensive discussion:

- AMERICAN: This is my last price. Take it or leave it. I have to be back at my desk by Monday, and this is the best I can do. How about it?

- JAPANESE: I know you are trying very hard to give us a good price for our products.

- AMERICAN: It's a deal, then.

- JAPANESE: (Long silence . . . )

- AMERICAN: Fine, I'll have my people draw up the papers for your approval. We'll meet here again tomorrow morning.

- JAPANESE: Yes, I'll see you tomorrow.

American's thoughts upon leaving:

Great! I can be on the plane tomorrow night. That would put me back in the office by the end of the week. The Japanese are easier to deal with than I thought. They agreed to all of our terms.
Japanese’s thoughts upon leaving:

How abrupt these Americans are! I can see that we have our work cut out for us if we are ever to agree on a contract! And how rude they were to use threats: “Take it or leave it!” How uncivilized to refuse our hospitality. They acted as though someone was forcing them to go to the evening entertainments we had planned for their enjoyment! Tomorrow will be a long day.

One of the strengths of the Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory (CMCT) is its ability to explain puzzling conversations such as the one above. Both negotiators misunderstood each other to such an extent that they had very different expectations about what would happen on the next day. It almost seems that they participated in different conversations. CMCT helps researchers understand such outcomes by understanding how the two negotiators’ rule systems interact.

The context for each negotiator’s set of rules was presented above. Now let us examine their conversational rules. Remember that definitions help people interpret what the other person’s words or actions mean, while behavior rules tell us what to do in response to a particular speech act. (You will read more about Speech Act Theory in Chapter 7.) First, notice that both negotiators understood the American’s statement, “Take it or leave it,” as a threat. Both used the same definition rule for interpreting that speech act. Their definition rule was something like this: “Take it or leave it” counts as a threat. But they apparently had different behavior rules. The American’s rule seems to have been, “When threatened during negotiations, return the threat or make a counter-offer.” The Japanese rule might have been, “When threatened during negotiations, ignore such impolite behavior so as to not embarrass the other person by calling attention to his or her bad manners. Do not respond in an impolite way.” (Note that overt disagreement would be considered impolite by the Japanese but accepted, even expected, by the American.) The first two sentences reveal that the negotiators had similar definition rules, but different behavior rules. Both understood the American was making a threat, but they disagreed about the proper response to the speech act “threat.”

The second and third pair of statements reveal two conflicting definition rules. The Japanese executive’s silence was interpreted differently by the two negotiators. In America, silence means agreement. In Japan, it means just the opposite. Notice that the definition rules are based on cultural values which support overt expressions of conflict in the United States but which support public harmony, and thus suppression of overt conflict, in Japan. The culture provides part of the context for understanding the negotiators’ rules. Thus, the different definition and behavior rules caused the American to misinterpret the silence and the Japanese businessman not to understand that the American really expects to sign a contract the next morning.

The Coordinated Management of Meaning has been applied most often to therapeutic situations, such as marriage counseling, in which a therapist attempts to diagnose a couple’s communication problems and to suggest ways of overcoming them. Our presentation of CMCT has been greatly oversimplified but sufficient for you to understand how the theory might be used to analyze the conversational rules used by a husband and wife. It explains how the rules of different people combined to produce a conversation in which they misunderstand each other, yet were still able to communicate.

There are several popular theories based on the human action perspective. We chose to present Constructivism and Coordinated Management of Meaning because they have generated and continue to generate the majority of rules and other human action studies conducted using qualitative research. They provide a good comparison and contrast of theories developed from the rules and other human action perspectives.

Strengths of the Rules and Other Human Action Perspectives

After reading about two examples of human action theories, you may have been able to identify strengths and weaknesses of this perspective.

1. Proponents of human action perspectives such as rules believe that the major strength of this perspective lies in its implicit assumptions about human beings. They argue that a theory that views humans as active choice-makers is most appropriate for the study of human communication. Many theorists, researchers, and students of communication are attracted to this perspective because of the importance it places on human choice and interpretation. Rules researchers believe that rules provide the best description of human nature and how to observe it and that the rules perspective values what is distinctly human, while the covering laws perspective does not.

2. Perhaps because of this set of assumptions, theories developed from the rules and other interpretive perspectives are especially useful in helping us to understand why communication takes place as it does. Rules researchers probe beneath surface relationships to explore people’s meanings and interpretations of events. By doing so, they provide what many consider more satisfactory explanations of human behavior than those discovered using the covering laws perspective.

Weaknesses of the Rules and Other Human Action Perspectives

1. The major disadvantage of the rules and other human action perspectives lies in their inability to predict the future. Human action theories such as constructivism and the Coordinated Management of Meaning tend to provide better understanding of behavior that has already occurred than predictions of future events. Theories based on
The systems perspective is the newest of the three paradigms used in communication theory. It was first introduced by von Bertalanffy (1968), a biologist, in an attempt to find principles common to all types of systems. von Bertalanffy believed that science is unified so that all types of systems—biological, physical, and chemical ones, for example—have common properties. Systems theory as a communication perspective is not an attempt to find properties common to all systems. However, communication scholars have found some of the principles von Bertalanffy developed to be useful in studying communication.

Systems theory is somewhat different from the laws and rules perspectives in that systems theorists do not advocate a particular “way of knowing.” A system could be nested together with laws, or with rules, or connected with both laws and rules. The contribution of systems theory is a set of concepts which help us to understand communication not as an isolated event, but as a system.

A system is a set of interdependent units which work together to adapt to a changing environment. An organization is one type of system and a good one to use as an example in discussing communication systems. Communication systems are open systems, that is, they interact with their environments. An organization communicates with customers, suppliers, the government, and other groups of individuals or institutions that form its environment. If it were a closed system which did not communicate with its environment, it would die, because closed systems tend toward entropy, chaos or total disorganization. Organizations receive inputs such as raw materials from their environment, transform those inputs in some way (such as using research information to create an advertising campaign), then send outputs back to the environment. During the transformation process, different departments of the organization may send outputs to each other for further processing.

A system is hierarchical. That is, the system can be broken up into smaller units, subsystems, which are part of larger suprasystems. The personnel department of an organization is a subsystem of the larger organization, which may be a subsystem of a multinational corporation, the suprasystem. The fact that the suprasystems and subsystems are interdependent leads to the systems property called nonsummarivity. The whole system is more than the sum of the contributions of each individual part. A cake is a good example of a system. To make a cake, you add butter, sugar, flour, eggs, baking soda and other ingredients, perhaps chocolate flavoring. When you bake the cake, it changes into something that is more than the individual characteristics of the ingredients. You cannot take the cake apart and retrieve the eggs or the chocolate flavoring. Even though you added just a bit of chocolate, the flavor changed the entire cake. The baking soda permeated the entire mixture and caused the cake to rise. The chemical interaction that created the cake changed the ingredients and created something new. A cake is more than just the individual parts added together, as you might add layers to a sandwich.

Every system is like a cake in the sense that if you take away or change one individual part, the entire system is affected. If the sales department of an organization has problems, the entire organization may lose profits. Perhaps the production department will have to make fewer cars, or even lay off workers on the assembly line, because of a problem in a completely different department.

Cybernetic systems try to maintain a balance with their environments through a process called homeostasis, or self-regulation. After a change in the environment, the system adapts to maintain an equilibrium. It may not be the same equilibrium point as before the change, but the system comes to some balance point. For example, many United States manufacturing companies
laid off workers during the last recession. When times got better, many, but not all, workers were rehired. The system maintained a balance, but the balance resulted in fewer jobs than the equilibrium point before the recession. A thermostat is also an excellent example of a cybernetic system.

One of the most interesting system properties is called equivocality. Equivocality means that there are many different ways by which a system may reach the same end state. Systems are teleological; they are designed to reach specific end states or goals. If an organization has a goal of increasing profits, it may reach the goal by increasing sales, by decreasing labor or materials costs, by increasing prices, or by adapting in other ways. Because of equivocality, researchers looking at an organizational outcome cannot know immediately what has caused the outcome. If profits increased, researchers would have to study the system closely to discover which of the many factors just listed contributed to raising profits. Communication researchers concerned with a decrease in morale must examine many possible causes in order to recommend an appropriate solution.

The systems perspective on communication is complex, reflecting the complicated nature of communication. It encourages communication students to be concerned about the environment or audience. Many of the terms applied to other types of systems are useful in shedding light on communication in our complex society, especially communication in organizations. Due to its "holistic" orientation, the attraction of using the systems approach to the study of human communication is strong. Our definition of a system, a set of independent units working together to adapt to a changing environment, conjures up thoughts of at least two communication systems that are well-suited for scholarly investigation from this perspective—organizations and families. Indeed, these two types of systems have received the most attention from communication theorists operating from a systems perspective. Due to the nonsensummatrice nature of a system, one of the most important concerns for a systems researcher or theorist is the investigation of relationships and interactions of each individual part of the system with the others, and with the environment. Since most interactions in human systems (such as families and organizations) involve communication, communication theorists and researchers are well prepared to study these interactions. As a result, several studies employing the systems approach in communication have focused on the exchange of information and the development and maintenance of relationships among the members of a system.

