COMS 120: SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

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Communication 120

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Defining Communication and Communication Study

1.1: Introduction

When you think of small groups, you probably think of the much dreaded “group assignment” that you’ve endured in high school and college. You are less likely to think of the numerous other groups to which you belong that bring more positive experiences, such as your family and friendship groups or shared-interest groups. Group communication scholars are so aware of this common negative sentiment toward group communication that they coined the term **grouphate** to describe it. Susan M. Sorensen, “Group-Hate: A Negative Reaction to Group Work” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Minneapolis, MN, May, 1981). Small groups, however, aren’t just entities meant to torture students; they have served a central purpose in human history and evolution. Groups make it easier for us to complete a wide variety of tasks; help us establish meaningful social bonds; and help us create, maintain, and change our sense of self. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 433. Negative group experiences are often exacerbated by a lack of knowledge about group communication processes. We are just expected to know how to work in groups without much instruction or practice. This lack of knowledge about group communication can lead to negative group interactions, which creates a negative cycle that perpetuates further negative experiences. Fortunately, as with other areas of communication, instruction in group communication can improve people’s skills and increase people’s satisfaction with their group experiences.

Contributors and Attributions

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1.2: Understanding Small Groups

Learning Objectives

- Define small group communication.
- Discuss the characteristics of small groups.
- Explain the functions of small groups.
- Compare and contrast different types of small groups.
- Discuss advantages and disadvantages of small groups.

Most of the communication skills discussed in this book are directed toward dyadic communication, meaning that they are applied in two-person interactions. While many of these skills can be transferred to and used in small group contexts, the more complex nature of group interaction necessitates some adaptation and some additional skills. Small group communication refers to interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence, and a shared identity. In this section, we will learn about the characteristics, functions, and types of small groups.

Characteristics of Small Groups

Different groups have different characteristics, serve different purposes, and can lead to positive, neutral, or negative experiences. While our interpersonal relationships primarily focus on relationship building, small groups usually focus on some sort of task completion or goal accomplishment. A college learning community focused on math and science, a campaign team for a state senator, and a group of local organic farmers are examples of small groups that would all have a different size, structure, identity, and interaction pattern.

Size of Small Groups

There is no set number of members for the ideal small group. A small group requires a minimum of three people (because two people would be a pair or dyad), but the upper range of group size is contingent on the purpose of the group. When groups grow beyond fifteen to twenty members, it becomes difficult to consider them a small group based on the previous definition. An analysis of the number of unique connections between members of small groups shows that they are deceptively complex. For example, within a six-person group, there are fifteen separate potential dyadic connections, and a twelve-person group would have sixty-six potential dyadic connections. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 452–53. As you can see, when we double the number of group members, we more than double the number of connections, which shows that network connection points in small groups grow exponentially as membership increases. So, while there is no set upper limit on the number of group members, it makes sense that the number of group members should be limited to those necessary to accomplish the goal or serve the purpose of the group. Small groups that add too many members increase the potential for group members to feel overwhelmed or disconnected.

Structure of Small Groups

Internal and external influences affect a group's structure. In terms of internal influences, member characteristics play a role in initial group formation. For instance, a person who is well informed about the group's task and/or highly motivated as a group member may emerge as a leader and set into motion internal decision-making processes, such as recruiting new members or assigning group roles, that affect the structure of a group. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 57. Different members will also gravitate toward different roles within the group and will advocate for certain procedures and courses of action over others. External factors such as group size, task, and resources also affect group structure. Some groups will have more control over these external factors through decision making than others. For example, a commission that is put together by a legislative body to look into ethical violations in athletic organizations will likely have less control over its external factors than a self-created weekly book club.

Figure 1.2.1: A self-formed study group likely has a more flexible structure than a city council committee. Image is in the Public Domain.

Group structure is also formed through formal and informal network connections. In terms of formal networks, groups may have clearly defined roles and responsibilities or a hierarchy that shows how members are connected. The group itself may also be a part of an organizational hierarchy that networks the group into a larger organizational structure. This type of formal network is especially important in groups that have to report to external stakeholders. These external stakeholders may influence the group's formal network, leaving the group little or no control over its structure. Conversely, groups have more control over their informal networks, which are connections among individuals within the group and among group members and people outside of the group that aren't official. For example, a group member's friend or relative may be able to secure a space to hold a fundraiser at a discounted rate, which helps the group achieve its task. Both types of networks are important because they may help facilitate information exchange within a group and extend a group's reach in order to access other resources.

Size and structure also affect communication within a group. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 66–74. In terms of size, the more people in a group, the more issues with scheduling and coordination of communication. Remember that time is an important resource in most group interactions and a resource that is usually strained. Structure can increase or decrease the flow of communication. Reachability refers to the way in which one member is or isn't connected to other group members. For example, the "Circle" group structure in Figure 1.2.2 "Small Group Structures" shows that each group member is connected to two other members. This can make coordination easy when only one or two people need to be brought in for a decision. In this case, Erik and Callie are very reachable by Winston, who could easily coordinate with them. However, if Winston needed to coordinate with Bill or Stephanie, he would have to wait on Erik or Callie to reach that person, which could create delays. The circle can be a good structure for groups who are passing along a task and in which each member is expected to progressively build on the others' work. A group of scholars coauthoring a research paper may work in such a manner, with each person adding to the paper and then passing it on to the next person in the circle. In this case, they can ask the previous person questions and write with the next person's area of expertise in mind. The "Wheel" group structure in Figure 1.2.2 "Small Group Structures" shows an alternative organization pattern. In this structure, Tara is very reachable by all members of the group. This can be a useful structure when Tara is the person with the most expertise in the task or the leader who needs to review and approve work at each step before it is passed along to other group members. But Phillip and Shadow, for example, wouldn't likely work together without Tara being involved.

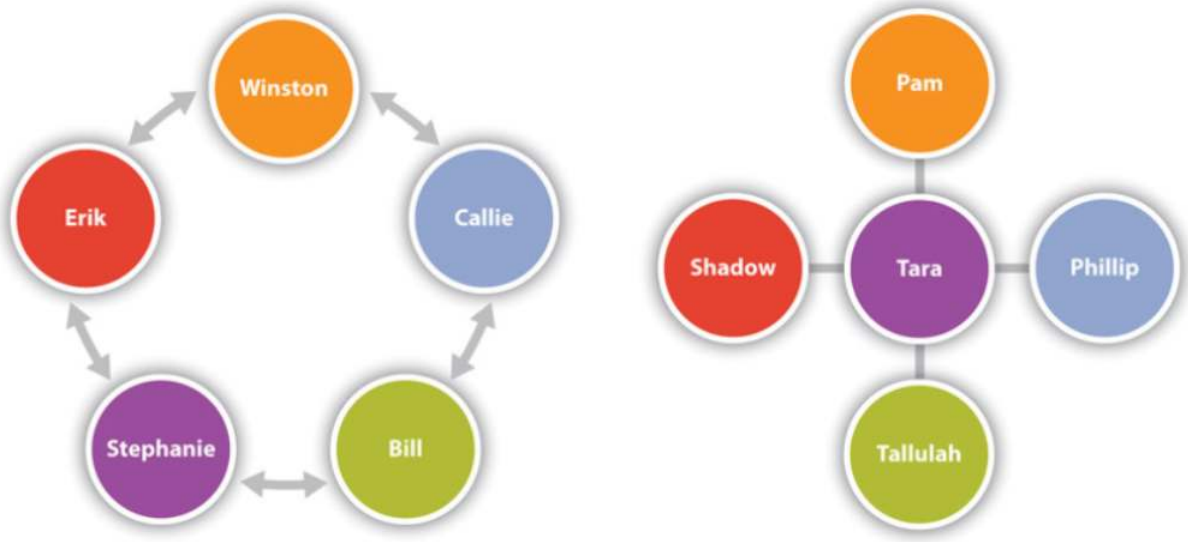

Figure 1.2.2: Small Group Structures

Looking at the group structures, we can make some assumptions about the communication that takes place in them. The wheel is an example of a centralized structure, while the circle is decentralized. Research has shown that centralized groups are better than decentralized groups in terms of speed and efficiency. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 68. But decentralized groups are more effective at solving complex problems. In centralized groups like the wheel, the person with the most connections, person C, is also more likely to be the leader of the group or at least have more status among group members, largely because that person has a broad perspective of what's going on in the group. The most central person can also act as a gatekeeper. Since this person has access to the most information, which is usually a sign of leadership or status, he or she could consciously decide to limit the flow of information. But in complex tasks, that person could become overwhelmed by the burden of processing and sharing information with all the other group members. The circle structure is more likely to emerge in groups where collaboration is the goal and a specific task and course of action isn't required under time constraints. While the person who initiated the group or has the most expertise in regards to the task may emerge as a leader in a decentralized group, the equal access to information lessens the hierarchy and potential for gatekeeping that is present in the more centralized groups.

Interdependence

Small groups exhibit interdependence, meaning they share a common purpose and a common fate. If the actions of one or two group members lead to a group deviating from or not achieving their purpose, then all members of the group are affected. Conversely, if the actions of only a few of the group members lead to success, then all members of the group benefit. This is a major contributor to many college students' dislike of group assignments, because they feel a loss of control and independence that they have when they complete an assignment alone. This concern is valid in that their grades might suffer because of the negative actions of someone else or their hard work may go to benefit the group member who just skated by. Group meeting attendance is a clear example of the interdependent nature of group interaction. Many of us have arrived at a group meeting only to find half of the members present. In some cases, the group members who show up have to leave and reschedule because they can't accomplish their task without the other members present. Group members who attend meetings but withdraw or don't participate can also derail group progress. Although it can be frustrating to have your job, grade, or reputation partially dependent on the actions of others, the interdependent nature of groups can also lead to higher-quality performance and output, especially when group members are accountable for their actions.

Shared Identity

The shared identity of a group manifests in several ways. Groups may have official charters or mission and vision statements that lay out the identity of a group. For example, the Girl Scout mission states that "Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place." Girl Scouts, "Facts," accessed July 15, 2012, http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/facts. The mission for this large organization influences the identities of the thousands of small groups called troops. Group identity is often formed around a shared goal and/or previous accomplishments, which adds

dynamism to the group as it looks toward the future and back on the past to inform its present. Shared identity can also be exhibited through group names, slogans, songs, handshakes, clothing, or other symbols. At a family reunion, for example, matching t-shirts specially made for the occasion, dishes made from recipes passed down from generation to generation, and shared stories of family members that have passed away help establish a shared identity and social reality.

A key element of the formation of a shared identity within a group is the establishment of the in-group as opposed to the out-group. The degree to which members share in the in-group identity varies from person to person and group to group. Even within a family, some members may not attend a reunion or get as excited about the matching t-shirts as others. Shared identity also emerges as groups become cohesive, meaning they identify with and like the group's task and other group members. The presence of cohesion and a shared identity leads to a building of trust, which can also positively influence productivity and members' satisfaction.

Functions of Small Groups

Why do we join groups? Even with the challenges of group membership that we have all faced, we still seek out and desire to be a part of numerous groups. In some cases, we join a group because we need a service or access to information. We may also be drawn to a group because we admire the group or its members. Whether we are conscious of it or not, our identities and self-concepts are built on the groups with which we identify. So, to answer the earlier question, we join groups because they function to help us meet instrumental, interpersonal, and identity needs.

Groups Meet Instrumental Needs

Groups have long served the instrumental needs of humans, helping with the most basic elements of survival since ancient humans first evolved. Groups helped humans survive by providing security and protection through increased numbers and access to resources. Today, groups are rarely such a matter of life and death, but they still serve important instrumental functions. Labor unions, for example, pool efforts and resources to attain material security in the form of pay increases and health benefits for their members, which protects them by providing a stable and dependable livelihood. Individual group members must also work to secure the instrumental needs of the group, creating a reciprocal relationship. Members of labor unions pay dues that help support the group's efforts. Some groups also meet our informational needs. Although they may not provide material resources, they enrich our knowledge or provide information that we can use to then meet our own instrumental needs. Many groups provide referrals to resources or offer advice. For example, several consumer protection and advocacy groups have been formed to offer referrals for people who have been the victim of fraudulent business practices. Whether a group forms to provide services to members that they couldn't get otherwise, advocate for changes that will affect members' lives, or provide information, many groups meet some type of instrumental need.

Groups Meet Interpersonal Needs

Group membership meets interpersonal needs by giving us access to inclusion, control, and support. In terms of inclusion, people have a fundamental drive to be a part of a group and to create and maintain social bonds. As we've learned, humans have always lived and worked in small groups. Family and friendship groups, shared-interest groups, and activity groups all provide us with a sense of belonging and being included in an in-group. People also join groups because they want to have some control over a decision-making process or to influence the outcome of a group. Being a part of a group allows people to share opinions and influence others. Conversely, some people join a group to be controlled, because they don't want to be the sole decision maker or leader and instead want to be given a role to follow.

Just as we enter into interpersonal relationships because we like someone, we are drawn toward a group when we are attracted to it and/or its members. Groups also provide support for others in ways that supplement the support that we get from significant others in interpersonal relationships. Some groups, like therapy groups for survivors of sexual assault or support groups for people with cancer, exist primarily to provide emotional support. While these groups may also meet instrumental needs through connections and referrals to resources, they fulfill the interpersonal need for belonging that is a central human need.

Groups Meet Identity Needs

Our affiliations are building blocks for our identities, because group membership allows us to use reference groups for social comparison—in short, identifying us with some groups and characteristics and separating us from others. Some people join groups to be affiliated with people who share similar or desirable characteristics in terms of beliefs, attitudes, values, or cultural identities. For example, people may join the National Organization for Women because they want to affiliate with others who support women's rights or a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) because they want to affiliate with African Americans, people concerned with civil rights, or a combination of the two. Group memberships vary in

terms of how much they affect our identity, as some are more prominent than others at various times in our lives. While religious groups as a whole are too large to be considered small groups, the work that people do as a part of a religious community—as a lay leader, deacon, member of a prayer group, or committee—may have deep ties to a person's identity.

Figure 1.2.3: Group membership helps meet our interpersonal needs by providing an opportunity for affection and inclusion. Group by Perry Grone on Unsplash.

The prestige of a group can initially attract us because we want that group's identity to "rub off" on our own identity. Likewise, the achievements we make as a group member can enhance our self-esteem, add to our reputation, and allow us to create or project certain identity characteristics to engage in impression management. For example, a person may take numerous tests to become a part of Mensa, which is an organization for people with high IQs, for no material gain but for the recognition or sense of achievement that the affiliation may bring. Likewise, people may join sports teams, professional organizations, and honor societies for the sense of achievement and affiliation. Such groups allow us opportunities to better ourselves by encouraging further development of skills or knowledge. For example, a person who used to play the oboe in high school may join the community band to continue to improve on his or her ability.

Types of Small Groups

There are many types of small groups, but the most common distinction made between types of small groups is that of task-oriented and relational-oriented groups. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 434. Task-oriented groups are formed to solve a problem, promote a cause, or generate ideas or information. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 254. In such groups, like a committee or study group, interactions and decisions are primarily evaluated based on the quality of the final product or output. The three main types of tasks are production, discussion, and problem-solving tasks.Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 44. Groups faced with production tasks are asked to produce something tangible from their group interactions such as a report, design for a playground, musical performance, or fundraiser event. Groups faced with discussion tasks are asked to talk through something without trying to come up with a right or wrong answer. Examples of this type of group include a support group for people with HIV/AIDS, a book club, or a group for new fathers. Groups faced with problem-solving tasks have to devise a course of action to meet a specific need. These groups also usually include a production and discussion component, but the end goal isn't necessarily a tangible product or a shared social reality through discussion. Instead, the end goal is a well-thought-out idea. Task-oriented groups require honed problem-solving skills to accomplish goals, and the structure of these groups is more rigid than that of relational-oriented groups.

Relational-oriented groups are formed to promote interpersonal connections and are more focused on quality interactions that contribute to the well-being of group members. Decision making is directed at strengthening or repairing relationships rather than completing discrete tasks or debating specific ideas or courses of action. All groups include task and relational elements, so it's best to think of these orientations as two ends of a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive. For example, although a family unit works together daily to accomplish tasks like getting the kids ready for school and friendship groups may plan a surprise party for one of the members, their primary and most meaningful interactions are still relational. This chapter focuses on task-oriented groups and the dynamics that operate within these groups.

To more specifically look at the types of small groups that exist, we can examine why groups form. Some groups are formed based on interpersonal relationships. Our family and friends are considered primary groups, or long-lasting groups that are formed based on relationships and include significant others. These are the small groups in which we interact most frequently. They form the basis of our society and our individual social realities. Kinship networks provide important support early in life and meet physiological and safety needs, which are essential for survival. They also meet higher-order needs such as social and self-esteem needs. When people do not interact with their biological family, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, they can establish fictive kinship networks, which are composed of people who are not biologically related but fulfill family roles and help provide the same support.

We also interact in many secondary groups, which are characterized by less frequent face-to-face interactions, less emotional and relational communication, and more task-related communication than primary groups. David B. Barker, "The Behavioral Analysis of Interpersonal Intimacy in Group Development," Small Group Research 22, no. 1 (1991): 79. While we are more likely to participate in secondary groups based on self-interest, our primary-group interactions are often more reciprocal or other oriented. For example, we may join groups because of a shared interest or need.

Groups formed based on shared interest include social groups and leisure groups such as a group of independent film buffs, science fiction fans, or bird watchers. Some groups form to meet the needs of individuals or of a particular group of people. Examples of groups that meet the needs of individuals include study groups or support groups like a weight loss group. These groups are focused on individual needs, even though they meet as a group, and they are also often discussion oriented. Service groups, on the other hand, work to meet the needs of individuals but are task oriented. Service groups include Habitat for Humanity and Rotary Club chapters, among others. Still other groups form around a shared need, and their primary task is advocacy. For example, the Gay Men's Health Crisis is a group that was formed by a small group of eight people in the early 1980s to advocate for resources and support for the still relatively unknown disease that would later be known as AIDS. Similar groups form to advocate for everything from a stop sign at a neighborhood intersection to the end of human trafficking.

As we already learned, other groups are formed primarily to accomplish a task. Teams are task-oriented groups in which members are especially loyal and dedicated to the task and other group members. Carl E. Larson and Frank M. J. LaFasto, TeamWork: What Must Go Right/What Must Go Wrong (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 73. In professional and civic contexts, the word team has become popularized as a means of drawing on the positive connotations of the term—connotations such as "high-spirited," "cooperative," and "hardworking." Scholars who have spent years studying highly effective teams have identified several common factors related to their success.

Successful teams have:

- clear and inspiring shared goals,
- a results-driven structure,
- competent team members,
- a collaborative climate,
- high standards for performance,
- external support and recognition, and
- ethical and accountable leadership.

Increasingly, small groups and teams are engaging in more virtual interaction. Virtual groups take advantage of new technologies and meet exclusively or primarily online to achieve their purpose or goal. Some virtual groups may complete their task without ever being physically face-to-face. Virtual groups bring with them distinct advantages and disadvantages that you can read more about in the "Getting Plugged In" feature next.

"Getting Plugged In"- Virtual Groups

Virtual groups are now common in academic, professional, and personal contexts, as classes meet entirely online, work teams interface using webinar or video-conferencing programs, and people connect around shared interests in a variety of online settings. Virtual groups are popular in professional contexts because they can bring together people who are geographically dispersed. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 163. Virtual groups also increase the possibility for the inclusion of diverse members. The ability to transcend distance means that people with diverse backgrounds and diverse perspectives are more easily accessed than in many offline groups.

One disadvantage of virtual groups stems from the difficulties that technological mediation presents for the relational and social dimensions of group interactions. Joseph B. Walther and Ulla Bunz, "The Rules of Virtual Groups: Trust, Liking, and Performance

in Computer-Mediated Communication," Journal of Communication 55, no. 4 (2005): 830. As we will learn later in this chapter, an important part of coming together as a group is the socialization of group members into the desired norms of the group. Since norms are implicit, much of this information is learned through observation or conveyed informally from one group member to another. In fact, in traditional groups, group members passively acquire 50 percent or more of their knowledge about group norms and procedures, meaning they observe rather than directly ask. Debra R. Comer, "Organizational Newcomers' Acquisition of Information from Peers," Management Communication Quarterly 5, no. 1 (1991): 64–89. Virtual groups experience more difficulty with this part of socialization than co-present traditional groups do, since any form of electronic mediation takes away some of the richness present in face-to-face interaction.

To help overcome these challenges, members of virtual groups should be prepared to put more time and effort into building the relational dimensions of their group. Members of virtual groups need to make the social cues that guide new members' socialization more explicit than they would in an offline group. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 164–65. Group members should also contribute often, even if just supporting someone else's contribution, because increased participation has been shown to increase liking among members of virtual groups. Joseph B. Walther and Ulla Bunz, "The Rules of Virtual Groups: Trust, Liking, and Performance in Computer-Mediated Communication," Journal of Communication 55, no. 4 (2005): 831–32. Virtual group members should also make an effort to put relational content that might otherwise be conveyed through nonverbal or contextual means into the verbal part of a message, as members who include little social content in their messages or only communicate about the group's task are more negatively evaluated. Virtual groups who do not overcome these challenges will likely struggle to meet deadlines, interact less frequently, and experience more absenteeism. What follows are some guidelines to help optimize virtual groups:

- Get started interacting as a group as early as possible, since it takes longer to build social cohesion.
- Interact frequently to stay on task and avoid having work build up.
- Start working toward completing the task while initial communication about setup, organization, and procedures are taking place.
- Respond overtly to other people's messages and contributions.
- Be explicit about your reactions and thoughts since typical nonverbal expressions may not be received as easily in virtual groups as they would be in co-located groups.
- Set deadlines and stick to them.

1. Make a list of some virtual groups to which you currently belong or have belonged to in the past. What are some differences between your experiences in virtual groups versus traditional co-located groups?
2. What are some group tasks or purposes that you think lend themselves to being accomplished in a virtual setting? What are some group tasks or purposes that you think would be best handled in a traditional co-located setting? Explain your answers for each.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Small Groups

As with anything, small groups have their advantages and disadvantages. Advantages of small groups include shared decision making, shared resources, synergy, and exposure to diversity. It is within small groups that most of the decisions that guide our country, introduce local laws, and influence our family interactions are made. In a democratic society, participation in decision making is a key part of citizenship. Groups also help in making decisions involving judgment calls that have ethical implications or the potential to negatively affect people. Individuals making such high-stakes decisions in a vacuum could have negative consequences given the lack of feedback, input, questioning, and proposals for alternatives that would come from group interaction. Group members also help expand our social networks, which provide access to more resources. A local community-theater group may be able to put on a production with a limited budget by drawing on these connections to get set-building supplies, props, costumes, actors, and publicity in ways that an individual could not. The increased knowledge, diverse perspectives, and access to resources that groups possess relates to another advantage of small groups—synergy.

Synergy refers to the potential for gains in performance or heightened quality of interactions when complementary members or member characteristics are added to existing ones. James R. Larson Jr., In Search of Synergy in Small Group Performance (New York: Psychology Press, 2010). Because of synergy, the final group product can be better than what any individual could have produced alone. When I worked in housing and residence life, I helped coordinate a "World Cup Soccer Tournament" for the international students that lived in my residence hall. As a group, we created teams representing different countries around the world, made brackets for people to track progress and predict winners, got sponsors, gathered prizes, and ended up with a very

successful event that would not have been possible without the synergy created by our collective group membership. The members of this group were also exposed to international diversity that enriched our experiences, which is also an advantage of group communication.

Participating in groups can also increase our exposure to diversity and broaden our perspectives. Although groups vary in the diversity of their members, we can strategically choose groups that expand our diversity, or we can unintentionally end up in a diverse group. When we participate in small groups, we expand our social networks, which increase the possibility to interact with people who have different cultural identities than ourselves. Since group members work together toward a common goal, shared identification with the task or group can give people with diverse backgrounds a sense of commonality that they might not have otherwise. Even when group members share cultural identities, the diversity of experience and opinion within a group can lead to broadened perspectives as alternative ideas are presented and opinions are challenged and defended. One of my favorite parts of facilitating class discussion is when students with different identities and/or perspectives teach one another things in ways that I could not on my own. This example brings together the potential of synergy and diversity. People who are more introverted or just avoid group communication and voluntarily distance themselves from groups—or are rejected from groups—risk losing opportunities to learn more about others and themselves.

Figure 1.2.4: Each group member has a different personality and this contributes to the overall group dynamic. Puppies by Cyrin Lookin is under a CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

There are also disadvantages to small group interaction. In some cases, one person can be just as or more effective than a group of people. Think about a situation in which a highly specialized skill or knowledge is needed to get something done. In this situation, one very knowledgeable person is probably a better fit for the task than a group of less knowledgeable people. Group interaction also has a tendency to slow down the decision-making process. Individuals connected through a hierarchy or chain of command often work better in situations where decisions must be made under time constraints. When group interaction does occur under time constraints, having one “point person” or leader who coordinates action and gives final approval or disapproval on ideas or suggestions for actions is best.

Group communication also presents interpersonal challenges. A common problem is coordinating and planning group meetings due to busy and conflicting schedules. Some people also have difficulty with the other-centeredness and self-sacrifice that some groups require. The interdependence of group members that we discussed earlier can also create some disadvantages. Group members may take advantage of the anonymity of a group and engage in social loafing, meaning they contribute less to the group than other members or than they would if working alone. Steven J. Karau and Kipling D. Williams, “Social Loafing: A Meta-Analytic Review and Theoretical Integration,” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 65, no. 4 (1993): 681. Social loafers expect that no one will notice their behaviors or that others will pick up their slack. It is this potential for social loafing that makes many students and professionals dread group work, especially those who have a tendency to cover for other group members to prevent the social loafer from diminishing the group’s productivity or output.

“Getting Competent”- Improving Your Group Experiences

Like many of you, I also had some negative group experiences in college that made me think similarly to a student who posted the following on a teaching blog: “Group work is code for ‘work as a group for a grade less than what you can get if you work alone.’” Maryellen Weimer, “Why Students Hate Groups,” The Teaching Professor, July 1, 2008, accessed July 15, 2012, www.teachingprofessor.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/why-students-hate-groups.But then I took a course called “Small Group and Team Communication” with an amazing teacher who later became one of my most influential mentors. She emphasized the fact that we all needed to increase our knowledge about group communication and group dynamics in order to better our group communication experiences—and she was right. So the first piece of advice to help you start improving your group experiences is to closely study the group communication chapters in this textbook and to apply what you learn to your group interactions. Neither students nor faculty are born knowing how to function as a group, yet students and faculty often think we’re supposed to learn as we go, which increases the likelihood of a negative experience.

A second piece of advice is to meet often with your group. Scott A. Myers and Alan K. Goodboy, “A Study of Grouphate in a Course on Small Group Communication,” Psychological Reports 97, no. 2 (2005): 385. Of course, to do this you have to overcome some scheduling and coordination difficulties, but putting other things aside to work as a group helps set up a norm that group work is important and worthwhile. Regular meetings also allow members to interact with each other, which can increase social bonds, build a sense of interdependence that can help diminish social loafing, and establish other important rules and norms that will guide future group interaction. Instead of committing to frequent meetings, many student groups use their first meeting to equally divide up the group’s tasks so they can then go off and work alone (not as a group). While some group work can definitely be done independently, dividing up the work and assigning someone to put it all together doesn’t allow group members to take advantage of one of the most powerful advantages of group work—synergy.

Last, establish group expectations and follow through with them. I recommend that my students come up with a group name and create a contract of group guidelines during their first meeting (both of which I learned from my group communication teacher whom I referenced earlier). The group name helps begin to establish a shared identity, which then contributes to interdependence and improves performance. The contract of group guidelines helps make explicit the group norms that might have otherwise been left implicit. Each group member contributes to the contract and then they all sign it. Groups often make guidelines about how meetings will be run, what to do about lateness and attendance, the type of climate they’d like for discussion, and other relevant expectations. If group members end up falling short of these expectations, the other group members can remind the straying member of the contact and the fact that he or she signed it. If the group encounters further issues, they can use the contract as a basis for evaluating the other group member or for communicating with the instructor.

1. Do you agree with the student’s quote about group work that was included at the beginning? Why or why not?
2. The second recommendation is to meet more with your group. Acknowledging that schedules are difficult to coordinate and that that is not really going to change, what are some strategies that you could use to overcome that challenge in order to get time together as a group?
3. What are some guidelines that you think you’d like to include in your contract with a future group?

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Small group communication refers to interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence, and a shared identity. Small groups are important communication units in academic, professional, civic, and personal contexts.
- Several characteristics influence small groups, including size, structure, interdependence, and shared identity.
  - In terms of size, small groups must consist of at least three people, but there is no set upper limit on the number of group members. The ideal number of group members is the smallest number needed to competently complete the group’s task or achieve the group’s purpose.
  - Internal influences such as member characteristics and external factors such as the group’s size, task, and access to resources affect a group’s structure. A group’s structure also affects how group members communicate, as some structures are more centralized and hierarchical and other structures are more decentralized and equal.
  - Groups are interdependent in that they have a shared purpose and a shared fate, meaning that each group member’s actions affect every other group member.
  - Groups develop a shared identity based on their task or purpose, previous accomplishments, future goals, and an identity that sets their members apart from other groups.

- Small groups serve several functions as they meet instrumental, interpersonal, and identity needs
  - Groups meet instrumental needs, as they allow us to pool resources and provide access to information to better help us survive and succeed.
  - Groups meet interpersonal needs, as they provide a sense of belonging (inclusion), an opportunity to participate in decision making and influence others (control), and emotional support.
  - Groups meet identity needs, as they offer us a chance to affiliate ourselves with others whom we perceive to be like us or whom we admire and would like to be associated with.
- There are various types of groups, including task-oriented, relational-oriented, primary, and secondary groups, as well as teams.
  - Task-oriented groups are formed to solve a problem, promote a cause, or generate ideas or information, while relational-oriented groups are formed to promote interpersonal connections. While there are elements of both in every group, the overall purpose of a group can usually be categorized as primarily task or relational oriented.
  - Primary groups are long-lasting groups that are formed based on interpersonal relationships and include family and friendship groups, and secondary groups are characterized by less frequent interaction and less emotional and relational communication than in primary groups. Our communication in primary groups is more frequently other oriented than our communication in secondary groups, which is often self-oriented.
  - Teams are similar to task-oriented groups, but they are characterized by a high degree of loyalty and dedication to the group's task and to other group members.
- Advantages of group communication include shared decision making, shared resources, synergy, and exposure to diversity. Disadvantages of group communication include unnecessary group formation (when the task would be better performed by one person), difficulty coordinating schedules, and difficulty with accountability and social loafing.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: For each of the follow examples of a small group context, indicate what you think would be the ideal size of the group and why. Also indicate who the ideal group members would be (in terms of their occupation/major, role, level of expertise, or other characteristics) and what structure would work best.
   a. A study group for this class
   b. A committee to decide on library renovation plans
   c. An upper-level college class in your major
   d. A group to advocate for more awareness of and support for abandoned animals
2. List some groups to which you have belonged that focused primarily on tasks and then list some that focused primarily on relationships. Compare and contrast your experiences in these groups.
3. Synergy is one of the main advantages of small group communication. Explain a time when a group you were in benefited from or failed to achieve synergy. What contributed to your success/failure?

Contributors and Attributions

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1.3: Small Group Development

Learning Objectives

- Explain the process of group development.
- Discuss the characteristics of each stage of group development.

Small groups have to start somewhere. Even established groups go through changes as members come and go, as tasks are started and completed, and as relationships change. In this section, we will learn about the stages of group development, which are forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Bruce W. Tuckman and Mary Ann C. Jensen, "Stages of Small-Group Development Revisited," *Group and Organizational Studies* 2, no. 4 (1977): 419–27. As with most models of communication phenomena, although we order the stages and discuss them separately, they are not always experienced in a linear fashion. Additionally, some groups don't experience all five stages, may experience stages multiple times, or may experience more than one stage at a time.

Forming

During the forming stage, group members begin to reduce uncertainty associated with new relationships and/or new tasks through initial interactions that lay the foundation for later group dynamics. Groups return to the forming stage as group members come and go over the life span of a group. Although there may not be as much uncertainty when one or two new people join a group as there is when a group first forms, groups spend some time in the forming stage every time group membership changes.

Given that interpersonal bonds are likely not yet formed and people are unfamiliar with the purpose of the group or task at hand, there are high levels of uncertainty. Early stages of role negotiation begin and members begin to determine goals for the group and establish rules and norms. Group cohesion also begins to form during this stage. Group cohesion refers to the commitment of members to the purpose of the group and the degree of attraction among individuals within the group. Owen Hargie, *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 445. The cohesion that begins in this stage sets the group on a trajectory influenced by group members' feelings about one another and their purpose or task. Groups with voluntary membership may exhibit high levels of optimism about what the group can accomplish. Although the optimism can be motivating, unrealistic expectations can lead to disappointment, making it important for group members to balance optimism with realism. Groups with assigned or mandatory membership may include members that carry some degree of resentment toward the group itself or the goals of the group. These members can start the group off on a negative trajectory that will lessen or make difficult group cohesiveness. Groups can still be successful if these members are balanced out by others who are more committed to and positive in regards to the purpose of the group.

Many factors influence how the forming stage of group development plays out. The personalities of the individuals in the group, the skills that members bring, the resources available to the group, the group's size, and the group's charge all contribute to the creation of the early tone of and climate within a group. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 14. For example, more dominant personalities may take early leadership roles in the group that can affect subsequent decisions. Group members' diverse skill sets and access to resources can also influence the early stages of role differentiation. In terms of size, the bonding that begins in the forming stage becomes difficult when the number of people within the group prevents every person from having a one-on-one connection with every other member of the group. Also, in larger groups, more dominant members tend to assert themselves as leaders and build smaller coalitions within the group, which can start the group on a trajectory toward more conflict during the upcoming storming stage. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 15.

When a group receives an external charge, meaning that the goal or purpose of the group is decided by people outside the group, there may be less uncertainty related to the task dimensions of the group. Additionally, decisions about what roles people will play including group leaders and other decisions about the workings of the group may come from the outside, which reduces some of the uncertainty inherent in the forming stage. Relational uncertainty can also be diminished when group members have preexisting relationships or familiarity with each other. Although the decreased uncertainty may be beneficial at this stage, too much imposed structure from the outside can create resentment or a feeling of powerlessness among group members. So a manageable amount of uncertainty is actually a good thing for group cohesion and productivity.

Storming

During the storming stage of group development, conflict emerges as people begin to perform their various roles, have their ideas heard, and negotiate where they fit in the group's structure. The uncertainty present in the forming stage begins to give way as people begin to occupy specific roles and the purpose, rules, and norms of a group become clearer. Conflict develops when some group members aren't satisfied with the role that they or others are playing or the decisions regarding the purpose or procedures of the group. For example, if a leader begins to emerge or is assigned during the forming stage, some members may feel that the leader is imposing his or her will on other members of the group. As we will learn in our section on group leadership, leaders should expect some degree of resentment from others who wanted to be the leader, have interpersonal conflicts with the leader, or just have general issues with being led.

Although the word storming and the concept of conflict have negative connotations, conflict can be positive and productive. Just like storms can replenish water supplies and make crops grow, storming can lead to group growth. While conflict is inevitable and should be experienced by every group, a group that gets stuck at the storming stage will likely not have much success in completing its task or achieving its purpose. Influences from outside the group can also affect the conflict in the storming stage. Interpersonal conflicts that predate the formation of the group may distract the group from the more productive idea- or task-oriented conflict that can be healthy for the group and increase the quality of ideas, decision making, and output.

Figure 1.3.1: Although we often have negative connotations of storming and conflict, the group conflict that happens in this stage is necessary and productive. Lightening on the Beach by Jeremy Bishop on Unsplash.

Norming

During the norming stage of group development, the practices and expectations of the group are solidified, which leads to more stability, productivity, and cohesion within the group. Group norms are behaviors that become routine but are not explicitly taught or stated. In short, group norms help set the tone for what group members ought to do and how they ought to behave. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 129. Many implicit norms are derived from social norms that people follow in their everyday life. Norms within the group about politeness, lateness, and communication patterns are typically similar to those in other contexts. Sometimes a norm needs to be challenged because it is not working for the group, which could lead a group back to the storming stage. Other times, group members challenge norms for no good reason, which can lead to punishment for the group member or create conflict within the group.