To best illustrate how the systems perspective has been employed in communication, let us examine one type of system that is common to all of us—the family. Communication behavior is an integral part of a family system (Bavelas & Segal, 1982). The relationships and interactions between the various members of a family are the materials that actually constitute the "family." Four discrete, non-interacting, non-communicating individuals, although they may live under the same roof, do not necessarily constitute a family. In employing the systems perspective to study a family, you will not be able to identify the essence of the family—its relationships and interactions—if you simply study each member in isolation. The systems perspective requires that you focus attention on the whole family and that you see each individual member only in the context of the whole family. The essence of the concept of family rests with the communication and interaction of its members. Even when the various members of a family are spread far and wide over several geographic locations, communication and interaction form bonds which hold the system together.

As previously stated, open systems are characterized by a great deal of exchange and interaction with their environment. Because families could not exist in isolation from others and their environment, families are considered open systems. The boundaries of the family are open to interactions with many others, such as neighbors, friends, and colleagues to name but a few. And, a single family may exist in the context of a much larger extended family. Bavelas and Segal (1982) suggest that the extended family may actually be considered an environment. This type of environment would consist of several nuclear families. Each nuclear family would contain sub-systems consisting of spouses, children, grandparents, cousins, and the like. It is also possible to identify the environment in a much broader fashion when discussing family interaction from a systems perspective. The environment could be taken to mean a given culture and/or climate in which the family exists. You may recall that one characteristic of a system is the attempt to maintain a balance with its environment through homeostasis or self-regulation.

How does a family system attempt to adjust communicatively to changing environmental conditions? How is family communication affected by a change in the environment? These questions call forth several areas worthy of attention by communication theorists and scholars interested in family communication.

Two communication students (Bellefontaine & Florea, 1983) attempted to study how a change in the environment caused a change in the communication interactions of the members of several families. The students were interested in examining how a change in the environment, poor economic conditions leading to the unemployment of the family provider, caused a change in family interaction and communication patterns. The students were specifically interested in examining how the unemployment of the family provider affected how frequently family members communicated, shared personal feelings, and argued, and how the self-esteem of the family members changed. Four families agreed to participate in this study. In each family, the husband/father was unemployed for a period of between one to six months. Using several methods to gather data (e.g., surveys, interviews with family members, observations), the researchers discovered that several changes in family communication patterns did indeed occur.

With the provider more accessible and available during the period of unemployment, communication between the family members increased.
Husbands and wives reported a slight increase in overall disclosure of feelings to each other. Understandably, the husbands’ feelings of self-esteem decreased. However, in several of the families studied, the wives reported increases in feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. Finally, all families noted increases in the frequency of social conflict and family dispute. As one father stated, “As a consequence of being laid off, I was home more often and saw things I normally didn’t have to deal with. Consequently, there were more areas of conflict.”

This study of family interaction helps illustrate several key concepts of the systems perspective as applied to communication. It demonstrates the concept that a system is a set of interdependent units all working together. When the main provider was laid off, the other members of the system tried to find jobs in order to keep money flowing into the system. The study also demonstrated the systems maxim that a change in one part of a system, of necessity, creates changes in other parts of the system. In this case, when the husband/father became unemployed, the other family members were affected financially and communicatively. However, each system tried to maintain a balance through self-regulation. If possible, the wife went to work, and the husband assumed more of the domestic responsibilities. Increased communication resulted from the need for all members of the system to get used to the new family arrangement. The other adjustments noted by the researchers, such as changes in social conflict and levels of self-esteem, reflect the complex and interactive nature of the family system.

As with other theory-building approaches to human communication, the systems perspective has a set of strengths and weaknesses associated with it.

Strengths of the Systems Perspective

1. The systems approach is a flexible and open perspective from which to study human communication. Advocates of this approach state that it does not impose a series of perceptual constraints or biases on researchers to force them to focus only on certain elements in a communication situation. Laws theorists focus on trying to identify causal relationships among communication phenomena, while rules theorists focus primarily on trying to identify social norms or individual interpretive patterns which guide communication behaviors in various contexts. Systems theorists, however, valuing breadth and generality in their theories, attempt to focus on all patterns of interaction and relationship within a communication event.

2. Human communication is such a complex phenomenon that it requires a broad-based, multi-leveled investigatory schema. For example, many factors contribute to the breakup of a marriage and family. If one were to interview just the husband, or the wife, or the children alone, a partial and incomplete picture of the trouble would result. The systems approach offers a means of examining the effects of all the factors involved, alone and in interaction. Advocates of the systems perspective feel that the laws and rules approaches are too narrow to investigate fully the complex interaction of the large number of factors that make up a communication event.

3. Advocates of the systems perspective state that this perspective utilizes situation-specific generalizations and thus is a more appropriate perspective to employ than the laws approach which uses universal generalizations. Many communication theorists feel that communication is culture specific. If communication is culture bound, then the universal generalizations identified by laws approach are not truly universal, but only true for the culture of the scientists or research participants. Systems theorists do not attempt to make universal generalizations.

Weaknesses of the Systems Perspective

1. Critics suggest that the systems perspective is too broad and too general to be useful in building theory in applied contexts. As we argued about communication in Chapter 1, if everything can be described as a system, then looking at phenomena as systems is not useful because this way of theorizing does not add insight. Instead, systems theory just makes explicit concepts which we intuitively understand from observation of the world around us. If it is equally valid to draw the boundaries of an organizational system around a work group, a department, a manufacturing plant, and an entire company, what benefit is gained by examining a department as a subsystem rather than a suprasystem? If both are equally valid, it should make no difference which approach we take. It would be impossible to test which level of observation was best.

2. While uncovering many important interactions and relationships involving communication in human systems, the systems perspective does not yield a great deal of explanatory power. Cahn (1981) suggests that its application fails to explain events previously unexplained. Critics suggest that the systems perspective does not help shed light on why things happen the way they do. Recall that explanation is one of the most important goals of a theory. An advocate of the systems approach, Monge (1973) notes that scientists developed theories which predicted the motion of planets before they had one that explained it. Perhaps future researchers may be able to develop systems theories with greater explanatory power.

3. Critics state that while the systems approach has many advocates, it has yet to generate much empirical or theoretical research. This is a very complex weakness of the systems approach which, at its core, may
reflect our discipline's desire to conduct research and publish findings rapidly. The effort to investigate the interrelationships and interactions of the many parts of a system is not only costly, but very time consuming. Examining all possible interactions between units of the system requires a relatively long term research focus. Many communication scholars are not prepared to spend the vast amount of time and money required to engage in an all-encompassing research study of changes in a system over time.

Summary

In this chapter we have examined three major perspectives on communication theory: covering laws, human action approaches exemplified by the rules approach, and the systems perspective. As you have learned, scientists from different perspectives make different assumptions, ask different questions, study the questions in different ways, and are interested in different types of answers. Researchers operating from the covering laws perspective emphasize cause and effect relationships, while rules researchers emphasize choice in the creation of individual and social rules. Systems theorists emphasize the interactions between the parts of an interdependent system and de-emphasize the role of individuals.

Your own experience has probably led you to feel more comfortable with one of these perspectives, or perhaps you will be tempted to adopt the perspective favored by your instructor. As you read Part II, Theory Building in Major Approaches to Communication, keep in mind the three "grand models" presented in this chapter. Try to imagine why your authors believe a particular theory is an example of a given perspective. For example, ask yourself: "Why is this theory an example of the laws approach? What cause-effect relationships does it propose? Might rules or systems provide a better explanation of the communication behavior being studied? How would theorists from the other two perspectives approach this research question?"

Ask the same type of questions for rules and systems theories. You will see that more research has been conducted using the laws perspective than any other. If you have not taken a course in research methods, reading the chapter on research methods in the Appendix before you proceed to Part II will give you a better understanding of how theories are tested in communication experiments.

Questions to Consider

1. What is a paradigm?
2. What are the main assumptions of the covering laws approach to communication theory?
3. How appropriate to the study of communication is a probabilistic conception of laws?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the laws perspective?
5. What are the major assumptions of the rules approach to communication theory?
6. How does the emphasis on intentions and goals distinguish the rules approach?
7. What are the assumptions of constructivism as a human action perspective?
8. How does the Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory explain communication?
9. What are the strengths and weaknesses of rules and other human action perspectives?
10. What are the assumptions of the systems approach to communication theory?
11. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the systems approach?
12. Explain the nonsummativity property of systems.
13. Which perspective might be the most useful for you to adopt in studying communication? Why do you prefer this one? What are its disadvantages?
14. What questions about communication will you attempt to answer using this perspective?