At this stage, there is a growing consensus among group members as to the roles that each person will play, the way group interactions will typically play out, and the direction of the group. Leaders that began to emerge have typically gained the support of other group members, and group identity begins to solidify. The group may now be recognizable by those on the outside, as slogans, branding, or patterns of interaction become associated with the group. This stage of group development is key for the smooth operation of the group. Norms bring a sense of predictability and stability that can allow a group to move on to the

performing stage of group development. Norms can also bring with them conformity pressures that can be positive or negative. In general, people go along with a certain amount of pressure to conform out of a drive to avoid being abnormal that is a natural part of our social interaction. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 128. Too much pressure, however, can lead people to feel isolated and can create a negative group climate. We will learn more about pressure as a group dynamic later in this chapter.

Explicit rules may also guide group interaction. Rules are explicitly stated guidelines for members and may refer to things like expected performance levels or output, attitudes, or dress codes. Rules may be communicated through verbal instructions, employee handbooks, membership policies, or codes of conduct. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 440. Groups can even use procedures like Robert's Rules of Order to manage the flow of conversations and decision-making procedures. Group members can contest or subvert group rules just as they can norms. Violations of group rules, however, typically result in more explicit punishments than do violations of norms.

Performing

During the performing stage of group development, group members work relatively smoothly toward the completion of a task or achievement of a purpose. Although interactions in the performing stage are task focused, the relational aspects of group interaction provide an underlying support for the group members. Socialization outside of official group time can serve as a needed relief from the group's task. During task-related interactions, group members ideally begin to develop a synergy that results from the pooling of skills, ideas, experiences, and resources. Synergy is positive in that it can lead group members to exceed their expectations and perform better than they could individually. Glitches in the group's performance can lead the group back to previous stages of group development. Changes in membership, member roles, or norms can necessitate a revisiting of aspects of the forming, storming, or norming stages. One way to continue to build group cohesion during the performing stage is to set short-term attainable group goals. Accomplishing something, even if it's small, can boost group morale, which in turn boosts cohesion and productivity.

Adjourning

The adjourning stage of group development occurs when a group dissolves because it has completed its purpose or goal, membership is declining and support for the group no longer exists, or it is dissolved because of some other internal or external cause. Some groups may live on indefinitely and not experience the adjourning stage. Other groups may experience so much conflict in the storming stage that they skip norming and performing and dissolve before they can complete their task. For groups with high social cohesion, adjourning may be a difficult emotional experience. However, group members may continue interpersonal relationships that formed even after the group dissolves. In reality, many bonds, even those that were very close, end up fading after the group disbands. This doesn't mean the relationship wasn't genuine; interpersonal relationships often form because of proximity and shared task interaction. Once that force is gone, it becomes difficult to maintain friendships, and many fade away. For groups that had negative experiences, the adjourning stage may be welcomed.

To make the most out of the adjourning stage, it is important that there be some guided and purposeful reflection. Many groups celebrate their accomplishments with a party or ceremony. Even groups that had negative experiences or failed to achieve their purpose can still learn something through reflection in the adjourning stage that may be beneficial for future group interactions. Often, group members leave a group experience with new or more developed skills that can be usefully applied in future group or individual contexts. Even groups that are relational rather than task focused can increase members' interpersonal, listening, or empathetic skills or increase cultural knowledge and introduce new perspectives.

Key Takeaways

- Small groups have to start somewhere, but their course of development varies after forming based on many factors. Some groups go through each stage of development in a progressive and linear fashion, while other groups may get stuck in a stage, skip a stage, or experience a stage multiple times.
- The five stages of group development include forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.

1. During the forming stage, group members engage in socially polite exchanges to help reduce uncertainty and gain familiarity with new members. Even though their early interactions may seem unproductive, they lay the groundwork for cohesion and other group dynamics that will play out more prominently in later stages.
2. During the storming stage, conflict emerges as group members begin to perform their various roles, have their ideas heard, and negotiate where they fit in the group's structure. Conflict is inevitable and important as a part of group development and can be

productive if it is managed properly.

3. During the norming stage, the practices and expectations (norms and rules) of the group are solidified, which leads to more stability, productivity, and cohesion within the group.
4. During the performing stage, group members work relatively smoothly toward the completion of a task or the achievement of their purpose, ideally capitalizing on the synergy that comes from the diverse experiences group members bring to the decision-making process.
5. During the adjourning stage, a group dissolves because its purpose has been met, because membership has declined or the group has lost support, or due to some other internal or external cause. It is important that groups reflect on the life of the group to learn any relevant lessons and celebrate accomplishments.

Exercises

1. Recall a previous or current small group to which you belonged/belong. Trace the group's development using the five stages discussed in this section. Did you experience all the stages? In what order? Did you stay in some stages more than others?
2. During the norming stage of group development, interaction patterns and group expectations solidify. Recall a current or former group. What were some of the norms for the group? What were some rules? How did you become aware of each?
3. Many people don't think about the importance of the adjourning stage. What do you think is the best way to complete the adjourning stage for a group that was successful and cohesive? What about for a group that was unsuccessful and not cohesive?

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1.4: Small Group Dynamics

Learning Objectives

- Explain the relationship between group cohesion and group climate.
- Describe the process of group member socialization.
- Explain the relationship between conformity and groupthink.
- Define various types of group conflict and identify strategies for managing each type.

Any time a group of people come together, new dynamics are put into place that differ from the dynamics present in our typical dyadic interactions. The impressions we form about other people's likeability and the way we think about a group's purpose are affected by the climate within a group that is created by all members. Groups also develop norms, and new group members are socialized into a group's climate and norms just as we are socialized into larger social and cultural norms in our everyday life. The pressure to conform to norms becomes more powerful in group situations, and some groups take advantage of these forces with positive and negative results. Last, the potential for productive and destructive conflict increases as multiple individuals come together to accomplish a task or achieve a purpose. This section explores the dynamics mentioned previously in order to better prepare you for future group interactions.

Group Cohesion and Climate

When something is cohesive, it sticks together, and the cohesion within a group helps establish an overall group climate. Group climate refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members. To better understand cohesion and climate, we can examine two types of cohesion: task and social.

Task cohesion refers to the commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group. Social cohesion refers to the attraction and liking among group members. Ideally, groups would have an appropriate balance between these two types of cohesion relative to the group's purpose, with task-oriented groups having higher task cohesion and relational-oriented groups having higher social cohesion. Even the most task-focused groups need some degree of social cohesion, and vice versa, but the balance will be determined by the purpose of the group and the individual members. For example, a team of workers from the local car dealership may join a local summer softball league because they're good friends and love the game. They may end up beating the team of faculty members from the community college who joined the league just to get to know each other better and have an excuse to get together and drink beer in the afternoon. In this example, the players from the car dealership exhibit high social and task cohesion, while the faculty exhibit high social but low task cohesion.

Cohesion benefits a group in many ways and can be assessed through specific group behaviors and characteristics. Groups with an appropriate level of cohesiveness Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 445.

- set goals easily;
- exhibit a high commitment to achieving the purpose of the group;
- are more productive;
- experience fewer attendance issues;
- have group members who are willing to stick with the group during times of difficulty;
- have satisfied group members who identify with, promote, and defend the group;
- have members who are willing to listen to each other and offer support and constructive criticism; and
- experience less anger and tension.

Appropriate levels of group cohesion usually create a positive group climate, since group climate is affected by members' satisfaction with the group. Climate has also been described as group morale. Following are some qualities that contribute to a positive group climate and morale: Peter J. Marston and Michael L. Hecht, "Group Satisfaction," in Small Group Communication, 5th ed., eds. Robert Cathcart and Larry Samovar (Dubuque, IA: Brown, 1988), 236–46.

- **Participation**. Group members feel better when they feel included in discussion and a part of the functioning of the group.
- **Messages**. Confirming messages help build relational dimensions within a group, and clear, organized, and relevant messages help build task dimensions within a group.
- **Feedback**. Positive, constructive, and relevant feedback contribute to group climate.

- **Equity**. Aside from individual participation, group members also like to feel as if participation is managed equally within the group and that appropriate turn taking is used.
- **Clear and accepted roles**. Group members like to know how status and hierarchy operate within a group. Knowing the roles isn't enough to lead to satisfaction, though—members must also be comfortable with and accept those roles.
- **Motivation**. Member motivation is activated by perceived connection to and relevance of the group's goals or purpose.

Figure 1.4.1: Cohesion and shared identity help create symbolic convergence as group members develop a group identity and shared social reality. Pride by David Yu is under a CC BY-NC 2.0

Group cohesion and climate is also demonstrated through symbolic convergence. Ernest G. Bormann, "Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Communication Formulation," Journal of Communication, 35, no. 4 (1985): 128–38. Symbolic convergence refers to the sense of community or group consciousness that develops in a group through non-task-related communication such as stories and jokes. The originator of symbolic convergence theory, Ernest Bormann, claims that the sharing of group fantasies creates symbolic convergence. Fantasy, in this sense, doesn't refer to fairy tales, sexual desire, or untrue things. In group communication, group fantasies are verbalized references to events outside the "here and now" of the group, including references to the group's past, predictions for the future, or other communication about people or events outside the group. Em Griffin, A First Look at Communication Theory, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 28.For example, as a graduate student, I spent a lot of time talking with others in our small group about research, writing, and other things related to our classes and academia in general. Most of this communication wouldn't lead to symbolic convergence or help establish the strong social bonds that we developed as a group. Instead, it was our grad student "war stories" about excessive reading loads and unreasonable paper requirements we had experienced in earlier years of grad school, horror stories about absent or vindictive thesis advisors, and "you won't believe this" stories from the classes that we were teaching that brought us together.

In any group, you can tell when symbolic convergence is occurring by observing how people share such fantasies and how group members react to them. If group members react positively and agree with or appreciate the teller's effort or other group members are triggered to tell their own related stories, then convergence is happening and cohesion and climate are being established. Over time, these fantasies build a shared vision of the group and what it means to be a member that creates a shared group consciousness. By reviewing and applying the concepts in this section, you can hopefully identify potential difficulties with group cohesion and work to enhance cohesion when needed in order to create more positive group climates and enhance your future group interactions.

"Getting Real" - Working in Teams

Although most college students hate working in groups, in the "real world" working in teams has become a regular part of professional expectations. Following Japan's lead, corporations in the United States began adopting a more team-based approach for project management decades ago. Anshu K. Jain, Jon M. Thompson, Joseph Chaudry, Shaun McKenzie, and Richard W.

Schwartz, "High-Performance Teams for Current and Future Physician Leaders: An Introduction," Journal of Surgical Education 65 (2008): 145. This model has become increasingly popular in various organizational settings since then as means to increase productivity and reduce bureaucracy. Teams in the workplace have horizontally expanded the traditional vertical hierarchy of organizations, as the aim of creating these teams was to produce smaller units within an organization that are small enough to be efficient and self-manageable but large enough to create the synergy that we discussed in the earlier part of the chapter.

Aside from efficiency, teams are also valued for the potential for innovation. The strategic pooling of people with diverse knowledge, experience, and skills can lead to synergistic collaborative thinking that produces new knowledge. Elisa du Chatenier, Jos A. A. M. Verstegen, Harm J. A. Biemans, Martin Mulder, and Onno S. W. F. Omta, "Identification of Competencies in Open Innovation Teams," *Research and Development Management* 40, no. 3 (2010): 271. This potential for innovation makes teams ideal in high-stakes situations where money, contracts, or lives are at stake. Large corporations are now putting together what has been termed ***inter-organizational*** high-performance research and development teams consisting of highly trained technical and scientific experts from diverse backgrounds to work collectively and simultaneously on complex projects under very challenging conditions. Lisa J. Daniel and Charles R. Davis, "What Makes High-Performance Teams Excel?" Research Technology Management 52, no. 4 (2009): 40–41. In markets where companies race to find the next generation of technological improvement, such research and development teams are critical for an organization's success. Research on such teams in real-world contexts has found that in order to be successful, high-performance teams should have a clear base such as a project mission, a leader who strategically assigns various tasks to members based on their specialized expertise, and shared leadership in which individual experts are trusted to make decisions relevant to their purview within the group. Although these high-performance teams are very task oriented, research has also found that the social element cannot be ignored, even under extreme internal and external pressures. In fact, cohesion and interdependence help create a shared reality that in turn improves productivity, because team members feel a sense of shared ownership over their charge. Stephanie T. Solansky, "Team Identification: A Determining Factor of Performance," Journal of Managerial Psychology 26, no. 3 (2011): 250.

Some challenges associated with working in teams include the potential for uncertainty or conflict due to the absence of traditional hierarchy, pressures that become overwhelming, lack of shared history since such teams are usually future oriented, and high expectations without resources necessary to complete the task.Elisa du Chatenier, Jos A. A. M. Verstegen, Harm J. A. Biemans, Martin Mulder, and Onno S. W. F. Omta, "Identification of Competencies in Open Innovation Teams," Research and Development Management 40, no. 3 (2010): 275–77. To overcome these challenges, team members can think positively but realistically about the team's end goal, exhibit trust in the expertise of other team members, be reliable and approachable to help build a good team spirit, take initiative with actions and ideas, ask critical questions, and provide critical but constructive feedback.

1. Given your career goals, what sorts of teamwork do you think you might engage in?
2. Would you welcome the opportunity to work on a high-performance team? Why or why not?
3. Members of teams are often under intense pressures to produce or perform at high levels. What is the line at which the pressure becomes too much? Ethically, how far should companies push teams and how far should team members go to complete a task?

Socializing Group Members

Group socialization refers to the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors. Group norms, rules, and cohesion can only be created and maintained through socialization. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 163. It is also through socialization that a shared identity and social reality develops among group members, but this development is dependent on several factors. For example, groups with higher levels of cohesion are more likely to have members that "buy into" rules and norms, which aids in socialization. The need for socialization also changes throughout a group's life span. If membership in a group is stable, long-term members should not need much socialization. However, when new members join a group, existing members must take time to engage in socialization. When a totally new group is formed, socialization will be an ongoing process as group members negotiate rules and procedures, develop norms, and create a shared history over time.

The information exchanged during socialization can be broken down into two general categories: technical and social knowledge. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 164. Technical knowledge focuses on skills and information needed to complete a task, and social knowledge focuses on behavioral norms that guide interaction. Each type of information is usually conveyed through a combination of formal and informal means. Technical knowledge can be fairly easily passed along through orientations, trainings, manuals, and documents, because this content is often fairly straightforward. Social knowledge is more ambiguous and is usually conveyed through informal means or passively learned

by new members through observation. To return to our earlier terminology, technical knowledge relates more to group rules and social knowledge relates more to group norms.

Companies and social organizations socialize new members in different ways. A new training cohort at an established company may be given technical rule-based information in the form of a manual and a history of the organization and an overview of the organizational culture to help convey social knowledge about group norms. Members of some small groups like fraternities or professional organizations have to take pledges or oaths that may convey a mixture of technical and social knowledge. Social knowledge may be conveyed in interactions that are separate from official group time. For example, literally socializing as a group is a good way to socialize group members. Many large and successful businesses encourage small groups within the company to socialize outside of work time in order to build cohesion and group solidarity.

Socialization continues after initial membership through the enforcement of rules and norms. When someone deviates from the rules and norms and is corrected, it serves as a reminder for all other members and performs a follow-up socializing function. Since rules are explicitly stated and documented, deviation from the rules can have consequences ranging from verbal warnings, to temporary or permanent separation from the group, to fines or other sanctions. And although norms are implicit, deviating from them can still have consequences. Even though someone may not actually verbally correct the deviation, the self-consciousness, embarrassment, or awkwardness that can result from such deviations is often enough to initiate corrective actions. Group norms can be so implicit that they are taken for granted and operate under group members' awareness.

Group rules and norms provide members with a sense of predictability that helps reduce uncertainty and increase a sense of security for one's place within the group. They also guide group members' involvement with the group, help create a shared social reality, and allow the group to function in particular ways without having actual people constantly educating, monitoring, and then correcting member behaviors. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 441. Of course, the degree to which this is successful depends on the buy-in from group members.

Group Pressures

There must be some kind of motivating force present within groups in order for the rules and norms to help govern and guide a group. Without such pressure, group members would have no incentive to conform to group norms or buy into the group's identity and values. In this section, we will discuss how rules and norms gain their power through internal and external pressures and how these pressures can have positive and negative effects.

Figure 1.4.2: Even though group members are different, failure to conform to the group's identity could create problems. One of these things is not like the others by Dave Morris is under a CC BY 2.0 license.

Conformity

In general, some people are more likely to accept norms and rules than others, which can influence the interaction and potential for conflict within a group. While some people may feel a need for social acceptance that leads them to accept a norm or rule with minimal conformity pressure, others may actively resist because they have a valid disagreement or because they have an aggressive or argumentative personality. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 133. Such personality traits are examples of internal pressures that operate within the individual group member and act as a self-governing mechanism. When group members discipline themselves and monitor

their own behavior, groups need not invest in as many external mechanisms to promote conformity. Deviating from the group's rules and norms that a member internalized during socialization can lead to self-imposed feelings of guilt or shame that can then initiate corrective behaviors and discourage the member from going against the group.

External pressures in the form of group policies, rewards or punishments, or other forces outside of individual group members also exert conformity pressure. In terms of group policies, groups that have an official admission process may have a probation period during which new members' membership is contingent on them conforming to group expectations. Deviation from expectations during this "trial period" could lead to expulsion from the group. Supervisors, mentors, and other types of group leaders are also agents that can impose external pressures toward conformity. These group members often have the ability to provide positive or negative reinforcement in the form of praise or punishment, which are clear attempts to influence behavior.

Conformity pressure can also stem from external forces when the whole group stands to receive a reward or punishment based on its performance, which ties back to the small group characteristic of interdependence. Although these pressures may seem negative, they also have positive results. Groups that exert an appropriate and ethical amount of conformity pressure typically have higher levels of group cohesion, which as we learned leads to increased satisfaction with group membership, better relationships, and better task performance. Groups with a strong but healthy level of conformity also project a strong group image to those outside the group, which can raise the group's profile or reputation. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 444. Pressures toward conformity, of course, can go too far, as is evidenced in tragic stories of people driven to suicide because they felt they couldn't live up to the conformity pressure of their group and people injured or killed enduring hazing rituals that take expectations for group conformity to unethical and criminal extremes.

"Getting Critical"- Hazing: Taking Conformity Pressures to the Extreme

Hazing can be defined as actions expected to be performed by aspiring or new members of a group that are irrelevant to the group's activities or mission and are humiliating, degrading, abusive, or dangerous. Brian K. Richardson, Zuoming Wang, and Camille A. Hall, "Blowing the Whistle against Greek Hazing: The Theory of Reasoned Action as a Framework for Reporting Intentions," Communication Studies 63, no. 2 (2012): 173. People who have participated in hazing or have been hazed often note that hazing activities are meant to build group identification and unity. Scholars note that hazing is rationalized because of high conformity pressures and that people who were hazed internalize the group's practices and are more likely to perpetuate hazing, creating a cycle of abuse. Shelly Campo, Gretchen Poulos, and John W. Sipple, "Prevalence and Profiling: Hazing among College Students and Points of Intervention," American Journal of Health Behavior 29, no. 2 (2005): 138. Hazing is not new; it has been around in academic and athletic settings since ancient Greece, but it has gotten much attention lately on college campuses as the number of student deaths attributed to hazing behaviors has increased steadily over the past years. In general, it is believed that hazing incidents are underreported, because these activities are done in secret within tightly knit organizations such as fraternities, sororities, and athletic teams that have strong norms of conformity. Brian K. Richardson, Zuoming Wang, and Camille A. Hall, "Blowing the Whistle against Greek Hazing: The Theory of Reasoned Action as a Framework for Reporting Intentions," Communication Studies 63, no. 2 (2012): 185–220.

The urge to belong is powerful, but where is the line when it comes to the actions people take or what people are willing to endure in order to be accepted? Hazing is meant to have aspiring group members prove their worth or commitment to the group. Examples of hazing include, but aren't limited to, being "kidnapped, transported, and abandoned"; drinking excessively in games or contests; sleep deprivation; engaging in or simulating sexual acts; being physically abused; being required to remain silent; wearing unusual clothes or costumes; or acting in a subservient manner to more senior group members. Shelly Campo, Gretchen Poulos, and John W. Sipple, "Prevalence and Profiling: Hazing among College Students and Points of Intervention," American Journal of Health Behavior 29, no. 2 (2005): 137; Aldo Cimino, "The Evolution of Hazing: Motivational Mechanisms and the Abuse of Newcomers," Journal of Cognition and Culture 11, no. 3–4 (2011): 235. Research has found that people in leadership roles, who are more likely to have strong group identification, are also more likely to engage in hazing activities. Shelly Campo, Gretchen Poulos, and John W. Sipple, "Prevalence and Profiling: Hazing among College Students and Points of Intervention," American Journal of Health Behavior 29, no. 2 (2005): 144. The same research also found that group members who have supportive friends outside of the organization are more likely to remove themselves from a hazing situation, which points to the fact that people who endure hazing may be doing so out of a strong drive to find the acceptance and belonging they do not have elsewhere.

1. What is your definition of hazing? When does something cross the line from a rite of passage or tradition to hazing?
2. What are some internal and external pressures that might lead to hazing activities?
3. Do some research on hazing incidents on college campuses. What concepts from this chapter do you think could be used in anti-hazing education campaigns to prevent incidents like the ones you researched?

Groupthink

Groupthink is a negative group phenomenon characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas or courses of action that results from high levels of cohesion and/or high conformity pressures. Irving L. Janis, Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascos (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1972). We can better understand groupthink by examining its causes and effects. When group members fall victim to groupthink, the effect is uncritical acceptance of decisions or suggestions for plans of action to accomplish a task or goal. Group meetings that appear to go smoothly with only positive interaction among happy, friendly people may seem ideal, but these actions may be symptomatic of groupthink. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 134. When people rush to agreement or fear argument, groupthink has a tendency to emerge. Decisions made as a result of groupthink may range from a poorly-thought-out presentation method that bores the audience to a mechanical failure resulting in death.

Two primary causes of groupthink are high levels of cohesion and excessive conformity pressures. When groups exhibit high levels of social cohesion, members may be reluctant to criticize or question another group member's ideas or suggestions for fear that it would damage the relationship. When group members have a high level of task cohesion, they may feel invincible and not critically evaluate ideas. High levels of cohesion may actually lessen conformity pressures since group members who identify strongly with the group's members and mission may not feel a need to question the decisions or suggestions made by others. For those who aren't blinded by the high levels of cohesion, internal conformity pressures may still lead them to withhold criticism of an idea because the norm is to defer to decisions made by organization leaders or a majority of group members. External conformity pressures because of impending reward or punishment, time pressures, or an aggressive leader are also factors that can lead to groupthink.

To Avoid Groupthink, Groups Should:

- Divvy up responsibilities between group members so decision-making power isn't in the hands of a few
- Track contributions of group members in such a way that each person's input and output is recorded so that it can be discussed
- Encourage and reward the expression of minority or dissenting opinions
- Allow members to submit ideas prior to a discussion so that opinions aren't swayed by members who propose ideas early in a discussion
- Question each major decision regarding its weaknesses and potential negative consequences relative to competing decisions (encourage members to play "devil's advocate")
- Have decisions reviewed by an outside party that wasn't involved in the decision-making process
- Have a "reflection period" after a decision is made and before it is implemented during which group members can express reservations or second thoughts about the decision

Group Conflict

Conflict can appear in indirect or direct forms within group interaction, just as it can in interpersonal interactions. Group members may openly question each other's ideas or express anger toward or dislike for another person. Group members may also indirectly engage in conflict communication through innuendo, joking, or passive-aggressive behavior. Although we often view conflict negatively, conflict can be beneficial for many reasons. When groups get into a rut, lose creativity, or become complacent, conflict can help get a group out of a bad or mediocre routine. Conversely, conflict can lead to lower group productivity due to strain on the task and social dimensions of a group. There are three main types of conflict within groups: procedural, substantive, and interpersonal. Randy Fujishin, Creating Effective Groups: The Art of Small Group Communication (San Francisco, CA: Acada Books, 2001): 160–61. Each of these types of conflict can vary in intensity, which can affect how much the conflict impacts the group and its members.

Procedural Conflict

Procedural conflict emerges from disagreements or trouble with the mechanics of group operations. In this type of conflict, group members differ in their beliefs about how something should be done. Procedural conflict can be handled by a group leader, especially if the leader put group procedures into place or has the individual power to change them. If there is no designated leader or the leader doesn't have sole power to change procedures (or just wants input from group members), proposals can be taken from the group on ways to address a procedural conflict to initiate a procedural change. A vote to reach a consensus or majority can also help resolve procedural conflict.

Figure 1.4.3: Procedural conflict can often be resolved with a group vote. Photo by CES is under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

Substantive Conflict

Substantive conflict focuses on group members' differing beliefs, attitudes, values, or ideas related to the purpose or task of the group. Rather than focusing on questions of how, substantive conflicts focus on questions of what. Substantive conflicts may emerge as a group tries to determine its purpose or mission. As members figure out how to complete a task or debate which project to start on next, there will undoubtedly be differences of opinion on what something means, what is acceptable in terms of supporting evidence for a proposal, or what is acceptable for a goal or performance standard. Leaders and other group members shouldn't rush to close this type of conflict down. As we learned in our earlier discussion of groupthink, open discussion and debate regarding ideas and suggestions for group action can lead to higher-quality output and may prevent groupthink. Leaders who make final decisions about substantive conflict for the sake of moving on run the risk of creating a win/lose competitive climate in which people feel like their ideas may be shot down, which could lead to less participation. To resolve this type of conflict, group members may want to do research to see what other groups have done in similar situations, as additional information often provides needed context for conflict regarding information and ideas. Once the information is gathered, weigh all proposals and try to discover common ground among perspectives. Civil and open discussions that debate the merits of an idea are more desirable than a climate in which people feel personally judged for their ideas.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict emerges from conflict between individual members of the group. Whereas procedural conflict deals with how and substantive conflict deals with what, interpersonal conflict deals with who. Such conflict can be completely irrelevant to the functioning or purpose of the group, perhaps focusing instead on personality differences. Interpersonal conflict can be the result of avoided or improperly handled procedural or substantive conflict that festers and becomes personal rather than task focused. This type of conflict can also result from differences in beliefs, attitudes, and values (when such differences are taken personally rather than substantively); different personalities; or different communication styles. While procedural and substantive conflict may be more easily expressed because they do not directly address a person, interpersonal conflict may slowly build as people avoid openly criticizing or confronting others. Passive-aggressive behavior is a sign that interpersonal conflict may be building under the surface, and other group members may want to intervene to avoid escalation and retaliation. Leaders can also meet with people involved in interpersonal conflict privately to help them engage in perception checking and act as mediators, if needed. While people who initiate procedural or substantive conflict may be perceived by other group members as concerned about the group's welfare and seen as competent in their ability to notice areas on which the group could improve, people who initiate interpersonal conflict are often held in ill-regard by other group members. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 217–18.

Primary and Secondary Tensions

Relevant to these types of conflict are primary and secondary tensions that emerge in every group. Ernest G. Bormann and Nancy C. Borman, Effective Small Group Communication, 4th ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Burgess Publishing, 1988), 72. When the group first comes together, members experience primary tension, which is tension based on uncertainty that is a natural part of initial interactions. It is only after group members begin to "break the ice" and get to know each other that the tension can be addressed and group members can proceed with the forming stage of group development. Small talk and politeness help group members manage primary tensions, and there is a relatively high threshold for these conflicts because we have all had experiences with such uncertainty when meeting people for the first time and many of us are optimistic that a little time and effort will allow us to get through the tensions. Since some people are more comfortable initiating conversation than others, it's important for more

extroverted group members to include less talkative members. Intentionally or unintentionally excluding people during the negotiation of primary tensions can lead to unexpected secondary tensions later on. During this stage people are also less direct in their communication, using more hedges and vague language than they will later in the group process. The indirect communication and small talk that characterize this part of group development aren't a waste of time, as they help manage primary tensions and lay the foundation for future interactions that may involve more substantive conflict.

Secondary tension emerges after groups have passed the forming stage of group development and begin to have conflict over member roles, differing ideas, and personality conflicts. These tensions are typically evidenced by less reserved and less polite behavior than primary tensions. People also have a lower tolerance threshold for secondary tensions, because rather than being an expected part of initial interaction, these conflicts can be more negative and interfere with the group's task performance. Secondary tensions are inevitable and shouldn't be feared or eliminated. It's not the presence or absence of secondary tension that makes a group successful or not; it's how it handles the tensions when they emerge. A certain level of secondary tension is tolerable, not distracting, and can actually enhance group performance and avoid groupthink. When secondary tensions rise above the tolerance threshold and become distracting, they should be released through direct means such as diplomatic confrontation or indirect means such as appropriate humor or taking a break. While primary tensions eventually disappear (at least until a new member arrives), secondary tensions will come and go and may persist for longer periods of time. For that reason, we will now turn to a discussion of how to manage conflict in group interaction.

Managing Conflict in Small Groups

Some common ways to manage conflict include clear decision-making procedures, third-party mediation, and leader facilitation. Commonly used methods of decision making, such as majority vote, can help or hurt conflict management efforts. While an up-and-down vote can allow a group to finalize a decision and move on, members whose vote fell on the minority side may feel resentment toward other group members. This can create a win/lose climate that leads to further conflict. Having a leader who makes ultimate decisions can also help move a group toward completion of a task, but conflict may only be pushed to the side and left not fully addressed. Third-party mediation can help move a group past a conflict and may create less feelings of animosity, since the person mediating and perhaps making a decision isn't a member of the group. In some cases, the leader can act as an internal third-party mediator to help other group members work productively through their conflict.

Tips for Managing Group Conflict:

1. Clarify the issue at hand by getting to the historical roots of the problem. Keep in mind that perception leads us to punctuate interactions differently, so it may be useful to know each person's perspective of when, how, and why the conflict began.
2. Create a positive discussion climate by encouraging and rewarding active listening.
3. Discuss needs rather than solutions. Determine each person's needs to be met and goals for the outcome of the conflict before offering or acting on potential solutions.
4. Set boundaries for discussion and engage in gatekeeping to prevent unproductive interactions like tangents and personal attacks.
5. Use "we" language to maintain existing group cohesion and identity, and use "I" language to help reduce defensiveness.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Conflict

Remember that a complete lack of conflict in a group is a bad sign, as it indicates either a lack of activity or a lack of commitment on the part of the members. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 223. Conflict, when properly handled, can lead a group to have a better understanding of the issues they face. For example, substantive conflict brings voice to alternative perspectives that may not have been heard otherwise. Additionally, when people view conflict as healthy, necessary, and productive, they can enter into a conflict episode with an open mind and an aim to learn something. This is especially true when those who initiate substantive conflict are able to share and defend their views in a competent and civil manner. Group cohesion can also increase as a result of well-managed conflict. Occasional experiences of tension and unrest followed by resolutions makes groups feel like they have accomplished something, which can lead them to not dread conflict and give them the confidence to more productively deal with it the next time.

Conflict that goes on for too long or is poorly handled can lead to decreased cohesiveness. Group members who try to avoid a conflict can still feel anger or frustration when the conflict drags on. Members who consistently take task-oriented conflict personally and escalate procedural or substantive conflict to interpersonal conflict are especially unpopular with other group members. Mishandled or chronic conflict can eventually lead to the destruction of a group or to a loss in members as people weigh the costs and rewards of membership. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and

the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 220. Hopefully a skilled leader or other group members can take on conflict resolution roles in order to prevent these disadvantages of conflict.

Key Takeaways

- Task cohesion refers to the degree of commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group, and social cohesion refers to the degree of attraction and liking among group members. Group climate refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members. The degree of each type of cohesion affects the group's climate. Groups can be very close socially but not perform well if they do not have an appropriate level of task cohesion. Groups that are too focused on the task can experience interpersonal conflict or a lack of motivation if the social cohesion, which helps enhance the feeling of interdependence, is lacking.
- Group socialization refers to the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors. Group members are socialized by receiving technical and social information. Cohesion plays a role in socialization, as groups that have high levels of task and social cohesion are more likely to buy into the norms of the group. Socialization continues after a member has joined, as members are officially or unofficially rewarded or punished for adhering to or deviating from the group's norms.
- Conformity pressures are an important force behind group socialization. Internal pressures such as an internal drive to be seen as part of the group or to avoid feeling ashamed or guilty for deviating from the group influence behavior and communication. Likewise, external pressures such as group policies and the potential for reward or punishment also play into group dynamics. The pressures toward conformity can manifest in groupthink, which is characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas, a high level of agreement, and a fear of argument.
- Groups experience different kinds of conflict, including procedural, substantive, and interpersonal conflict.
  - Procedural conflict emerges from disagreements or trouble with the mechanics of group operations and deal with questions about "how" a group should do something. A leader may be able to resolve this conflict by changing or explaining a procedure or taking, from group members, proposals for or votes on procedural revisions.
  - Substantive conflict focuses on group members' differing beliefs, attitudes, values, or ideas related to the purpose or task of the group. Leaders and other group members should avoid closing off this type of conflict before people have had a chance to be heard, as a lack of substantive conflict can lead to groupthink. Instead, listen to all viewpoints, try to find common ground, and then weigh and evaluate the information as a group.
  - Interpersonal conflict emerges from personal conflict between individual members of a group. Manage interpersonal conflict by getting to the root cause of the conflict. In some cases, interpersonal conflict may be disguised as procedural or substantive conflict, or it may develop as a result of poorly managed procedural or substantive conflict. Leaders, group members not directly involved in the conflict, or even outside third parties may also be able to effectively mediate interpersonal conflict.

Exercises

1. Group cohesion and climate are important dynamics within a small group. Identify and then compare and contrast a current or former small group that was cohesive and one that was not cohesive, including a discussion of how the presence or lack of cohesion affected the group's climate.
2. Groupthink is a negative group dynamic that relates to cohesion and conformity pressures. Several historic events with far-reaching and devastating implications have been analyzed through the lens of groupthink. Choose one of the following examples, and do some Internet research on your own. Then explain how groupthink played a role in the event.
   a. The Watergate scandal and cover-up (1972–74)
   b. The space shuttle Challenger explosion (1986)
   c. The rationale for the invasion of Iraq—specifically the supposed existence of weapons of mass destruction (2001–2)
3. Getting integrated: How might you handle group conflict differently in an academic context versus a professional context? Why? Include a reference to a specific type of conflict discussed in this section and discuss which conflict management strategies discussed in the chapter might be best in each context.

Contributors and Attributions

- Template:ContribCCComm120

1.5: Leadership and Small Group Communication

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the various perspectives on how and why people become leaders.
- Compare and contrast various leadership styles.
- Discuss the types of power that a leader may tap into.

Leadership is one of the most studied aspects of group communication. Scholars in business, communication, psychology, and many other fields have written extensively about the qualities of leaders, theories of leadership, and how to build leadership skills. It's important to point out that although a group may have only one official leader, other group members play important leadership roles. Making this distinction also helps us differentiate between leaders and leadership. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 456. The leader is a group role that is associated with a high-status position and may be formally or informally recognized by group members. Leadership is a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviors that influence the functioning of a group and move a group toward the completion of its task. A person in the role of leader may provide no or poor leadership. Likewise, a person who is not recognized as a "leader" in title can provide excellent leadership. In the remainder of this section, we will discuss some approaches to the study of leadership, leadership styles, and leadership and group dynamics.

Why and How People Become Leaders

Throughout human history, some people have grown into, taken, or been given positions as leaders. Many early leaders were believed to be divine in some way. In some indigenous cultures, shamans are considered leaders because they are believed to be bridges that can connect the spiritual and physical realms. Many early kings, queens, and military leaders were said to be approved by a god to lead the people. Today, many leaders are elected or appointed to positions of power, but most of them have already accumulated much experience in leadership roles. Some leaders are well respected, some are feared, some are hated, and many elicit some combination of these reactions. This brief overview illustrates the centrality of leadership throughout human history, but it wasn't until the last hundred years that leadership became an object of systematic study.

Before we move onto specific approaches to studying leadership, let's distinguish between designated and emergent leaders. In general, some people gravitate more toward leadership roles than others, and some leaders are designated while other are emergent. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 456. Designated leaders are officially recognized in their leadership role and may be appointed or elected by people inside or outside the group. Designated leaders can be especially successful when they are sought out by others to fulfill and are then accepted in leadership roles. On the other hand, some people seek out leadership positions not because they possess leadership skills and have been successful leaders in the past but because they have a drive to hold and wield power. Many groups are initially leaderless and must either designate a leader or wait for one to emerge organically. Emergent leaders gain status and respect through engagement with the group and its task and are turned to by others as a resource when leadership is needed. Emergent leaders may play an important role when a designated leader unexpectedly leaves. We will now turn our attention to three common perspectives on why some people are more likely to be designated leaders than others and how leaders emerge in the absence of or in addition to a designated leader.

Figure 1.5.1: A group leader may be formally designated by someone inside or outside the group or may emerge naturally during early group meetings. Image by Markus Spiske on Unsplash.