References

Interpersonal Contexts

Chapter 9

The Development of Interpersonal Communication Study

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, few communication scholars were engaged in research and theory building about interpersonal relationships. The focus instead was on how attitudes, beliefs, and values could be altered via public and mass communication messages. During this period, research and theory building in interpersonal interaction were conducted primarily by sociologists, social psychologists, and anthropologists. The study of dyadic or one-on-one communication did not begin in earnest until the mid-1960s. Researchers then investigated how communication could be used to develop and improve interpersonal relationships with friends, lovers, and spouses. The aura of the 1960s with messages about peace, understanding, and cooperation prompted many institutions of higher education to offer courses dealing with the development and improvement of human relations.

The first synthesis of early empirical research efforts included studies of social psychologists. In the early 1970s scholars published the first textbooks in interpersonal communication (Giffin & Patton, 1971; Keltner, 1970; McCroskey, Larson, & Knapp, 1971). By the mid to late 1970s, the communication discipline...
was heavily involved in researching and theorizing about interpersonal communication and relationship development. Most of this research in interpersonal communication was borrowed from works in social psychology. By the mid to late 1970s and 1980s, several theories of interpersonal communication and relational interaction had been formulated.

A Multi-Perspective Orientation to Interpersonal Communication

Throughout this text, we have attempted to illustrate the variety of theory building options available by showing the differences between laws, human action (rules), and systems approaches to communication (see Chapter 3). This chapter will introduce you to examples of interpersonal or relational communication theories from each of these perspectives. Recall that advocates of the law-governed approach to communication theory emphasize the causes of interpersonal communication. Rule-governed researchers and theorists stress the influence of individual choice and free will. Systems scholars stress the interaction, interdependence, and coordination of behavior between individuals. They examine the entire “interpersonal system,” which can range in size from the friend-lover, friend-friend, or husband-wife dyad to a larger extended family system or social network. Systems scholars believe that “to understand the process of mutual adaptation in interpersonal communication, it is necessary to focus on moment-to-moment changes during interactive events” (Knapp & Miller, 1985, p. 15). As each theory is described, you will see how the underlying perspective shaped the development of the theory.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

One example of a theory developed from the law-governed approach is Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) (Berger, 1979; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). URT was initially presented as a series of axioms and theorems which describe the relationships between uncertainty and several communication factors. The theory seeks to explain and predict interpersonal communication during the beginning of an interaction. One core assumption of this theory is that when strangers meet, they seek to reduce uncertainty about each other. Simultaneously, people seek to increase their ability to predict their partner’s and their own behavior in the situation. Interviews, first dates, and interactions with foreigners are situations in which we are highly uncertain. One of the major problems we face when we first meet people is the uncertainty of predicting their behavior. If we could predict others’ behavior, we could choose more appropriate behaviors ourselves. (Recall that one goal of theories is to help us control our environment). According to URT, different types of communication occur during three stages of first meetings.

Three Stages of Initial Interactions

Some information about others is easily revealed. Physical appearance cues can indicate another’s sex, age, and economic or social status. This information is then supplemented with additional biographic and demographic information obtained during the entry phase of relationship development. Much of the interaction in this entry phase is controlled by communication rules and norms. For example, it is considered improper to ask strangers for intimate details about their personal behavior. When communicators begin to share attitudes, beliefs, values, and more personal data, the personal phase begins (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). During this phase, the communicators feel less constrained by rules and norms and tend to communicate more freely with each other. The third phase of initial interaction is the exit phase. During this phase, the communicators decide on future interaction plans. They may discuss or negotiate ways to allow the relationship to grow and continue. However, any particular conversation may be terminated at the end of the entry phase.

Uncertainty Reduction Axioms

Uncertainty Reduction Theory was developed to describe the interrelationships between uncertainty, the amount of verbal communication, information seeking, similarity and attraction, the intimacy level of the communication content, nonverbal expressions of affiliation, and the rate at which individuals engage in equal amounts of information exchange. The seven axioms offered in Uncertainty Reduction Theory take the form of “If . . . then . . .” statements typical of the law-governed approach. The first axiom of the theory suggests that, if uncertainty levels are high, the amount of verbal communication between strangers will decrease. The more we learn about someone, the less uncertain we are, and the amount of verbal communication increases.

Two other factors which reduce uncertainty between communicators are information seeking behavior (Axiom 3) and the degree of similarity individuals perceive in each other (Axiom 6). When strangers first meet and interact, the amount of information they seek from each other is quite high. As a relationship progresses, the amount of overt information-seeking behavior decreases. The degree of perceived similarity (in background, attitudes, appearance) between communicators also reduces uncertainty (perceived similarity is one of the components of interpersonal attraction theory and will be discussed in more detail below). Similarity between strangers helps reduce uncertainty because the number of alternative explanations for the person’s behavior decreases. Individuals use cues about similarity and dissimilarity (especially background and attitude cues) to help them understand why other people communicate as they do. For example, if I am talking with Dana, who comes from a large
city similar to mine, then I would have some basis to explain why Dana uses an assertive or aggressive communication style. Similarity in background, real or imagined, may help us explain and predict attitudes and beliefs. Indeed, Berger (1979) found that perceived background similarity led to predictions of attitude similarity.

If communicators are very uncertain, URT suggests they will exchange information and will self-disclose at about the same rate. Axiom 5 states that high levels of uncertainty will produce high and about equal rates of information exchange between communicators. Under conditions of high uncertainty such as when strangers meet, an imbalance in the exchange of information may create tension. One person may be accused of dominating the conversation, and the relationship may be terminated.

Nonverbal expressions of interest and attention also increase as uncertainty decreases (Axiom 2). Communicators may exhibit more direct eye gaze, touch more, and sit closer to each other. As uncertainty is further reduced, more intimate communication messages may be exchanged (Axiom 4). As uncertainty is further reduced, self-disclosing statements reveal more intimate information and may rapidly move the relationship from the entry phase. The final result of less uncertainty is that communicators like each other more overall (Axiom 7) because they feel they know and understand each other better.

Figure 9.1
Uncertainty Reduction Axioms

1. A high level of uncertainty is present at the beginning of an interaction. As verbal communication between strangers increases, the level of uncertainty for each interaction will decrease. As uncertainty is further reduced, the amount of verbal communication will increase.

2. As nonverbal affiliative expressiveness increases, uncertainty levels will decrease in an initial interaction situation. In addition, decreases in uncertainty level will cause increases in nonverbal affiliative expressiveness.

3. High levels of uncertainty cause increases in information seeking behavior. As uncertainty levels decline, information seeking behavior decreases.

4. High levels of uncertainty cause decreases in the intimacy level of communication. Low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of intimacy.

5. High levels of uncertainty produce high rates of reciprocity. Low levels of uncertainty produce low reciprocity rates.

6. Similarities between persons reduce uncertainty; while dissimilarities increase uncertainty.

7. Increases in uncertainty produce decreases in liking; decreases in uncertainty level produce increases in liking.

Uncertainty Reduction Theorems

Twenty-one theorems of URT were developed by Berger and Calabrese (1975). Taken together, Theorems 1-6 suggest that when the amount of communication between strangers in initial interaction increases, nonverbal expressions of interest (such as direct eye contact, head nods, pleasantness of voice), intimate communication content, liking, and similarity also increase. More communication creates less need for immediate and equal exchanges of information-seeking communication.

Figure 9.2
Uncertainty Reduction Theorems

1. Amount of verbal communication and nonverbal affiliative expressiveness are positively related.

2. Amount of communication and intimacy level of communication are positively related.

3. Amount of communication and information seeking behavior are inversely related.

4. Amount of communication and reciprocity rate are inversely related.

5. Amount of communication and liking are positively related.

6. Amount of communication and similarity are positively related.

7. Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and intimacy level of communication content are positively related.

8. Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and information seeking are inversely related.

9. Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and reciprocity rate are inversely related.

10. Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and liking are positively related.

11. Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and similarity are positively related.

12. Intimacy level of communication content and information seeking are inversely related.

13. Intimacy level of communication content and reciprocity rate are inversely related.

14. Intimacy level of communication content and liking are positively related.

15. Intimacy level of communication content and similarity are positively related.

16. Information seeking and reciprocity rate are positively related.

17. Information seeking and liking are negatively related.

18. Information seeking and similarity are negatively related.

19. Reciprocity rate and liking are negatively related.

20. Reciprocity rate and similarity are negatively related.

21. Similarity and liking are positively related.

Theorems 7 - 11 deal with nonverbal cues associated with affiliation or liking (factors of nonverbal expressiveness). These theorems suggest the greater the nonverbal expressiveness, the more intimate content, perceived similarity, and liking there will be. More nonverbal expressiveness reduces the need for information-seeking behavior and for equal, immediate exchanges of communication.

Theorems 12 - 15 are related to the intimacy level of communication content. As communication content becomes more intimate and personal, perceived similarity and liking between communicators increase. In addition, as self-disclosing messages become more intimate, people's tendency to seek information and need for immediate and equal exchanges of information decrease too.

Theorems 16 - 18 deal expressly with the concept of information-seeking. Theorem 12 suggests that strangers use less information-seeking communication as they begin to like each other more. As a relationship develops, there is less need to ask questions and "interrogate" one another. People are more willing to volunteer information about themselves.