Leaders Emerge Because of Their Traits

The trait approach to studying leadership distinguishes leaders from followers based on traits, or personal characteristics. Charles Pavitt, "Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 313. Some traits that leaders, in general, share are related to physical appearance, communication ability, intelligence, and personality. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 120.In terms of physical appearance, designated leaders tend to be taller and more attractive than other group members. This could be because we consciously and/or subconsciously associate a larger size (in terms of height and build, but not body fat) with strength and strength with good leadership. As far as communication abilities, leaders speak more fluently, have a more confident tone, and communicate more often than other group members. Leaders are also moderately more intelligent than other group members, which is attractive because leaders need good problem-solving skills. Interestingly, group members are not as likely to designate or recognize an emergent leader that they perceive to be exceedingly more intelligent than them. Last, leaders are usually more extroverted, assertive, and persistent than other group members. These personality traits help get these group members noticed by others, and expressivity is often seen as attractive and as a sign of communication competence.

The trait approach to studying leaders has provided some useful information regarding how people view ideal leaders, but it has not provided much insight into why some people become and are more successful leaders than others. The list of ideal traits is not final, because excellent leaders can have few, if any, of these traits and poor leaders can possess many. Additionally, these traits are difficult to change or control without much time and effort. Because these traits are enduring, there isn't much room for people to learn and develop leadership skills, which makes this approach less desirable for communication scholars who view leadership as a communication competence. Rather than viewing these traits as a guide for what to look for when choosing your next leader, view them as traits that are made meaningful through context and communication behaviors.

Leaders Emerge Because of the Situation

The emergent approach to studying leadership considers how leaders emerge in groups that are initially leaderless and how situational contexts affect this process. Charles Pavitt, "Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 314. The situational context that surrounds a group influences what type of leader is best. Situations may be highly structured, highly unstructured, or anywhere in between. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 126. Research has found that leaders with a high task orientation are likely to emerge in both highly structured contexts like a group that works to maintain a completely automated factory unit and highly unstructured contexts like a group that is responding to a crisis. Relational-oriented leaders are more likely to emerge in semi structured contexts that are less formal and in groups composed of people who have specific knowledge and are therefore be trusted to do much of their work independently. Fred E. Fiedler, A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness (New York:

McGraw-Hill, 1967). For example, a group of local business owners who form a group for professional networking would likely prefer a leader with a relational-oriented style, since these group members are likely already leaders in their own right and therefore might resent a person who takes a rigid task-oriented style over a more collegial style.

Leaders emerge differently in different groups, but there are two stages common to each scenario. Ernest G. Bormann and Nancy C. Bormann, Effective Small Group Communication, 4th ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Burgess CA, 1988), 130–33. The first stage only covers a brief period, perhaps no longer than a portion of one meeting. During this first stage, about half of the group's members are eliminated from the possibility of being the group's leader. Remember that this is an informal and implicit process—not like people being picked for a kickball team or intentionally vetted. But there are some communicative behaviors that influence who makes the cut to the next stage of informal leader consideration. People will likely be eliminated as leader candidates if they do not actively contribute to initial group interactions, if they contribute but communicate poorly, if they contribute but appear too rigid or inflexible in their beliefs, or if they seem uninformed about the task of the group.

The second stage of leader emergence is where a more or less pronounced struggle for leadership begins. In one scenario, a leader candidate picks up an ally in the group who acts as a supporter or lieutenant, reinforcing the ideas and contributions of the candidate. If there are no other leader candidates or the others fail to pick up a supporter, the candidate with the supporter will likely become the leader. In a second scenario, there are two leader candidates who both pick up supporters and who are both qualified leaders. This leads to a more intense and potentially prolonged struggle that can actually be uncomfortable for other group members. Although the two leader candidates don't overtly fight with each other or say, "I should be leader, not you!" they both take strong stances in regards to the group's purpose and try to influence the structure, procedures, and trajectory for the group. Group members not involved in this struggle may not know who to listen to, which can lead to low task and social cohesion and may cause a group to fail. In some cases, one candidate-supporter team will retreat, leaving a clear leader to step up. But the candidate who retreated will still enjoy a relatively high status in the group and be respected for vying for leadership. The second-place candidate may become a nuisance for the new emergent leader, questioning his or her decisions. Rather than excluding or punishing the second-place candidate, the new leader should give him or her responsibilities within the group to make use of the group member's respected status.

Leaders Emerge Based on Communication Skill and Competence

This final approach to the study of leadership is considered a functional approach, because it focuses on how particular communication behaviors function to create the conditions of leadership. This last approach is the most useful for communication scholars and for people who want to improve their leadership skills, because leadership behaviors (which are learnable and adaptable) rather than traits or situations (which are often beyond our control) are the primary focus of study. As we've already learned, any group member can exhibit leadership behaviors, not just a designated or emergent leader. Therefore leadership behaviors are important for all of us to understand even if we don't anticipate serving in leadership positions. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 126.

The communication behaviors that facilitate effective leadership encompass three main areas of group communication including task, procedural, and relational functions. Although any group member can perform leadership behaviors, groups usually have patterns of and expectations for behaviors once they get to the norming and performing stages of group development. Many groups only meet one or two times, and in these cases it is likely that a designated leader will perform many of the functions to get the group started and then step in to facilitate as needed.

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's task-related functions include providing, seeking, and evaluating information. Leaders may want to be cautious about contributing ideas before soliciting ideas from group members, since the leader's contribution may sway or influence others in the group, therefore diminishing the importance of varying perspectives. Likewise a leader may want to solicit evaluation of ideas from members before providing his or her own judgment. In group situations where creativity is needed to generate ideas or solutions to a problem, the task leader may be wise to facilitate brainstorming and discussion.

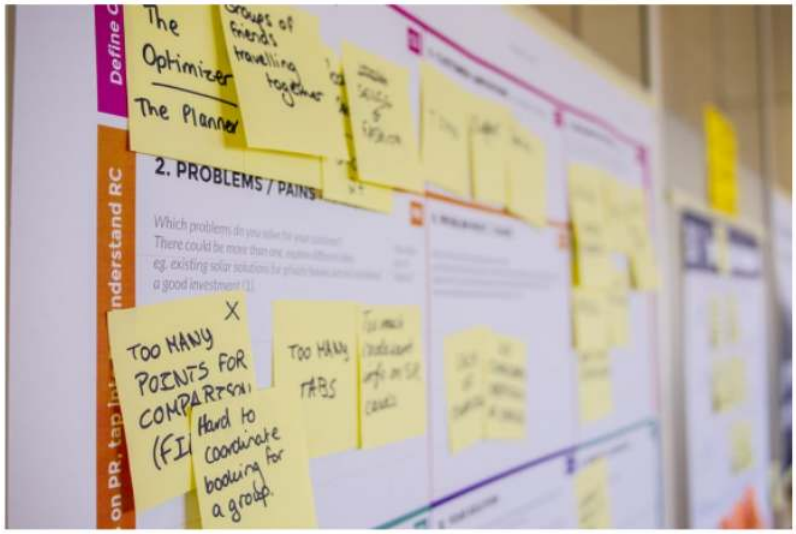

Figure 1.5.2: A group leader with high communication competence can facilitate brainstorming and group discussion to enhance the creativity and quality of group members' ideas. Image by Daria Nepriakhina on Unsplash.

This can allow the leader to keep his or her eye on the "big picture" and challenge group members to make their ideas more concrete or discuss their implications beyond the group without adding his or her own opinion. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the task-related functions of a group include the following: John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 131–32.

- Contributing ideas
- Seeking ideas
- Evaluating ideas
- Seeking idea evaluation
- Visualizing abstract ideas
- Generalizing from specific ideas

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's procedural-related functions help guide the group as it proceeds from idea generation to implementation. Some leaders are better at facilitating and managing ideas than they are at managing the administrative functions of a group. So while a group leader may help establish the goals of the group and set the agenda, another group member with more experience in group operations may step in to periodically revisit and assess progress toward completion of goals and compare the group's performance against its agenda. It's also important to check in between idea-generating sessions to clarify, summarize, and gauge the agreement level of group members. A very skilled and experienced leader may take primary responsibility for all these behaviors, but it's often beneficial to share them with group members to avoid becoming overburdened. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the procedural functions of a group include the following: John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 132–34.

- Goal setting
- Agenda making
- Clarifying
- Summarizing
- Verbalizing consensus
- Generalizing from specific ideas

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's relational functions include creating a participative and inclusive climate, establishing norms of reflection and self-analysis, and managing conflict. By encouraging participation among group members, a leader can help quell people who try to monopolize discussion and create an overall climate of openness and equality. Leaders want to make sure that people don't feel personally judged for their ideas and that criticism remains idea centered, not person centered. A safe and positive climate typically leads to higher-quality idea generation and decision making. Leaders also encourage group members to meta-communicate, or talk about the group's communication. This can help the group identify and begin to address

any interpersonal or communication issues before they escalate and divert the group away from accomplishing its goal. A group with a well-established participative and inclusive climate will be better prepared to handle conflict when it emerges. Remember that conflict when handled competently can enhance group performance. Leaders may even instigate productive conflict by playing devil's advocate or facilitating civil debate of ideas.

To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the relational functions of a group include the following:

- Regulating participation
- Climate making
- Instigating group self-analysis
- Resolving conflict
- Instigating productive conflict

Leadership Styles

Given the large amount of research done on leadership, it is not surprising that there are several different ways to define or categorize leadership styles. In general, effective leaders do not fit solely into one style in any of the following classifications. Instead, they are able to adapt their leadership style to fit the relational and situational context. Julia T. Wood, "Leading in Purposive Discussions: A Study of Adaptive Behavior," Communication Monographs 44, no. 2 (1977): 152–65. One common way to study leadership style is to make a distinction among autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leaders. Kurt Lewin, Ronald Lippitt, and Ralph K. White, "Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created 'Social Climates,'" Journal of Social Psychology 10, no. 2 (1939): 269–99.These leadership styles can be described as follows:

- Autocratic leaders set policies and make decisions primarily on their own, taking advantage of the power present in their title or status to set the agenda for the group.
- Democratic leaders facilitate group discussion and like to take input from all members before making a decision.
- Laissez-faire leaders take a "hands-off" approach, preferring to give group members freedom to reach and implement their own decisions.

While this is a frequently cited model of leadership styles, we will focus in more detail on a model that was developed a few years after this one. I choose to focus on this later model because it offers some more specifics in terms of the communicative elements of each leadership style. The four leadership styles used in this model are directive, participative, supportive, and achievement oriented. Robert J. House and Terrence R. Mitchell, "Path-Goal Theory of Leadership," Journal of Contemporary Business 3 (1974): 81–97.

Directive Leaders

Directive leaders help provide psychological structure for their group members by clearly communicating expectations, keeping a schedule and agenda, providing specific guidance as group members work toward the completion of their task, and taking the lead on setting and communicating group rules and procedures. Although this is most similar to the autocratic leadership style mentioned before, it is more nuanced and flexible. The originators of this model note that a leader can be directive without being seen as authoritarian. To do this, directive leaders must be good motivators who encourage productivity through positive reinforcement or reward rather than through the threat of punishment.

Figure 1.5.3: Directive leaders provide structure and clear expectations for their group. To be effective they must be skilled motivators. Image by Melany Rochester on Unsplash.

A directive leadership style is effective in groups that do not have a history and may require direction to get started on their task. It can also be the most appropriate method during crisis situations in which decisions must be made under time constraints or other extraordinary pressures. When groups have an established history and are composed of people with unique skills and expertise, a directive approach may be seen as "micromanaging." In these groups, a more participative style may be the best option.

Participative Leaders

Participative leaders work to include group members in the decision-making process by soliciting and considering their opinions and suggestions. When group members feel included, their personal goals are more likely to align with the group and organization's goals, which can help productivity. This style of leadership can also aid in group member socialization, as the members feel like they get to help establish group norms and rules, which affects cohesion and climate. When group members participate more, they buy into the group's norms and goals more, which can increase conformity pressures for incoming group members. As we learned earlier, this is good to a point, but it can become negative when the pressures lead to unethical group member behavior. In addition to consulting group members for help with decision making, participative leaders also grant group members more freedom to work independently. This can lead group members to feel trusted and respected for their skills, which can increase their effort and output.

The participative method of leadership is similar to the democratic style discussed earlier, and it is a style of leadership practiced in many organizations that have established work groups that meet consistently over long periods of time. US companies began to adopt a more participative and less directive style of management in the 1980s after organizational scholars researched teamwork and efficiency in Japanese corporations. Japanese managers included employees in decision making, which blurred the line between the leader and other group members and enhanced productivity. These small groups were called quality circles, because they focused on group interaction intended to improve quality and productivity. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 122–23.

Supportive Leaders

Supportive leaders show concern for their followers' needs and emotions. They want to support group members' welfare through a positive and friendly group climate. These leaders are good at reducing the stress and frustration of the group, which helps create a positive climate and can help increase group members' positive feelings about the task and other group members. As we will learn later, some group roles function to maintain the relational climate of the group, and several group members often perform these role

behaviors. With a supportive leader as a model, such behaviors would likely be performed as part of established group norms, which can do much to enhance social cohesion. Supportive leaders do not provide unconditionally positive praise. They also competently provide constructive criticism in order to challenge and enhance group members' contributions.

A supportive leadership style is more likely in groups that are primarily relational rather than task focused. For example, support groups and therapy groups benefit from a supportive leader. While maintaining positive relationships is an important part of any group's functioning, most task-oriented groups need to spend more time on task than social functions in order to efficiently work toward the completion of their task. Skilled directive or participative leaders of task-oriented groups would be wise to employ supportive leadership behaviors when group members experience emotional stress to prevent relational stress from negatively impacting the group's climate and cohesion.

Achievement-Oriented Leaders

Achievement-oriented leaders strive for excellence and set challenging goals, constantly seeking improvement and exhibiting confidence that group members can meet their high expectations. These leaders often engage in systematic social comparison, keeping tabs on other similar high-performing groups to assess their expectations and the group's progress. This type of leadership is similar to what other scholars call transformational or visionary leadership and is often associated with leaders like former Apple CEO Steve Jobs, talk show host and television network CEO Oprah Winfrey, former president Bill Clinton, and business magnate turned philanthropist Warren Buffett. Achievement-oriented leaders are likely less common than the other styles, as this style requires a high level of skill and commitment on the part of the leader and the group. Although rare, these leaders can be found at all levels of groups ranging from local school boards to Fortune 500 companies. Certain group dynamics must be in place in order to accommodate this leadership style. Groups for which an achievement-oriented leadership style would be effective are typically intentionally created and are made up of members who are skilled and competent in regards to the group's task. In many cases, the leader is specifically chosen because of his or her reputation and expertise, and even though the group members may not have a history of working with the leader, the members and leader must have a high degree of mutual respect.

"Getting Plugged In" - Steve Jobs as an Achievement-Oriented Leader

"Where can you find a leader with Jobs' willingness to fail, his sheer tenacity, persistence, and resiliency, his grandiose ego, his overwhelming belief in himself?" Alan Deutschman, "Exit the King," The Daily Beast, September 21, 2011, accessed August 23, 2012, http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/08/28/steve-jobs-american-genius.html. This closing line of an article following the death of Steve Jobs clearly illustrates the larger-than-life personality and extraordinary drive of achievement-oriented leaders. Jobs, who founded Apple Computers, was widely recognized as a visionary with a brilliant mind during his early years at the helm of Apple (from 1976 to 1985), but he hadn't yet gained respect as a business leader. Jobs left the company and later returned in 1997. After his return, Apple reached its height under his leadership, which was now enhanced by business knowledge and skills he gained during his time away from the company. The fact that Jobs was able to largely teach himself the ins and outs of business practices is a quality of achievement-oriented leaders, who are constantly self-reflective and evaluate their skills and performance, making adaptations as necessary.

Achievement-oriented leaders also often possess good instincts, allowing them to make decisions quickly while acknowledging the potential for failure but also showing a resiliency that allows them to bounce back from mistakes and come back stronger. Rather than bringing in panels of experts, presenting ideas to focus groups for feedback, or putting a new product through market research and testing, Jobs relied on his instincts, which led to some embarrassing failures and some remarkable successes that overshadowed the failures. Although Jobs made unilateral decisions, he relied heavily on the creative and technical expertise of others who worked for him and were able to make his creative, innovative, and some say genius ideas reality. As do other achievement-oriented leaders, Jobs held his group members to exceptionally high standards and fostered a culture that mirrored his own perfectionism. Constant comparisons to other technological innovators like Bill Gates, CEO of Microsoft, pushed Jobs and those who worked for him to work tirelessly to produce the "next big thing." Achievement-oriented leaders like Jobs have been described as maniacal, intense, workaholics, perfectionists, risk takers, narcissists, innovative, and visionary. These descriptors carry positive and negative connotations but often yield amazing results when possessed by a leader, the likes of which only seldom come around.

1. Do you think Jobs could have been as successful had he employed one of the other leadership styles? Why or why not? How might the achievement-oriented leadership style be well suited for a technology company like Apple or the technology field in general?
2. In what circumstances would you like to work for an achievement-oriented leader, and why? In what circumstances would you prefer not to work with an achievement-oriented leader, and why?

3. Do some research on another achievement-oriented leader. Discuss how that leader's traits are similar to and/or different from those of Steve Jobs.

Leadership and Power

Leaders help move group members toward the completion of their goal using various motivational strategies. The types of power leaders draw on to motivate have long been a topic of small group study. A leader may possess or draw on any of the following five types of power to varying degrees: legitimate, expert, referent, information, and reward/coercive. John R. P. French Jr. and Bertram Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in Studies in Social Power, ed. Dorwin Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 150–67. Effective leaders do not need to possess all five types of power. Instead, competent leaders know how to draw on other group members who may be better able to exercise a type of power in a given situation.

Legitimate Power

The very title of leader brings with it legitimate power, which is power that flows from the officially recognized position, status, or title of a group member. For example, the leader of the "Social Media Relations Department" of a retail chain receives legitimate power through the title "director of social media relations." It is important to note though that being designated as someone with status or a position of power doesn't mean that the group members respect or recognize that power. Even with a title, leaders must still earn the ability to provide leadership. Of the five types of power, however, the leader alone is most likely to possess legitimate power.

Expert Power

Figure 1.5.4: A group member with expertise in an area relevant to the group's task may draw on expert power to lead the group. For example, a transplant surgeon may lead a team of other doctors and nurses during the surgery while a critical care nurse may take the lead during post-surgery recovery. Image by Zach Vessels on Unsplash.

Expert power comes from knowledge, skill, or expertise that a group member possesses and other group members do not. For example, even though all the workers in the Social Media Relations Department have experience with computers, the information technology (IT) officer has expert power when it comes to computer networking and programming. Because of this, even though the director may have a higher status, she or he must defer to the IT officer when the office network crashes. A leader who has legitimate and expert power may be able to take a central role in setting the group's direction, contributing to problem solving, and helping the group achieve its goal. In groups with a designated leader who relies primarily on legitimate power, a member with a significant amount of expert power may emerge as an unofficial secondary leader.

Referent Power

Referent power comes from the attractiveness, likeability, and charisma of the group member. As we learned earlier, more physically attractive people and more outgoing people are often chosen as leaders. This could be due to their referent power. Referent power also derives from a person's reputation. A group member may have referent power if he or she is well respected outside of the group for previous accomplishments or even because he or she is known as a dependable and capable group member. Like legitimate power, the fact that a person possesses referent power doesn't mean he or she has the talent, skill, or other characteristic needed to actually lead the group. A person could just be likable but have no relevant knowledge about the group's

task or leadership experience. Some groups actually desire this type of leader, especially if the person is meant to attract external attention and serve as more of a "figurehead" than a regularly functioning group member. For example, a group formed to raise funds for a science and nature museum may choose a former mayor, local celebrity, or NASA astronaut as their leader because of his or her referent power. In this situation it would probably be best for the group to have a secondary leader who attends to task and problem-solving functions within the group.

Information Power

Information power comes from a person's ability to access information that comes through informal channels and well-established social and professional networks. We have already learned that information networks are an important part of a group's structure and can affect a group's access to various resources. When a group member is said to have "know how," they possess information power. The knowledge may not always be official, but it helps the group solve problems and get things done. Individuals develop information power through years of interacting with others, making connections, and building and maintaining interpersonal and instrumental relationships. For example, the group formed to raise funds for the science and nature museum may need to draw on informal information networks to get leads on potential donors, to get information about what local science teachers would recommend for exhibits, or to book a band willing to perform for free at a fundraising concert.

Reward and Coercive Power

The final two types of power, reward and coercive, are related. Reward power comes from the ability of a group member to provide a positive incentive as a compliance-gaining strategy, and coercive power comes from the ability of a group member to provide a negative incentive. These two types of power can be difficult for leaders and other group members to manage, because their use can lead to interpersonal conflict. Reward power can be used by nearly any group member if he or she gives another group member positive feedback on an idea, an appreciation card for hard work, or a pat on the back. Because of limited resources, many leaders are frustrated by their inability to give worthwhile tangible rewards to group members such as prizes, bonuses, or raises. Additionally, the use of reward power may seem corny or paternalistic to some or may arouse accusations of favoritism or jealousy among group members who don't receive the award.

Coercive power, since it entails punishment or negative incentive, can lead to interpersonal conflict and a negative group climate if it is overused or used improperly. While any leader or group member could make threats to others, leaders with legitimate power are typically in the best position to use coercive power. In such cases, coercive power may manifest in loss of pay and/or privileges, being excluded from the group, or being fired (if the group work is job related). In many volunteer groups or groups that lack formal rules and procedures, leaders have a more difficult time using coercive power, since they can't issue official punishments. Instead, coercive power will likely take the form of interpersonal punishments such as ignoring group members or excluding them from group activities.

"Getting Real"- Leadership as the Foundation of a Career

As we've already learned, leaders share traits, some more innate and naturally tapped into than others. Successful leaders also develop and refine leadership skills and behaviors that they are not "born with." Since much of leadership is skill and behavior based, it is never too early to start developing yourself as a leader. Whether you are planning to start your first career path fresh out of college, you've returned to college in order to switch career paths, or you're in college to help you advance more quickly in your current career path, you should have already been working on your leadership skills for years; it's not something you want to start your first day on the new job. Since leaders must be able to draw from a wealth of personal experience in order to solve problems, relate to others, and motivate others to achieve a task, you should start to seek out leadership positions in school and/or community groups. Since you may not yet be sure of your exact career path, try to get a variety of positions over a few years that are generally transferrable to professional contexts. In these roles, work on building a reputation as an ethical leader and as a leader who takes responsibility rather than playing the "blame game." Leaders still have to be good team players and often have to take on roles and responsibilities that other group members do not want. Instead of complaining or expecting recognition for your "extra work," accept these responsibilities enthusiastically and be prepared for your hard work to go unnoticed. Much of what a good leader does occurs in the background and isn't publicly praised or acknowledged. Even when the group succeeds because of your hard work as the leader, you still have to be willing to share that praise with others who helped, because even though you may have worked the hardest, you didn't do it alone.

As you build up your experience and reputation as a leader, be prepared for your workload to grow and your interpersonal communication competence to become more important. Once you're in your career path, you can draw on this previous leadership experience and volunteer or step up when the need arises, which can help you get noticed. Of course, you have to be able to follow

through on your commitment, which takes discipline and dedication. While you may be excited to prove your leadership chops in your new career path, I caution you about taking on too much too fast. It's easy for a young and/or new member of a work team to become overcommitted, as more experienced group members are excited to have a person to share some of their work responsibilities with. Hopefully, your previous leadership experience will give you confidence that your group members will notice. People are attracted to confidence and want to follow people who exhibit it. Aside from confidence, good leaders also develop dynamism, which is a set of communication behaviors that conveys enthusiasm and creates an energetic and positive climate. Once confidence and dynamism have attracted a good team of people, good leaders facilitate quality interaction among group members, build cohesion, and capitalize on the synergy of group communication in order to come up with forward-thinking solutions to problems. Good leaders also continue to build skills in order to become better leaders. Leaders are excellent observers of human behavior and are able to assess situations using contextual clues and nonverbal communication. They can then use this knowledge to adapt their communication to the situation. Leaders also have a high degree of emotional intelligence, which allows them to better sense, understand, and respond to others' emotions and to have more control over their own displays of emotions. Last, good leaders further their careers by being reflexive and regularly evaluating their strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Since our perceptions are often skewed, it's also good to have colleagues and mentors/supervisors give you formal evaluations of your job performance, making explicit comments about leadership behaviors. As you can see, the work of a leader only grows more complex as one moves further along a career path. But with the skills gained through many years of increasingly challenging leadership roles, a leader can adapt to and manage this increasing complexity.

1. What leadership positions have you had so far? In what ways might they prepare you for more complex and career-specific leadership positions you may have later?
2. What communication competencies do you think are most important for a leader to have and why? How do you rate in terms of the competencies you ranked as most important?
3. Who do you know who would be able to give you constructive feedback on your leadership skills? What do you think this person would say? (You may want to consider actually asking the person for feedback).

Key Takeaways

- Leaders fulfill a group role that is associated with status and power within the group that may be formally or informally recognized by people inside and/or outside of the group. While there are usually only one or two official leaders within a group, all group members can perform leadership functions, which are a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviors that influence the functioning of a group and move a group toward the completion of its tasks.
- There are many perspectives on how and why people become leaders:
  - Designated leaders are officially recognized in their leadership role and may be appointed or elected.
  - Emergent leaders gain status and respect through engagement with the group and its task and are turned to by others as a resource when leadership is needed.
  - The trait approach to studying leadership distinguishes leaders from followers based on traits or personal characteristics, such as physical appearance, communication ability, intelligence, and personality. While this approach is useful for understanding how people conceptualize ideal leaders, it doesn't offer communication scholars much insight into how leadership can be studied and developed as a skill.
  - Situational context also affects how leaders emerge. Different leadership styles and skills are needed based on the level of structure surrounding a group and on how group interactions play out in initial meetings and whether or not a leadership struggle occurs.
  - Leaders also emerge based on communication skill and competence, as certain communication behaviors function to create the conditions of leadership. This approach is most useful to communication scholars, because in it leadership is seen as a set of communication behaviors that are learnable and adaptable rather than traits or situational factors, which are often beyond our control.
- Leaders can adopt a directive, participative, supportive, or achievement-oriented style.
  - Directive leaders help provide psychological structure for their group members by clearly communicating expectations, keeping a schedule and agenda, providing specific guidance as group members work toward the completion of their task, and taking the lead on setting and communicating group rules and procedures.
  - Participative leaders work to include group members in the decision-making process by soliciting and considering their opinions and suggestions.
  - Supportive leaders show concern for their followers' needs and emotions.

- Achievement-oriented leaders strive for excellence and set challenging goals, constantly seeking improvement and exhibiting confidence that group members can meet their high expectations.

- Leaders and other group members move their groups toward success and/or the completion of their task by tapping into various types of power.
  - Legitimate power flows from the officially recognized power, status, or title of a group member.
  - Expert power comes from knowledge, skill, or expertise that a group member possesses and other group members do not.
  - Referent power comes from the attractiveness, likeability, and charisma of the group member.
  - Information power comes from a person's ability to access information that comes through informal channels and well-established social and professional networks.
  - Reward power comes from the ability of a group member to provide a positive incentive as a compliance-gaining strategy, and coercive power comes from the ability of a group member to provide a negative incentive (punishment).

Exercises

1. In what situations would a designated leader be better than an emergent leader, and vice versa? Why?
2. Think of a leader that you currently work with or have worked with who made a strong (positive or negative) impression on you. Which leadership style did he or she use most frequently? Cite specific communication behaviors to back up your analysis.
3. Getting integrated: Teachers are often viewed as leaders in academic contexts along with bosses/managers in professional, politicians/elected officials in civic, and parents in personal contexts. For each of these leaders and contexts, identify some important leadership qualities that each should possess, and discuss some of the influences in each context that may affect the leader and his or her leadership style.

Contributors and Attributions

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Reading Group Development

2.1: Introduction

Introductory Exercises

1. Have you ever been in a group that seems stuck in endless loops of conflict, where nothing gets done, and all the energy was spent on interpersonal conflicts? Can you share an example? Share and compare your results with classmates.
2. Have you ever been in a group that gets things done, where everyone seems to know their role and responsibilities, where all members contribute and perform? Can you share an example? Share and compare your results with classmates.

> *The ratio of We's to I's is the best indicator of the development of a team.*
>
> ***~Anonymous***

Getting Started

A group is people doing something together. It can be a large group of thousand and we'll call them a crowd. It can be a small group of just three members. People might be social, or work together, formal or informal with each other, they might be assigned or self-selected as members—the range is great and varied, and as the group grows so does the complexity.

In this section we explore group development. Groups start out as a zero in our lives. They require no time, no thought, no energy, and no effort. Then we choose to be part of one, or receive an assignment. Now the group is no longer a zero in our lives. It might have a number, like 10%, meaning we spend about 10% of our work time on a project with a group. It could be 100%, as in we work every day within the group. We could call it a 10 for the ten hours a week we invest in it. Regardless what we call a group in our lives, we have to call it something because it now exists for us, where once it did not.

We can also anticipate conflicts in a group. At work we may see people in terms, or between departments, conflict with each other. Even at home we may observe the friction that occurs between family members even after years of interaction. Where there are groups there will be conflict.

We find norms and expectations within groups. Ever group has a code of conduct, no matter how informal, of who does what when and how. Power, status, and even companionship all play a role in group expectations for its members.

Finally, all groups end. Families end, change, and transform. Work relationships change as well. Groups accept new members, lose former members, and they themselves become new groups, rising out of the ashes of the old.

All groups form, have conflicts, form norms, and dissolve. In this section we'll explore three related theories on group development, comparing their similarities and differences. We'll learn more about why we need groups, and why they need us. We will explore how it that we come to know each other, and how important groups are in our lives.

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2.2: Group Life Cycles

Learning Objectives

- Identify the typical stages in the life cycle of a group.

Groups are dynamic systems, in constant change. Groups grow together and eventually come apart. People join groups and others leave. This dynamic changes and transforms the very nature of the group. Group socialization involves how the group members interact with one another and form relationships. Just as you were once born, and changed your family, they changed you. You came to know a language and culture, a value system and set of beliefs that influences you to this day. You came to be socialized, to experience the process of learning to associate, communicate, or interact within a group. A group you belong to this year—perhaps a soccer team or the cast of a play—may not be part of your life next year. And those who are in leadership positions may ascend or descend the leadership hierarchy as the needs of the group, and other circumstances, change over time.

Group Life Cycle Patterns

Your life cycle is characterized with several steps, and while it doesn't follow a prescribed path, there are universal stages we can all recognize. You were born. You didn't choose your birth, your parents, your language or your culture, but you came to know them through communication. You came to know yourself, learned skills and discovered talents, and met other people. You worked, learned, lived, and loved, and as you aged, minor injuries took longer to heal. You competed in ever-increasing age groups in your favorite sport, and while your time for each performance may have increased as you aged, your experience allowed you to excel in other ways. Where you were once the novice, you have now learned something to share. You lived to see some of your friends pass before you, and the moment will arrive when you too must confront death.

In the same way, groups experience similar steps and stages and take on many of the characteristics we associate with life. Moreland, R., & Levine, J. (1982). Socialization in small groups: temporal changes in individual group relations. (L. Berkowitz, Ed.) Advances in Experimental Social Psycology, 15, 153. They grow, overcome illness and dysfunction, and transform across time. No group, just as no individual, lives forever.

Your first day on the job may be comparable to the first day you went to school. At home you may have learned some of the basics, like how to write with a pencil, but knowledge of that skill and its application are two different things. People spoke in different ways at school than at home, and you came to understand the importance of recess, of raising your hand to get the teacher's attention, and how to follow other school rules. At work, you may have trained for your profession, but the academic knowledge only serves as your foundation, much as your socialization at home served to guide you at school. On the job they use jargon terms, have schedules that may include coffee breaks (recess), have a supervisor (teacher), and have their own rules, explicit and understood. On the first day, it was all new, even if many of the elements were familiar.

In order to better understand group development and its life cycle, many researchers have described the universal stages and phases of groups. While there are modern interpretations of these stages, most draw from the model proposed by Tuckman. Tuckman, B. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. Psychological Bulletin, 63, 384–399. This model specifies the usual order of the phases of group development, and allows us to predict several stages we can anticipate as we join a new group.

Tuckman begins with the forming stage (also called orientation stage or orientation phase) as the initiation of group formation. This stage is also called the orientation stage because individual group members come to know each other. Group members who are new to each other and can't predict each other's behavior can be expected to experience the stress of uncertainty. Uncertainty theory states that we choose to know more about others with whom we have interactions in order to reduce or resolve the anxiety associated with the unknown. Berger, C., & Calabrese, R. (1975). Some explorations in initial interactions and beyond: toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. Human communication Research, 1, 99–112.,Berger, C. (1986). Response uncertain outcome values in predicted relationships: uncertainty reduction theory then and now. Human Communication Research, 13, 34–38.,Gudykunst, W. (1995). Anxiety/uncertainty management theory. In R. W. Wiseman (Ed.), Intercultural communication theory (pp. 8–58). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. The more we know about others, and become accustomed to how they communicate, the better we can predict how they will interact with us in future contexts. If you learn that Monday mornings are never a good time for your supervisor, you quickly learn to schedule meetings later in the week. Individuals are initially tentative and display caution as they begin to learn about the group and its members.

If you don't someone very well, it is easy to offend. Each group member brings to the group a set of experiences, combined with education and a self-concept. You won't be able to read this information on a name tag, you will only come to know it through time and interaction. Since the possibility of overlapping and competing viewpoints and perspectives exists, the group will experience a storming stage, a time of struggles as the members themselves sort out their differences. There may be more than one way to solve the problem or task at hand, and some group members may prefer one strategy over another. Some members of the group may be senior to the organization in comparison to you, and members may treat them differently. Some group members may be as new as you are and just as uncertain about everyone's talents, skills, roles, and self-perceptions. The wise communicator will anticipate the storming stage and help facilitate opportunities for the members to resolve uncertainty before the work commences. There may be challenges for leadership, and conflicting viewpoints. The sociology professor sees the world differently than the physics professor. The sales agent sees things differently than someone from accounting. A manager who understands and anticipates this normal challenge in the group's life cycle can help the group become more productive.

A clear definition of the purpose and mission of the group can help the members focus their energies. Interaction prior to the first meeting can help reduce uncertainty. Coffee and calories can help bring a group together. Providing the group with what they need, and opportunities to know each other, prior to their task can increase efficiency.

Groups that make a successful transition from the storming stage will next experience the norming stage, where the group establishes norms, or informal rules, for behavior and interaction. Who speaks first? Who takes notes? Who is creative and visual, and who is detail-oriented? Sometimes our job titles and functions speak for themselves, but human beings are complex. We are not simply a list of job functions, and in the dynamic marketplace of today's business environment you will often find that people have talents and skills well beyond their "official" role or task. Drawing on these strengths can make the group more effective.

The norming stage is marked by less division and more collaboration. The level of anxiety associated with interaction is generally reduced, making for a more positive work climate that promotes listening. When people feel less threatened, and their needs are met, they are more likely to focus their complete attention on the purpose of the group. If they are still concerned with who does what, and whether they will speak in error, the interaction framework will stay in the storming stage. Tensions are reduced when the normative expectations are known, and the degree to which a manager can describe these at the outset can reduce the amount of time the group remains in uncertainty. Group members generally express more satisfaction with clear expectations and are more inclined to participate.

Ultimately, the purpose of a work group is performance, and the preceding stages lead us to the performing stage, in which the group accomplishes its mandate, fulfills its purpose, and reaches its goals. To facilitate performance, group members can't skip the initiation of getting to know each other, or the sorting out of roles and norms, but they can try to focus on performance with clear expectations from the moment the group is formed. Productivity is often how we measure success in business and industry, and the group has to produce. Outcome assessments may have been built into the system from the beginning, and would serve as a benchmark for success. Wise managers know to celebrate success, as it brings more success, social cohesion, group participation, and a sense of job satisfaction. Incremental gains toward a benchmark may also be cause for celebration and support, and failure to reach a goal should be regarded as an opportunity for clarification.

It is generally wiser to focus on the performance of the group rather than individual contributions. Managers and group members will want to offer assistance to underperformers as well as congratulating members for their contributions. If the goal is to create a community where competition pushes each member to perform, individual highlights may serve your needs, but if you want a group to solve a problem or address a challenge as a group, you have to promote group cohesion. Members need to feel a sense of belonging, and praise (or the lack thereof) can be a sword with two edges. One stimulates and motivates, while the other demoralizes and divides.

Groups should be designed to produce and perform in ways and at levels that individuals cannot, or else you should consider compartmentalizing the tasks. The performing stage is where the productivity occurs, and it is necessary to make sure the group has what it needs to perform. Missing pieces, parts, or information can stall the group, and reset the cycle to storming all over again. Loss of performance is inefficiency, and that carries a cost. Managers will be measured by the group's productivity and performance, and their success reflects on the manager. Make sure the performing stage is one that is productive and healthy for its members.

Imagine that you are the manager of a group that has produced an award-winning design for an ecologically innovative four-seat car. Their success is your success. Their celebrations are yours, even if you are not the focus of them. A manager manages the process, while group members perform. If you were a member of the group, and you helped design the belt line, you made a fundamental contribution to the style of the car. Individual consumers may never consider the line from the front fender, across the

doors, to the rear taillight as they make a purchase decision, but they will recognize beauty. You will know that you could not have achieved that fundamental part of car design without help from the engineers in the group, and if the number-crunching accountants had not seen the efficiency of the production process that produced it, it may never have survived the transition from prototype to production. The group came together and accomplished its goals with amazing results.

Now, as typically happens eventually with all groups, the time has come to move on to new assignments. In the adjourning stage, group members leave the group. Before you leave the group it may be time for a debriefing, a meeting to go over what worked, what didn't, and ways to improve for next time, or if you are in the US military, to participate in the "After Action Review" or AAR. While it is important to focus on group progress throughout the cycle, closure brings perspective. The completion of any training, mission, task, or journey provides an opportunity to review what occurred with a bit of distance. This stage can provide an important opportunity for managers and group members alike to learn from failure and success.

The group may cease to exist, or it may be transformed with new members and a new set of goals. Your contributions may have caught the attention of management, and you may be assigned to the redesign of the flagship vehicle, the halo car of your marque or brand. It's quite a professional honor, and it's yours because of your successful work in a group. Others will be reassigned to tasks that require their talents and skills, and you may or may not collaborate with them in the future.

You may miss the interactions with the members, even the more cantankerous ones, and will experience both relief and a sense of loss. Like life, the group process is normal, and mixed emotions are to be expected. A wise manager anticipates this stage and facilitates the separation with skill and ease. We often close this process with a ritual marking its passing, though the ritual may be as formal as an award or as informal as a "thank you" or a verbal acknowledgement of a job well done over coffee and calories.

On a more sober note, it is important not to forget that groups can reach the adjourning stage without having achieved success. Some businesses go bankrupt, some departments are closed, and some individuals lose their positions after a group fails to perform. Adjournment can come suddenly and unexpectedly, or gradually and piece by piece. Either way, a skilled business communicator will be prepared and recognize it as part of the classic group life cycle.

Table 2.2.1: Tuckman's Linear Model of Group Development Tuckman, B. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. Psychological Bulletin, 63, 384–399.

Stages	Activities
Forming	Members come together, learn about each other, and determine the purpose of the group.
Storming	Members engage in more direct communication and get to know each other. Conflicts between group members will often arise during this stage.
Norming	Members establish spoken or unspoken rules about how they communicate and work. Status, rank and roles in the group are established.
Performing	Members fulfill their purpose and reach their goal.
Adjourning	Members leave the group.

Let's now turn our attention to two other model's group lifecycles. While Tuckman's model is familiar, both Tubbs and Fisher offer two distinct, though similar views. Each model provides an area of emphasis, and all follow a similar progression.

In Tubb's Small Group Communication Theory (1995), the emphasis is on conflict vs. groupthink. As we've discussed, conflict is present in all groups, and we see the danger of groupthink raised in its absence. When the emphasis is on conformity, the group lacks diversity of viewpoints and the tendency to go along with the flow can produce disastrous results.

First Tubb's (Tubbs, 1995)Tubbs, Stewart. (1995). A systems approach to small group interaction. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995. asserts that we are involved in an orientation phase. We get to know each other, focus on limitations, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses, and begin to discuss the task at hand. This stage is followed by the conflict stage, characterized by different viewpoints, disagreements, competing agendas, and debate. This stage is natural and in this model is viewed as necessary to inhibit conformity or groupthink. The consensus stage follows conflict, where group members select some ideas or actions over others and the group proceeds to get the task done. It is characterized by agreement and teamwork. Individual differences are not as apparent,

having been sorted out during the previous conflict stage. All groups end, and once the task has been completed as a result of consensus and action, the group dissolves in the closure stage. This stage often features statements of agreement and support for the result, action, or outcome.

We can compare and contrast Tubb's model of group development to Fisher's and view both overlap and divergence. Here the emphasis is on the group process of individuals becoming a functioning group that emerges successfully from conflict. The first stage is familiar: Orientation. It is characterized by awkward moments as individuals get to know each other, their backgrounds or special skill areas, and people size each other up. The group turns the corner to conflict where divergent points of view are presented, often characterized by struggles for power or a speech turn. As the group descends into conflict there can emerge allies and challengers, as members persuade each other and present alternatives. This process continues until one view point, course of action, or path becomes the generally-agreed upon course for the group, and they emerge together in the emergence stage. Dissension and argument are no longer features of the conversation, and the emphasis is on action. The team acts, and then progresses to the reinforcement stage, characterized by affirmations and statements of agreement or support for the task or actions. Group members often look to each other for support at this stage, and it sharply contrasts with the preceding conflict stage, where opposing viewpoints were aired. The emphasis is on group members to reinforce each other and the decision or outcome.

Finally we can consider Poole's approach to group development, itself a distinct and divergent model that provides additional insight into group dynamics. In the case of Tuckman, Tubbs, and Fisher, we can observe a step-by-step process from start to finish. Poole asserts group development is far more complex, but offers three distinct, interdependent tracks or patterns of communication that overlap, start and stop, and go back and forth as the group wrestles with the challenges. Here the emphasis is on the transitions between the two main tracks: Topic and Relation. In the topic track, group members discuss the topic and all the relevant issues as they explore how to approach it, get a handle on it, or resolve it. In the relation track, group members also discuss themselves, self-disclosure information, and ask questions to learn more about each other. It relates to reducing uncertainty between group members, and sometimes the group shifts from the topic track to the relationship track as members sort out personal issues or work on relationships. In this moment where the group shifts between the two main tracks emerges a third track: breakpoints. The breakpoint stage is characterized by turns in the conversation that regulate interaction, from an actual break in the discussion like a coffee break to a shift in the conversation to something they all have in common, like participation in a softball league. Breakpoints can also include postponement, where decisions are delayed to allow for further research or consideration, regression in the conversation, where topics once considered and addressed are raised yet again, or even adjournment, where the group closes for a time, for the day, or disbands to address new tasks as members of new groups.

Finally, let's turn our attention to assessing whether the group is working together, pulling apart, and ways to improve group interactions. An effective group can be recognized in several ways including:

- Group members are active, interested, and involved.
- Group members are comfortable; no obvious tensions.
- Group members understand and accept the task, goal, or activity.
- Disagreement is resolved amicably.
- Active listening behaviors can be frequently observed.
- Group members interact freely; no one member is in control.
- Group members openly discuss their progress.
- Criticism is present, accepted, and discussed openly.

These signs allow us insight into the group dynamics, and we can observe how they contribute to task completion as well as group health. Conversely, there are also several ways we can recognize when a group is ineffective:

- Some group members are not active, interested, or involved.
- Group member interactions include obvious tensions.
- Group members do not understand or accept the task, goal, or activity; passive/aggressive behaviors may be present.
- Disagreement is not resolved.
- Active listening behaviors cannot be frequently observed.
- Group members do not interact freely; one member is in control.
- Group members do not discuss their progress.
- Criticism is not present; Groupthink is a significant risk.

With these telltale signs in mind, we can take an active part in promoting an active, effective, and healthy group:

- Encourage every member to contribute, speak, or share their thoughts.
- Encourage every member to understand their role, and everyone's roles, and how they complement each other.
- Encourage interdependence and interaction.
- Encourage the group to build on their common strengths and skills, celebrating incremental success.
- Encourage active listing and refrain from interruptions.
- Encourage group members to assess their collective progress frequently.

In this section we have examined group development and several theories on how groups come together, complete their task, goal, or activity, and grow apart. Just like interpersonal relationships include signs of health and prosperity, so do groups. The effective group leader understands both group process and ways to make a positive difference.

- Individual members demonstrate interest and involvement.
- There are no obvious tensions.
- It is clear the group understands and accepts the task.
- Listen behaviors are clearly demonstrated.
- Difference of opinion or viewpoint doesn't upset the group. Humor is a common characteristic, and tensions that may arise are quickly and amicably resolved.
- People feel free to express their viewpoints, thoughts, and feelings. Criticism is considered by group members and not considered as a personal attack.
- Consensus in decision-making is apparent.
- No one individual dominates the group.
- The group self-regulates, evaluating progress, regrouping, or advancing towards a common goal.
- Group member roles are clear and accepted.

An ineffective group can also be recognized in several ways:

- Some topics are not discussed, and understood as off-limits.
- There is a sense of urgency, preferring advancement and task completion before consideration or consensus.
- One or more group members dominate the discussion.
- Individual members demonstrate lack of interest and involvement.
- There are obvious tensions.
- It is clear the group does not understand or accepts the task. Group members are arguing in cycles, returning again and again to themes with no resolution.
- Listen behaviors are not clearly demonstrated.
- Difference of opinion or viewpoint upsets the group. Tensions rise with the expression of criticism.
- Criticism is not considered by group members and often interpreted as a personal attack.
- Consensus in decision-making is not apparent.
- The group does not self-regulate, and little discussion on group progress is present.
- Group member roles are not clear or accepted.

As we close our discussion on group development, let's consider five action steps members can encourage to help a group become more effective:

- Group members take turns speaking and listening, and do not interrupt.
- Group members acknowledge and combine their strengths.
- Group members separate the issues from personalities, message from messenger.
- Group members outline action steps and discuss progress periodically.
- Group members clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.

Key Takeaway

- Groups come together and grow apart in predictable patterns.

Exercises

1. Is it possible for an outsider (a non-group member) to help a group move from the storming stage to the norming stage? Explain your answer and present it to the class.

2. Think of a group of which you are a member and identify some roles played by group members, including yourself. Have your roles, and those of others, changed over time? Are some roles more positive than others? Discuss your answers with your classmates.
3. In the course where you are using this book, think of yourself and your classmates as a group. At what stage of group formation are you currently? What stage will you be at when the school year ends?

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2.3: Life Cycle of Group Member Roles

Learning Objectives

- Describe different types of group members and group member roles.

Just as groups go through a life cycle when they form and eventually adjourn, so the members of groups fulfill different roles during this life cycle. These roles, proposed by Moreland and Levine, are summarized in Table 2.3.1 "The Life Cycle of Member Roles".

Suppose you are about to graduate from school, and you are in the midst of an employment search. You've gathered extensive information on a couple of local businesses and are aware that they will be participating in the university job fair. You've explored their websites, talked to people currently employed at each company, and learned what you can from the public information available. At this stage, you are considered a potential member. You may have an electrical, chemical, or mechanical engineering degree soon, but you are not a member of an engineering team.

You show up at the job fair in professional attire and completely prepared. The representatives of each company are respectful, cordial, and give you contact information. One of them even calls a member of the organization on the spot and arranges an interview for you next week. You are excited at the prospect, and want to learn more. You are still a potential member.

The interview goes well the following week. The day after the meeting you receive a call for a follow-up interview, which leads to a committee interview. A few weeks later, the company calls you with a job offer. However, in the meantime you have also been interviewing with other potential employers, and you are waiting to hear back from two of them. You are still a potential member.

After careful consideration, you decide to take the job offer and start the next week. The projects look interesting, you'll be gaining valuable experience, and the commute to work is reasonable. Your first day on the job is positive, and they've assigned you a mentor. The conversations are positive, but at times you feel lost, as if they are speaking a language you can't quite grasp. As a new group member, your level of acceptance will increase as you begin learning the groups' rules, spoken and unspoken.Fisher, B. A. (1970). Decision emergence: phases in group decision making. Speech Monographs, 37, 56–66. You will gradually move from the potential member role to the role of new group member as you learn to fit into the group.

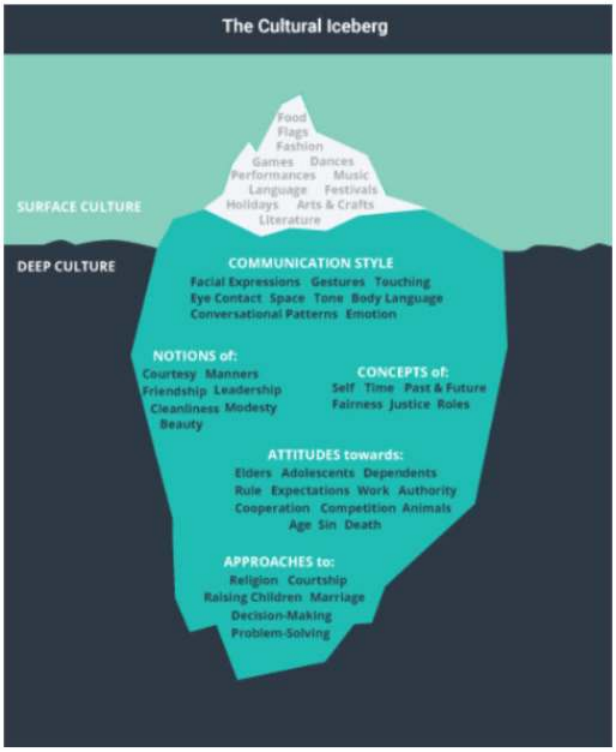

Figure 2.3.1: As a member of a new group, you will learn new customs and traditions. The cultural iceberg (by Laura Underwood), adapted from Lindner (2013).

Over time and projects, you gradually increase your responsibilities. You are no longer looked at as the new person, and you can follow almost every conversation. You can't quite say "I remember when" because your tenure hasn't been that long, but you are a known quantity and know your way around. You are a full member of the group. Full members enjoy knowing the rules and customs, and can even create new rules. New group members look to full members for leadership and guidance. Full group members can control the agenda and have considerable influence on the agenda and activities.

Full members of a group, however, can and do come into conflict. When you were a new member, you may have remained silent when you felt you had something to say, but now you state your case. There is more than one way to get the job done. You may suggest new ways that emphasize efficiency over existing methods. Co-workers who have been working in the department for several years may be unwilling to adapt and change, and tension may result. Expressing different views can cause conflict and may even interfere with communication.

When this type of tension arises, divergent group members pull back, contribute less, and start to see themselves as separate from the group. Divergent group members have less eye contact, seek out each other's opinion less frequently, and listen defensively. In the beginning of the process, you felt a sense of belonging, but now you don't. Marginal group members start to look outside the group for their interpersonal needs.

After several months of trying to cope with these adjustments, you decide that you never really investigated the other two companies; that your job search process was incomplete. Perhaps you should take a second look at the options. You will report to work on Monday, but will start the process of becoming an ex-member, one who no longer belongs. You may experience a sense of relief upon making this decision, given that you haven't felt like you belonged to the group for a while. When you line up your next job and submit your resignation, you make it official.

Table 2.3.1: The Life Cycle of Member Roles. Moreland, R., & Levine, J. (1982). Socialization in small groups: temporal changes in individual group relations. (L. Berkowitz, Ed.) Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 15, 153.

	Potential Member	Curiosity and Interest
1	New Member	Joined the group but still an outsider, and unknown
2	Full Member	Knows the "rules" and is looked to for leadership
3	Divergent Member	Focuses on differences
4	Marginal Member	No longer involved
5	Ex-Member	No longer considered a member

This process has no set timetable. Some people overcome differences and stay in the group for years. Others get promoted and leave the group only when they get transferred to regional headquarters. As a skilled communicator, you will recognize the signs of divergence, just like you anticipate the storming stage, and do your best to facilitate success.

Key Takeaway

- Group membership follows a predictable pattern of stages.

Exercises

1. Consider a time when you were exploring group members, but had not yet decided to join. It would be accepting a job, or joining a church, for example. What points did you consider when deciding to become a member (or not). Share your results with your classmates.
2. You decided to be part of a group but quickly learned that there were members of the group, full members, who viewed you as the new person. How did you know they considered you a new person, and how did their language use reflect their full membership? Did they use terms that were unfamiliar? Did they discuss topics that made little sense to you? Share your results with classmates.
3. As a full member of a group you may have been asked to train a new employee, help a new person find their way around, or otherwise help them learn about the group, organization, or company. Did you think about your own orientation process and did

your experience guide your actions? What did you do to help this person? What would you do different if the same situation presented itself again? Share your results with classmates.

4. As a full member of the group, you know the ins and outs. You know the strengths and weaknesses of the group members, their likes and dislikes, and at times, familiarity can breed contempt. Have you had conflicts arise because of this close familiarity and how was it resolved? Share and compare your results with classmates.
5. Think of a group you no longer belong to. At what point did you become an ex-member? Were you ever a marginal group member or a full member? Write a 2–3 paragraph description of the group, how and why you became a member, and how and why you left. Share your description with a classmate.

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2.4: Why People Join Groups

Learning Objectives

- Understand the role of interpersonal needs in the communication process.

"What are you doing?" You may have had no problem answering the question, and simply pulled a couple of lines from yesterday's Twitter or reviewed your BlackBerry calendar. But if you had to compose an entirely original answer, would it prove to be a challenge? Perhaps at first this might appear to be a simple task. You have to work and your job required your participation in a meeting, or you care about someone and met him or her for lunch.

Both scenarios make sense on the surface, but we have to consider the *why* with more depth. Why that meeting, and why that partner? Why not another job, or a lunch date with someone else? If we consider the question long enough, we'll come around to the conclusion that we communicate with others in order to meet basic needs, and our meetings, interactions, and relationships help us meet those needs. We may also recognize that not all of our needs are met by any one person, job, experience, or context; instead, we diversify our communication interactions in order to meet our needs. At first you may be skeptical of the idea that we communicate to meet our basic needs, but let's consider a theory on the subject and see how well it predicts, describes, and anticipate our tendency to interact.

William Schutz offers an alternate version of interpersonal needs. Like Maslow, he considers the universal aspects of our needs, but he outlines how they operate within a range or continuum for each person. According to Schutz, the need for *affection*, or appreciation, is basic to all humans. We all need to be recognized and feel like we belong, but may have differing levels of expectations to meet that need. When part of the merger process is announced and the news of layoffs comes, those co-workers who have never been particularly outgoing and have largely kept to themselves may become even more withdrawn. Schutz describes *under-personals* as people who seek limited interaction. On the opposite end of the spectrum, you may know people where you work that are often seeking attention and affirmation. Schutz describes *over-personals* as people who have a strong need to be liked and constantly seek attention from others. The person who strikes a healthy balance is called a *personal individual*.

Humans also have a need for *control*, or the ability to influence people and events. But that need may vary by the context, environment, and sense of security. You may have already researched similar mergers, as well as the forecasts for the new organization, and come to realize that your position and your department are central to the current business model. You may have also of taken steps to prioritize your budget, assess your transferable skills, and look for opportunities beyond your current context. Schutz would describe your efforts to control your situation as *autocratic*, or self-directed. At the same time there may be several employees who have not taken similar steps who look to you and others for leadership, in effect abdicating their responsibility. *Abdicrats* shift the burn of responsibility from themselves to others, looking to others for a sense of control. *Democrats* share the need between the individual and the group, and may try to hold a departmental meeting to gather information and share.

Finally, Schutz echoes Maslow in his assertion that belonging is a basic interpersonal need, but notes that it exists within a range or continuum, where some need more and others less. *Under-socials* may be less likely to seek interaction, may prefer smaller groups, and will generally not be found on center stage. *Over-socials*, however, crave the spotlight of attention and are highly motivated to seek belonging. A *social person* is one who strikes a healthy balance between being withdrawn and being the constant center of attention.

Schutz describes these three interpersonal needs of affection, control, and belonging as interdependent and variable. In one context an individual may have a high need for control, while in others he or she may not perceive the same level of motivation or compulsion to meet that need. Both Maslow and Schutz offer us two related versions of interpersonal needs that begin to address the central question: why communicate?

We communicate with each other to meet our needs, regardless how we define those needs. From the time you are a newborn infant crying for food or the time you are a toddler learning to say "please" when requesting a cup of milk, to the time you are a adult learning the rituals of the job interview and the conference room, you learn to communicate in order to gain a sense of self within the group or community, meeting your basic needs as you grow and learn.

Key Takeaway

- Through communication, we meet universal human needs.

Exercises

1. Review the types of individuals from Schutz's theory described in this section. Which types do you think fit you? Which types fit some of your co-workers or classmates? Why? Share your opinions with your classmates and compare your self-assessment with the types they believe describe you.
2. Think of two or more different situations and how you might express your personal needs differently from one situation to the other. Have you observed similar variations in personal needs in other people from one situation to another? Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.

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2.5: Social Penetration Theory

Learning Objectives

- Discuss social penetration theory, self disclosure, and the principles of self-disclosure.
- Describe interpersonal relations.

How do you get to know other people? If the answer springs immediately to mind, we're getting somewhere: communication. Communication allows us to share experiences, come to know ourselves and others, and form relationships, but it requires time and effort. You don't get to know someone in a day, a month, or even a year. At the same time you are coming to know them, they are changing, adapting, and growing—and so are you. When groups come together people get to know each other and start the trust-building process. When we do not take the time to get to know each other, and focus simply on the task at hand, the group often suffers.

Altman and Taylor describe this progression from superficial to intimate levels of communication in social penetration theory, which is often called the Onion Theory because the model looks like an onion and involves layers that are peeled away. According to social penetration theory, we fear that which we do not know. That includes people. Strangers go from being unknown to known through a series of steps that we can observe through conversational interactions. People come together in groups and teams and do amazing things.

If we didn't have the weather to talk about, what would we say? People across cultures use a variety of signals to indicate neutral or submissive stances in relation to each other. A wave, a nod, or a spoken reference about a beautiful day can indicate an open, approachable stance rather than a guarded, defensive posture. At the outermost layer of the onion, in this model, there is only that which we can observe. We can observe characteristics about each other and make judgments, but they are educated guesses at best. Our nonverbal displays of affiliation, like a team jacket, a uniform, or a badge, may communicate something about us, but we only peel away a layer when we engage in conversation, oral or written.

As we move from public to private information we make the transition from small talk to substantial, and eventually intimate, conversations. Communication requires trust and that often takes time. Beginnings are fragile times and when expectations, roles, and ways of communicating are not clear, misunderstandings can occur. Some relationships may never proceed past observations on the weather, while others may explore controversial topics like politics or religion. A married couple that has spent countless years together may be able to finish each other's sentences, and as memory fades, the retelling of stories may serve to bond and reinforce the relationship. Increasingly intimate knowledge and levels of trust are achieved over time, involving frequency of interaction and well as length and quality. Positive interactions may lead to more positive interactions, while negative ones may lead to less overall interaction.

This may appear to be common sense at first, but let's examine an example. You are new to a position and your supervisor has been in his or her role for a number of years. Some people at your same level within the organization enjoy a level of knowledge and ease of interaction with your supervisor that you lack. They may have had more time and interactions with the supervisor, but you can still use this theory to gain trust and build a healthy relationship. Recognize that you are unknown to your supervisor, and they to you. Start with superficial conversations that are neutral and non-threatening, but that demonstrate a willingness to engage in communication. Silence early in a relationship can be a sign of respect, but it can also send the message that you are fearful, shy, or lack confidence. It can be interpreted as an unwillingness to communicate, and may actually discourage interaction. If the supervisor picks up the conversation, keep your responses short and light. If not, keep an upbeat attitude and mention the weather.

Over time the conversations may gradually grow to cross topics beyond the scope of the office, and a relationship may form that involves trust. To a degree, you and your co-workers learn to predict one another's responses and relax in the knowledge of mutual respect. If, however, you skip from superficial to intimate topics too quickly, you run risk of violating normative expectations. Trust takes time, and with can come empathy and understanding, but if you share with your supervisor your personal struggles on day one, it may erode your credibility. According to the social penetration theory, people go from superficial to intimate conversations as trust develops through repeated, positive interactions. Self-disclosure is "information, thoughts, or feelings we tell others about ourselves that they would not otherwise know." McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. pp. 112Taking it step by step, and not rushing to self-disclose or asking personal questions too soon, can help develop positive business relationships.

Principles of Self-Disclosure

Write down five terms that describe your personal self, and five terms that describe your professional self. Once you have completed your two lists, compare the results. They may have points that overlap, or may have words that describe you in your distinct roles that are quite different. This difference can be easy to address, but at times it can be a challenge to maintain. How much of "you" do you share in the workplace? Our personal and professional lives don't exist independently, and in many ways are interdependent.

How do people know more about us? We communicate information about ourselves, whether or not we are aware of it. You cannot not communicate. Watzlawick, P. (1993). The language of change: elements of therapeutic communication. New York, NY: Norton & Company. From your internal monologue and intrapersonal to communication, to verbal and nonverbal communication, communication is constantly occurring. What do you communicate about yourself by the clothes (or brands) you wear, the tattoos you display, or the piercing you remove before you enter the workplace? Self-disclosure is a process by which you intentionally communicate information to others, but can involve unintentional, but revealing slips. Beebe and Redmond offer us five principles of self-disclosure that remind us that communication is an integral part of any business or organizational setting. Let's discuss them one by one.

Self-Disclosure Usually Moves in Small Steps

Would you come to work on your first day wearing a large purple hat? If you knew that office attire was primarily brown and gray suits? Most people would say, "of course not!" as there is a normative expectation for dress, sometimes called a dress code. After you have worked within the organization, earned trust and established credibility, and earned your place in the community, the purple hat might be positively received with a sense of humor. But if you haven't yet earned your place, your fashion statement may be poorly received. In the same way, personal information is normally reserved for those of confidence, and earned over time. Take small steps as you come to know your colleagues, taking care to make sure who you are does not speak louder than what you say.

Self-Disclosure Moves from Impersonal to Intimate Information

So you decided against wearing the purple hat to work on your first day, but after a successful first week you went out with friends from your college days. You shut down the bar late in the evening and paid for it on Sunday. At work on Monday, is it a wise strategy to share the finer tips of the drinking games you played on Saturday night? Again, most people would say, "of course not!" It has nothing to do with work, and only makes you look immature. Some people have serious substance abuse issues, and your stories could sound insensitive, producing a negative impact. How would you know, as you don't really know your co-workers yet? In the same way, it is not a wise strategy to post photos from the weekend's escapades on your MySpace, Facebook, or similar social networking web page. Employers are increasingly aware of their employees' web pages, and the picture of you looking stupid may come to mind when your supervisor is considering you for a promotion. You represent yourself, but you also represent your company and its reputation. If you don't represent it well, you run the risk of not representing it at all.

Self-Disclosure Is Reciprocal

Monday morning brings the opportunity to tell all sorts of stories about the weekend, and since you've wisely decided to leave any references to the bar in the past, you may instead choose the wise conversational strategy of asking questions. You may ask your co-workers what they did, what it was like, who they met, and where they went, but eventually all conversations form a circle that comes back to you. The dance between source and receiver isn't linear, it's transactional. After a couple of stories, sooner or later, you'll hear the question "What did you do this weekend?" It's now your turn. This aspect of conversation is universal. We expect when we reveal something about ourselves that others will reciprocate. The dyadic effect is the formal term for this process, and is often thought to meet the need to reduce uncertainty about conversational partners. If you stay quiet or decline to answer after everyone else has taken a turn, what will happen? They may be put off at first, they may invent stories and let their imaginations run wild, or they may reject you. It may be subtle at first, but reciprocity is expected.

You have the choice of what to reveal, and when. You may choose to describe your weekend by describing the friends and conversations while omitting any reference to the bar. You may choose to focus on your Sunday afternoon gardening activities. You may just say you read a good book and mention the title of the one you are reading. Regardless of what option you choose, you have the freedom and responsibility within the dyadic effect to reciprocate, but you have a degree of control. You can learn to anticipate when your turn will come, and to give some thought to what you will say before the moment arrives.

Self-Disclosure Involves Risk

If you decided to go with the “good book” option, or perhaps mention that you watched a movie, you just ran the risk that whatever you are reading or watching may be criticized. If the book you are enjoying is controversial, you might anticipate a bit of a debate, but if you mentioned a romance novel, or one that has a science fiction theme, you may have thought it wouldn’t generate criticism. Sometimes the most innocent reference or comment can produce conflict when the conversational partners have little prior history. At the same time, nothing ventured, nothing gained. How are you going to discover that the person you work with appreciates the same author or genre if you don’t share that information? Self-disclosure involves risk, but can produce positive results.

Self-Disclosure Involves Trust

Before you mention the title of the book or movie you saw this weekend, you may consider your audience and what you know about them. If you’ve only known them for a week, your awareness of their habits, quirks, likes and dislikes may be limited. At the same time, if you feel safe and relatively secure, you may test the waters with a reference to the genre but not the author. You may also decide that it is just a book, and they can take it or leave it.

“Trust is the ability to place confidence in or rely on the character or truth of someone.” McLean, S. (2005). The basics of interpersonal communication. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. pp 114 Trust is a process, not a badge to be earned. It takes time to develop, and can be lost in a moment. Even if you don’t agree with you co-worker, understand that self-revelation communicates a measure of trust and confidence. Respect that confidence, and respect yourself.

Also consider the nature of the information. Some information communicated in confidence must see the light of day. Sexual harassment, fraud, theft, and abuse are all issues in the workplace, and if you become aware of these behaviors you will have a responsibility to report them according to your organization’s procedures. A professional understands that trust is built over time, and understands how valuable this intangible commodity can be to success.

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal communication can be defined as communication between two people, but the definition fails to capture the essence of a relationship. This broad definition is useful when we compare it to intrapersonal communication, or communication with ourselves, as opposed to mass communication, or communication with a large audience, but it requires clarification. The developmental view of interpersonal communication places emphasis on the relationship rather than the size of the audience, and draws a distinction between impersonal and personal interactions.

For example, one day your co-worker and best friend, Iris, whom you’ve come to know on a personal as well as a professional level, gets promoted to the position of manager. She didn’t tell you ahead of time because it wasn’t certain, and she didn’t know how to bring up the possible change of roles. Your relationship with Iris will change as your roles transform. Her perspective will change, and so will yours. You may stay friends, or she may not have as much time for afterhours activities as she once did. Over time you and Iris gradually grow apart, spending less time together. You eventually lose touch. What is the status of your relationship?

If you have ever had even a minor interpersonal transaction such as buying a cup of coffee from a clerk, you know that some people can be personable, but does that mean you’ve developed a relationship within the transaction process? For many people the transaction is an impersonal experience, however pleasant. What is the difference between the brief interaction of a transaction and the interactions you periodically have with your colleague Iris who is now your manager?

The developmental view places an emphasis on the prior history, but also focuses on the level of familiarity and trust. Over time and with increased frequency we form bonds or relationships with people, and if that time and frequency are diminished, we lose that familiarity. The relationship with the clerk may be impersonal, but so can the relationship with the manager after time has passed and the familiarity is lost. From a developmental view, interpersonal communication can exist across this range of experience and interaction.

Review the lists you made for Introductory Exercise #3 at the beginning of this chapter. If you evaluate your list of what is important to you, will you find objects or relationships? You may value your home or vehicle, but for most people relationships with friends and family are at the top of the list. Interpersonal relationships take time and effort to form, and they can be challenging. All relationships are dynamic, meaning that they transform and adapt to changes within the context and environment. They require effort and sacrifice, and at times give rise to the question: why bother? A short answer may be that we as humans are compelled to form bonds, but it still fails to answer the question, why?

Uncertainty theory states that we choose to know more about others with whom we have interactions in order to reduce or resolve the anxiety associated with the unknown. Berger, C., & Calabrese, R. (1975). Some explorations in initial interactions and beyond: toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. Human communication Research, 1, 99–112.,Berger, C. (1986). Response uncertain outcome values in predicted relationships: uncertainty reduction theory then and now. Human Communication Research, 13, 34–38. Gudykunst, W.(1995) Anxiety/uncertainty management theory. In R. W. Wiseman (Ed.), Intercultural communication theory (pp. 8–58). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. The more we know about others, and become accustomed to how they communicate, the better we can predict how they will interact with us in future contexts. If you learn that Monday mornings are never a good time for your supervisor, you quickly learn to schedule meetings later in the week. The predicted outcome value theory asserts that not only do we want to reduce uncertainty, we also want to maximize our possible benefit from the association. Sunnafrank, M. (1986). Predicted outcome value during initial interactions: a reformulation of uncertainty reduction theory. Human Communication Research, 3–33.,Sunnafrank, M. (1990). Predicted outcome value and uncertainty reduction theory: a test of competing perspective. Human Communication Theory, 17, 76–150.,Kellerman, K., & Reynolds, R. (1990). when ignorance is bliss: the role of motivation to reduce uncertainty in uncertainty reduction theory. Human communication Research, 17, 5–75. This theory would predict that you would choose Tuesday or later for a meeting in order to maximize the potential for positive interaction and any possible rewards that may result. One theory involves the avoidance of fear while the other focuses on the pursuit of reward, and together they provide a point of reference as we continue our discussion on interpersonal relationships.

Regardless of whether we focus on collaboration or competition, we can see that interpersonal communication is necessary in the business environment. We want to know our place and role within the organization, accurately predict those within our proximity, and create a sense of safety and belonging. Family for many is the first experience in interpersonal relationships, but as we develop professionally, our relationships at work may take on many of the attributes we associate with family communication. We look to each other with similar sibling rivalries, competition for attention and resources, and support. The workplace and our peers can become as close, or closer, than our birth families, with similar challenges and rewards.

Key Takeaways

- Interpersonal relationships are an important part of the work environment.
- We come to know one another gradually.
- Self-disclosure involves risk and reward, and is a normal part of communication.

Exercises

1. Write down five terms that describe your personal self, and five terms that describe your professional self. Compare your results with a classmate.
2. Think of someone you trust and who trusts you. How did you come to have a mutually trusting relationship? Did it take effort on both people's part? Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.
3. How important do you think self-disclosure is in business settings? Give some examples. Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.

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2.6: Group Norms

Learning Objectives

- Define group norms.
- Discuss the role and function of group norms.
- Discuss the effect of group norms on a group's development.

A new vice president came into an organization. At the end of her first weekly meeting with her staff members, she tossed a nerf ball to one of them and asked the person to say how she was feeling. When that person finished, the vice president asked her to toss the ball to someone else, and so on, until everyone had expressed himself or herself. This process soon became a regular feature of the group's meetings.

In our earlier section on group life cycles, you learned about Bruce Tuckman's model of forming, storming, norming, and performing. Along with roles, status, and trust, which we'll encounter in the next chapter, norms are usually generated and adopted after a group's "forming" and "storming" stages.

As a group moves from "forming" toward "performing," then, norms help guide its members along the way. Whether we see them or not, norms are powerful predictors of a group's behavior.

What Norms Are

Group norms are rules or guidelines that reflect expectations of how group members should act and interact. They define what behaviors are acceptable or not; good or not; right or not; or appropriate or not (O'Hair & Wieman, p. 19).O'Hair, D. & Wiemann, M.O. (2004). The essential guide to group communication. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Norms may relate to how people look, behave, or communicate with each other. Tossing a nerf ball around a circle of workers is perhaps a peculiar way to start a meeting, and it probably doesn't contribute directly to achieving substantive goals, but it did represent a norm in the vice president's group we described—which, by the way, was a real group and not a product of imagination!

Some norms relate to how a group as a whole will act—e.g., when and how often it will meet, for instance. Others have to do with the behavior of individual group members and the roles those members play within the group.

By defining what social behavior lies within acceptable boundaries, norms can help a group function smoothly and face conflict without falling apart (Hayes, p. 31).Hayes, N. (2004). Managing teams: A strategy for success. London: Thomson. Thus, they can constitute a potent force to promote positive interaction among group members.

Origin of Norms

In a new group, norms may arise organically as members settle into their relationships and start to function together. Decisions need to be made and time needs to be taken for diverse activities such as identifying goals, determining tasks, and allocating human and tangible resources. Who will take the lead on these areas of the group's behavior has to be determined.

Further questions need to be answered as the group gets off the ground. Here are some examples:

- What topics are and are not appropriate for the group to discuss?
- How and to what degree will members respect and attend to each other's statements and viewpoints?
- How and when, if ever, will the group behave casually?
- What mechanisms will the group use to solve problems?

Any group eventually needs to deal with these questions, and the answers it reaches will become embodied as norms.

Implicit Norms

Whether a group is new or not, its norms aren't always expressed or discussed. People may simply assume that certain norms exist and accept them "by unspoken consent" in which case they are implicit norms.