Theorems 19 - 21 deal with reciprocity, or rates of information exchange. As two individuals perceive greater similarity and are more attracted to each other, they feel less need to exchange information with equal frequency. However, the theory also suggests that when uncertainty is high, communicators tend to reciprocate behavior, as one person increases information-seeking, the other person will also tend to seek more information.

Theorem 21 suggests that the greater the real and perceived similarity between communicators in a developing relationship, the more overall attraction or liking will exist. During the last twenty-five years, social psychological and communication researchers have conducted much research into the relationship between similarity and liking. For Uncertainty Reduction Theory, the key to this relationship is our need to reduce uncertainty. Berger and Calabrese (1975) suggest that the concept of uncertainty reduction accounts for many research findings concerning the similarity-attraction relationship.

In the almost fifteen years since the initial presentation of URT, many communication scholars have examined its assumptions through quantitative and empirical research. URT has been used to study the development and maintenance of romantic relationships (Parke & Adelman, 1983) and relationships between people of different cultures (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984; Gudykunst, Nishida, Koike & Shino, 1986; Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985). Lester (1986) studied uncertainty reduction in organizational communication. Berger and Calabrese (1975) suggest that, in our increasingly mobile society, we may all need to decrease uncertainty in new relationships several times during our lives. As we move from job to job, from city to city, and perhaps from one intimate relationship to another, we may spend a great deal of time developing new relationships by communicating to reduce uncertainty. Thus, these extensions of URT will be discussed in more detail below.

Moving Beyond Initial Interaction Stages

In an effort to explain how uncertainty reduction works beyond the initial stages of relational development, Berger (1979, 1986) has extended the boundaries of the original theory by including new concepts and refining the original ones. Cognitive uncertainty (the type of uncertainty presented in the original formulation of the theory) refers to a generalized state of uncertainty between individuals, while linguistic or behavioral uncertainty refers to the level of uncertainty felt in a particular conversation.

Three levels of knowledge are also described in the extended theory. Descriptive knowledge deals with statements people make to describe others' current behavior. A second level of knowledge, predictive knowledge, includes statements about others' beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and future behavior. Finally, an individual reaches the explanatory level of knowledge when he or she can explain why another person behaves or believes a certain way. Each level of knowledge includes the preceding level, and progression to each higher level becomes increasing more difficult. As our desire to develop a significant and long-term relationship increases, so does our need for higher levels of knowledge. The relative success of a long-term intimate relationship depends, in part, on one's ability to offer explanations of a partner's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The three levels of knowledge can also be applied to the examination of self. Many people have high levels of descriptive and predictive knowledge about themselves. People generally know their own attitudes and can usually predict their own behavior. However, explanatory knowledge about oneself is often very difficult, perhaps even impossible, for any given person to acquire. Individuals frequently consult with experts such as psychologists or counselors to uncover explanatory knowledge about themselves.

Under several conditions, the desire to gain knowledge about others is quite strong. The first condition concerns incentive. We try to find out more about people who can provide us with rewards or satisfy our needs so that we may develop strategies to obtain the rewards. For example, we may develop relationships with fraternity or sorority members so that our new friends can help "get us in." When they can help us get what we want, these people possess high incentive value for us, so we monitor their behavior, as well as our own communication with them, more closely. For example, we may examine how they respond to praise. If we discover that they enjoy being complimented and are more gracious and giving after being praised, we may then compliment them frequently in order to develop the relationship more quickly.

A second motive which stimulates information-seeking is deviant or unpredictable behavior of others. When a person's communication behavior deviates from our expectations, we monitor their communication more closely to get additional information. We often respond less favorably to the unusual or unpredictable behavior of others than to behavior consistent with our
expectations. One researcher found that as a stranger in an initial interaction gave more compliments, observers rated him as friendlier (Berger, 1979).
However, they also judged him more dishonest and less sincere. Observers probably imputed ulterior motives to the stranger to explain the increase in compliments. Thus, when a person’s communication follows conventional norms and rules, we may pay less attention to it. However, when a person’s communication deviates from conventions, rules and norms, we pay closer attention to that behavior (increase our monitoring) to generate more reliable information about the person.

A third and final motive for acquiring information about others is the likelihood of interacting with them in the future. Generally, the expectation of or desire for future contact causes people to pay closer attention to their own and others’ communication. Expecting future interaction can also strongly influence our evaluation of another’s behavior. People who believe that they will be communicating with another person in the future may change their communication behavior to be viewed more favorably. People generally do not disclose intimate information to strangers. However, in two contexts this spontaneous and intimate self-disclosure to strangers does occur. The “stranger-on-the-plane” situation is one context in which we suspend normal communication rules because we never expect to meet the other person again. You may recall a long airplane ride during which your seatmate revealed intimate personal details after meeting you only a few hours earlier. An out-of-town pub or bar is another “special” context in which we may ignore the rules we typically follow for self-disclosure (Berger, 1979).

Strategies to Reduce Uncertainty

The development (extension) of Uncertainty Reduction Theory revealed three general strategies used to reduce uncertainty about others. Passive strategies involve watching someone without being observed. You may have engaged in a passive strategy to reduce uncertainty about someone you were attracted to. You may have unobtrusively observed this person talking with other students in class, in the cafeteria, or in the dormitory. Note that while you were gaining information, no direct communication occurred between you. We prefer to observe others in informal social situations where norms and rules are frequently relaxed and more revealing information may emerge (Berger, 1979).

Active strategies of uncertainty reduction require more effort to discover information, but there is still no direct contact between the observer and the observed (target of observation). An active strategy may include finding out about another person by asking third parties for information. You may have discovered someone’s “availability” for a relationship by asking friends whether the person was involved with someone. Interactive strategies include obtaining information directly through asking questions (interrogation) and offering personal information about yourself (self-disclosure). The self-disclosure strategy relies on the fact that self-disclosure by one person stimulates self-disclosure in another. If I reveal something important about myself to others, they feel “obliged” to reveal something equally important about themselves to me. A cocktail party is a good place to observe people using interactive strategies. When individuals give information about themselves, they may exaggerate or lie. Thus, it is important to be able to detect deception. One type of interactive strategy is deception detection strategies, including the careful scrutiny of nonverbal behavior (see Chapter B). Much research has examined people’s ability to detect deception in others (see esp. Knapp & Comadena, 1979).

A Test of Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Parks and Adelman (1983) tested Uncertainty Reduction Theory applied to premarital romantic relationships. Parks and Adelman suggest that all relationships are embedded within a larger social framework created by each partner’s separate communication networks and relationships. This individual network may reduce uncertainty by providing “third party” information about one’s romantic partner. For example, observing your partner interact with family may be quite telling in that they may communicate in ways you have never observed before. The mere act of meeting a partner’s larger social network or family may reduce uncertainty. Indeed, failing to introduce a partner to one’s friends and family may make the partner uncertain and provoke such questions as, “If I’m so important to you, how come I’ve never met your friends?” (Parks & Adelman, 1983, p. 58). Further, support from a partner’s network or family may reduce uncertainty and help to make the relationship grow and stabilize. Using interviews and questionnaires, Parks and Adelman found that people who received more support for their romantic involvement from family and friends expressed less uncertainty about their relationships and were less likely to terminate them compared to people who received less support.

Predicted Outcome Value Theory

Predicted Outcome Value (POV) Theory, a modification of Uncertainty Reduction Theory) emphasizes anticipated rewards and costs of relationships by stressing incentive value (Sonnafrank, 1986). Recall from the discussion above that incentive value consists of the perceived future rewards and costs likely to be experienced if the relationship develops. POV places less emphasis on the need for uncertainty reduction in initial interactions and greater emphasis on the need to ensure that future interactions with someone will lead to more positive experiences than negative ones. POV maintains that the need to maximize outcomes is central to the process of developing relationships. Beginning stages of any relationship are usually limited in the number of actual experiences and outcomes. Thus, predicted positive outcomes should influence a person’s decision to seek, avoid or restrict further communication (Sonnafrank, 1986).
POV offers several key explanations for how people predict outcomes in developing relationships. Individuals who predict greater positive outcomes will be more attracted to relationships and will more often try to extend their relationships compared to people with lower predicted positive outcomes. On the other hand, individuals who predict greater negative outcomes will communicate specifically to block relational development. Further, individuals guide conversations toward topics that they expect will result in greater predicted positive outcomes (Sunnafrank, 1986, pp. 10-18). According to Predicted Outcome Value Theory, reducing uncertainty allows people to predict future outcomes better. They can thus control their communication to produce positive outcomes.