Consider "same seat syndrome," for example. How often have you found that people in a college classroom seem to gravitate every day to exactly the same chairs they've always sat in? Nobody says, "Hey, I've decided that this will be my chair forever" or "I see that that's your territory, so I'll never sit there," do they?

Often norms are difficult for group members to express in words. What topics are okay or not okay to talk about during informal "chit-chat" may be a matter of unstated intuition rather than something that people can readily describe. Nevertheless, implicit norms may be extremely powerful, and even large groups are apt to have at least some implicit norms.

The cultural background each member brings to a group may lie beneath conscious awareness, yet it may exert a powerful influence on both that person's and the group's behavior and expectations. Just as a fish is unaware that it lives in water, a person may easily go through life and participate in group interactions without perceiving that he or she is the product of a culture.

Explicit Norms

Sometimes group norms are stated outright, either orally or in writing; then they are explicit norms. Such explicit rules may be imposed by an authority figure such as an executive or designated team leader. They may be part of formal policies or regulations. Wearing a uniform or answering the telephone in a certain way, for instance, may be written requirements in a workplace group.

Manuals, and even books, have been composed to provide members of groups with norms of how to behave. A manager in one organization we know wrote a policy in response to almost every problem or difficulty his division experienced. Because the manager served for more than 15 years in his position, the collection of these incident-based policies eventually filled a large tabbed binder. The bigger the group, the more likely it is that its norms will be rigid and explicit like these (Lamberton, L., & Minor-Evans, L., 2002). Lamberton, L., & Minor-Evans, L. (2002). Human relations: Strategies for success (2nd ed.). New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill.

Table 2.6.1: Implicit, Explicit, Individual, and Whole-Group Norms.

	Individual	Whole-Group
Explicit	Each new member receives a copy of the group's bylaws	The group keeps minutes of all its meetings
Implicit	A person should raise his/her hand to signal a desire to speak	Someone brings doughnuts or other treats every time the group meets

Interaction, Procedure, Status, and Achievement Norms

Norms may relate to four aspects of a group's identity: interaction, procedure, status, and achievement (Engleberg & Wynn, p. 37). Engleberg, I.N., & Wynn, D. R. (2013). Working in groups (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson. Let's look at each of these kinds of norms.

Interaction norms specify how people communicate in the group. Is it expected that everyone in the group should have an opportunity to speak about any topic that the group deals with? How long is it okay for one person to speak?

Procedure-oriented norms identify how the group functions. Does it hold meetings according to an established schedule? Who speaks first when the group gets together? Does someone distribute a written record of what happened after every time the group gets together?

Status norms indicate the degree of influence that members possess and how that influence is obtained and expressed. Who decides when a group discussion has concluded? When and how are officers for the group elected?

Achievement norms relate to standards the group sets for the nature and amount of its work. Must members cite readings or the comments of authorities when they make presentations to the group? What happens to a group member who completes tasks late or fails to complete them at all?

As we'll discover in the next chapter, enforcing and changing the norms of a group throughout its life cycle may present substantial challenges. Those challenges can best be overcome if members share a common understanding of their group's norms.

Key Takeaway

- Group norms, whether explicit or implicit, underlie and affect almost all aspects of a group's activities.

Exercises

1. Think of an unusual norm you've encountered in a group you were part of. Do you know how and from whom it originated? If not, what is your speculation about its origin?
2. Identify an implicit norm in a group you were part of. Would it have been a good idea to make the norm explicit instead? Why or why not?

3. Describe a group norm you've experienced that dealt with either interaction, procedure, status, or achievement.

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2.7: Summary

In this chapter we have discussed group development and several theories. We have discussed group stages of development and their hallmark features. Working in a group can be challenging, but with insight and understanding into the group development process, the effective group communicator can make a positive difference.

Review Questions

1. Discuss storming as a stage, how to recognize it and the role it plays in group development.
2. Discuss adjournment as a stage, how to recognize it, and the role it plays in group development.
3. Select the least important group development stage and discuss why you selected it.
4. Select the most important group development stage and discussion why you selected it.
5. Conflict is present in all groups. Discuss one positive role of conflict in a group and provide an example.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Management of Teams

3.1: Introduction

Figure 3.1.1: The coordination needed by a symphony to perform in unison is a prime example of teamwork. Image by Samuel Sianipar on Unsplash.

What's in it for me?

Reading this chapter will help you do the following:

1. Recognize and understand group dynamics and development.
2. Understand the difference between groups and teams.
3. Understand how to organize effective teams.
4. Recognize and address common barriers to team effectiveness.
5. Build and maintain cohesive teams.

Table 3.1.1: The P-O-L-C Framework

Planning	Organizing	Leading	Controlling
1. Vision & Mission 2. Strategizing 3. Goals & Objectives	1. Organization Design 2. Culture 3. Social Networks	1. Leadership 2. Decision Making 3. Communications 4. Groups/Teams 5. Motivation	1. Systems/Processes 2. Strategic Human Resources

Groups and teams are ubiquitous on the organizational landscape and managers will find that team management skills are required within each of the planning-organizing-leading-controlling (P-O-L-C) functions. For instance, planning may often occur in teams, particularly in less centralized organizations or toward the higher levels of the firm. When making decisions about the structure of the firm and individual jobs, managers conducting their organizing function must determine how teams will be used within the organization. Teams and groups have implications for the controlling function because teams require different performance assessments and rewards. Finally, teams and groups are a facet of the leading function. Today's managers must be both good team members and good team leaders. Managing groups and teams is a key component of leadership.

In your personal life, you probably already belong to various groups such as the group of students in your management class; you may also belong to teams, such as an athletic team or a musical ensemble. In your career, you will undoubtedly be called on to be part of, and mostly likely to manage, groups and teams.

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3.2: Group Dynamics

Learning Objectives

- Understand the difference between informal and formal groups.
- Learn the stages of group development.
- Identify examples of the punctuated equilibrium model.
- Learn how group cohesion, social loafing, and collective efficacy can affect groups.

Because many tasks in today's world have become so complex, groups and teams have become an essential component of an organization's success. The success of the group depends on the successful management of its members and making sure all aspects of work are fair for each member. Being able to work in a group is a key skill for managers and employees alike.

Types of Groups: Formal and Informal

What is a group? A group is a collection of individuals who interact with each other such that one person's actions have an impact on the others. In organizations, most work is done within groups, and managing groups is key to each of the P-O-L-C functions. How groups function has important implications for organizational productivity. Groups where people get along, feel the desire to contribute, and are capable of coordinating their efforts may have high performance levels, whereas those characterized by extreme levels of conflict or hostility may demoralize members of the workforce.

In organizations, groups can be classified into two basic types: informal and formal. Informal work groups are made up of two or more individuals who are associated with one another in ways not prescribed by the formal organization. For example, a few people in the company who get together to play tennis on the weekend would be considered an informal group. A formal work group is made up of managers, subordinates, or both with close associations among group members that influence the behavior of individuals in the group. We will discuss many different types of formal work groups later on in this chapter.

Stages of Group Development

American organizational psychologist Bruce Tuckman presented a robust model in 1965 that is still widely used today. On the basis of his observations of group behavior in a variety of settings, he proposed a four-stage map of group evolution, known as the Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing Model. Tuckman, B. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. Psychological Bulletin, 63, 384–399. Later he enhanced the model by adding a fifth and final stage, adjourning. The phases are illustrated in the Stages of the Group Development Model. Interestingly enough, just as an individual moves through developmental stages such as childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, so does a group, although in a much shorter period of time.

According to this theory, to facilitate a group successfully, the leader needs to move through various leadership styles over time. Generally, this is accomplished by first being more direct, eventually serving as a coach, and later, once the group is able to assume more power and responsibility for itself, shifting to delegator.

While research has not confirmed that this is descriptive of how groups progress, knowing and following these steps can help groups be more effective. For example, groups that do not go through the storming phase early on will often return to this stage toward the end of the group process to address unresolved issues. Another example of the validity of the group development model involves groups that take the time to get to know each other socially in the forming stage. When this socialization occurs, groups tend to handle future challenges better because the individuals have an understanding of each other's needs.

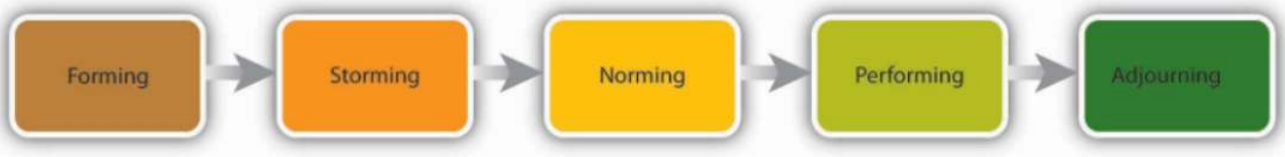

Figure 3.2.1: Stages of the Group Development Model

Forming

In the Forming stage, the group comes together for the first time. The members may already know each other or they may be total strangers. In either case, there is a level of formality, some anxiety, and a degree of guardedness as group members are not sure

what is going to happen next. “Will I be accepted? What will my role be? Who has the power here?” These are some of the questions participants think about during this stage of group formation. Because of the large amount of uncertainty, members tend to be polite, conflict avoidant, and observant. They are trying to figure out the “rules of the game” without being too vulnerable. At this point, they may also be quite excited and optimistic about the task, perhaps experiencing a level of pride at being chosen to join a particular group.

Group members are trying to achieve several goals at this stage, although this may not necessarily be done consciously. First, they are trying to get to know one another. Often this can be accomplished by finding some common ground. Members also begin to explore group boundaries to determine what will be considered acceptable behavior. “Can I interrupt? Can I leave when I feel like it?” This trial phase may also involve testing the appointed leader or seeing whether a leader emerges from the group. At this point, group members are also discovering how the group will work in terms of what needs to be done and who will be responsible for each task. This stage is often characterized by abstract discussions about issues to be addressed by the group; those who like to get moving can become impatient with this part of the process. This phase is usually short in duration, perhaps a meeting or two.

Storming

Once group members feel sufficiently safe and included, they tend to enter the Storming phase. Participants focus less on keeping their guard up as they shed social facades, becoming more authentic and more argumentative. Group members begin to explore their power and influence, and they often stake out their territory by differentiating themselves from the other group members rather than seeking common ground. Discussions can become heated as participants raise conflicting points of view and values, or disagree over how tasks should be done and who is assigned to them. It is not unusual for group members to become defensive, competitive, or jealous. They may take sides or begin to form cliques within the group. Questioning and resisting direction from the leader is also quite common. “Why should I have to do this? Who designed this project in the first place? What gives you the authority to tell me what to do?”

Although little seems to get accomplished at this stage, it actually serves an important purpose: group members are becoming more authentic as they express their deeper thoughts and feelings. What they are really exploring is “Can I truly be me, have power, and be accepted?” During this chaotic stage, a great deal of creative energy that was previously buried is released and available for use, but it takes skill to move the group from Storming to Norming. In many cases, the group gets stuck in the Storming phase.

Once group members discover that they can be authentic and that the group is capable of handling differences without dissolving, they are ready to enter the next stage, Norming.

Norming

“We survived!” is the common sentiment as this stage. Group members often feel elated at this point, and they are much more committed to each other and the group’s goal. Feeling energized by knowing they can handle the “tough stuff,” group members are now ready to get to work. Finding themselves more cohesive and cooperative, participants find it easy to establish their own ground rules (or norms) and define their operating procedures and goals. The group tends to make big decisions, while subgroups or individuals handle the smaller decisions. It is hoped at this point the group members are more open and respectful toward each other and willing to ask one another for both help and feedback. They may even begin to form friendships and share more personal information.

At this point, the leader should become more of a facilitator by stepping back and letting the group assume more responsibility for its goal. Since the group’s energy is running high, this is an ideal time to host a social or team-building event.

Performing

Galvanized by a sense of shared vision and a feeling of unity, the group is ready to go into high gear. Members are more interdependent, individuality and differences are respected, and group members feel themselves to be part of a greater entity. At the Performing stage, participants are not only getting the work done, but they also pay greater attention to how they are doing it. They ask such questions as, “Do our operating procedures best support productivity and quality assurance? Do we have suitable means for addressing differences that arise so we can preempt destructive conflicts? Are we relating to and communicating with each other in ways that enhance group dynamics and help us achieve our goals? How can I further develop as a person to become more effective?” By now, the group has matured, becoming more competent, autonomous, and insightful.

Group leaders can finally move into coaching roles and help members grow in skill and leadership. These leadership shifts are essential for managers enacting the Leadership function to keep in mind. In fact, a manager who leads multiple teams may find it necessary to shift leadership styles not only over time but between teams at different stages.

Adjourning

Just as groups form, so do they end. For example, many groups or teams formed in a business context are project-oriented and therefore are temporary. Alternatively, a working group may dissolve because of an organizational restructuring. As with graduating from school or leaving home for the first time, these endings can be bittersweet, with group members feeling a combination of victory, grief, and insecurity about what is coming next. For those who like routine and bond closely with fellow group members, this transition can be particularly challenging. Group leaders and members alike should be sensitive to handling these endings respectfully and compassionately. An ideal way to close a group is to set aside time to debrief ("How did it all go? What did we learn?"), acknowledge one another, and celebrate a job well done.

The Punctuated-Equilibrium Model

As you may have noted, the five-stage model we have just reviewed is a linear process. According to the model, a group progresses to the Performing stage, at which point it finds itself in an ongoing, smooth-sailing situation until the group dissolves. In reality, subsequent researchers, most notably Joy H. Karriker, have found that the life of a group is much more dynamic and cyclical in nature. Karriker, J. H. (2005). Cyclical group development and interaction-based leadership emergence in autonomous teams: an integrated model. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 11(4), 54–64. For example, a group may operate in the Performing stage for several months. Then, because of a disruption, such as a competing emerging technology that changes the rules of the game or the introduction of a new CEO, the group may move back into the Storming phase before returning to Performing. Ideally, any regression in the linear group progression will ultimately result in a higher level of functioning. Proponents of this cyclical model draw from behavioral scientist Connie Gersick's study of punctuated equilibrium. Gersick, C. J. G. (1991). Revolutionary change theories: A multilevel exploration of the punctuated equilibrium paradigm. Academy of Management Review, 16(1), 10–36.

The concept of punctuated equilibrium was first proposed in 1972 by paleontologists Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, who both believed that evolution occurred in rapid, radical spurts rather than gradually over time. Identifying numerous examples of this pattern in social behavior, Gersick found that the concept applied to organizational change. She proposed that groups remain fairly static, maintaining a certain equilibrium for long periods. Change during these periods is incremental, largely due to the resistance to change that arises when systems take root and processes become institutionalized. In this model, revolutionary change occurs in brief, punctuated bursts, generally catalyzed by a crisis or a problem that breaks through the systemic inertia and shakes up the deep organizational structures in place. At this point, the organization or group has the opportunity to learn and create new structures that are better aligned with current realities. Whether the group does this is not guaranteed. In sum, in Gersick's model, groups can repeatedly cycle through the Storming and Performing stages, with revolutionary change taking place during short transitional windows. For organizations and groups who understand that disruption, conflict, and chaos are inevitable in the life of a social system, these disruptions represent opportunities for innovation and creativity.

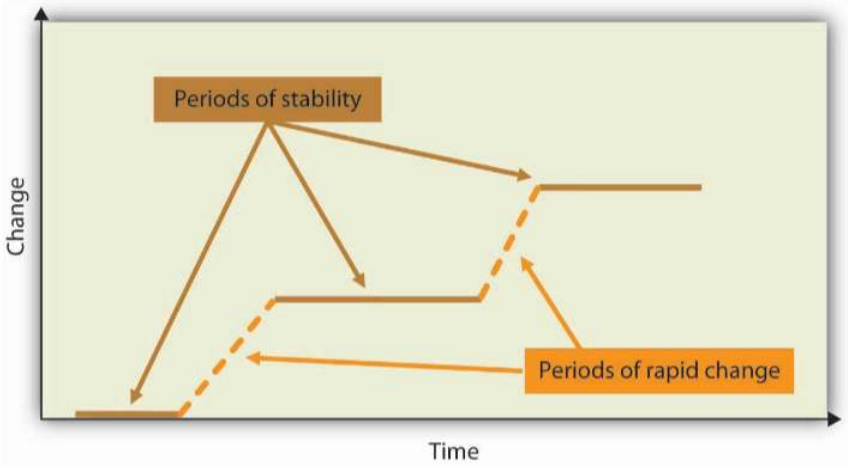

Figure 3.2.2: The Punctuated Equilibrium Model

Cohesion, Social Loafing, and Collective Efficacy

Cohesion can be thought of as a kind of social glue. It refers to the degree of camaraderie within the group. Cohesive groups are those in which members are attached to each other and act as one unit. The more cohesive a group, the more productive it will be

and the more rewarding the experience will be for the group's members. Beal, D. J., Cohen, R. R., Burke, M. J., & McLendon, C. L. (2003). Cohesion and performance in groups: A meta-analytic clarification of construct relations. Journal of Applied Psychology, 88, 989–1004; Evans, C. R., & Dion, K. L. (1991). Group cohesion and performance: A meta-analysis. Small Group Research, 22, 175–186. Cohesive groups tend to have the following characteristics: they have a collective identity; they experience a moral bond and a desire to remain part of the group; they share a sense of purpose, working together on a meaningful task or cause; and they establish a structured pattern of communication.

The fundamental factors affecting group cohesion include the following:

- **Similarity**. The more similar group members are in terms of age, sex, education, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs, the more likely the group will bond.
- **Stability**. The longer a group stays together, the more cohesive it becomes.
- **Size**. Smaller groups tend to have higher levels of cohesion.
- **Support**. When group members receive coaching and are encouraged to support their fellow team members, group identity strengthens.
- **Satisfaction**. Cohesion is correlated with how pleased group members are with one another's performance, behavior, and conformity to group norms.

As you might imagine, there are many benefits in creating a cohesive group. Members are generally more personally satisfied and feel greater self-confidence and self-esteem in a group where they feel they belong. For many, membership in such a group can be a buffer against stress, which can improve mental and physical well-being. Because members are invested in the group and its work, they are more likely to regularly attend and actively participate in the group, taking more responsibility for the group's functioning. In addition, members can draw on the strength of the group to persevere through challenging situations that might otherwise be too hard to tackle alone.

Can a Group Have Too Much Cohesion?

Despite the advantages of cohesion, too much cohesion can be detrimental to a group. Because members can come to value belonging over all else, an internal pressure to conform may arise where some members modify their behavior to adhere to group norms. Members may become conflict avoidant, focusing on trying to please one another so as not to be ostracized. In some cases, members might censor themselves to maintain the party line. As such, the group is dominated by a superficial sense of harmony and discourages diversity of thought. Having less tolerance for deviants, who threaten the group's static identity, cohesive groups will often disapprove of members who dare to disagree. Members attempting to make a change may be criticized, undermined, or even ostracized by other members, who perceive their attempts as a threat to the status quo. The painful possibility of being marginalized can keep many members in line with the majority.

The more strongly members identify with the group, the easier it is to see outsiders as inferior or, in extreme cases, as enemies. It is easy to see how this can lead to increased insularity. This form of prejudice can have a downward spiral effect. The group is not getting corrective feedback from within its own confines, and it is closing itself off from input and a cross-fertilization of ideas from the outside. In such an environment, groups can easily adopt extreme ideas that will not be challenged. Denial increases as problems are ignored and failures are blamed on external factors. With limited, often biased, information and no internal or external opposition, groups like these can make disastrous decisions.

Groupthink is a group pressure phenomenon that increases the risk of the group making flawed decisions by allowing reductions in mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment. A famous example of groupthink is the decision to invade Cuba made by President John F. Kennedy and his cabinet in 1961. In a matter of days, Cuban forces repelled the invaders, whose objective was to overthrow the entire Cuban government, resulting in many casualties and captured troops. In retrospect, there were many reasons why the Bay of Pigs invasion was doomed from the start, but the planning and approval were characterized by a belief that the insiders knew best and did not need to consider "devil's advocate" points of view. As this example illustrates, groupthink is a serious risk in highly cohesive groups. Janis, I. L. (1972). Victims of groupthink. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Cohesive groups can go awry in much milder ways. For example, group members can value their social interactions so much that they have fun together but spend little time on accomplishing their assigned task. Or a group's goal may begin to diverge from the larger organization's goal and those trying to uphold the organization's goal may be criticized (for example, students may tease the class "brain" for doing well in school).

In addition, research shows that cohesion leads to acceptance of group norms. Goodman, P. S., Ravlin, E., & Schminke, M. (1987). Understanding groups in organizations. Research in Organizational Behavior, 9, 121–173. Groups with high task commitment tend

to do well, but suppose you belong to a group in which the norms are to work as little as possible! As you might imagine, these groups accomplish little and can actually work together against the organization's goals.

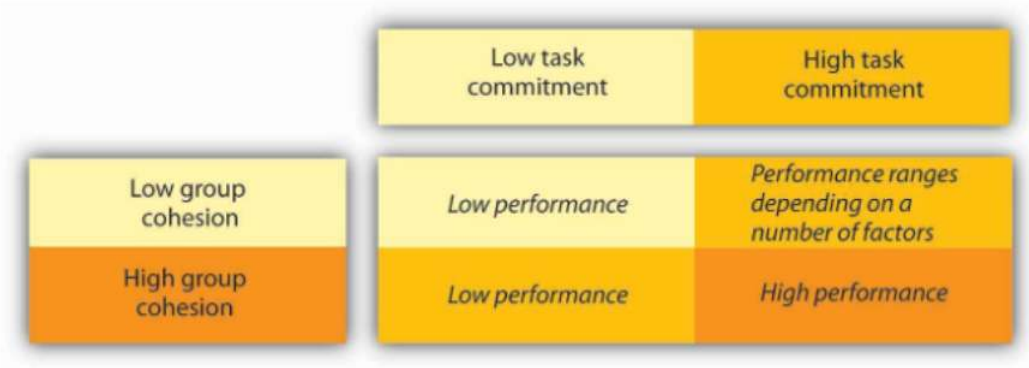

Figure 3.2.3: Groups with high cohesion and high task commitment tend to be the most effective.

Social Loafing

Social loafing refers to the tendency of individuals to put in less effort when working in a group context. This phenomenon, also known as the Ringelmann effect, was first noted by French agricultural engineer Max Ringelmann in 1913. In one study, he had people pull on a rope individually and in groups. He found that as the number of people pulling increased, the group's total pulling force was less than the sum of individual efforts had been when measured alone.Karau, S. J., & Williams, K. D. (1993). Social loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical integration. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65, 681–706.

Why do people work less hard when they are working with other people? Observations show that as the size of the group grows, this effect becomes larger as well. Karau, S. J., & Williams, K. D. (1993). Social loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical integration. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65, 681–706. The social loafing tendency is not so much a matter of laziness as a matter of perceiving that one will receive neither one's fair share of rewards if the group is successful nor blame if the group fails. Rationales for this behavior include, "My own effort will have little effect on the outcome." "Others aren't pulling their weight, so why should I?" Or "I don't have much to contribute, and no one will notice anyway." This is a consistent effect across a great number of group tasks and countries. Gabrenya, W. L., Latane, B., & Wang, Y. (1983). Social loafing in cross-cultural perspective. Journal of Cross-Cultural Perspective, 14, 368–384; Harkins, S., & Petty, R. E. (1982). Effects of task difficulty and task uniqueness on social loafing. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 43, 1214–1229; Taylor, D. W., & Faust, W. L. (1952). Twenty questions: Efficiency of problem-solving as a function of the size of the group. Journal of Experimental Psychology, 44, 360–363; Ziller, R. C. (1957). Four techniques of group decision-making under uncertainty. Journal of Applied Psychology, 41, 384–388. Research also shows that perceptions of fairness are related to less social loafing. Price, K. H., Harrison, D. A., & Gavin, J. H. (2006). Withholding inputs in team contexts: Member composition, interaction processes, evaluation structure, and social loafing. Journal of Applied Psychology, 91, 1375–1384. Therefore, teams that are deemed as more fair should also see less social loafing.

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy refers to a group's perception of its ability to successfully perform well. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. A group with high collective efficacy is one whose members share a belief in the group's capability to pursue its agreed-upon course of action and attain its goals. Collective efficacy is influenced by a number of factors, including watching others ("that group did it and we're better than them"), verbal persuasion ("we can do this"), and how a person feels ("this is a good group"). Research shows that a group's collective efficacy is positively related to its performance. Gully, S. M., Incalcaterra, K. A., Joshi, A., & Beaubien, J. M. (2002). A meta-analysis of team-efficacy, potency, and performance: Interdependence and level of analysis as moderators of observed relationships. Journal of Applied Psychology, 87, 819–832; Porter, C. O. L. H (2005). Goal orientation: Effects on backing up behavior, performance, efficacy, and commitment in teams. Journal of Applied Psychology, 90, 811–818; Tasa, K., Taggar, S., & Seijts, G. H. (2007). The development of collective efficacy in teams: A multilevel and longitudinal perspective. Journal of Applied Psychology, 92, 17–27. In addition, this relationship is stronger when task interdependence (the degree an individual's task is linked to someone else's work) is high rather than low.

Key Takeaway

Groups may be either formal or informal. Groups go through developmental stages much like individuals do. The Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing-Adjourning Model is useful in prescribing stages that groups should pay attention to as they develop. The punctuated-equilibrium model of group development argues that groups often move forward during bursts of change after long periods without change. Groups that are similar, stable, small, supportive, and satisfied tend to be more cohesive than groups that are not. Cohesion can help support group performance if the group values task completion, but too much cohesion can also be a concern for groups. Social loafing increases as groups become larger. When collective efficacy is high, groups tend to perform better.

Exercises

1. Similarity. The more similar group members are in terms of age, sex, education, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs, the more likely the group will bond.
2. Stability. The longer a group stays together, the more cohesive it becomes.
3. Size. Smaller groups tend to have higher levels of cohesion.
4. Support. When group members receive coaching and are encouraged to support their fellow team members, group identity strengthens.
5. Satisfaction. Cohesion is correlated with how pleased group members are with one another's performance, behavior, and conformity to group norms.
6. How do the tactics related to group dynamics involve the managerial functions outlined by the P-O-L-C framework?
7. If you believe the punctuated-equilibrium model is true about groups, how can you use this knowledge to help your own group?
8. Think about the most cohesive group you have ever been in. How did it compare to less cohesive groups in terms of similarity, stability, size, support, and satisfaction?
9. Why do you think social loafing occurs within groups? What can be done to combat it?
10. Have you seen instances of collective efficacy helping or hurting a team? Please explain your answer.

Contributors and Attributions

- Template:ContribCCComm120

3.3: Understanding Team Design Characteristics

Learning Objectives

- Understand the difference between groups and teams.
- Understand the factors leading to the rise in the use of teams.
- Understand how tasks and roles affect teams.
- Identify different types of teams.
- Identify team design considerations.

Effective teams give companies a significant competitive advantage. In a high-functioning team, the sum is truly greater than the parts. Team members not only benefit from one another's diverse experiences and perspectives but also stimulate each other's creativity. Plus, for many people, working in a team can be more fun than working alone. Let's take a closer look at what a team is, the different team characteristics, types of teams companies use, and how to design effective teams.

Differences Between Groups and Teams

Organizations consist of groups of people. What exactly is the difference between a group and a team? A group is a collection of individuals. Within an organization, groups might consist of project-related groups such as a product group or division or they can encompass an entire store or branch of a company. The performance of a group consists of the inputs of the group minus any process losses such as the quality of a product, ramp-up time to production, or the sales for a given month. Process loss is any aspect of group interaction that inhibits group functioning.

Why do we say group instead of team? A collection of people is not a team, though they may learn to function in that way. A team is a particular type of group: a cohesive coalition of people working together to achieve mutual goals. Being on a team does not equate to a total suppression of personal agendas, but it does require a commitment to the vision and involves each individual working toward accomplishing the team's objective. Teams differ from other types of groups in that members are focused on a joint goal or product, such as a presentation, discussing a topic, writing a report, creating a new design or prototype, or winning a team Olympic medal. Moreover, teams also tend to be defined by their relatively smaller size. For instance, according to one definition, "A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they are mutually accountable."Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (1993). The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance organization. Boston: Harvard Business School.

Figure 3.3.1: Teams are only as good as their weakest link. While Michael Phelps has been dubbed "the world's greatest swimmer" and received a great deal of personal attention, such as meeting President George W. Bush, he could not have achieved his record eight gold medals in one Olympic games without the help of his teammates Aaron Peirsol, Brendan Hansen, and Jason Lezak. Image is in the Public Domain.

The purpose of assembling a team is to accomplish larger, more complex goals than what would be possible for an individual working alone or even the simple sum of several individuals working independently. Teamwork is also needed in cases where multiple skills are tapped or where buy-in is required from several individuals. Teams can, but do not always, provide improved performance. Working together to further a team agenda seems to increase mutual cooperation between what are often competing factions. The aim and purpose of a team is to perform, get results, and achieve victory in the workplace. The best managers are those who can gather together a group of individuals and mold them into an effective team.

The key properties of a true team include **collaborative action** where, along with a common goal, teams have collaborative tasks. Conversely, in a group, individuals are responsible only for their own area. They also share the rewards of strong team performance with their **compensation based on shared outcomes**. Compensation of individuals must be based primarily on a shared outcome, not individual performance. Members are also willing to **sacrifice for the common good** in which individuals give up scarce resources for the common good instead of competing for those resources. For example, teams occur in sports such as soccer and basketball, in which the individuals actively help each other, forgo their own chance to score by passing the ball, and win or lose collectively as a team.

Teams in Organizations

The early 1990s saw a dramatic rise in the use of teams within organizations, along with dramatic results such as the Miller Brewing Company increasing productivity 30% in the plants that used self-directed teams compared with those that used the traditional organization. This same method allowed Texas Instruments in Malaysia to reduce defects from 100 parts per million to 20 parts per million. In addition, Westinghouse reduced its cycle time from 12 weeks to 2 weeks, and Harris Electronics was able to achieve an 18% reduction in costs. Welins, R., Byham, W., & Dixon, G. (1994). Inside Teams. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. The team method has served countless companies over the years through both quantifiable improvements and more subtle individual worker-related benefits.

Companies such as Square D, a maker of circuit breakers, switched to self-directed teams and found that overtime on machines like the punch press dropped 70% under teams. Productivity increased because the setup operators were able to manipulate the work in much more effective ways than a supervisor could dictate. Moskal, B. (1988, June 20). Supervisors, begone! Industry Week, p. 32. In 2001, clothing retailer Chico's FAS was looking to grow its business. The company hired Scott Edmonds as president, and two years later revenues had almost doubled from $378 million to $760 million. By 2006, revenues were $1.6 billion, and Chico's had nine years of double-digit same-store sales growth. What did Edmonds do to get these results? He created a horizontal organization "ruled by high-performance teams with real decision-making clout and accountability for results, rather than by committees that pass decisions up to the next level or toss them over the wall into the nearest silo."

The use of teams also began to increase because advances in technology have resulted in more complex systems that require contributions from multiple people across the organization. Overall, team-based organizations have more motivation and involvement, and teams can often accomplish more than individuals. Cannon-Bowers, J. A. and Salas, E. (2001, February). Team effectiveness and competencies. In W. Karwowski (Ed.), International encyclopedia of ergonomics and human factors (1383). London: CRC Press. It is no wonder organizations are relying on teams more and more.

Do We Need a Team?

Teams are not a cure-all for organizations. To determine whether a team is needed, organizations should consider whether a variety of knowledge, skills, and abilities are needed, whether ideas and feedback are needed from different groups within the organization, how interdependent the tasks are, if wide cooperation is needed to get things done, and whether the organization would benefit from shared goals. Rees, F. (1997). Teamwork from start to finish. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. If the answer to these questions is "yes," then a team or teams might make sense. For example, research shows that the more team members perceive that outcomes are interdependent, the better they share information and the better they perform. De Dreu, C. K. W. (2007). Cooperative outcome interdependence, task reflexivity, and team effectiveness: A motivated information processing perspective. Journal of Applied Psychology, 92, 628–638.

Team Tasks and Roles

Teams differ in terms of the tasks they are trying to accomplish and the roles team members play.

Figure 3.3.2: Production tasks include actually making something such as a team of construction workers creating a new building. Image by Arron Choi on Unsplash.

As early as the 1970s, J. R. Hackman identified three major classes of tasks: (1) production tasks, (2) idea generation tasks, and (3) problem-solving tasks. Hackman, J. R. (1976). Group influences on individuals. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.), Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology. Chicago: Rand-McNally. Production tasks include actually making something, such as a building, a product, or a marketing plan. Idea generation tasks deal with creative tasks, such as brainstorming a new direction or creating a new process. Problem-solving tasks refer to coming up with plans for actions and making decisions, both facets of managerial P-O-L-C

functions (planning and leading). For example, a team may be charged with coming up with a new marketing slogan, which is an idea generation task, while another team might be asked to manage an entire line of products, including making decisions about products to produce, managing the production of the product lines, marketing them, and staffing their division. The second team has all three types of tasks to accomplish at different points in time.

Task Interdependence

Another key to understanding how tasks are related to teams is to understand their level of task interdependence. Task interdependence refers to the degree that team members depend on one another to get information, support, or materials from other team members to be effective. Research shows that self-managing teams are most effective when their tasks are highly interdependent. Langfred, C. W. (2005). Autonomy and performance in teams: The multilevel moderating effect of task interdependence. Journal of Management, 31, 513–529; Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., & Bradway, L. K. (1997). Task interdependence as a moderator of the relation between group control and performance. Human Relations, 50, 169–181.

There are three types of task interdependence. Pooled interdependence exists when team members may work independently and simply combine their efforts to create the team's output. For example, when students meet to divide the sections of a research paper and one person simply puts all the sections together to create one paper, the team is using the pooled interdependence model. However, they might decide that it makes more sense to start with one person writing the introduction of their research paper, then the second person reads what was written by the first person and, drawing from this section, writes about the findings within the paper. Using the findings section, the third person writes the conclusions. If one person's output becomes another person's input, the team would be experiencing sequential interdependence. And finally, if the student team decided that in order to create a top notch research paper they should work together on each phase of the research paper so that their best ideas would be captured at each stage, they would be undertaking reciprocal interdependence. Another important type of interdependence that is not specific to the task itself is outcome interdependence, where the rewards that an individual receives depend on the performance of others.

Team Roles

While relatively little research has been conducted on team roles, recent studies show that individuals who are more aware of team roles and the behavior required for each role perform better than individuals that do not. This fact remains true for both student project teams as well as work teams, even after accounting for intelligence and personality. Mumford, T. V., Van Iddekinge, C. H., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2008). The team role test: Development and validation of a team role knowledge situational judgment test. Journal of Applied Psychology, 93, 250–267. Early research found that teams tend to have two categories of roles: those related to the tasks at hand and those related to the team's functioning. For example, teams that only focus on production at all costs may be successful in the short run, but if they pay no attention to how team members feel about working 70 hours a week, they are likely to experience high turnover.

On the basis of decades of research on teams, 10 key roles have been identified. Bales, R. F. (1950). Interaction process analysis: A method for the study of small groups. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley; Benne, K. D., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. Journal of Social Issues, 4, 41–49; Belbin, R. M. (1993). Management teams: Why they succeed or fail. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann. Team leadership is effective when leaders are able to adapt the roles they are contributing to or asking others to contribute to fit what the team needs, given its stage and the tasks at hand.Kozlowski, S. W. J., Gully, S. M., McHugh, P. P., Salas, E., & Cannon-Bowers, J. A. (1996). A dynamic theory of leadership and team effectiveness: Developmental and task contingent roles. In G. Ferris (Ed.), Research in personnel and human resource management (Vol. 14, pp. 253–305). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press; Kozlowski, S. W. J., Gully, S. M., Salas, E., & Cannon-Bowers, J. A. (1996). Team leadership and development: Theory, principles, and guidelines for training leaders and teams. In M. M. Beyerlein, D. A. Johnson, & S. T. Beyerlein (Eds.), Advances in interdisciplinary studies of work teams (Vol. 3, pp. 253–291). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press. Ineffective leaders might always engage in the same task role behaviors when what they really need to do is focus on social roles, put disagreements aside, and get back to work. While these behaviors can be effective from time to time, if the team doesn't modify its role behaviors as things change, they most likely will not be effective.