POV modifies all seven axioms of the original Uncertainty Reduction Theory by suggesting that predicted outcome value acts as a mediating variable and modifies the relationships between uncertainty reduction and communication factors such as amount of verbal communication, expressing affiliation nonverbally, seeking information, communicating intimate content, using reciprocal rates of communication, and feeling similarity and liking. Advocates of POV believe research shows these modifications strengthen Uncertainty Reduction Theory. Berger (1986) suggests that predicting an outcome value is itself one type of uncertainty-reducing activity. He views POV as an expansion of, not an alternative to, Uncertainty Reduction Theory. More research is needed to determine which theory best explains the role of communication in developing relationships. Additional research is also necessary to test whether these two theories accurately describe communication in the later stages of relationship development.

The Social Exchange Approach

Equity Theory and social exchange theories belong to the same “family.” Social exchange theories have been of great interest to communication theorists, although these theories originally come from the disciplines of social psychology, sociology, and psychology (see Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). The social exchange approach to interpersonal communication suggests that people communicate to maximize positive outcomes, to minimize negative outcomes, and to achieve financial, physical and social rewards (Roloff, 1981). Like Predicted Outcome Value theorists, social exchange theorists believe individuals initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships on the basis of real and perceived rewards and costs associated with the relationship. For example, according to the social exchange approach, you date someone because you are receiving some reward from the relationship: companionship, affection, love, and ego-gratification. Costs are associated with any relationship; they can include time, money, physical and emotional energy. If you believe the costs of maintaining a relationship greatly exceed the rewards you expect to receive from the relationship, you are likely to terminate the relationship.

Social exchange is “the voluntary transference of some object or activity from one person to another in return for other objects or activities” (Roloff, 1981, p. 21). Resources that people exchange through interpersonal communication include affection, prestige, services such as child rearing, goods or products such as jewelry, information such as advice, opinions, or instructions, and money (Foa & Foa, 1974). Interpersonal communication is a purposeful, goal-directed, and intentional activity which involves the exchange of symbols. Viewed from a social exchange framework, interpersonal communication can be thought of as the process by which individuals involved in a relationship provide each other with, and negotiate for, the exchange of resources (Roloff, 1981).

Equity Theory

Equity is sometimes discussed as equality. When people are engaged in an equitable relationship, then they perceive that their balance of rewards and costs is “fair” or “equal” compared to their partner’s balance. Individuals evaluate the fairness of a relationship by calculating their own and their partner’s inputs to and outcomes from the relationship. Inputs are the positive and negative contributions to the relationship, while outcomes are the consequences one receives from the relationship. If my ratio of rewards to costs is equal to my partner’s, then equity exists. Many of us have witnessed inequitable relationships in which the number and value of one party’s inputs greatly exceeded those of the relational partner. Partners may complain that they are responsible for giving all the affection in a relationship or that the “gifts” received from their partner are not equal in value to the gifts they give; “I bought a television for Mickey’s last birthday, but Mickey only gave me a videotape for mine!”

Propositions About Equity. Although Equity Theory has generated a considerable amount of research, Walster, Walster and Berscheid (1978) suggest that Equity Theory can be summarized by four propositions. Proposition I states, “Individuals will try to maximize their outcomes (where outcomes equal rewards minus costs)” (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, p. 6). This proposition suggests that people will behave in ways that enhance their own self-interest. The adage, “Every person has a price,” is a maxim that could be derived from this proposition. The second proposition has two parts. In order to avoid constant conflict and to maximize positive collective group outcomes, compromise is necessary. This first part of the proposition emphasizes that groups develop sets of rules regarding what counts as a fair distribution of effort and resources in a relationship. The second half states that groups reward or punish members according to their fair or unfair treatment of others. Divorce laws constitute one attempt by society to ensure that the tangible aspects of
a relationship (property, goods, money) are distributed somewhat equitably after a couple separates (Rolloff, 1981).

Consequences of Inequity: Proposition III states, “When individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress individuals feel.” (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, p. 17). Both victims and beneficiaries in unfair relationships may feel distress if society tends to “blame the victim,” although the victim of inequity may feel more distress than the victimizer. Some empirical research supports this assertion. In one experimental study, students who completed a “proofreading task” expected to receive two dollars for their efforts. Afterwards, all were told they had done a good job. However, some participants received one dollar (inequitably paid), some three dollars (overpaid), and some two dollars (equitably paid). When asked to describe their moods, equitably paid subjects were more content than the underpaid or overpaid participants (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978).

The final proposition in Equity Theory discusses how individuals respond to inequity. People in inequitable relationships try to restore equity to eliminate their distress. The more unfair the relationship, the more distressed one feels. People who are more distressed try harder than others to restore equity (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). There are several explanations for why inequity may surface in a previously fair relationship. As we learn more about another, we discover new sources of inequity about which may have been unaware. Couples often experience greater conflict after marriage than before because they know more about each other and have more basis for disagreement (Rolloff, 1981). A second reason individuals may suddenly feel a relationship is inequitable is that people grow and change during the stages of a relationship but may not communicate their changed needs to their partner. For example, suppose that as the relationship develops, Dale needs more demonstrations of affection. If Dale does not directly communicate this need to Jamie, and Jamie does not spontaneously demonstrate more affection, Dale may feel unfairly treated, as if Dale is giving more than Jamie. Important events in a relationship such as one partner’s moving away to college or the birth of a baby may enhance feelings of inequity. The feelings may persist until the partners adjust their inputs. Finally, the partners may feel that the value of the rewards and costs and the “distribution” of profits in the relationship which they once considered equitable are in fact unfair. Rolloff (1983) suggests that societal influences such as the women’s movement and the media help convince some that equity in the distribution of relational rewards no longer exists.

Restoring Equity. Walster, Walster and Berscheid (1978) propose two ways to restore equity in a relationship: restoring actual equity or psychological equity. Restoring actual equity involves altering your own or your partner’s gains in the relationship. Behaviors are altered in an attempt to create equity. For example, you may start to praise your partner less if you believe that he or she is praising you less, or you may more frequently seek out others who tend to praise you. When people engage in psychological equity restoration, they distort reality in an effort to convince themselves that an inequitable relationship is, in fact, equitable. Suppose Dana feels that Lyn is not showing enough affection. Dana may restore equity psychologically by saying, “I’m very lucky to have Lyn as my partner, so whatever amount of affection I receive, I’m fortunate to get!”

Equity and the Relational Development Process. When thinking of the development of intimate relationships involving friends, lovers, and spouses, you may feel that the application of Equity Theory is mercenary and unromantic. Many people feel that special types of interpersonal relationships are somehow above the economic metaphors of exchanging goods and services, costs and rewards, and the entire concept of social exchange in general. Recall that central to Equity Theory is the proposition that human beings think first and foremost of their own self-interest. This view contrasts sharply with more conventional beliefs about communication between spouses, lovers, friends, parents, and children. Conventional thought views communication in these contexts as the most profound demonstration of unconditional love, support, and giving. In these “special” interpersonal relationships, our own self-interests take a secondary role to the self-interests of our relational partners. In these relationships we become less concerned with getting and more concerned with giving. If we can suspend judgment for just a while, we may be able to discern more clearly whether Equity Theory accurately explains the development, escalation, maintenance, and possible de-escalation of intimate relationships. Walster, Walster, and Berscheid (1978) suggest that relationships grow on the basis of equitable exchanges. Rolloff (1981) contends that we become attracted to people who we believe can engage in equitable relationships with us. Intimate relationships usually involve deeper and more frequent self-disclosures. DeVito (1989) suggests that without self-disclosure of an honest and profound nature, a truly intimate relationship cannot exist. Thus, Equity Theory can be used to describe the nature of self-disclosure in an intimate relationship. If one partner engages in a great deal of self-disclosure, while the other does not, inequity may be said to exist. Those who self-disclose provide much input into a relationship through their self-revelations, with a great deal of potential cost. As many of us know, providing personal details about our lives to another, even to a special other, can be quite risky. Conversely, the person receiving self-disclosure receives much potential reward (in the form of information), but may sacrifice few costs. The inequity which exists in this type of relationship could signal distress for the participants. In order to alleviate this distress and restore equity, reciprocating self-disclosure with an approximately equal depth and amount of information must become more typical in the relationship. The more we reveal about ourselves to others, the more willing they should be to reveal important and intimate information about
The value of the costs is also more extreme in intimate relationships. A casual acquaintance may challenge our intelligence, honesty, or integrity without doing much damage to our self-concept. However, if our spouse or best friend were to make the same comments, we might feel psychologically devastated. People in casual relationships typically exchange more tangible and less symbolic resources; money, goods, services, and certain types of information. The exchange of affection (love) is more typical of intimate relationships. It is also true that the value of certain kinds of rewards (love, status, certain types of information) is less generally agreed upon than the value of other types of rewards. Values for these rewards tend to vary from person to person and from couple to couple. Intimate relationships also lend themselves more frequently to the interchangeability of resources. That is, if a casual friend lends you fifty dollars, you are generally obligated to repay that money by cash or check. However, if an intimate relational partner such as your girlfriend or boyfriend lends you fifty dollars, you can “repay” them in ways other than money. You could drive them to school for a month or do their laundry for two months.

Equity Concerns in Friendship Development. Research has supported the basic propositions of Equity Theory. Individuals involved in more equitable relationships are more satisfied with their interpersonal friendship and marital relationships. These findings appear consistent, even in inequitable relationships where one person seems to profit unfairly from the inequity.

Roberto and Scott (1986) used Equity Theory to examine patterns of exchange between older adults and their friends. The researchers tested over one hundred senior citizens using interviews and a questionnaire to measure the perceptions of one’s own and one’s partner’s inputs and outputs in a relationship (The Walster Global Measure of Participants’ Perceptions of Inputs, Outcomes, and Equity/Inequity; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, pp. 234-236). Using formulas designed to translate equity into numbers, participants were classified as overbenefited, equitably benefited, and underbenefited in their interpersonal relationships. The researchers found that older individuals with equitable friendships reported less distress than those with inequitable interpersonal relationships.

Equity Concerns in Intimate Relationship Development. Intimate relationships promote more intense feelings of liking and loving than casual ones. Attraction research has explored factors that lead to the development of intimate relationships, and there are several issues involving interpersonal attraction which relate specifically to Equity Theory. Walster and Walster (1978) have defined interpersonal attraction as, “An individual’s tendency or predisposition to evaluate another person or symbol of that person in a positive (or negative) way” (p. 280). How does Equity Theory relate to the concept of attraction, liking, and mate selection? Researchers have discovered that equity of self-disclosure promotes greater marital adjustment (Davidson, Balswick, & Halverson, 1983). Several proponents of Equity Theory suggest that equity considerations are important in dating and marriage relationships. Indeed, some equity theorists even offer a “Matching Hypothesis.” This hypothesis states that the more equitable a romantic relationship is, the more likely the relationship will progress to permanence and/or marriage. How can we use Equity Theory to assess a potential partner? Walster, Walster, and Berscheid (1978) suggest that we judge potential mates on such traits as beauty or physical attractiveness, physical and mental health, and intelligence and education. Research indicates that, “Birds of a feather flock together;” that is, people with certain levels of these traits look for partners whose levels of the trait match their own. For example, if Lou is extremely attractive, Lou will seek out an extremely attractive relationship partner.

According to Equity Theory, individuals are attracted to potential mates who are their physical, intellectual, and educational equals. In a field experiment conducted by Kiesler and Baral (1970), some male participants were led to believe that they had done quite well on an “intelligence test.” Others were told that they had done poorly. Each participant then interacted with a female associate (confederate) of the experimenters who was made up to appear either very attractive or very unattractive. The researchers found strong support for the “matching hypothesis.” When the males’ self-esteem was temporarily lowered, they behaved more romantically with the less attractive female. When their self-esteem was raised, they behaved more romantically with the more attractive female. The researchers suggest that the more desirable a man feels, the more physically attractive a woman he thinks he deserves. Thus, we are
Attracted to people we think can form equitable relationships with us. Using several of the propositions outlined in Equity Theory, Berscheid, Walster, and Austin (1973) examined over fifty thousand responses to a survey published in Psychology Today. In general, they found that the more attractive a person was (compared to a partner), the richer, the more loving, and the more self-sacrificing the partner was. Equity can be achieved through an association with a dissimilar partner since people give greater amounts of one resource to compensate for the lack of another resource.

Evaluation of Equity Theory: Equity Theory does not view interpersonal communication in a very romantic way. It is, however, a clear, well-stated theory which has been studied extensively over the last twenty years. Equity Theory allows us to make predictions about interpersonal communication and relationship development in a wide range of contexts; the theory has a broad scope. The large number of studies produced by this theory have provided communication theorists and researchers with useful research techniques and hypotheses. Equity Theory thus has heuristic or research-generating value. Equity Theory findings also correspond well to “conventional wisdom” about relationships. Many of us can easily identify with the situations and communication patterns associated with the theory.

Attraction Theories and Relational Development

An interpersonal relationship will develop only if those involved like or are attracted to each other. The questions “Why do people like each other?” and “What attracts people to each other?” have stimulated almost a quarter century of research by theorists in communication and social psychology. Clearly, attraction is important to a variety of social outcomes and relationships of varying levels of intimacy. We choose to spend “the rest of our lives” with someone to whom we are attracted. We may hire someone or be hired because of attraction. We may temporarily feel “crushed” because someone we are attracted to does not share those feelings. We are often willing to tolerate uncomfortable situations and unpleasant behavior because we are attracted to a particular person. In extreme cases, people whose feelings of attraction are not returned respond with violence or threats.

Reinforcement Theory and Attraction

Donn Byrne, a pioneer in the study of interpersonal attraction, has devoted much of his career to studying why we like some people and dislike others. Byrne and other theorists sought to identify the many factors of interpersonal attraction and then to study each factor separately. They later attempted to combine the experimental findings to determine the relative contribution of each component to understanding the whole. This technique, inductive theory-building, involves collecting the many findings from specific and narrowly focused studies. Theorists then attempt to draw conclusions or to build a more general theory from the specific results.

Byrne felt that the principle of reinforcement explains most of interpersonal attraction. The reinforcement principle suggests that we like and are attracted to those people who reward us. Rewards can range from verbal compliments or praise to actual gifts. Similarly, we dislike and are repelled by individuals who punish us. Again, punishment can take many forms from unfavorable comments to uncomfortable or damaging experiences.

Similarity and Interpersonal Attraction

In studying reinforcement and attraction, Byrne (1974) focused on one primary component—similar attitudes. Byrne used Reinforcement Theory to explain the attraction-similarity research. If the behavior, attitudes, beliefs, values, abilities, and personality of another individual are similar to our own, they are positively rewarding to us. Research shows that people who believe others are similar to themselves are more attracted to them (Byrne, 1974; Sunnafrank, 1983, 1985; Sunnafrank & Miller, 1981). This factor, which is called “homophily” in communication and “similarity” in social psychology, is important when we evaluate those people with whom we intend to develop a relationship. Rogers and Bhowmic (1970) argued that perceived similarity, (the degree to which we believe another’s characteristics are similar to ours) is related to attraction.

Several consistent findings have emerged in the research on similarity. We are more likely to be persuaded by communicators if we believe they are similar to us (Berscheid, 1966). Similar communicators communicate more with each other (Rogers & Bhowmic, 1970). Numerous studies report greater overall liking and attraction between similar than between dissimilar communicators. Similarity is made up of several factors or dimensions (Andersen & Todd-Martins, 1978). Berscheid and Walster (1978) suggest that similarity consists of six dimensions: attitude, personality, physical characteristics, social characteristics, intelligence, and education. McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975) offer four dimensions of similarity: attitude similarity, value similarity, moral similarity, and appearance similarity. They developed a questionnaire to measure perceived similarity between communicators and tested it with high school, college, and adult participants. For all groups, attitude similarity was the most important factor in perceived similarity.

Communicators frequently make judgments about the attractiveness of others based on inferred, rather than actual, characteristics. Cappella (1984) suggests that, “We are as much studying who people think they are attracted to as who they are attracted to” (p. 241). Byrne’s research and that of many interpersonal attraction researchers, including Berscheid, Walster, Sunnafrank and Miller, is conducted under the law-governed method of inquiry. The research methods
used to test hypotheses and research questions about interpersonal attraction and attitude similarity are designed to establish causes of attraction. In conducting much of his research on attraction and attitude similarity, Byrne employed the “bogus stranger” technique. In this method, participants completed an attitude questionnaire. They were then given another scale supposedly completed by a stranger. Actually, the researcher chose the answers on the strangers’ questionnaire. The researcher divided people into two groups to create two experimental conditions: the “similar” and “dissimilar” attitude conditions. In the “similar” condition, the stranger’s scale almost duplicated the responses of the research participant. In the “dissimilar” condition, the questionnaire had almost opposite responses from those of the participant.

Researchers have also studied the effect of other kinds of similarity. Byrne, Griffin, and Stefanik (1967) have suggested that another’s similarity to oneself, whether it be similar behavior, ability, or attitude, makes one more comfortable. Similarity provides reassurance and reinforcement that the person is functioning in a logical and meaningful way because the interaction seems more understandable and predictable.

**Evaluating the Attraction-Reinforcement Research**

Interpersonal attraction research was one of the first efforts to find that similar attitudes cause interpersonal attraction. It provided several useful research techniques, like “bogus stranger” which later were used in many experimental studies of interpersonal communication. Some critics (Eiser, 1980; Gergen, 1980) have challenged Byrne’s experimental methods as too contrived and artificial to predict how people actually are attracted to each other. For example, we rarely read questionnaires completed by those we have just met and might be considering as friends. These critics feel that, because the studies were so artificial, the findings cannot be generalized to actual attraction situations and thus are not very useful. Other critics have described more fundamental limitations of the early work. Duck (1985) suggests that the studies investigating the relationship between attitude similarity and attraction did not describe how people recognize reinforcing attitudes in normal, everyday encounters with strangers. Early researchers did not study the communication of attitudes, beliefs, and values between individuals. Perhaps some people fail to communicate the right messages about their attitudes, inadequately self-disclose to others, or have difficulty with expressions of warmth, concern, and interest (Duck, 1985). Some people even consciously hide or disguise their real attitudes to be more attractive to others. Perhaps only very competent communicators can accurately discern others’ “real” attitudes. Skill and knowledge of interpersonal communication are critical elements in the attitude similarity-attraction relationship. As Duck (1985) states, “relationship development requires different sorts of knowledge and communicative skill at different points” (p. 660). The early attraction-attitude similarity research failed to recognize the importance of these factors. Byrne’s research also failed to acknowledge that an individual’s attitudes may change as a relationship develops. This change in attitudes may affect a person’s ability or desire to reward the partner.