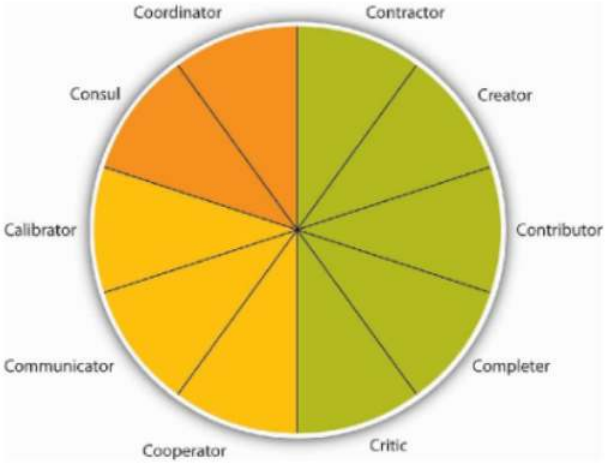

Figure 3.3.3: Teams are based on many roles being carried out as summarized by the Team Role Typology. These 10 roles include task roles (green), social roles (yellow), and boundary spanning roles (orange). Source: Mumford, T. V., Van Iddekinge, C. H., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2008). The team role test: Development and validation of a team role knowledge situational judgment test. Journal of Applied Psychology, 93, 250–267; Mumford, T. V., Campion, M. A., & Morgeson, F. P. (2006). Situational judgments in work teams: A team role typology. In J. A. Weekley & R. E. Ployhart (Eds.), Situational judgment tests: Theory, measurement (pp. 319–343). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Task Roles

Five roles make up the task portion of the role typology. The **contractor role** includes behaviors that serve to organize the team's work, including creating team time lines, production schedules, and task sequencing. The **creator role** deals more with changes in the team's task process structure. For example, reframing the team goals and looking at the context of goals would fall under this role. The **contributor role** is important because it brings information and expertise to the team. This role is characterized by sharing knowledge and training those who have less expertise to strengthen the team. Research shows that teams with highly intelligent members and evenly distributed workloads are more effective than those with uneven workloads. Ellis, A. P. J., Hollenbeck, J. R., Ilgen, D. R., Porter, C. O. L. H., West, B. J., & Moon, H. (2003). Team learning: Collectively connecting the dots. Journal of Applied Psychology, 88, 821–835. The **completer role** is also important as it is often where ideas are transformed into action. Behaviors associated with this role include following up on tasks such as gathering needed background information or summarizing the team's ideas into reports. Finally, the critic role includes "devil's advocate" behaviors which go against the assumptions being made by the team.

Social Roles

Social roles serve to keep the team operating effectively. When the social roles are filled, team members feel more cohesive and the group is less prone to suffer process losses or biases, such as social loafing, groupthink, or a lack of participation from all members. Three roles fall under the umbrella of social roles. The **cooperator role** includes supporting those with expertise toward the team's goals. This is a proactive role. The **communicator role** includes behaviors that are targeted at collaboration such as practicing good listening skills and appropriately using humor to diffuse tense situations. Having a good communicator helps the team to feel more open to sharing ideas. And the **calibrator role** is an important one and serves to keep the team on track in terms of suggesting any needed changes to the team's process. This role includes initiating discussions about potential team problems such as power struggles or other tensions. Similarly, this role may involve settling disagreements or pointing out what is working and what is not in terms of team process.

Boundary-Spanning Roles

The final two roles are related to activities outside of the team that help to connect the team to the larger organization. Anacona, D. G. (1990). Outward bound: Strategies for team survival in an organization. Academy of Management Journal, 33, 334–365; Anacona, D. G. (1992). Bridging the boundary: External activity and performance in organizational teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 37, 634–665; Druskat, V. U., & Wheeler, J. V. (2003). Managing from the boundary: The effective leadership of self-managing work teams. Academy of Management Journal, 46, 435–457. Teams that engage in a greater level of boundary-spanning behaviors increase their team effectiveness. Marrone, J. A., Tesluk, P. E., & Carson, J. B. (2007). A multi-level investigation of antecedents and consequences of team member boundary-spanning behavior. Academy of Management Journal, 50, 1423–1439. The consul role includes gathering information from the larger organization and informing those within the organization about

team activities, goals, and successes. Often the **consul role** is filled by team managers or leaders. The **coordinator role** includes interfacing with others within the organization so that the team's efforts are in line with other individuals and teams within the organization.

Types of Teams

There are many different types of teams, and a given team may be described according to multiple types. For example, a team of scientists writing a research article for publication may be temporary, virtual, and cross-functional.

Teams may be permanent or long term, but more typically, a team exists for a limited time. In fact, one-third of all teams in the United States are temporary. Gordon, J. (1992). Work teams: How far have they come? Training, 29, 59–62. An example of a temporary team is a task force that addresses a specific issue or problem until it is resolved. Other teams may be temporary or ongoing such as product development teams. In addition, matrix organizations have cross-functional teams where individuals from different parts of the organization staff the team, which may be temporary or long-standing.

Virtual Teams

Virtual teams are teams in which members are not located in the same physical place. They may be in different cities, states, or even different countries. Some virtual teams are formed by necessity, such as to take advantage of lower labor costs in different countries; one study found that upward of 8.4 million individuals worldwide work virtually in at least one team. Ahuja, M., & Galvin, J. (2003). Socialization in virtual group. Journal of Management, 29, 161–185. Often, virtual teams are formed to take advantage of distributed expertise or time—the needed experts may be living in different cities. A company that sells products around the world, for example, may need technologists who can solve customer problems at any hour of the day or night. It may be difficult to find the caliber of people needed who would be willing to work at 2 a.m. on a Saturday, for example. So companies organize virtual technical support teams. BakBone Software, for instance, has a 13-member technical support team. Each member has a degree in computer science and is divided among offices in California, Maryland, England, and Tokyo. BakBone believes it has been able to hire stronger candidates by drawing from a diverse talent pool and hiring in different geographic regions rather than limiting hiring to one region or time zone. Alexander, S. (2000, November 10). Virtual teams going global. Infoworld. Retrieved February 12, 2009, from www.infoworld.com/articles/ca/xml/00/11/13/001113cavirtual.html.

Despite potential benefits, virtual teams present special management challenges, particularly to the controlling function. Managers often think that they have to see team members working to believe that work is being done. Because this kind of oversight is impossible in virtual team situations, it is important to devise evaluation schemes that focus on deliverables. Are team members delivering what they said they would? In self-managed teams, are team members producing the results the team decided to measure itself on?

Another special challenge of virtual teams is building trust. Will team members deliver results just as they would in face-to-face teams? Can members trust one another to do what they said they would do? Companies often invest in bringing a virtual team together at least once so members can get to know one another and build trust. Kirkman, B. L., Rosen, B., Gibson, C. B., Tesluk, P. E., & McPherson, S. O. (2002). Five challenges to virtual team success: Lessons from Sabre, Inc. Academy of Management Executive, 16, 67–79. In manager-led virtual teams, managers should be held accountable for their team's results and evaluated on their ability as a team leader.

Finally, communication is especially important in virtual teams, through e-mail, phone calls, conference calls, or project management tools that help organize work. If individuals in a virtual team are not fully engaged and tend to avoid conflict, team performance can suffer. Montoya-Weiss, M. M., Massey, A. P., & Song, M. (2001). Getting it together: Temporal coordination and conflict management in global virtual teams. Academy of Management Journal, 44, 1251–1262. A wiki is an Internet-based method for many people to collaborate and contribute to a document or discussion. Essentially, the document remains available for team members to access and amend at any time. The most famous example is Wikipedia, which is gaining traction as a way to structure project work globally and get information into the hands of those that need it. Empowered organizations put information into everyone's hands. Kirkman, B. L., & Rosen, B. (2000). Powering up teams. Organizational Dynamics, 28(3), 48–66. Research shows that empowered teams are more effective than those that are not empowered. Mathieu, J. E., Gilson, L. L., & Ruddy, T. M. (2006). Empowerment and team effectiveness: An empirical test of an integrated model. Journal of Applied Psychology, 91, 97–108.

Top Management Teams

Top management teams are appointed by the chief executive officer (CEO) and, ideally, reflect the skills and areas that the CEO considers vital for the company. There are no formal rules about top management team design or structure. The top management team often includes representatives from functional areas, such as finance, human resources, and marketing or key geographic areas, such as Europe, Asia, and North America. Depending on the company, other areas may be represented such as legal counsel or the company's chief technologist. Typical top management team member titles include chief operating officer (COO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief marketing officer (CMO), or chief technology officer (CTO). Because CEOs spend an increasing amount of time outside their companies (i.e., with suppliers, customers, regulators, and so on), the role of the COO has taken on a much higher level of internal operating responsibilities. In most American companies, the CEO also serves as chairman of the board and can have the additional title of president. Companies have top management teams to help set the company's vision and strategic direction, key tasks within the planning P-O-L-C function. Top teams make decisions on new markets, expansions, acquisitions, or divestitures. The top team is also important for its symbolic role: how the top team behaves dictates the organization's culture and priorities by allocating resources and by modeling behaviors that will likely be emulated lower down in the organization. Importantly, the top team is most effective when team composition is functionally and demographically diverse and when it can truly operate as a team, not just as group of individual executives. Carpenter, M. A., Geletkanycz, M. A., & Sanders, W. G. (2004). The upper echelons revisited: The antecedents, elements, and consequences of TMT composition. Journal of Management, 30, 749–778.

That "the people make the place" holds especially true for members of the top management team. In a study of 15 firms that demonstrated excellence, defined as sustained performance over a 15-year period, leadership researcher Jim Collins noted that those firms attended to people first and strategy second. "They got the right people on the bus, moved the wrong people off the bus, ushered the right people to the right seats—then they figured out where to drive it." Collins, J. (2001, July–August). Level leadership. Harvard Business Review, 66–76. The best teams plan for turnover. **Succession planning** is the process of identifying future members of the top management team. Effective succession planning allows the best top teams to achieve high performance today and create a legacy of high performance for the future.

Team Leadership and Autonomy

Teams also vary in terms of how they are led. Traditional or manager-led teams are teams in which the manager serves as the team leader. The manager assigns work to other team members. These types of teams are the most natural to form, wherein managers have the power to hire and fire team members and are held accountable for the team's results.

Self-managed teams are a new form of team that rose in popularity with the Total Quality Movement in the 1980s. Unlike manager-led teams, these teams manage themselves and do not report directly to a supervisor. Instead, team members select their own leader, and they may even take turns in the leadership role. Self-managed teams also have the power to select new team members. As a whole, the team shares responsibility for a significant task, such as assembly of an entire car. The task is ongoing rather than temporary such as a charity fund drive for a given year.

Organizations began to use self-managed teams as a way to reduce hierarchy by allowing team members to complete tasks and solve problems on their own. The benefits of self-managed teams extend much further. Research has shown that employees in self-managed teams have higher job satisfaction, increased self-esteem, and grow more on the job. The benefits to the organization include increased productivity, increased flexibility, and lower turnover. Self-managed teams can be found at all levels of the organization, and they bring particular benefits to lower-level employees by giving them a sense of ownership of their jobs that they may not otherwise have. The increased satisfaction can also reduce absenteeism because employees do not want to let their team members down.

Typical team goals are improving quality, reducing costs, and meeting deadlines. Teams also have a "stretch" goal, which is difficult to reach but important to the business unit. Many teams also have special project goals. Texas Instruments (TI), a company that makes semiconductors, used self-directed teams to make improvements in work processes. Welins, R., Byham, W., & Dixon, G. (1994). Inside teams. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Teams were allowed to set their own goals in conjunction with managers and other teams. TI also added an individual component to the typical team compensation system. This individual component rewarded team members for learning new skills that added to their knowledge. These "knowledge blocks" include topics such as leadership, administration, and problem solving. The team decides what additional skills people might need to help the team meet its objectives. Team members would then take classes or otherwise demonstrate their proficiency in that new skill on the job to be

certified for mastering the skill. Individuals could then be evaluated based on their contribution to the team and how they are building skills to support the team.

Self-managed teams are empowered, which means that they have the responsibility as well as the authority to achieve their goals. Team members have the power to control tasks and processes and to make decisions. Research shows that self-managed teams may be at a higher risk of suffering from negative outcomes due to conflict, so it is important that they are supported with training to help them deal with conflict effectively. Alper, S., Tjosvold, D., & Law, K. S. (2000). Conflict management, efficacy, and performance in organizational teams. Personnel Psychology, 53, 625–642; Langfred, C. W. (2007). The downside of self-management: A longitudinal study of the effects of conflict on trust, autonomy, and task interdependence in self-managing teams. Academy of Management Journal, 50, 885–900. Self-managed teams may still have a leader who helps them coordinate with the larger organization. Morgeson, F. P. (2005). The external leadership of self-managing teams: Intervening in the context of novel and disruptive events. Journal of Applied Psychology, 90, 497–508. For a product team composed of engineering, production, and marketing employees, empowerment means that the team can decide everything about a product's appearance, production, and cost without having to get permission or sign-off from higher management. As a result, empowered teams can more effectively meet tighter deadlines. At AT&T, for example, the model-4200 phone team cut development time in half while lowering costs and improving quality by using the empowered team approach. Parker, G. (1994). Cross-functional teams. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. A special form of self-managed teams are self-directed teams in which they also determine who will lead them with no external oversight.

Figure 3.3.4: Team leadership is a major determinant of how autonomous a team can be.

Designing Effective Teams

Designing an effective team means making decisions about team composition (who should be on the team), team size (the optimal number of people on the team), and team diversity (should team members be of similar background, such as all engineers, or of different backgrounds). Answering these questions will depend, to a large extent, on the type of task that the team will be performing. Teams can be charged with a variety of tasks, from problem solving to generating creative and innovative ideas to managing the daily operations of a manufacturing plant.

Who Are the Best Individuals for the Team?

A key consideration when forming a team is to ensure that all the team members are **qualified** for the roles they will fill for the team. This process often entails understanding the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) of team members as well as the personality traits needed before starting the selection process. Humphrey, S. E., Hollenbeck, J. R., Meyer, C. J., & Ilgen, D. R. (2007). Trait configurations in self-managed teams: A conceptual examination of the use of seeding for maximizing and minimizing trait variance in teams. Journal of Applied Psychology, 92, 885–892. When talking to potential team members, be sure to communicate the job requirements and norms of the team. To the degree that this is not possible, such as when already existing groups are used, think of ways to train the team members as much as possible to help ensure success. In addition to task knowledge, research has shown that individuals who understand the concepts covered in this chapter and in this book such as conflict resolution, motivation, planning, and leadership actually perform better on their jobs. This finding holds for a variety of jobs, including officer in the United States Air Force, an employee at a pulp mill, or a team member at a box manufacturing plant. Hirschfeld, R. R., Jordan, M. H., Field, H. S., Giles, W. F., & Armenakis, A. A. (2006). Becoming team players: Team members' mastery of teamwork knowledge as a predictor of team task proficiency and observed teamwork effectiveness. Journal of Applied

Psychology, 91, 467–474; Stevens, M. J., & Campion, M. A. (1999). Staffing work teams: Development and validation of a selection test for teamwork settings. Journal of Management, 25, 207–228.

How Large Should My Team Be?

Interestingly, research has shown that regardless of **team size**, the most active team member speaks 43% of the time. The difference is that the team member who participates the least in a three-person team is still active 23% of the time versus only 3% in a 10-person team. McGrath, J. E. (1984). Groups: Interaction and performance. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall; Solomon, H. (1960). Mathematical thinking in the measurement of behavior. Glencoe, IL: Free Press. When deciding team size, a good rule of thumb is a size of 2 to 20 members. The majority of teams have 10 members or less because the larger the team, the harder it is to coordinate and interact as a team. With fewer individuals, team members are more able to work through differences and agree on a common plan of action. They have a clearer understanding of others' roles and greater accountability to fulfill their roles (remember social loafing?). Some tasks, however, require larger team sizes because of the need for diverse skills or because of the complexity of the task. In those cases, the best solution is to create sub teams where one member from each sub team is a member of a larger coordinating team. The relationship between team size and performance seems to greatly depend on the level of task interdependence, with some studies finding larger teams out producing smaller teams and other studies finding just the opposite. Campion, M. A., Medsker, G. J., & Higgs, A. C. (1993). Relations between work group characteristics and effectiveness: Implications for designing effective work groups. Personnel Psychology, 46, 823–850; Magjuka, R. J., & Baldwin, T. T. (1991). Team-based employee involvement programs: Effects of design and administration. Personnel Psychology, 44, 793–812; Vinokur-Kaplan, D. (1995). Treatment teams that work (and those that don't): An application of Hackman's group effectiveness model to interdisciplinary teams in psychiatric hospitals. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 31, 303–327. The bottom line is that team size should be matched to the goals of the team.

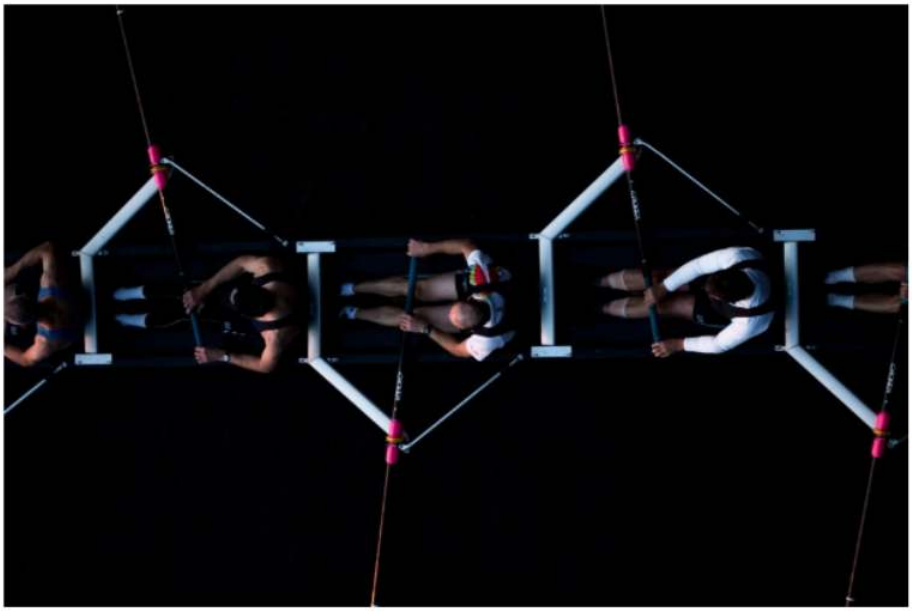

Figure 3.3.5: The ideal size for a team depends on the task. Groups larger than 10 members tend to be harder to coordinate and often break into sub-teams to accomplish the work. Image by Josh Calabrese on Unsplash.

How Diverse Should My Team Be?

Team composition and **team diversity** often go hand in hand. Teams whose members have complementary skills are often more successful because members can see each other's blind spots. One team member's strengths can compensate for another's weaknesses. Jackson, S. E., Joshi, A., & Erhardt, N. L. (2003). Recent research on team and organizational diversity: SWOT analysis and implications. Journal of Management, 29, 801–830; van Knippenberg, D., De Dreu, C. K. W., & Homan, A. C. (2004). Work group diversity and group performance: An integrative model and research agenda. Journal of Applied Psychology, 89, 1008–1022. For example, consider the challenge that companies face when trying to forecast future sales of a given product. Workers who are educated as forecasters have the analytic skills needed for forecasting, but these workers often lack critical information about customers. Salespeople, in contrast, regularly communicate with customers, which means they're in the know about upcoming customer decisions. But salespeople often lack the analytic skills, discipline, or desire to enter this knowledge into spreadsheets and

software that will help a company forecast future sales. Putting forecasters and salespeople together on a team tasked with determining the most accurate product forecast each quarter makes the best use of each member's skills and expertise.

Diversity in team composition can help teams come up with more creative and effective solutions. Research shows that teams that believe in the value of diversity performed better than teams that do not. Homan, A. C., van Knippenberg, D., Van Kleef, G. A., & De Dreu, C. K. W. (2007). Bridging fault lines by valuing diversity: Diversity beliefs, information elaboration, and performance in diverse work groups. Journal of Applied Psychology, 92, 1189–1199. The more diverse a team is in terms of expertise, gender, age, and background, the more ability the group has to avoid the problems of groupthink. Surowiecki. J. (2005). The wisdom of crowds. New York: Anchor Books. For example, different educational levels for team members were related to more creativity in research and development teams and faster time to market for new products. Eisenhardt, K. M., & Tabrizi, B. N. (1995). Accelerating adaptive processes: Product innovation in the global computer industry. Administrative Science Quarterly, 4, 84–110; Shin, S. J., & Zhou, J. (2007). When is educational specialization heterogeneity related to creativity in research and development teams? Transformational leadership as a moderator. Journal of Applied Psychology, 92, 1709–1721. Members will be more inclined to make different kinds of mistakes, which means that they'll be able to catch and correct those mistakes.

Key Takeaway

Teams, though similar to groups, are different in both scope and composition. A team is a particular type of group: a cohesive coalition of people working together to achieve mutual goals. In the 21st century, many companies have moved toward the extensive use of teams. The task a team is charged with accomplishing affects how they perform. In general, task interdependence works well for self-managing teams. Team roles consist of task, social, and boundary-spanning roles. Different types of teams include task forces, product development teams, cross-functional teams, and top management teams. Team leadership and autonomy varies depending on whether the team is traditionally managed, self-managed, or self-directed. Teams are most effective when teams consist of members with the right KSAs for the tasks, are not too large, contain diversity across team members. Decisions about where and how to use teams, the leadership of teams, and the structure of teams illustrate the overlap in the design and leading P-O-L-C functions.

Exercises

1. Think of the last team you were in. Did the task you were asked to do affect the team? Why or why not?
2. Which of the 10 work roles do you normally take in a team? How difficult or easy do you think it would be for you to take on a different role?
3. Have you ever worked in a virtual team? If so, what were the challenges and advantages of working virtually?
4. How large do you think teams should be and why?

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3.4: Organizing Effective Teams

Learning Objectives

- Understand how to create team norms, roles, and expectations.
- Identify keys to running effective team meetings.

When a team is well organized, it tends to perform well. Well-designed teams are able to capitalize on positive events while maintaining composure when facing a negative event. There are several strategies that can boost team effectiveness through effective organization.

Establishing Team Norms and Contracts

A key to successful team design is to have clear norms, roles, and expectations among team members. Problems such as social loafing or groupthink can be avoided by paying careful attention to team member differences and providing clear definitions for roles, expectancy, measurement, and rewards.

Team Norms

Norms are shared expectations about how things operate within a group or team. Just as new employees learn to understand and share the assumptions, norms, and values that are part of an organization's culture, they also must learn the norms of their immediate team. This understanding helps teams be more cohesive and perform better. Norms are a powerful way of ensuring coordination within a team. For example, is it acceptable to be late to meetings? How prepared are you supposed to be at the meetings? Is it acceptable to criticize someone else's work? These norms are shaped early during the life of a team and affect whether the team is productive, cohesive, and successful.

Explore some ideas about team norms by doing the Square Wheels exercise.

Square Wheels Exercise and Group Discussion

Sometimes it can be challenging to start a conversation around team ground rules and performance. The following exercise can be used to get a team talking about what works and what doesn't in teams they've worked in and how your team can be designed most effectively.

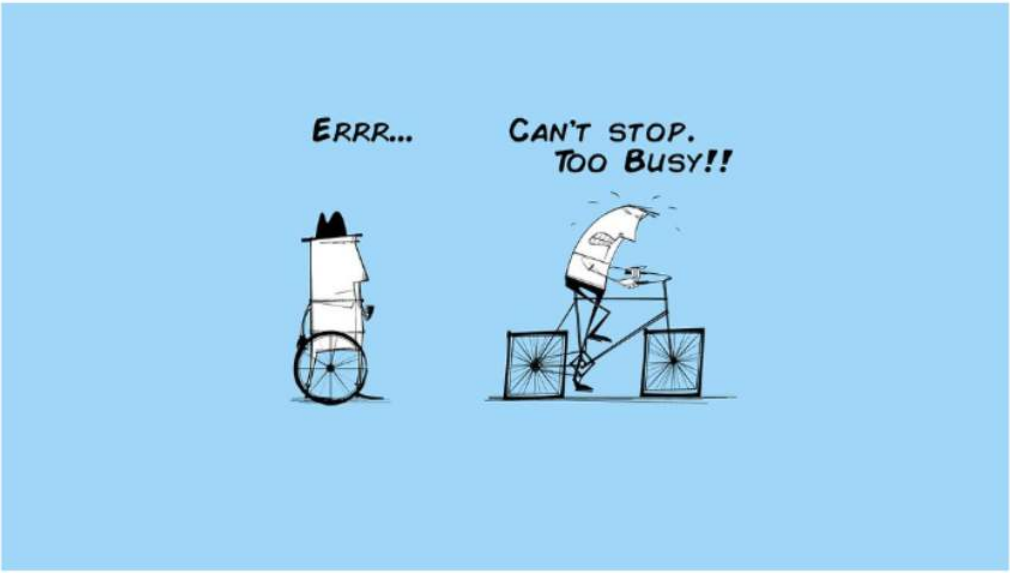

Figure 3.4.1: Too Busy to Improve by Alan O'Rourke is under a CC BY 2.0 license.

This picture of a bike with square wheels is an illustration of how many organizations seem to operate. Print out the illustration and have everyone in your team write on the paper, identifying as many of the key issues and opportunities for improvement as you can. Following this, have a conversation around what this illustration might mean for your own team.

Team Contracts

Scientific research as well as experience working with thousands of teams show that teams that are able to articulate and agree on established ground rules, goals, and roles and develop a team contract around these standards are better equipped to face challenges that may arise within the team. Katzenback, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (1993). The wisdom of teams. Boston: Harvard Business School Press; Porter, T. W., & Lilly, B. S. (1996). The effects of conflict, trust, and task commitment on project team performance. International Journal of Conflict Management, 7, 361–376. Having a team contract does not necessarily mean that the team will be successful, but it can serve as a road map when the team veers off course. Questions that can help to create a meaningful team contract include:

- Team Values and Goals: What are our shared team values? What is our team goal?
- Team Roles and Leadership: Who does what within this team? (Who takes notes at the meeting? Who sets the agenda? Who assigns tasks? Who runs the meetings?) Does the team have a formal leader? If so, what are his or her roles?
- Team Decision Making: How are minor decisions made? How are major decisions made?
- Team Communication: Who do you contact if you cannot make a meeting? Who communicates with whom? How often will the team meet?
- Team Performance: What constitutes good team performance? What if a team member tries hard but does not seem to be producing quality work? How will poor attendance/work quality be dealt with?

Team Meetings

Anyone who has been involved in a team knows it involves team meetings. While few individuals relish meetings, they serve an important function in terms of information sharing and decision making. They also serve an important social function and can help to build team cohesion and a task function in terms of coordination. Unfortunately, we've all attended lengthy meetings that were a waste of time and where little happened that couldn't have been accomplished by reading an e-mail in five minutes. To run effective meetings, it helps to think of meetings in terms of three sequential steps. Haynes, M. E. (1997). Effective meeting skills. Menlo Park, C Crisp.

Before the Meeting

Much of the effectiveness of a meeting is determined before the team gathers. There are three key things you can do to ensure the team members get the most out of their meeting.

First, ask yourself: Is a meeting needed? Leaders should do a number of things before the meeting to help make it effective. The first thing is to be sure a meeting is even needed. If the meeting is primarily informational, ask yourself whether it is imperative that the group fully understands the information and whether future decisions will be built on this information. If so, a meeting may be needed. If not, perhaps simply communicating with everyone in a written format will save valuable time. Similarly, decision-making meetings make the most sense when the problem is complex and important, there are questions of fairness to be resolved, and commitment is needed moving forward.

Second, create and distribute an agenda. An agenda is important in helping to inform those invited about the purpose of the meeting. It also helps organize the flow of the meeting and keep the team on track.

Third, send a reminder before the meeting. Reminding everyone of the purpose, time, and location of the meeting helps everyone prepare themselves. Anyone who has attended a team meeting only to find there is no reason to meet because members haven't completed their agreed-upon tasks knows that, as a result, team performance or morale can be negatively affected. Follow up to make sure everyone is prepared. As a team member, inform others immediately if you will not be ready with your tasks so they can determine whether the meeting should be postponed.

During the Meeting

During the meeting, there are several things you can do to make sure the team starts and keeps on track.

Start the meeting on time. Waiting for members who are running late only punishes those who are on time and reinforces the idea that it's OK to be late. Starting the meeting promptly sends an important signal that you are respectful of everyone's time.

Follow the meeting agenda. Veering off agenda communicates to members that it is not important. It also makes it difficult for others to keep track of where you are in the meeting and can facilitate important points not being addressed.

Manage group dynamics for full participation. As you've seen in this chapter, there are a number of group dynamics that can limit a team's functioning. Be on the lookout for full participation and engagement from all team members as well as any potential problems such as social loafing, group conflict, or groupthink.

Figure 3.4.2: © The New Yorker Collection 1979 Henry Martin from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

Summarize the meeting with action items. Be sure to clarify team member roles moving forward. If individual's tasks are not clear, chances are role confusion will arise later. There should be clear notes from the meeting regarding who is responsible for each action item and the timeframes associated with next steps.

End the meeting on time. This is vitally important as it shows that you respect everyone's time and are organized. If another meeting is needed to follow up, schedule it later, but don't let the meeting run over.

After the Meeting

Follow up on action items. After the meeting you probably have several action items. In addition, it is likely that you'll need to follow up on the action items of others.

Figure 3.4.3: Conducting meetings standing up saves time yet keeps information flowing across the team. See Bluedorn, A. C., Turban, D. B., & Love, M. S. (1999). Image by Kaleidico on Unsplash.

Key Takeaway

Much like group development, team socialization takes place over the life of the team. The stages move from evaluation to commitment to role transition. Team norms are important for the team process and help to establish who is doing what for the team

and how the team will function. Creating a team contract helps with this process. Keys to address in a team contract are team values and goals, team roles and leadership, team decision making, team communication expectations, and how team performance is characterized. Team meetings can help a team coordinate and share information. Effective meetings include preparation, management during the meeting, and follow up on action items generated in the meeting.

Exercises

1. Have the norms for most of the teams you have belonged to been formal or informal? How do you think that has affected these teams?
2. Have you ever been involved in creating a team contract? Explain how you think that may have influenced how the team functioned?
3. Should the person requesting a meeting always prepare a meeting agenda? Why or why not?
4. Do you think conducting team meetings standing up is a good idea? Why or why not?

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3.5: Barriers to Effective Teams

Learning Objectives

- Recognize common barriers to effective teams and how to address them

Problems can arise in any team that will hurt the team's effectiveness. Here are some common problems faced by teams and how to deal with them.

Common Barriers to Effective Teams

Challenges of Knowing Where to Begin

At the start of a project, team members may be at a loss as to how to begin. Also, they may have reached the end of a task but are unable to move on to the next step or put the task to rest.

Floundering often results from a lack of clear goals, so the remedy is to go back to the team's mission or plan and make sure that it is clear to everyone. Team leaders can help move the team past floundering by asking, "What is holding us up? Do we need more data? Do we need assurances or support? Does anyone feel that we've missed something important?"

Dominating Team Members

Some team members may have a dominating personality that encroaches on the participation or airtime of others. This overbearing behavior may hurt the team morale or the momentum of the team.

A good way to overcome this barrier is to design a team evaluation to include a "balance of participation" in meetings. Knowing that fair and equitable participation by all will affect the team's performance evaluation will help team members limit domination by one member and encourage participation from all members, even shy or reluctant ones. Team members can say, "We've heard from Mary on this issue, so let's hear from others about their ideas."

Poor Performance of Some Team Members

Research shows that teams deal with poor performers in different ways, depending on members' perceptions of the reasons for poor performance. Jackson, C. L., & LePine, J. A. (2003). Peer responses to a team's weakest link: A test and extension of LePine and Van Dyne's model. Journal of Applied Psychology, 88, 459–475. In situations in which the poor performer is perceived as lacking in ability, teams are more likely to train the member. In situations in which members perceive the individual as simply being low on motivation, they are more likely to try to motivate or reject the poor performer.

Keep in mind that justice is an important part of keeping individuals working hard for the team. Colquitt, J. A. (2004). Does the justice of the one interact with the justice of the many? Reactions to procedural justice in teams. Journal of Applied Psychology, 89, 633–646. Be sure that poor performers are dealt with in a way that is deemed fair by all the team members.

Poorly Managed Team Conflict

Disagreements among team members are normal and should be expected. Healthy teams raise issues and discuss differing points of view because that will ultimately help the team reach stronger, well-reasoned decisions. Unfortunately, sometimes disagreements arise because of personality issues or feuds that predated the teams' formation.

Ideally, teams should be designed to avoid bringing adversaries together on the same team. If that is not possible, the next best solution is to have adversaries discuss their issues privately, so the team's progress is not disrupted. The team leader or other team member can offer to facilitate the discussion. One way to make a discussion between conflicting parties meaningful is to form a behavioral contract between the two parties. That is, if one party agrees to do X, the other will agree to do Y. Scholtes, P. (1988). The team handbook. Madison, WI: Joiner Associates.

Key Takeaway

Barriers to effective teams include the challenges of knowing where to begin, dominating team members, the poor performance of team members, and poorly managed team conflict.

Exercises

1. Have you ever been involved in a team where one or more dominating team members hurt the team's performance? Share what happened and how the team dealt with this.
2. Have you ever been involved in a team where conflict erupted between team members? How was the situation handled?

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3.6: Developing Your Team Skills

Learning Objectives

- Identify guidelines for developing cohesion in your team.

Steps to Creating and Maintaining a Cohesive Team

There are several steps you can take as a manager to help build a cohesive team. For example, you can work to:

- Align the group with the greater organization. Establish common objectives in which members can get involved.
- Let members have choices in setting their own goals. Include them in decision making at the organizational level.
- Define clear roles. Demonstrate how each person's contribution furthers the group goal—everyone is responsible for a special piece of the puzzle.
- Situate group members in proximity to one another. This builds familiarity.
- Give frequent praise, both to individuals and to the group, and encourage them to praise each other. This builds individual self-confidence, reaffirms positive behavior, and creates an overall positive atmosphere.
- Treat all members with dignity and respect. This demonstrates that there are no favorites and everyone is valued.
- Celebrate differences. This highlights each individual's contribution while also making diversity a norm.
- Establish common rituals. Thursday morning coffee, monthly potlucks—these reaffirm group identity and create shared experiences.

Key Takeaway

There are many things you can do to help build a cohesive team. One key thing to remember is that too much cohesion without strong performance norms can be a problem. Many of the ways to build cohesive groups are also fun, such as celebrating successes and creating rituals.

Exercises

1. Think of the most cohesive group you have ever been in. What factors made the group so close?
2. What are some challenges you see to creating a cohesive group?
3. How does team size affect cohesion?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Small Group Communications across Cultures

4.1: Communicating Cross Culturally

Several years ago, a popular American politician made a trip Latin America. At the airport of the host country, he emerged from the aircraft waving to the assembled crowd which included dignitaries and reporters from the local press. Someone asked the American politician how his flight had been. In response, he used his thumb and forefinger to flash the common "OK!" gesture in front of the news cameras.

Leaving the airport, the American politician went for a short visit with local government officials. Next, he went to a major university to deliver an address. He was accompanied to the university by his official U.S. government translator who happened to be a military man in full uniform. The American politician's speech dealt with the United States' desire to help their Latin American neighbors by way of economic aid that would help develop their economies and better the economic conditions of the poor.

The entire trip was a disaster. Why? Because, though the American politician's verbal communication was satisfactory, non-verbally he had communicated an entirely different message.

When asked how his flight had been, the American had flashed what to him was a friendly, positive "OK" hand gesture. This act had been photographed by the news media and wound up on the front pages of local newspapers. While that hand gesture means "OK" in North America, it is a very obscene gesture in that part of Latin America.

The university where the American politician chose to deliver his policy address had just been the site of violent anti-government demonstrations. The government had chosen the university site for his address in hopes of communicating their sympathetic understanding of students' position. The students, however, viewed the American politician as a friend of the local government who was invading their university with a military translator. The students interpreted the presence of a military translator as meaning that the American politician supported the policies of the local government.

The American politician had communicated two radically different sets of messages: one verbally and one nonverbally.

Communicating Between the Lines

What is the first thing you notice about a person? Dress? Face? "Style"? Whatever, it is probably not his language. Though language may not be the most prominent characteristic of a person, it is certainly one of the most revealing. Until verbal communication is established, knowledge of a person is limited and one-sided. Language opens his side -- his thoughts, his interests, and his view of life -- in effect, himself.

Language is spoken. Language is heard. The verbal, audible form of language is its most obvious characteristic. It consists of audible symbols expressed by the speaker. Our responses to these symbols vary according to our understanding of and familiarity with the specific language. Communication also occurs in a nonverbal, inaudible context. Certain body movements correspond with audible speech messages. In some cases, the associated body movement may replace speech altogether. A raised eyebrow may indicate "yes" or a hand movement signal "good-by."