**The Interpersonal Goal-Oriented Theory of Attraction**

Communication theorists have expanded our understanding of the similarity-attraction relationship. The early research failed to include the influence of actual conversation in the process of interpersonal attraction. The influence of outside factors such as status differences between people and environmental factors was not studied. Sunnafrahn and his associates have studied the similarity-attraction relationship from a goal-oriented, communication-based perspective. They have examined the influence of “normal” communication and attitude information during the early acquaintance stages of relationships, since most first encounters between strangers include conversations. As Uncertainty Reduction Theory predicts, more personal information in the early stages of acquaintance occurs. Sunnafrahn’s (1986) Perceived Outcome Value (POV) Theory, people seek information about others in order to enhance the quality (or perceived outcome value) of their interactions. Thus, both Uncertainty Reduction Theory and Perceived Outcome Value Theory predict that people seek information prior to an initial encounter when they anticipate meeting someone new. People may believe that simply knowing the attitudes of a stranger will help them better predict and control the interaction. This information as age, sex, or social status can be obtained from mutual acquaintances or from the context in which the people meet.

Attending the same house of worship, political rally, class, party, or professional meeting reveals certain shared characteristics.

Sunnafrahn and Miller (1981) designed an experiment to discover how a “normal” first conversation between strangers affects the relationship between similar attitudes and attraction. Participants were told that they would be working on a project with a stranger who had attitudes either like or unlike their own. Half the participants then engaged in a five-minute interaction with their partner; the other half did not. The participants next completed a questionnaire that measured how much they were attracted to their partner. Results indicated that participants who did not have a chance to communicate preferred the “similar” stranger. Those who did communicate were more attracted to a stranger unlike themselves. Initial, non-threatening communication appears to make people more attracted to dissimilar others. To explain
this finding, Sunnafrank and Miller suggest that when people engage in brief
encounters with strangers, they feel better able to predict the stranger's behavior
in future interactions. This feeling of stability and control, in turn, influences
attraction. To underscore this point, the researchers reported that participants
who met dissimilar strangers but had no opportunity to communicate with
them were least attracted to the strangers. This study appears to support the
assumptions of Uncertainty Reduction Theory, which suggests that individuals
strive to predict and control their environments. Sunnafrank (1983) suggests
that meeting these goals is the most important factor in determining attraction.
Stable and predictable environments are reinforcing to individuals, unstable
ones are not.

Sunnafrank extended this research by studying later stages of conversations
about attitudes. He discovered that both first conversations and first
conversations followed by discussions of attitudes made people more attracted
to dissimilar, but not similar, strangers. If you already believed that a stranger
shared your attitudes, confirmation would simply support your expectations.
It would not necessarily increase your attraction to the stranger. However, if
you believed that you would meet someone very different from you (an anti-
nuclear energy person meeting a pro-nuclear energy person), a normal first
conversation should reduce the threat associated with the different attitudes,
and you should be more attracted to that person than before. Sunnafrank's
good-oriented theory of attraction seems to explain the later stages of the process
of developing relationships. The similarity-attraction relationship discovered
by earlier researchers best explains relations between individuals before com-
munication takes place. When we communicate with others who are different
from us at work, at school, or at parties, the communication may reduce our
tendency to be attracted only to those we think are like ourselves. Sunnafrank's
(1985) work also extended the previous findings to include interactions between
opposite-sex partners. Since opposite-sex interaction constitutes a large per-
centage of first meetings, this extension is very important.

Relational Development From A Rules Perspective

Cushman and Florence (1974) argue that developing, presenting, and
validating our individual self-concepts is the primary goal of interpersonal
communication. When individuals communicate, they "create" identities for
themselves and others. This identity creation enables us to discover what we
can and cannot do and who we can and cannot be in the presence of others.
When people "agree" on created identities, then the climate necessary to
develop an interpersonal relationship is established. For example, if Sandy
wants to be seen as intelligent and insightful and Jess accepts that image by
responding favorably when Sandy acts intelligently and by complimenting the
keen insights, Sandy and Jess "agree" on Sandy's identity. Of course, they
probably never actually debate what kind of person Sandy is. They simply
fall into a pattern which indicates both accept the self-definition. Jess' behavior
is called reciprocal self-concept support. Different types of self-concept support
lead to different interpersonal relationships: friends, lovers, intimates. Different
degrees of self-concept support lead to different levels of an interpersonal
relationship: acquaintance, friend, or best friend.

The Self-Concept and Interpersonal Attraction

Cushman, Valensten and Dietrich (1982) suggest that perceived self-
concept support is linked to interpersonal attraction. In order to support
another's self-concept, a person must be able to recognize the uniqueness
and special configuration of another's self-concept and must know the
communication rules to communicate support (Cushman & Cahn, 1985). A person
must be able to identify cues presented by a receiver that indicate the receiver
understood the message. This ability is called perceived understanding (Cahn

According to Cushman's rules-based theory, three propositions explain the
relationship between self-concept and interpersonal attraction. First, individuals
are attracted to those with the ability to convey support for their self-concept
(perceived self-concept support). Second, actual similarity in self-concepts
between individuals has no influence on attraction. Third, perceived self-
concept support can be controlled by communication. The focus (who will be
the recipient of the support) and the intensity (how strongly the support
will be felt) can vary. Perceived understanding and support are essential to
validate self-concepts. According to the theory, we are attracted to and form
relationships with those who validate our self-concepts.

A Three-Stage Rule-Based Model of Relationship Development

Cushman and his associates use the practical syllogism (a method of
reasoning which consists of two premises and a conclusion) to explain com-
munication during relationship development. Individuals who wish to form

A Rules Theory of Interpersonal
Communication and Relationship Development

The theories discussed so far used the law-governed perspective. As discussed
in Chapter 3, some scholars think that communication is best understood from
a rules perspective. These theorists feel that communication takes its
significance from shared rules which guide the choices that people make when
they encode and decode messages.
a new relationship know that they must follow certain communication rules. People consciously, purposely, and intentionally communicate in ways which foster a new relationship. Three factors influence the formation of interpersonal relationships: honesty, trust, and self-concept support. These factors are necessary in the growth of intimate and friendly relationships.

Cushman and his associates have developed a three-stage model of how friendships are formed. According to this model, people have a group of individuals whom they can expect to encounter called a field of availables. The field of availables is affected by such forces as birth and death rates, age and sex distributions of a population, and by social, educational, religious, and economic structures. The socialization process also reduces one’s field of availables. Cushman and Cahn (1983) stress that communication rules which govern interactions among our field of availables are fairly standardized for all individuals. Within the field of availables, there exist a number of individuals with desirable attributes and with whom we would consider developing a relationship. Cushman and his associates call these people the field of approachables.

Three communication rules limit the field of approachables. These rules form the basis of subsequent interactions which guide the development of the relationship (Cushman, Valentinset, & Dietrich, 1982):

1. The more you think that the qualities you admire for yourself are actually found in someone else, the more likely you are to communicate with the other.
2. The more favorably you think that someone will respond to an offer of friendship or self-concept support, the more likely you are to communicate with the other.
3. The more self-concept support someone provides you, the more you will think that the person wants to be your friend.

Within the field of approachables, there exists a subset of individuals with whom we will begin to develop relationships and who will actually become our friends. These people are our field of reciprocals. Two communication rules limit the field of reciprocals (Cushman, Valentinset, & Dietrich, 1982):

1. The more our interactions support our initial feelings that the other person possesses qualities we like and admire, the greater the chance that a relationship will develop.
2. The more we openly show respect for each other’s self-concept, the greater the chance that our relationship will develop.

According to this rules theory, developing relationships, especially friendships, are characterized by honesty, trust between individuals, and support for each other’s self-concept. This same three-stage model is also used to explain how more intimate relationships develop. In mate formation, the model emphasizes physical attraction, reciprocal affection, and perceptions of an ideal mate.

Cahn’s Theory of Perceived Understanding

Cahn (1984) has advanced a rules-based theory of interpersonal communication with the core concept of perceived understanding. Sometimes called the “perception of being understood/misunderstood,” perceived understanding is, “the communicator’s assessment of his success or failure when attempting to communicate with another person” (Cahn, 1981, p. 1). The perception of being understood/misunderstood is linked to an individual’s interpretation of messages.