Language may also be in written form -- and thus no longer audible. Various alphabets, including hieroglyphics, pictorial, or phonetic orthographics have been used throughout history. To be sure, not every society has a written form of its spoken language. However, every language has the potential of being written, and every speaker of that language is a potential writer of it.

Language communicates what members of a society need to know. It is a major tool of any social group, effecting loyalties based on past, present, or future events and relationships. Language can also disrupt society for it can destroy relationships and loyalties. The Apostle James' description of the tongue as a fire is an apt one. He exclaims: "Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark" (James 3:5).

This leads us to define language as verbal, systematic, and symbolic communication. Language is always verbal. Spoken language is the basis for all other forms of language: written language, sign language, and gestures. The written symbols stand for sounds.

Language is not just something spoken; it is also systematic. All language is structured. There are relationships between actors and their actions and their modifiers. The structure formed by these relationships is called grammar. Every language has a grammar and its speakers follow its rules, whether or not they are aware of them. A five-year-old may not know the difference between a noun and a verb, but he can speak a grammatically correct sentence. Grammar gives meaning to language. It tells us who the actor is and who is being acted upon.

Besides being verbal and systematic, language is also symbolic. We use symbols to stand for classes of things. These symbols are arbitrary and not directly related to the class of objects they represent. For example, there is nothing about the four-legged, furry

animal that is man's friend that suggests "dog" or "perro" or "chien." These are simply sounds that the English, Spanish, and French have agreed to call that particular beast. Symbols are abstract. That is, we can talk about a dog that is not present or even one that has never existed. We can manipulate the symbol. Language is possible because human beings are capable of symbolic activity.

While language is verbal, systematic, and symbolic, its function is communication. Indeed, we can even define language as communication. Language is a vehicle used to try to transport what is in one person's mind into another person's mind. It is a vehicle for abstract concepts.

The phenomena of language

Language serves as a bridge between the biological and cultural aspects of life. Malinowski dealt with seven key biological needs of human life: metabolism, bodily comforts, safety, growth, reproduction, movement, and health. Human beings, responding to these biological needs, form and perpetuate social structures and institutions designed to fill these needs.

Language serves the social group by providing a vital avenue of communication among the group's members as they establish and perpetuate the institutions designed to meet their biological needs. Of course, communication is far more than simply verbal or even written language usage. It involves the sum total of message sent within the social context: organizational messages, positional and relational messages, as well as verbal and language source messages. By linking the past with the present, it assures the group that needs are being met, or it indicates that some reorganization of society is necessary.

A student suffering in a stuffy, overheated classroom has several courses of action. The student can simply squirm uncomfortably. This will not accomplish much because he will probably be ignored. He could raise his hand (a nonverbal signal) and then say nothing. This might attract some attention, but no doubt he would be considered odd or foolish. If he tries nothing else, the heat will remain excessive. Language is needed. The situation can be remedied for the present and future if the student speaks to the teacher, and the teacher speaks to the maintenance department. The person assigned to the problem will also use speech to remedy the situation.

Speech begins in the brain. The size and complexity of the brain allows complex speech. Numerous experiments have attempted to teach the higher apes to communicate with humans using speech. Although the apes can speak and be understood in limited ways, they will never duplicate human speech due to their limited vocal mechanisms as well as the limited complexity of their brains. This limitation affects their ability to form sounds, to develop complex sentence types, to correlate expression with meaning, and to transmit and teach this complexity to their offspring.

Evolutionists have tried to explain language as a development from simple to more complex forms, or according to Otto Jespersen, from complex to simpler and thus more efficient expression. Perhaps their major pitfall was that they distinguished between "primitive" languages and "true" languages. "Primitive" languages did not qualify as fully developed languages. "True" languages were basically the European languages.

In reality, all known languages are adequate expressions of the cultures in which they function. All languages have a regularity of structure, potential to express abstract concepts, and characteristics generally associated with "true" languages. It is significant to consider that some languages are more advanced than, but not superior to, others in the areas of technological and philosophical expression. The less advanced languages can be termed "local" and the more advanced, "world" languages. Even though all languages have the resources to express the same things, languages directly associated with industrial and urban growth have developed additional vocabulary and syntactic flexibility.

Early attempts to explain language in more scientific ways assumed there had been a transition or development from unsystematic forms of communication to language proper (from grunting to actual words, for example). Linguists worked at trying to see how such a transition could have taken place. Edward Sapir deals with the transition of language from the expressive to the referential function. He felt that language had begun as a spontaneous reaction to reality. From there, it had developed into a highly specific symbolic system representing reality.

The well-known linguist Noam Chomsky feels that primitive languages have never existed. He noted that language, wherever it is found, is full-blown and adequate for its usage by the social group.

Language acquisition

All human societies use language. The means by which the members of these societies acquire their language is of great interest to anthropologists and linguists. The following observations from Chomsky help in understanding this process:

1. There is no evidence of any primitive languages. All known languages have full-blown grammatical structures and are capable of expanding to incorporate any new technology or concepts which enter that society. Not only are there no known primitive languages now, but also there is no evidence that such primitive languages ever existed.
2. Children in every society begin learning language at about the same age. American, Mexican, Chinese, and Saudi children all begin acquiring their language at eighteen to twenty-four months of age. There is no known society where language acquisition begins earlier or later.
3. Children in all societies learn language at the same rate. The Chinese child learns Chinese at the same rate as the American child learns English and the Mexican child learns Spanish. By the age of five, children in all societies have usually mastered the grammatical structure of their language.

Based on these three observations, Chomsky has concluded that there is a readiness factor involved in language acquisition. He postulates that human beings have an innate language ability.

Evolutionists have problems with Chomsky's scheme because he sees no evidence for the evolution of language. In fact, Chomsky's observations point to the sudden appearance of full-blown language. This, of course, would be in harmony with a Biblical creation position.

Language in culture

Language changes through time. As a result there are historical and comparative linguistic studies. Language also varies from location to location, resulting in the study of dialectology. The result of such language change and variation can be (a) a dialect -- when a smaller group has language varieties not common to the majority of speakers of the language -- or (b) an idiolect -- when a person has developed his own peculiar usage of the language.

Dialects of languages can vary in pronunciation. For example, Central American speakers of Spanish pronounce c before e and i and z as the English c in city while in most of Spain they are pronounced like the English th in thin. Variation may also come in the grammar, when structures are changed by addition, replacement, or subtraction of grammatical units.

Dialects may also vary in vocabulary. Those variations serve as reference points in dialect geographies. Certain social dialects of English use the term "pancake" for a very thin cake made of batter poured onto a hot greased surface and cooked on both sides until brown. Other English speakers call the same thing a "flapjack." Still others use the word "griddlecake" or "flannel cake." The reality -- the thin brown cake -- is the same even though dialects have developed different terms.

Distinct sociocultural groups will also assign differing qualities to objects, animals, or people. In the United States, the dog is considered "man's best friend." In the Hebrew culture of Old Testament times, the dog was a despised animal.

It becomes necessary, therefore, to shift from a concept of language as an expression of a culture, to one of communication through the use of language. Language is the servant of the culture that gave it birth. There is no sacredness of language apart from the large context of meaning established within a culture. Therefore, students in more traditional foreign language courses are often unable to speak that language when they enter the normal cultural setting of the language. The students have learned the language in relation to their own sociocultural values and perspectives, not those of the people who speak the language as their mother tongue. Fluency in a second language is often hindered by previously learned incorrect habits. Relearning of language skills takes a long time. Some never break the bad habits, and so, never gain fluency.

Because language is learned behavior, it is therefore part of culture. Adaptation to one's cultural setting begins even before birth. Time schedules, for example, are cultural. The fetus is subject to his mother's time schedule before birth. After birth, feeding, sleeping, and other activities are some of the baby's first lived experiences. Each culture has its own time schedule. People in some cultures rise early; people in others retire late. The power of this routine is felt only when one leaves his own culture or subculture and moves into another with a clashing routine. The schedule is so internalized that forced change of schedule, or clash with another schedule, is emotionally disturbing and disrupting.

Cultures vary in the values, qualities, or characteristics they assign to things, animals, or humans. Cultures, or sociocultural groups, also divide the entire universe in their particular pattern. Assignment of characteristics and categories is made to fit that pattern. Each society has its own division of the color spectrum. There are languages with only three vowels while others have twelve or fifteen vowels. In the same way, some societies have a limited inventory of colors while others have a much larger inventory. North American housewives can usually recognize and name more colors than can their husbands. Women working with fabrics can usually distinguish and name more fabrics than can the average housewife. However, any North American -- male or female --

probably distinguishes far more colors than will a Mayan Indian of Central America. To the Mayan, the color spectrum is divided into only five parts plus a sixth quality of "no color." Their language reflects this division of the color spectrum, assigning only six words to colors. Introduction of a color shade not recognized as one of these six calls for the creation of a new term, the borrowing from a language having more color categories, or the modification of the color word with such concepts as very light or dark, or some reduplication of the stem word to indicate intensity of color.

Sapir and Whorf claim human beings are enslaved to their own cultural process of dividing the universe into categories and that thought patterns are based on language. They believe that linguistic categories are not the result of a process of thinking. Rather, the thought is dependent on already existing, arbitrary linguistic categories.

H. Douglas Brown says their hypothesis can be demonstrated by the way various languages divide the color spectrum. All humans, with normal vision, see the same range of color. They all differentiate the same wave lengths of light. If language or linguistic categories were the result of thinking, we would expect the color spectrum to be divided into the same color bands in all languages. However, this is not true. In English, the color spectrum is divided into seven basic categories: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, and purple. In Shona, a language of Rhodesia, the color spectrum is divided into three basic categories: cips uka (reds and purples at the two ends), citema (blues running into greens), and cicena (greens and yellows). In Bassa, a language of Liberia, the color spectrum is in two basic categories: hui (the blue-green end of the spectrum) and ziza (the red-orange end of the spectrum). The Zuni Indians of the American Southwest see yellows and oranges as a basic category, and the Taos Indians of New Mexico see blues and greens as a basic category. In Madagascar, Malagasy speakers distinguish over one hundred basic categories of color.

Table 4.1.1: Lexical mappings of the color spectrum in three languages

English					
purple	blue	green	yellow	orange	red
Shona					
cips uka	citema	cicena	cips uka		
Bassa					
hui	ziza				

From Principles of Language Learning and Teaching

Ethnoscience is the branch of anthropology concerned with the cultural aspects of cognitive structure. It is concerned with the effect of culture and language on the cognitive processes, that is, how does language affect how we think about and look at things? The Hanunoo have names for ninety-two varieties of rice while the English speaker would label them all rice. The Hanunoo sees ninety-two different things while the American sees one. The Eskimo has six names for snow, all of which we would call snow. We distinguish between a Ford Pinto, a Ford Mustang, a Chevrolet Vega, a Plymouth Duster, and many more makes and models of automobiles while the Hanunoo and the Eskimo will likely call them all "cars." Roger Brown concludes:

> *The findings of ethnoscience and comparative semantics suggest that it is a rare thing to find a word in one language that is exactly equivalent in reference to a word in an unrelated language. If each lexicon is regarded as a template imposed on a common reality, these templates do not match up. On the level of grammar, differences of meaning between languages are more striking and probably of greater significance. Benjamin Whorf has described some fascinating differences and has argued that they result in unlike modes of thought.*

If reality were such as directly to impose itself on the child's mind, one would expect it to have imposed itself in that same form on the languages of the world. The ubiquity of linguistic nonequivalence suggests that reality can be variously construed and, therefore, that the child's manipulations and observations are not alone likely to yield the stock of conceptions that prevail in that child's society. . . . For any concept that is cultural rather than natural the problem set by the need to master its linguistic expression is sufficient to cause the concept to be learned.

One's identity is manifested and defined partly by how that person responds to language within the sociocultural context. Identity is expressed in three primary ways: by the language one speaks, the degree to which one uses talk or silence, and by the use of nonverbal behavioral cues.

The language and dialect of language that someone speaks identifies that person, if not to a specific location, at least to their being in or out of their dialect area. A native speaker of American English can easily recognize the various dialects of Boston, southern, Midwestern, or Texan speech. People also tend to identify others by the language they speak, as by saying someone is Spanish-speaking.

North American society is a "talk" society. Silence is uncomfortable. It is difficult for an average American to spend more than a few moments of shared silence without speaking. It is not enough for a situation to be overlooked, apologized for, or clarified by actions. The actions must be explained verbally.

It is not proper for an American subordinate to remain silent while being corrected. An American must respond verbally to show that the offense has been understood. A Filipino, on the other hand, remains silent while being rebuked. Any spoken word shows a lack of respect. The Filipino will also apologize with an action, for example, extending a favor to the one who has been offended, but saying nothing. What he has done is totally understood by the other.

There are certain cultures and subcultures where language is taken very seriously. This is an international sore spot in the encounter between East and West. The Far Easterner tends to take language more seriously than the North American and reacts negatively to what he considers flippant usage.

Language is thus a major means of communication among people. It is utilized in a variety of ways, depending on one's sociocultural background, his nationality, and his local and personal needs. It is also closely associated with specific situations: informal or formal, conversation or lecture, detailed or general, prose or poetry, direct and straightforward, or circuitous and indirect. People adapt their language according to their perception of the demands of the situation.

One's degree of fluency in a language corresponds to that person's degree of response and awareness within the language setting. A person's fluency is thus more or less effective; response is more or less adaptive. The child who is attentive to language, responsive to current usage, and respectful to differential usage will probably grow up able to move into any social setting in his or her own society. That person will be perceptually fluent, rising to all the demands of the language. On the other hand, the child who ignores language nuance, assuming a person with different usage is odd, and who is unresponsive to current usage, will probably grow up ignoring language dynamics and be unable to adapt comfortably to the demands of social and geographic mobility. This will handicap that person within the context of his own culture and any cross-cultural experiences he may encounter.

Language considerations enter forcefully into spiritual practice. Prayer is the medium of communication which human beings use to contact God. Prayer is primarily verbal, whether or not it is audible. Because language between men is based on the socialization process within one society and one's attitude to that process, habits are formed which, positively or adversely, affect the God/human being relationship. Prayer in the "closet" may be quiet, rambling, and in effect, inaudible or unintelligible to other people. Such rambling prayers are also tolerable in a small group. Taken into a larger group, however, these same characteristics, which may be admirable in small group prayer, generate utter confusion. God understands each prayer equally, but corporate prayer experience is hindered unless the language is adapted to the large group situation.

Nonverbal communication refers to the process whereby a message is sent and received through any one or more human sense channels, without the use of language. Such messages can be intentional and conscious or unintentional and unconscious. A preacher's hand gestures during a sermon are usually intentional. Totally unconscious communication was effected by a woman who, seated with her legs crossed, punctuated the end of each sentence with a jerk of her leg as she read orally. Whatever the intention in the mind of the communicator, or whatever the level of awareness of the messages being sent, nonverbal communication is very powerful and significant in a person's life and in his interaction in the community.

The patterns of nonverbal behavior are culturally defined. Yes or no messages are conveyed by the nodding or shaking of one's head. These patterns are part of the arbitrary selection of symbols of the culture (in some cultures the nodding up and down of the head means "yes" while in others it means "no"). These behaviors must be learned, along with language and other aspects of the structure of society, by new members entering the culture.

Learning these nonverbal clues can present problems. The same symbol may transmit opposite messages in two different cultures, or two opposite signals may mean the same thing in the two cultures. The hand motion with fingers extended down from the palm and moved in rhythm toward the speaker signifies "goodbye" to someone from the United States but means "come here" to most Latin Americans. Yet, the Latin American symbol for "goodbye" is almost identical to the American symbol meaning "come here." Obviously, this can be confusing and frustrating. When a member of one culture visits or lives within another culture, he must master these signals until he perceives them according to the intent of the other person.

Nonverbal communication is expressed and perceived through all of the senses -- hearing, touch, smell, sight, and taste. Nonverbal communication may also include body temperature, body movement, and time and space. For example, the person who perspires intensely when he is nervous is communicating that message with his "wet" clothes as though he had verbalized his nervousness. That the two messages, verbal and nonverbal, may not coincide is a fascinating study in the field of social psychology. The person who perspires heavily but claims he is not nervous may be either consciously trying to deceive or unaware of his motives in denying his nervousness.

A young Mayan Indian man, viewing an elephant for the first time in a zoo, stood comfortably by the fence until the elephant approached him. By an unconscious movement, the Mayan gradually backed away from the fence until the elephant turned away. Then the young man moved gradually toward the fence. He was totally unaware of his actions. His description of the encounter was effusive, but he never mentioned any "fear" of the giant beast.

Kinesic communication involves muscle or body movement. Specific messages are transmitted by hand waves, eye contact, facial expressions, head nods, and other movements. In an interpretive dance the movements of the entire body are high in message content. In fact, in certain Southeast Asian nations the interpretive dance is the primary nonverbal means of communicating to a group. The Thai easily read the symbolic message of the formal dance without its needing to be verbalized.

Sometimes kinesic symbols cause frustration in cross-cultural encounters. North American eye contact is far too intense for a Filipino, who tends to break eye contact early. The Filipino breaks eye contact (1) to show subordination to authority, (2) to differentiate roles such as man and woman or adult and child, and (3) to indicate that staring is not proper behavior. The North American, even though placing low value on staring, encourages eye contact to show respect and trustworthiness.

A Filipino woman in a North American class, resisting the culturally determined eye contact of a professor, eventually cried out, "You make me feel naked!" In other words, she was saying, "You stare at me as if you want to see right through me."

Cultural factors govern body movement, determining what moves, when it moves, where it moves, and restrictions on movement. Hips may move in sports or dancing but not in the services of some churches. A child can move the body freely in gym but not in the classroom. A North American girl who grows up in Latin America may return home with more body movement as part of her flirtation pattern and find she is classified as "loose" among her peers. A Latin woman tends to move more of her body when men are present than does an American woman, although neither communicates loose morals within her own culture. When the North American girl moves into the Latin American culture, she may be seen as "cold." Conversely, when the Latin American girl moves to North America, she may be considered "loose."

Proxemic communication implies relationships of space, duration, distance, territory, and the perception of these on the part of the participant.

Standing patterns have been schemed by Edward T. Hall as intimate, personal, and public. North American intimate space extends two feet from the person; Latin American intimate space extends only a foot or so. This intimate-personal space border defines the space within which one feels uncomfortable in a personal, but not intimate, conversation. Thus, the Latin feels quite comfortable conversing just a foot away from the face of the other. When he moves that close to a North American, however, he is invading that person's intimate space. Such an invasion causes the American to react defensively with visible muscle tension, skin discoloration, and even body movements of "retreat."

The following selection from Helen Keller illustrates the frustrating and exhilarating process by which one discovers a correlation between nonverbal and verbal experiences. For most of us, this process occurs gradually when we are too young to appreciate it. Helen Keller was old enough at the time to remember the experience later. We go through a similar process, although on a much smaller scale, when we become fluent in a second language.

> "The morning after my teacher came she led me into her room and gave me a doll. The little blind children at the Perkins Institution had sent it and Laura Bridgman had dressed it; but I did not know this until afterward.
>
> "When I had played with it a little while, Miss Sullivan slowly spelled into my hand the word "d-o-l-l." I was at once interested in this finger play and tried to imitate it. When I finally succeeded in making the letters correctly I was flushed with childish pleasure and pride. Running downstairs to my mother I held up my hands and made the letters for doll. I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed. I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation. In the days that followed, I learned to spell in this uncomprehending way a great many words, among them pin, hat, cup and a few verbs like sit, stand and walk. But my teacher had been with me several weeks before I understood that everything has a name.

"One day, while I was playing with my new doll, Miss Sullivan put my big rag doll into my lap also, spelled "d-o-l-l" and tried to make me understand that "d-o-I-I" applied to both. Earlier in the day we had had a tussle over the words "m-u-g" and "w-a-t-e-r." Miss Sullivan had tried to impress it upon me that "m-u-g" is mug and "w-a-t-e-r" is water, but I persisted in confounding the two. In despair she had dropped the subject for the time only to renew it at the first opportunity. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor. . . .

"We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten -- a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

"I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me.

"On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow.

"I learned a great many new words that day. I do not remember what they all were; but I do know that mother, father, sister, teacher were among them -- words that were to make the world blossom for me, "like Aaron's rod, with flowers." It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, and for the first time longed for a new day to come. . . .

"I had now the key to all language, and I was eager to learn to use it. Children who hear acquire language without any particular effort; the words that fall from others' lips they catch on the wing, as it were, delightedly, while the little deaf child must trap them by a slow and often painful process. But whatever the process, the result is wonderful. Gradually from naming an object we advance step by step until we have traversed the vast distance between our first stammered syllable and the sweep of thought in a line of Shakespeare.

"At first, when my teacher told me about a new thing I asked very few questions. My ideas were vague, and my vocabulary was inadequate; but as my knowledge of things grew, and I learned more and more words, my field of inquiry broadened, and I would return again and again to the same subject, eager for further information. Sometimes a new word revived an image that some earlier experience had engraved on my brain.

"I remember the morning that I first asked the meaning of the word, "love." This was before I knew many words. I had found a few early violets in the garden and brought them to my teacher. She tried to kiss me; but at that time I did not like to have anyone kiss me except my mother. Miss Sullivan put her arm gently around me and spelled into my hand, "I love Helen."

"What is love?" I asked.

"She drew me closer to her and said, "It is here," pointing to my heart, whose beats l was conscious of for the first time. Her words puzzled me very much because l did not then understand anything unless l touched it.

"I smelt the violets in her hand and asked, half in words, half in signs, a question which meant, "Is love the sweetness of flowers?"

"No," said my teacher.

"Again I thought. The warm sun was shining on us. "Is this not love?" I asked, pointing in the direction from which the heat came. "Is this not love?"

"It seemed to me that there would be nothing more beautiful than the sun, whose warmth makes all things grow. But Miss Sullivan shook her head, and I was greatly puzzled and disappointed. I thought it strange that my teacher could not show me love.

"A day or two afterward I was stringing beads of different sizes in symmetrical groups -- two large beads, three small ones, and so on. I had made many mistakes, and Miss Sullivan had pointed them out again and again with gentle patience. Finally l

noticed a very obvious error in the sequence and for an instant I concentrated my attention on the lesson and tried to think how I should have arranged the beads. Miss Sullivan touched my forehead and spelled with decided emphasis, "Think."

"In a flash I knew that the word was the name of a process that was going on in my head. This was my first conscious perception of an abstract idea."

Living rooms are often arranged in keeping with the personal space relationships of a culture. People may comfortably sit closer side by side than face to face. The Mayan equivalent of a living room is designed for standing or sitting only in the extremities on a log by the walls. A North American living room is arranged so that no one is farther than ten feet from another. If the room is larger than this, a conversation area will be arranged with the seats closer than the perimeter of the room would indicate.

Public distance includes that space in which a person feels comfortable in a public area or gathering. The amount of this space will vary according to the situation. For example, when people are on an elevator, they will invade what would normally be considered each another's intimate space. However, reduced body movement compensates for this intrusion. The outer limit of public space is the maximum distance one feels he can maintain and still feel a part of the gathering. This usually means being within the sound of the activity, closer with a public address or farther away at a musical performance.

Seating patterns are arranged with a purpose. Frequently, the pattern includes a focal point, the performer or speaker, with the audience arranged in rows or in a semicircle facing the focal point. In theater in the round, the audience surrounds the stage; but the focus is still on the actors. Involvement theater in the sixties attempted to bring everyone into the performance itself. This was resisted, however, by many in North American society because of public space preferences.

Competition versus cooperation is also signaled by seating patterns. When desks are separated, competition is signaled. No one can copy the work of another. The seminar room, with people seated side by side around a table, signals cooperation because people can see and share in each other's work.

Walking patterns are also part of public space involving schedule, direction, and distance. Certain Hebrew laws were built on the distance one could walk from his property in a day. A limit was placed on Sabbath journeys with that distance being called, logically, "a Sabbath day's journey." Hebrew people soon learned to carry some of their property with them and lay it at the end of one "Sabbath day's journey"; so they could then walk an additional distance from that property.

The schedule of walking patterns concerns the time of day one may be seen in public in a given society. Among the Pocomchi in Guatemala, men can be seen sweeping the house and walking before 6:00 A.M. but never after that hour. Likewise, no one would be on legitimate business after 9:00 P.M. In the Philippines, Saturday night is a very late night. People stroll in the parks until 2:00 A.M. on Sunday. When visible numbers of blacks were permitted in private white colleges, pressure was put on these schools to make curfews later by a couple of hours and to serve breakfast later in the morning, since the day started "later" for blacks.

Verbal and nonverbal behavior are what social interaction is all about. These skills are learned within the context of one's society. They are expressed as normal behavior within the settings defined by that society. Only through adequate grasp of the language and non-verbal aspects of the culture can communication be carried out.

Contributors and Attributions

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4.2: Understanding Intercultural Communication

Understanding Intercultural Communication

If you decide to take a class on intercultural communication you will learn a great deal about the similarities and differences across cultural groups. Since this chapter is meant to give you an overview or taste of this exciting field of study we will discuss important cultural dimension concepts for understanding communication practices among cultures.

Collectivist versus Individualistic

In addition to the four speaking styles that characterize cultures so do value systems. Of particular importance to intercultural communication is whether the culture has a collectivist or individualistic orientation. When a person or culture has a collective orientation they place the needs and interests of the group above individual desires or motivations. In contrast, the self or one's own personal goals motivate those cultures with individualistic orientation. Thus, each person is viewed as responsible for their own success or failure in life. From years of research, Geert Hofstede organized 52 countries in terms of their orientation to individualism. What does it say about your country? Compare it to a country you want to travel to.

When looking at Hofstede's research and that of others on individualism and collectivism, it is important to remember that no culture is purely one or the other. Think of these qualities as points along a continuum rather than fixed positions. Individuals and co-cultures may exhibit differences in individualism/collectivism from the dominant culture and certain contexts may highlight one or the other. Changing is difficult. In some of your classes, for example, does the Professor require a group project as part of the final grade? How do students respond to such an assignment? In our experience, we find that some students enjoy and benefit from the collective and collaborative process and seem to learn better in such an environment. These students have more of a collective orientation. Other students, usually the majority, are resistant to such assignments citing reasons such as "it's difficult to coordinate schedules with four other people" or "I don't want my grade resting on someone else's performance." These statements reflect an individual orientation.

High Context versus Low Context

Think about someone you are very close to—a best friend, romantic partner, or sibling. Have there been times when you began a sentence and the other person knew exactly what you were going to say before you said it? For example, in a situation between two sisters, one sister might exclaim, "Get off!" (which is short for "get off my wavelength"). This phenomenon of being on someone's wavelength is similar to what Hall (1976) describes as high context. In high-context communication, the meaning is in the people, or more specifically, the relationship between the people as opposed to just the words. Low-context communication occurs when we have to rely on the translation of the words to decipher a person's meaning. The American legal system, for example, relies on low-context communication.

While some cultures are low or high context, in general terms, there can also be individual or contextual differences within cultures. In the example above between the two sisters, they are using high-context communication; however, America is considered a low-context culture. Countries such as Germany and Sweden are also low context while Japan and China are high-context cultures.

Power Distance

Hofstede (1997) defines power distance as "the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (p. 28). Hofstede believes that power distance is learned early in families. In high power distance cultures, children are expected to be obedient toward parents versus being treated more or less as equals. In high power distance cultures, people are expected to display respect for those of higher status. For example, in countries such as Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, people are expected to display respect for monks by greeting and taking leave of monks with ritualistic greetings, removing hats in the presence of a monk, dressing modestly, seating monks at a higher level, and using a vocabulary that shows respect. Power distance also refers to the extent to which power, prestige, and wealth are distributed within a culture. Cultures with high power distance have power and influence concentrated in the hands of a few rather than distributed throughout the population. These countries tend to be more authoritarian and may communicate in a way to limit interaction and reinforce the differences between people. In the high power distance workplace, superiors and subordinates consider each other existentially unequal. Power is centralized, and there is a wide salary gap between the top and bottom of the organization.

Feminity versus Masculinity

Hofstede (1980) found that women's social role varied less from culture to culture than men's. He labeled as masculine cultures those that strive for the maximal distinction between what women and men are expected to do. Cultures that place high values on masculine traits stress assertiveness, competition, and material success. Those labeled as feminine cultures are those that permit more overlapping social roles for the sexes. Cultures that place a high value on feminine traits stress quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and concern for others.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The extent to which people in a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. Hofstede explains that this feeling is expressed through nervous stress and in a need for predictability or a need for written and unwritten rules (Hofstede, 1997). In these cultures, such situations are avoided by maintaining strict codes of behavior and a belief in absolute truths. Cultures strong in uncertainty avoidance are active, aggressive, emotional, compulsive, security seeking, and intolerant; cultures weak in uncertainty avoidance are contemplative, less aggressive, unemotional, relaxed, accepting of personal risks, and relatively tolerant. Students from high uncertainty avoidance cultures expect their teachers to be experts who have all the answers. And in the workplace, there is an inner need to work hard, and there is a need for rules, precision, and punctuality. Students from low uncertainty avoidance cultures accept teachers who admit to not knowing all the answers. And in the workplace, employees work hard only when needed, there are no more rules than are necessary, and precision and punctuality have to be learned.

Long-term Orientation versus Short-term Orientation

In 1987, the "Chinese Culture Connection," composed of Michael H. Bond and others, extended Hofstede's work to include a new dimension they labeled Confucian work dynamism, now more commonly called long-term orientation versus short-term orientation to life. This dimension includes such values as thrift, persistence, having a sense of shame, and ordering relationships work dynamism refers to dedicated, motivated, responsible, and educated individuals with a sense of commitment and organizational identity and loyalty.

Indulgence versus Restraint

In 2010 a sixth dimension was added to the model, Indulgence versus Restraint. This was based on Bulgarian sociologist Minkov's label and also drew on the extensive World Values Survey. Indulgence societies tend to allow relatively free gratification of natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun whereas Restraint societies are more likely to believe that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict norms. Indulgent cultures will tend to focus more on individual happiness and wellbeing, leisure time is more important and there are greater freedom and personal control. This is in contrast with restrained cultures where positive emotions are less freely expressed and happiness, freedom, and leisure are not given the same importance. The map below broadly reflects where indulgence and restraint tend to prevail. For a more detailed information, review the Dimension Maps of the World. These six world maps demonstrate the cultural dimensions distributed by country observing the culture of each.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Verbal Communication

5.1: Defining Verbal Communication

When people ponder the word communication, they often think about the act of talking. We rely on verbal communication to exchange messages with one another and develop as individuals. The term verbal communication often evokes the idea of spoken communication, but written communication is also part of verbal communication. Reading this book you are decoding the authors' written verbal communication in order to learn more about communication. Let's explore the various components of our definition of verbal communication and examine how it functions in our lives.

Verbal communication is about language, both written and spoken. In general, verbal communication refers to our use of words while nonverbal communication refers to communication that occurs through means other than words, such as body language, gestures, and silence. Both verbal and nonverbal communication can be spoken and written. Many people mistakenly assume that verbal communication refers only to spoken communication. However, you will learn that this is not the case. Let's say you tell a friend a joke and he or she laughs in response. Is the laughter verbal or nonverbal communication? Why? As laughter is not a word we would consider this vocal act as a form of nonverbal communication. For simplification, the box below highlights the kinds of communication that fall into the various categories. You can find many definitions of verbal communication in our literature, but for this text, we define Verbal Communication as an agreed-upon and rule-governed system of symbols used to share meaning. Let's examine each component of this definition in detail.

	Verbal Communication	Nonverbal Communication
Oral	Spoken Language	Laughing, Crying, Coughing, etc.
Non Oral	Written Language/Sign Language	Gestures, Body Language, etc.

A System of Symbols

Symbols are arbitrary representations of thoughts, ideas, emotions, objects, or actions used to encode and decode meaning (Nelson & Kessler Shaw). Symbols stand for, or represent, something else. For example, there is nothing inherent about calling a cat a cat.

Rather, English speakers have agreed that these symbols (words), whose components (letters) are used in a particular order each time, stand for both the actual object, as well as our interpretation of that object. This idea is illustrated by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richard's triangle of meaning. The word "cat" is not the actual cat. Nor does it have any direct connection to an actual cat. Instead, it is a symbolic representation of our idea of a cat, as indicated by the line going from the word "cat" to the speaker's idea of "cat" to the actual object.

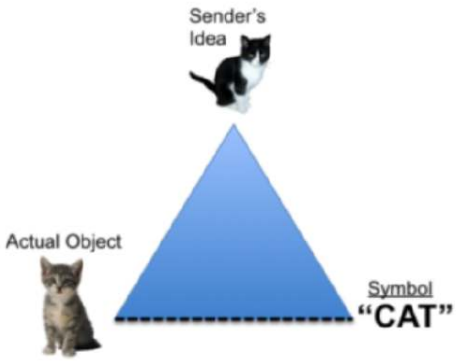

Figure 5.1.1: Cat, Cat, Cat.

Symbols have three distinct qualities: they are arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract. Notice that the picture of the cat on the left side of the triangle more closely represents a real cat than the word "cat." However, we do not use pictures as language, or verbal communication. Instead, we use words to represent our ideas. This example demonstrates our agreement that the word "cat" represents or stands for a real cat AND our idea of a cat. The symbols we use are **arbitrary** and have no direct relationship to the objects or ideas they represent. We generally consider communication successful when we reach agreement on the meanings of the symbols we use (Duck).

Not only are symbols arbitrary, they are **ambiguous** — that is, they have several possible meanings. Imagine your friend tells you she has an apple on her desk. Is she referring to a piece of fruit or her computer? If a friend says that a person he met is cool, does

he mean that person is cold or awesome? The meanings of symbols change over time due to changes in social norms, values, and advances in technology. You might be asking, “If symbols can have multiple meanings then how do we communicate and understand one another?” We are able to communicate because there are a finite number of possible meanings for our symbols, a range of meanings which the members of a given language system agree upon. Without an agreed-upon system of symbols, we could share relatively little meaning with one another.

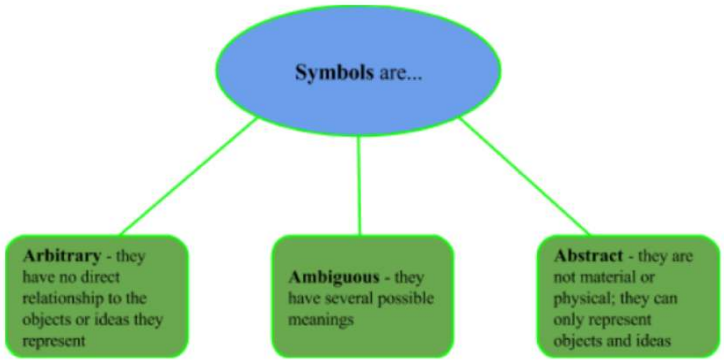

Figure 5.1.2: Symbols are..

A simple example of ambiguity can be represented by one of your classmates asking a simple question to the teacher during a lecture where she is showing PowerPoint slides: “can you go to the last slide please?” The teacher is half way through the presentation. Is the student asking if the teacher can go back to the previous slide? Or does the student really want the lecture to be over with and is insisting that the teacher jump to the final slide of the presentation? Chances are the student missed a point on the previous slide and would like to see it again to quickly take notes. However, suspense may have overtaken the student and they may have a desire to see the final slide. Even a simple word like “last” can be ambiguous and open to more than one interpretation.

The verbal symbols we use are also **abstract**, meaning that, words are not material or physical. A certain level of abstraction is inherent in the fact that symbols can only represent objects and ideas. This abstraction allows us to use a phrase like “the public” in a broad way to mean all the people in the United States rather than having to distinguish among all the diverse groups that make up the U.S. population. Similarly, in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter book series, wizards and witches call the non-magical population on earth “muggles” rather than having to define all the separate cultures of muggles. Abstraction is helpful when you want to communicate complex concepts in a simple way. However, the more abstract the language, the greater potential there is for confusion.

Rule-Governed

Verbal communication is **rule-governed**. We must follow agreed-upon rules to make sense of the symbols we share. Let’s take another look at our example of the word cat. What would happen if there were no rules for using the symbols (letters) that make up this word? If placing these symbols in a proper order was not important, then cta, tac, tca, act, or atc could all mean cat. Even worse, what if you could use any three letters to refer to cat? Or still worse, what if there were no rules and anything could represent cat? Clearly, it’s important that we have rules to govern our verbal communication. There are four general rules for verbal communication, involving the sounds, meaning, arrangement, and use of symbols.

Pin It! SOUNDS AND LETTERS: A POEM FOR ENGLISH STUDENTS

When in English class we speak,
Why is break not rhymed with freak?
Will you tell me why it’s true
That we say sew, but also few?