The Perceived Understanding Scale

Cahn and Shulman (1984) designed a questionnaire (scale) to measure perceived understanding. The questionnaire consists of two dimensions: some questions measure perception of being understood or feeling understood, and some measure perception of being misunderstood or feeling misunderstood. The first dimension contains the characteristics identified most often with the feeling of being understood: satisfaction, relaxation, pleasing, good, acceptance, comfortableness, happiness, and importance. The second dimension contains the characteristics identified most often with feelings of being misunderstood: dissatisfaction, annoyance, discomfort, insecurity, sadness, failure, incompleteness, and disinterest. In completing the questionnaire, individuals are first asked to identify in writing one person with whom they have recently talked. Then they are requested to use each adjective on the questionnaire to indicate how they felt during and immediately after trying to make themselves understood by the person they identified. Cahn and Shulman believe that it is possible to feel both somewhat understood and somewhat misunderstood at the same time. They feel that the questionnaire can be used to measure the intensity of the development of an interpersonal relationship and to identify communication behaviors which contribute to perceived understanding.

Perceived Understanding and Relationship Development

Theorists have suggested that individuals in the beginning stages of relationship development seek information to reduce uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) or to enhance their perceived outcome value (Summerv, 1986). Cahn (1983, 1986, 1987) believes that perceived understanding is also a factor in the relationship development process. People feel understood when,

for example, what Kerry thinks of an object or concept (Kerry’s direct perspective) and what Kerry imagines Sam thinks Kerry thinks about that object
or concept (Kerry's meta-metaperspective) are congruent. The perception of feeling understood or misunderstood involves comparing one's metaperspective with one's own direct perspective (Cahn, 1987). For example, suppose Kerry likes and engages in outward displays of affection such as hand-holding, touching arms and shoulders, and kissing; this is Kerry's direct perspective. Kerry also has a meta-metaperspective; Kerry believes Sam thinks that Kerry does not like outward and visible expressions of affection. Whether or not Kerry is correct about what Sam thinks, Kerry may feel misunderstood. Feelings of being understood or misunderstood serve as reasons for individuals to continue or abandon certain courses of action. If you feel someone understands you, you are more likely to continue to interact with that person. Feeling understood promotes closeness and feelings of emotional intimacy with others. These feelings surface because people believe they are following rules appropriate to the interaction. If people feel consistently misunderstood when they interact with someone, then they will probably communicate with that person less frequently. When feelings of misunderstanding surface, people believe that they behaved by "the wrong set of rules." Individuals who feel misunderstood frequently ask questions like, "What happened?" "What went wrong?" "Where did I fail?" and "What am I supposed to do now?" (Cahn, 1987, p. 12).

Consequences of Perceived Understanding

Perceived understanding seems to enhance one's satisfaction with a relationship. Individuals who felt their partners understood them were more attracted to and more trusting of others than individuals who felt misunderstood (Cahn & Frey, 1982). Feeling understood or misunderstood may play a more important part in the later stages of relationships as well (Cahn, 1983; Cahn & Handford, 1984). Perceived understanding has been called an index of the intensity of relationship development. As an intensity variable, the more the relationship develops, the stronger the effect of perceived understanding. Cahn (1983, 1984, 1987) examined perceived understanding between teachers and students. The factor most associated with students' evaluation of teachers was perceived understanding. Three teacher communication behaviors were related to perceived understanding: classroom/platform behavior, student-centered behavior, and democratic/participatory teaching style. Cahn's theory extends communication theories about how relationships develop. Perceived understanding can be added to the list of factors that help connections grow.

A Systems Model of Relational Interaction

Millar and Rogers (1976, 1987) offer a systems-oriented view of interpersonal communication. Their relational approach suggests that communication scholars studying interpersonal dynamics should focus on patterns of exchange during interaction. They believe that individuals and messages cannot be studied separately or in isolation. Instead, patterns of messages and responses must be examined over time. The Millar and Rogers model is consistent with the principles of the systems approach; a relationship is viewed as a joint product of behavior and is more than the sum of the individual parts. The Millar and Rogers (1987) interpersonal dynamics model suggests that relationships emerge from patterns of interaction made up of "redundant, interlocked cycles of messages, continually negotiated and co-defined rather than unilaterally caused by personal qualities and/or social role prescriptions" (p. 118). According to this systems theory, interpersonal relationships are much less influenced by causes (law-governed) or social rules (rule-governed) than by patterns of message exchange.

The Dimensions of Interpersonal Relations

There are three types of message exchange patterns: control, trust and intimacy. Control is exhibited in messages such as, "I'm in charge here," "You can't talk to me like that," and "You don't have the right to tell me what to do." (Millar & Rogers, 1987, p. 120). The control dimension refers to which partner currently has the right to define and direct the actions of the pair (dyad). The partner who creates the most relational definitions or defines the system's actions is the partner who has the most control. According to Millar and Rogers, relational control can be measured by redundancy (how much change there is in partners' negotiation over rights), dominance (how much one partner dominates the interaction and power (the potential to influence or restrict a partner's behaviors). Trust requires both members of a relationship to be trusting and trustworthy. By trusting, people admit that they are dependent on another and that they believe the partner will not exploit them or take advantage of their trust. Intimacy measures how often partners use the other to confirm their feelings of "separateness or connectedness" in the relationship (Millar & Rogers, 1987, p. 123). Very intimate relationships involve a great deal of mutual self-confirmation, behavior in which partners use each other primarily to fulfill their needs. Intimacy is communicated in such comments as, "No one understands me the way you do," and "I couldn't live without him." (Millar & Rogers, 1987, p. 124).

Coding Relational Messages

This approach to communication assumes that messages contain both content and relational dimensions. For example, the phrase, "Open the door" is understood by the content ("open the door") and relational ("I command you to ... ") aspects. In their research, Rogers and Farace (1975) code messages focusing on relational control rather than the content of messages. They code message sequences rather than individual message units. The purpose of the coding is to determine the relationship of one utterance to what precedes
it. In message pairs, the second utterance defines the transaction because it indicates whether the receiver accepts the other's control, exerts control, or remains on an equal level (is not controlled or controlling). Each message is categorized according to a three-digit code. The first digit designates who is the speaker. The second digit designates the grammatical form of the message: (1) Assertion; (2) Question; (3) Talk-Over; (4) Noncomplete; (5) Other. The third digit is the most important. This digit designates the response of the message relative to the previous message. Rogers and Farace (1975) developed nine categories of responses:

1. Support: acceptance, approval, or agreement with the previous statement;
2. Nonsupport: disagreement, rejection, or a challenge to a previous utterance;
3. Extension: utterance which continues the flow of a previous utterance;
4. Answer: a direct answer to a question;
5. Instruction: a qualified or suggested order;
6. Order: a direct and unqualified instruction;
7. Disconfirmation: refusing to acknowledge the previous utterance;
8. Topic change: denotes a change of topic;
9. Initiation—termination: code for the beginning or ending of a discussion;
10. Other

Three levels of control can also be coded for the messages and their relationship to previous messages. An attempt to assert or gain control is considered a one-up statement (1). A request, acceptance of the other's definition of the relationship, or an attempt to yield control is considered a one-down statement (1). A nondemanding, leveling movement which neutralizes control is considered a one-across statement (—). For example, a question that supports a previous utterance would be coded as a one-down. Several researchers have used this coding scheme in studies during the past ten years.

The Millar and Rogers systems model has helped researchers understand patterns of control in interpersonal relationships. The dimensions of control, trust and intimacy have stimulated much research and theory building in interpersonal communication.

Summary

This chapter explored several theories of communication in interpersonal contexts. Theories were presented to explain and predict communication during the process of developing relationships. Some of the theories reviewed reflect the law-governed approach to understanding communication:

Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Perceived Outcome Value Theory, Equity Theory, Reinforcement Theory, Attraction Theory, and Interpersonal Goal-Oriented Theory of Attraction. Two action or rule-governed theories were also presented: Cushman, Valentinso and Dietrich's Rules Theory of Interpersonal Communication and Cahn's Theory of Perceived Understanding. A systems model of interpersonal dynamics by Millar and Rogers was reviewed. Major assumptions, propositions and principles of each theory were discussed. Examples of communication research which tested the theories were provided.

Questions To Consider

1. Describe the beginnings of the study of interpersonal communication in the 1960s.
2. How do the laws, rules, and systems perspectives differ in their approaches to interpersonal communication?
3. What are the assumptions, and predictions Uncertainty Reduction Theory makes about communication?
4. In what ways does Predicted Outcome Value Theory modify Uncertainty Reduction Theory?
5. How does Equity Theory explain the development of interpersonal relations?
6. According to Reinforcement Theory, why are people attracted to each other?
7. How is relationship development explained from a rule perspective?
8. What are the stages and main concerns of the rules-based model of relationship development?
9. How do relationships develop according to the Theory of Perceived Understanding?
10. How is interpersonal communication studied from a systems perspective?
11. Explain the difference between one-down, one-up, and one-across messages.

References