When a poet writes a verse
Why is horse not rhymed with worse?
Beard sounds not the same as heard
Lord sounds not the same as word

Cow is cow, but low is low
Shoe is never rhymed with toe.

Think of nose and dose and lose
Think of goose, but then of choose.

Confuse not comb with tomb or bomb,
Doll with roll, or home with some.
We have blood and food and good.
Mould is not pronounced like could.

There's pay and say, but paid and said.
"I will read", but "I have read".
Why say done, but gone and lone –
Is there any reason known?

To summarise, it seems to me
Sounds and letters disagree.

Taken from: http://www.ukstudentlife.com/Ideas/Fun/Wordplay.htm

- **Phonology** is the study of speech sounds. The pronunciation of the word cat comes from the rules governing how letters sound, especially in relation to one another. The context in which words are spoken may provide answers for how they should be pronounced. When we don't follow phonological rules, confusion results. One way to understand and apply phonological rules is to use syntactic and pragmatic rules to clarify phonological rules.
- **Semantic** rules help us understand the difference in meaning between the word cat and the word dog. Instead of each of these words meaning any four-legged domestic pet, we use each word to specify what four-legged domestic pet we are talking about. You've probably used these words to say things like, "I'm a cat person" or "I'm a dog person." Each of these statements provides insight into what the sender is trying to communicate. The Case in Point, "A Poem for English Students," not only illustrates the idea of phonology, but also semantics. Even though many of the words are spelled the same, their meanings vary depending on how they are pronounced and in what context they are used. We attach meanings to words; meanings are not inherent in words themselves. As you've been reading, words (symbols) are arbitrary and attain meaning only when people give them meaning. While we can always look to a dictionary to find a standardized definition of a word, or its denotative meaning, meanings do not always follow standard, agreed-upon definitions when used in various contexts. For example, think of the word "sick." The denotative definition of the word is ill or unwell. However, connotative meanings, the meanings we assign based on our experiences and beliefs, are quite varied. Sick can have a connotative meaning that describes something as good or awesome as opposed to its literal meaning of illness, which usually has a negative association. The denotative and connotative definitions of "sick" are in total contrast of one another which can cause confusion. Think about an instance where a student is asked by their parent about a friend at school. The student replies that the friend is "sick." The parent then asks about the new teacher at school and the student describes the teacher as "sick" as well. The parent must now ask for clarification as they do not know if the teacher is in bad health, or is an excellent teacher, and if the friend of their child is ill or awesome.
- **Syntactics** is the study of language structure and symbolic arrangement. Syntactics focuses on the rules we use to combine words into meaningful sentences and statements. We speak and write according to agreed-upon syntactic rules to keep meaning coherent and understandable. Think about this sentence: "The pink and purple elephant flapped its wings and flew out the window." While the content of this sentence is fictitious and unreal, you can understand and visualize it because it follows syntactic rules for language structure.
- **Pragmatics** is the study of how people actually use verbal communication. For example, as a student you probably speak more formally to your professors than to your peers. It's likely that you make different word choices when you speak to your parents than you do when you speak to your friends. Think of the words "bowel movements," "poop," "crap," and "shit." While all of these words have essentially the same denotative meaning, people make choices based on context and audience regarding which word they feel comfortable using. These differences illustrate the pragmatics of our verbal communication. Even though you use agreed-upon symbolic systems and follow phonological, syntactic, and semantic rules, you apply these rules differently in different contexts. Each communication context has different rules for "appropriate" communication. We are trained from a young age to communicate "appropriately" in different social contexts.

It is only through an agreed-upon and rule-governed system of symbols that we can exchange verbal communication in an effective manner. Without agreement, rules, and symbols, verbal communication would not work. The reality is, after we learn language in school, we don't spend much time consciously thinking about all of these rules, we simply use them. However, rules keep our verbal communication structured in ways that make it useful for us to communicate more effectively.

Pin It

Communication Now

We all know we can look up words in the dictionary, such as Webster's Dictionary. When we do this, we are looking up the Denotative Meaning of words. However, given that there are so many Connotative Meanings of words, we now have a resource to look up those meanings as well. Urban Dictionary is a resource for people to find out how words that have certain denotative meanings are used connotatively. Go ahead, give it a try!

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Nonverbal Communication

6.1: Introduction

When we think about communication, we most often focus on how we exchange information using words. While verbal communication is important, humans relied on nonverbal communication for thousands of years before we developed the capability to communicate with words. Nonverbal communication is a process of generating meaning using behavior other than words. Rather than thinking of nonverbal communication as the opposite of or as separate from verbal communication, it's more accurate to view them as operating side by side—as part of the same system. Yet, as part of the same system, they still have important differences, including how the brain processes them. For instance, nonverbal communication is typically governed by the right side of the brain and verbal, the left. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 2–8. This hemispheric distinction has been clearly evidenced, as people who suffer trauma to the right side of their brain lose the ability to recognize facial expressions but can still process verbal communication. Conversely, people whose left hemisphere of the brain is damaged lose the ability to speak, read, and understand language. Interestingly, a person with damage to the left hemisphere of the brain who loses the ability to speak can often still sing since the creation, but not the reading, of music is governed by the right brain. The content and composition of verbal and nonverbal communication also differs. In terms of content, nonverbal communication tends to do the work of communicating emotions more than verbal. In terms of composition, although there are rules of grammar that structure our verbal communication, no such official guides govern our use of nonverbal signals. Likewise, there aren't dictionaries and thesauruses of nonverbal communication like there are with verbal symbols. Finally, whereas we humans are unique in our capacity to abstract and transcend space and time using verbal symbols, we are not the only creatures that engage in nonverbal communication. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 49. These are just some of the characteristics that differentiate verbal communication from nonverbal, and in the remainder of this chapter we will discuss in more detail the principles, functions, and types of nonverbal communication and conclude with some guidance on how to improve our nonverbal communication competence.

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6.2: Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define nonverbal communication.
- Compare and contrast verbal communication and nonverbal communication.
- Discuss the principles of nonverbal communication.
- Provide examples of the functions of nonverbal communication.

A channel is the sensory route on which a message travels. Oral communication only relies on one channel, because spoken language is transmitted through sound and picked up by our ears. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, can be taken in by all five of our senses. Since most of our communication relies on visual and auditory channels, those will be the focus of this chapter. But we can also receive messages and generate meaning through touch, taste, and smell. Touch is an especially powerful form of nonverbal communication that we will discuss in this chapter, but we will not get into taste and smell, which have not received as much scholarly attention in relation to nonverbal communication as the other senses.

To further define nonverbal communication, we need to distinguish between vocal and verbal aspects of communication. Verbal and nonverbal communication include both vocal and non-vocal elements, and Table 6.1 shows the relationship among vocal, non-vocal, verbal, and nonverbal aspects of communication. A vocal element of verbal communication is spoken words—for example, "Come back here." A vocal element of nonverbal communication is paralanguage, which is the vocalized but not verbal part of a spoken message, such as speaking rate, volume, and pitch. Non-vocal elements of verbal communication include the use of unspoken symbols to convey meaning. Writing and American Sign Language (ASL) are non-vocal examples of verbal communication and are not considered nonverbal communication. Non-vocal elements of nonverbal communication include body language such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Gestures are non-vocal and nonverbal since most of them do not refer to a specific word like a written or signed symbol does.

Table 6.2.1: Vocal and Non-vocal Elements of Communication. Source: Adapted from Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 45.

	Verbal Communication	Nonverbal Communication
Vocal	Spoken words	Paralanguage (pitch, volume, speaking rate, etc.)
Nonvocal	Writing, sign language	Body language (gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, etc.)

Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication has a distinct history and serves separate evolutionary functions from verbal communication. For example, nonverbal communication is primarily biologically based while verbal communication is primarily culturally based. This is evidenced by the fact that some nonverbal communication has the same meaning across cultures while no verbal communication systems share that same universal recognizability. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 17. Nonverbal communication also evolved earlier than verbal communication and served an early and important survival function that helped humans later develop verbal communication. While some of our nonverbal communication abilities, like our sense of smell, lost strength as our verbal capacities increased, other abilities like paralanguage and movement have grown alongside verbal complexity. The fact that nonverbal communication is processed by an older part of our brain makes it more instinctual and involuntary than verbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Important Interpersonal and Emotional Messages

You've probably heard that more meaning is generated from nonverbal communication than from verbal. Some studies have claimed that 90 percent of our meaning is derived from nonverbal signals, but more recent and reliable findings claim that it is closer to 65 percent.Laura K. Guerrero and Kory Floyd, Nonverbal Communication in Close Relationships (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006): 2. We may rely more on nonverbal signals in situations where verbal and nonverbal messages conflict and in situations where emotional or relational communication is taking place.Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 47. For example, when someone asks a question and we're not sure about

the “angle” they are taking, we may hone in on nonverbal cues to fill in the meaning. For example, the question “What are you doing tonight?” could mean any number of things, but we could rely on posture, tone of voice, and eye contact to see if the person is just curious, suspicious, or hinting that they would like company for the evening. We also put more weight on nonverbal communication when determining a person’s credibility. For example, if a classmate delivers a speech in class and her verbal content seems well-researched and unbiased, but her nonverbal communication is poor (her voice is monotone, she avoids eye contact, she fidgets), she will likely not be viewed as credible. Conversely, in some situations, verbal communication might carry more meaning than nonverbal. In interactions where information exchange is the focus, at a briefing at work, for example, verbal communication likely accounts for much more of the meaning generated. Despite this exception, a key principle of nonverbal communication is that it often takes on more meaning in interpersonal and/or emotional exchanges.

Figure 6.2.1: About 65 percent of the meaning we derive during interactions comes from nonverbal communication. Image by Jessica Da Rosa on Unsplash.

Nonverbal Communication Is More Involuntary than Verbal

There are some instances in which we verbally communicate involuntarily. These types of exclamations are often verbal responses to a surprising stimulus. For example, we say “owww!” when we stub our toe or scream “stop!” when we see someone heading toward danger. Involuntary nonverbal signals are much more common, and although most nonverbal communication isn’t completely involuntary, it is more below our consciousness than verbal communication and therefore more difficult to control.

The involuntary nature of much nonverbal communication makes it more difficult to control or “fake.” For example, although you can consciously smile a little and shake hands with someone when you first see them, it’s difficult to fake that you’re “happy” to meet someone. Nonverbal communication leaks out in ways that expose our underlying thoughts or feelings. Spokespeople, lawyers, or other public representatives who are the “face” of a politician, celebrity, corporation, or organization must learn to control their facial expressions and other nonverbal communication so they can effectively convey the message of their employer or client without having their personal thoughts and feelings leak through. Poker players, therapists, police officers, doctors, teachers, and actors are also in professions that often require them to have more awareness of and control over their nonverbal communication.

Have you ever tried to conceal your surprise, suppress your anger, or act joyful even when you weren’t? Most people whose careers don’t involve conscious manipulation of nonverbal signals find it difficult to control or suppress them. While we can consciously decide to stop sending verbal messages, our nonverbal communication always has the potential of generating meaning for another person. The teenager who decides to shut out his dad and not communicate with him still sends a message with his “blank” stare

(still a facial expression) and lack of movement (still a gesture). In this sense, nonverbal communication is “irrepressible.” Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 21.

Nonverbal Communication Is More Ambiguous

In learning about verbal communication we learn that the symbolic and abstract nature of language can lead to misunderstandings, but nonverbal communication is even more ambiguous. As with verbal communication, most of our nonverbal signals can be linked to multiple meanings, but unlike words, many nonverbal signals do not have any one specific meaning. If you’ve ever had someone wink at you and didn’t know why, you’ve probably experienced this uncertainty. Did they wink to express their affection for you, their pleasure with something you just did, or because you share some inside knowledge or joke?

Just as we look at context clues in a sentence or paragraph to derive meaning from a particular word, we can look for context clues in various sources of information like the physical environment, other nonverbal signals, or verbal communication to make sense of a particular nonverbal cue. Unlike verbal communication, however, nonverbal communication doesn’t have explicit rules of grammar that bring structure, order, and agreed-on patterns of usage. Instead, we implicitly learn norms of nonverbal communication, which leads to greater variance. In general, we exhibit more idiosyncrasies in our usage of nonverbal communication than we do with verbal communication, which also increases the ambiguity of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication Is More Credible

Although we can rely on verbal communication to fill in the blanks sometimes left by nonverbal expressions, we often put more trust into what people do over what they say. This is especially true in times of stress or danger when our behaviors become more instinctual and we rely on older systems of thinking and acting that evolved before our ability to speak and write.Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 18. This innateness creates intuitive feelings about the genuineness of nonverbal communication, and this genuineness relates back to our earlier discussion about the sometimes involuntary and often subconscious nature of nonverbal communication. An example of the innateness of nonverbal signals can be found in children who have been blind since birth but still exhibit the same facial expressions as other children. In short, the involuntary or subconscious nature of nonverbal communication makes it less easy to fake, which makes it seem more honest and credible. We will learn more about the role that nonverbal communication plays in deception later in this chapter.

Functions of Nonverbal Communication

A primary function of nonverbal communication is to convey meaning by reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication. Nonverbal communication is also used to influence others and regulate conversational flow. Perhaps even more important are the ways in which nonverbal communication functions as a central part of relational communication and identity expression.

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Meaning

Nonverbal communication conveys meaning by reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication. As we’ve already learned, verbal and nonverbal communication are two parts of the same system that often work side by side, helping us generate meaning. In terms of reinforcing verbal communication, gestures can help describe a space or shape that another person is unfamiliar with in ways that words alone cannot. Gestures also reinforce basic meaning—for example, pointing to the door when you tell someone to leave. Facial expressions reinforce the emotional states we convey through verbal communication. For example, smiling while telling a funny story better conveys your emotions. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 51. Vocal variation can help us emphasize a particular part of a message, which helps reinforce a word or sentence’s meaning. For example, saying “How was your weekend?” conveys a different meaning than “How was your weekend?”

Nonverbal communication can substitute for verbal communication in a variety of ways. Nonverbal communication can convey much meaning when verbal communication isn’t effective because of language barriers. Language barriers are present when a person hasn’t yet learned to speak or loses the ability to speak. For example, babies who have not yet developed language skills make facial expressions, at a few months old, that are similar to those of adults and therefore can generate meaning. Harriet Oster, Douglas Hegley, and Linda Nagel, “Adult Judgments and Fine-Grained Analysis of Infant Facial Expressions: Testing the Validity of A Priori Coding Formulas,” Developmental Psychology 28, no. 6 (1992): 1115–31. People who have developed language skills but can’t use them because they have temporarily or permanently lost them or because they are using incompatible language codes, like in some cross-cultural encounters, can still communicate nonverbally. Although it’s always a good idea to learn some of the

local language when you travel, gestures such as pointing or demonstrating the size or shape of something may suffice in basic interactions.

Nonverbal communication is also useful in a quiet situation where verbal communication would be disturbing; for example, you may use a gesture to signal to a friend that you're ready to leave the library. Crowded or loud places can also impede verbal communication and lead people to rely more on nonverbal messages. Getting a server or bartender's attention with a hand gesture is definitely more polite than yelling, "Hey you!" Finally, there are just times when we know it's better not to say something aloud. If you want to point out a person's unusual outfit or signal to a friend that you think his or her date is a loser, you're probably more likely to do that nonverbally.

Last, nonverbal communication can convey meaning by contradicting verbal communication. As we learned earlier, we often perceive nonverbal communication to be more credible than verbal communication. This is especially true when we receive mixed messages, or messages in which verbal and nonverbal signals contradict each other. For example, a person may say, "You can't do anything right!" in a mean tone but follow that up with a wink, which could indicate the person is teasing or joking. Mixed messages lead to uncertainty and confusion on the part of receivers, which leads us to look for more information to try to determine which message is more credible. If we are unable to resolve the discrepancy, we are likely to react negatively and potentially withdraw from the interaction. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 52. Persistent mixed messages can lead to relational distress and hurt a person's credibility in professional settings.

Figure 6.2.2: We send mixed messages when our verbal and nonverbal communication contradict each other. If this woman said she was excited about seeing you, would you believe her? Image by Kyle Broad On Unsplash.

Nonverbal Communication Influences Others

Nonverbal communication can be used to influence people in a variety of ways, but the most common way is through deception. Deception is typically thought of as the intentional act of altering information to influence another person, which means that it extends beyond lying to include concealing, omitting, or exaggerating information. While verbal communication is to blame for the content of the deception, nonverbal communication partners with the language through deceptive acts to be more convincing. Since most of us intuitively believe that nonverbal communication is more credible than verbal communication, we often intentionally try to control our nonverbal communication when we are engaging in deception. Likewise, we try to evaluate other people's nonverbal communication to determine the veracity of their messages. Students initially seem surprised when we discuss the prevalence of deception, but their surprise diminishes once they realize that deception isn't always malevolent, mean, or hurtful. Deception obviously has negative connotations, but people engage in deception for many reasons, including to excuse our own mistakes, to be polite to others, or to influence others' behaviors or perceptions.

The fact that deception served an important evolutionary purpose helps explain its prevalence among humans today. Species that are capable of deception have a higher survival rate. Other animals engage in nonverbal deception that helps them attract mates, hide from predators, and trap prey.Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 276. To put it bluntly, the better at deception a creature is, the more likely it is to survive. So, over time, the

humans that were better liars were the ones that got their genes passed on. But the fact that lying played a part in our survival as a species doesn't give us a license to lie.

Aside from deception, we can use nonverbal communication to "take the edge off" a critical or unpleasant message in an attempt to influence the reaction of the other person. We can also use eye contact and proximity to get someone to move or leave an area. For example, hungry diners waiting to snag a first-come-first-serve table in a crowded restaurant send messages to the people who have already eaten and paid that it's time to go. People on competition reality television shows like Survivor and Big Brother play what they've come to term a "social game." The social aspects of the game involve the manipulation of verbal and nonverbal cues to send strategic messages about oneself in an attempt to influence others. Nonverbal cues such as length of conversational turn, volume, posture, touch, eye contact, and choices of clothing and accessories can become part of a player's social game strategy. Although reality television isn't a reflection of real life, people still engage in competition and strategically change their communication to influence others, making it important to be aware of how we nonverbally influence others and how they may try to influence us.

Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversational Flow

Conversational interaction has been likened to a dance, where each person has to make moves and take turns without stepping on the other's toes. Nonverbal communication helps us regulate our conversations so we don't end up constantly interrupting each other or waiting in awkward silences between speaker turns. Pitch, which is a part of vocalics, helps us cue others into our conversational intentions. A rising pitch typically indicates a question and a falling pitch indicates the end of a thought or the end of a conversational turn. We can also use a falling pitch to indicate closure, which can be very useful at the end of a speech to signal to the audience that you are finished, which cues the applause and prevents an awkward silence that the speaker ends up filling with "That's it" or "Thank you." We also signal our turn is coming to an end by stopping hand gestures and shifting our eye contact to the person who we think will speak next. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 53. Conversely, we can "hold the floor" with nonverbal signals even when we're not exactly sure what we're going to say next. Repeating a hand gesture or using one or more verbal fillers can extend our turn even though we are not verbally communicating at the moment.

Nonverbal Communication Affects Relationships

To successfully relate to other people, we must possess some skill at encoding and decoding nonverbal communication. The nonverbal messages we send and receive influence our relationships in positive and negative ways and can work to bring people together or push them apart. Nonverbal communication in the form of tie signs, immediacy behaviors, and expressions of emotion are just three of many examples that illustrate how nonverbal communication affects our relationships.

Tie signs are nonverbal cues that communicate intimacy and signal the connection between two people. These relational indicators can be objects such as wedding rings or tattoos that are symbolic of another person or the relationship, actions such as sharing the same drinking glass, or touch behaviors such as hand-holding. Walid A. Afifi and Michelle L. Johnson, "The Nature and Function of Tie-Signs," in The Sourcebook of Nonverbal Measures: Going beyond Words, ed. Valerie Manusov (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005): 190. Touch behaviors are the most frequently studied tie signs and can communicate much about a relationship based on the area being touched, the length of time, and the intensity of the touch. Kisses and hugs, for example, are considered tie signs, but a kiss on the cheek is different from a kiss on the mouth and a full embrace is different from a half embrace. If you consider yourself a "people watcher," take note of the various tie signs you see people use and what they might say about the relationship.

Immediacy behaviors play a central role in bringing people together and have been identified by some scholars as the most important function of nonverbal communication. Peter A. Andersen and Janis F. Andersen, "Measures of Perceived Nonverbal Immediacy," in The Sourcebook of Nonverbal Measures: Going beyond Words, ed. Valerie Manusov (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005): 113–26. Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators and include things like smiling, nodding, making eye contact, and occasionally engaging in social, polite, or professional touch. Mark E. Comadena, Stephen K. Hunt, and Cheri J. Simonds, "The Effects of Teacher Clarity, Nonverbal Immediacy, and Caring on Student Motivation, Affective and Cognitive Learning," Communication Research Reports 24, no. 3 (2007): 241. Immediacy behaviors are a good way of creating rapport, or a friendly and positive connection between people. Skilled nonverbal communicators are more likely to be able to create rapport with others due to attention-getting expressiveness, warm initial greetings, and an ability to get "in tune" with others, which conveys empathy. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed.

Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 12. These skills are important to help initiate and maintain relationships.

While verbal communication is our primary tool for solving problems and providing detailed instructions, nonverbal communication is our primary tool for communicating emotions. This makes sense when we remember that nonverbal communication emerged before verbal communication and was the channel through which we expressed anger, fear, and love for thousands of years of human history. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 27. Touch and facial expressions are two primary ways we express emotions nonverbally. Love is a primary emotion that we express nonverbally and that forms the basis of our close relationships. Although no single facial expression for love has been identified, it is expressed through prolonged eye contact, close interpersonal distances, increased touch, and increased time spent together, among other things. Given many people's limited emotional vocabulary, nonverbal expressions of emotion are central to our relationships.

"Getting Real"- Teachers and Immediacy Behaviors

A considerable amount of research has been done on teachers' use of immediacy behaviors, which points to the importance of this communication concept in teaching professions. Virginia P. Richmond, Derek R. Lane, and James C. McCroskey, "Teacher Immediacy and the Teacher-Student Relationship," in Handbook of Instructional Communication: Rhetorical and Relational Perspectives, eds. Timothy P. Mottet, Virginia P. Richmond, and James C. McCroskey (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2006), 168. Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators. Mark E. Comadena, Stephen K. Hunt, and Cheri J. Simonds, "The Effects of Teacher Clarity, Nonverbal Immediacy, and Caring on Student Motivation, Affective and Cognitive Learning," Communication Research Reports 24, no. 3 (2007): 241. Specific nonverbal behaviors have been found to increase or decrease perceived levels of immediacy, and such behaviors impact student learning, teacher's evaluations, and the teacher-student relationship. Virginia P. Richmond, Derek R. Lane, and James C. McCroskey, "Teacher Immediacy and the Teacher-Student Relationship," in Handbook of Instructional Communication: Rhetorical and Relational Perspectives, eds. Timothy P. Mottet, Virginia P. Richmond, and James C. McCroskey (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2006), 169, 184–85. Even those who do not plan on going into teaching as a career can benefit from learning about immediacy behaviors, as they can also be used productively in other interpersonal contexts such as between a manager and employee, a salesperson and a client, or a politician and constituent. Much of this research in teaching contexts has focused on the relationship between immediacy behaviors and student learning, and research consistently shows that effective use of immediacy behaviors increases learning in various contexts and at various levels. Aside from enhancing student learning, the effective use of immediacy behaviors also leads to better evaluations by students, which can have a direct impact on a teacher's career. While student evaluations of teachers take various factors into consideration, judgments of personality may be formed after only brief initial impressions. Research shows that students make character assumptions about teachers after only brief exposure to their nonverbal behaviors. Based on nonverbal cues such as frowning, head nodding, pointing, sitting, smiling, standing, strong gestures, weak gestures, and walking, students may or may not evaluate a teacher as open, attentive, confident, dominant, honest, likable, anxious, professional, supportive, or enthusiastic. The following are examples of immediacy behaviors that can be effectively used by teachers:

- Moving around the classroom during class activities, lectures, and discussions (reduces physical distance)
- Keeping the line of sight open between the teacher's body and the students by avoiding or only briefly standing behind lecterns / computer tables or sitting behind a desk while directly interacting with students (reduces physical distance)
- Being expressive and animated with facial expressions, gestures, and voice (demonstrates enthusiasm)
- Smiling (creates a positive and open climate)
- Making frequent eye contact with students (communicates attentiveness and interest)
- Calling students by name (reduces perceived psychological distance)
- Making appropriate self-disclosures to students about personal thoughts, feelings, or experiences (reduces perceived psychological distance, creates open climate)

Teachers who are judged as less immediate are more likely to sit, touch their heads, shake instead of nod their heads, use sarcasm, avoid eye contact, and use less expressive nonverbal behaviors. Finally, immediacy behaviors affect the teacher-student relationship. Immediacy behaviors help establish rapport, which is a personal connection that increases students' investment in the class and material, increases motivation, increases communication between teacher and student, increases liking, creates a sense of mutual respect, reduces challenging behavior by students, and reduces anxiety.

1. Recall a teacher you have had that exhibited effective immediacy behaviors. Recall a teacher you have had that didn't exhibit immediacy behaviors. Make a column for each teacher and note examples of specific behaviors of each. Discuss your list with a classmate and compare and contrast your lists.
2. Think about the teachers that you listed in the previous question. Discuss how their behaviors affected your learning and your relationship.
3. How much should immediacy behaviors, relative to other characteristics such as professionalism, experience, training, and content knowledge, factor into the evaluation of teachers by their students, peers, and supervisors? What, if anything, should schools do to enhance teachers' knowledge of immediacy behaviors?

Nonverbal Communication Expresses Our Identities

Nonverbal communication expresses who we are. Our identities (the groups to which we belong, our cultures, our hobbies and interests, etc.) are conveyed nonverbally through the way we set up our living and working spaces, the clothes we wear, the way we carry ourselves, and the accents and tones of our voices. Our physical bodies give others impressions about who we are, and some of these features are more under our control than others. Height, for example, has been shown to influence how people are treated and perceived in various contexts. Our level of attractiveness also influences our identities and how people perceive us. Although we can temporarily alter our height or looks—for example, with different shoes or different color contact lenses—we can only permanently alter these features using more invasive and costly measures such as cosmetic surgery. We have more control over some other aspects of nonverbal communication in terms of how we communicate our identities. For example, the way we carry and present ourselves through posture, eye contact, and tone of voice can be altered to present ourselves as warm or distant depending on the context.

Aside from our physical body, artifacts, which are the objects and possessions that surround us, also communicate our identities. Examples of artifacts include our clothes, jewelry, and space decorations. In all the previous examples, implicit norms or explicit rules can affect how we nonverbally present ourselves. For example, in a particular workplace it may be a norm (implicit) for people in management positions to dress casually, or it may be a rule (explicit) that different levels of employees wear different uniforms or follow particular dress codes. We can also use nonverbal communication to express identity characteristics that do not match up with who we actually think we are. Through changes to nonverbal signals, a capable person can try to appear helpless, a guilty person can try to appear innocent, or an uninformed person can try to appear credible.

Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal communication is a process of generating meaning using behavior other than words. Nonverbal communication includes vocal elements, which is referred to as paralanguage and includes pitch, volume, and rate, and non-vocal elements, which are usually referred to as body language and includes gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, among other things.
- Although verbal communication and nonverbal communication work side by side as part of a larger language system, there are some important differences between the two. They are processed by different hemispheres of the brain, nonverbal communication conveys more emotional and affective meaning than verbal communication, nonverbal communication isn't governed by an explicit system of rules in the same way that grammar guides verbal communication, and while verbal communication is a uniquely human ability, many creatures including plants, birds, and mammals communicate nonverbally.
- Nonverbal communication operates on the following principles: nonverbal communication typically conveys more meaning than verbal communication, nonverbal communication is more involuntary than verbal communication, nonverbal communication is often more ambiguous than verbal communication, and nonverbal communication is often more credible than verbal communication.
- Nonverbal communication serves several functions.
- Nonverbal communication affects verbal communication in that it can complement, reinforce, substitute, or contradict verbal messages.
- Nonverbal communication influences others, as it is a key component of deception and can be used to assert dominance or to engage in compliance gaining.
- Nonverbal communication regulates conversational flow, as it provides important cues that signal the beginning and end of conversational turns and facilitates the beginning and end of an interaction.
- Nonverbal communication affects relationships, as it is a primary means through which we communicate emotions, establish social bonds, and engage in relational maintenance.
- Nonverbal communication expresses our identities, as who we are is conveyed through the way we set up our living and working spaces, the clothes we wear, our personal presentation, and the tones in our voices.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: To better understand nonverbal communication, try to think of an example to illustrate each of the four principles discussed in the chapter. Be integrative in your approach by including at least one example from an academic, professional, civic, and personal context.
2. When someone sends you a mixed message in which the verbal and nonverbal messages contradict each other, which one do you place more meaning on? Why?
3. Our personal presentation, style of dress, and surroundings such as a dorm room, apartment, car, or office send nonverbal messages about our identities. Analyze some of the nonverbal signals that your personal presentation or environment send. What do they say about who you are? Do they create the impression that you desire?

Contributors and Attributions

- Template:ContribCCComm120

6.3: Types of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define kinesics.
- Define haptics.
- Define vocalics.
- Define proxemics.
- Define chronemics.
- Provide examples of types of nonverbal communication that fall under these categories.
- Discuss the ways in which personal presentation and environment provide nonverbal cues.

Just as verbal language is broken up into various categories, there are also different types of nonverbal communication. As we learn about each type of nonverbal signal, keep in mind that non-verbals often work in concert with each other, combining to repeat, modify, or contradict the verbal message being sent.

Kinesics

The word kinesics comes from the root word kinesis, which means "movement," and refers to the study of hand, arm, body, and face movements. Specifically, this section will outline the use of gestures, head movements and posture, eye contact, and facial expressions as nonverbal communication.

Gestures

There are three main types of gestures: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 36. Adaptors are touching behaviors and movements that indicate internal states typically related to arousal or anxiety. Adaptors can be targeted toward the self, objects, or others. In regular social situations, adaptors result from uneasiness, anxiety, or a general sense that we are not in control of our surroundings. Many of us subconsciously click pens, shake our legs, or engage in other adaptors during classes, meetings, or while waiting as a way to do something with our excess energy. Public speaking students who watch video recordings of their speeches notice nonverbal adaptors that they didn't know they used. In public speaking situations, people most commonly use self- or object-focused adaptors. Common self-touching behaviors like scratching, twirling hair, or fidgeting with fingers or hands are considered self-adaptors. Some self-adaptors manifest internally, as coughs or throat-clearing sounds. My personal weakness is object adaptors. Specifically, I subconsciously gravitate toward metallic objects like paper clips or staples holding my notes together and catch myself bending them or fidgeting with them while I'm speaking. Other people play with dry-erase markers, their note cards, the change in their pockets, or the lectern while speaking. Use of object adaptors can also signal boredom as people play with the straw in their drink or peel the label off a bottle of beer. Smartphones have become common object adaptors, as people can fiddle with their phones to help ease anxiety. Finally, as noted, other adaptors are more common in social situations than in public speaking situations given the speaker's distance from audience members. Other adaptors involve adjusting or grooming others, similar to how primates like chimpanzees pick things off each other. It would definitely be strange for a speaker to approach an audience member and pick lint off his or her sweater, fix a crooked tie, tuck a tag in, or pat down a flyaway hair in the middle of a speech.

Emblems are gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning. These are still different from the signs used by hearing-impaired people or others who communicate using American Sign Language (ASL). Even though they have a generally agreed-on meaning, they are not part of a formal sign system like ASL that is explicitly taught to a group of people. A hitchhiker's raised thumb, the "OK" sign with thumb and index finger connected in a circle with the other three fingers sticking up, and the raised middle finger are all examples of emblems that have an agreed-on meaning or meanings with a culture. Emblems can be still or in motion; for example, circling the index finger around at the side of your head says "He or she is crazy," or rolling your hands over and over in front of you says "Move on."

Just as we can trace the history of a word, or its etymology, we can also trace some nonverbal signals, especially emblems, to their origins. Holding up the index and middle fingers in a "V" shape with the palm facing in is an insult gesture in Britain that basically means "up yours." This gesture dates back centuries to the period in which the primary weapon of war was the bow and arrow. When archers were captured, their enemies would often cut off these two fingers, which was seen as the ultimate insult and worse than being executed since the archer could no longer shoot his bow and arrow. So holding up the two fingers was a provoking

gesture used by archers to show their enemies that they still had their shooting fingers. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 121.

Illustrators are the most common type of gesture and are used to illustrate the verbal message they accompany. For example, you might use hand gestures to indicate the size or shape of an object. Unlike emblems, illustrators do not typically have meaning on their own and are used more subconsciously than emblems. These largely involuntary and seemingly natural gestures flow from us as we speak but vary in terms of intensity and frequency based on context. Although we are never explicitly taught how to use illustrative gestures, we do it automatically. Think about how you still gesture when having an animated conversation on the phone even though the other person can't see you.

Head Movements and Posture

I group head movements and posture together because they are often both used to acknowledge others and communicate interest or attentiveness. In terms of head movements, a head nod is a universal sign of acknowledgement in cultures where the formal bow is no longer used as a greeting. In these cases, the head nod essentially serves as an abbreviated bow. An innate and universal head movement is the headshake back and forth to signal "no." This nonverbal signal begins at birth, even before a baby has the ability to know that it has a corresponding meaning. Babies shake their head from side to side to reject their mother's breast and later shake their head to reject attempts to spoon-feed. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 232. This biologically based movement then sticks with us to be a recognizable signal for "no." We also move our head to indicate interest. For example, a head up typically indicates an engaged or neutral attitude, a head tilt indicates interest and is an innate submission gesture that exposes the neck and subconsciously makes people feel more trusting of us, and a head down signals a negative or aggressive attitude. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 232–34.

There are four general human postures: standing, sitting, squatting, and lying down. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 63. Within each of these postures there are many variations, and when combined with particular gestures or other nonverbal cues they can express many different meanings. Most of our communication occurs while we are standing or sitting. One interesting standing posture involves putting our hands on our hips and is a nonverbal cue that we use subconsciously to make us look bigger and show assertiveness. When the elbows are pointed out, this prevents others from getting past us as easily and is a sign of attempted dominance or a gesture that says we're ready for action. In terms of sitting, leaning back shows informality and indifference, straddling a chair is a sign of dominance (but also some insecurity because the person is protecting the vulnerable front part of his or her body), and leaning forward shows interest and attentiveness. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 243–44.

Eye Contact

We also communicate through eye behaviors, primarily eye contact. While eye behaviors are often studied under the category of kinesics, they have their own branch of nonverbal studies called oculesics, which comes from the Latin word oculus, meaning "eye." The face and eyes are the main point of focus during communication, and along with our ears our eyes take in most of the communicative information around us. The saying "The eyes are the window to the soul" is actually accurate in terms of where people typically think others are "located," which is right behind the eyes. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 40. Certain eye behaviors have become tied to personality traits or emotional states, as illustrated in phrases like "hungry eyes," "evil eyes," and "bedroom eyes." To better understand oculesics, we will discuss the characteristics and functions of eye contact and pupil dilation.

Eye contact serves several communicative functions ranging from regulating interaction to monitoring interaction, to conveying information, to establishing interpersonal connections. In terms of regulating communication, we use eye contact to signal to others that we are ready to speak or we use it to cue others to speak. I'm sure we've all been in that awkward situation where a teacher asks a question, no one else offers a response, and he or she looks directly at us as if to say, "What do you think?" In that case, the teacher's eye contact is used to cue us to respond. During an interaction, eye contact also changes as we shift from speaker to listener. US Americans typically shift eye contact while speaking—looking away from the listener and then looking back at his or her face every few seconds. Toward the end of our speaking turn, we make more direct eye contact with our listener to indicate that we are finishing up. While listening, we tend to make more sustained eye contact, not glancing away as regularly as we do while speaking. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 276.

Aside from regulating conversations, eye contact is also used to monitor interaction by taking in feedback and other nonverbal cues and to send information. Our eyes bring in the visual information we need to interpret people's movements, gestures, and eye contact. A speaker can use his or her eye contact to determine if an audience is engaged, confused, or bored and then adapt his or her message accordingly. Our eyes also send information to others. People know not to interrupt when we are in deep thought because we naturally look away from others when we are processing information. Making eye contact with others also communicates that we are paying attention and are interested in what another person is saying. Eye contact is a key part of active listening.

Eye contact can also be used to intimidate others. We have social norms about how much eye contact we make with people, and those norms vary depending on the setting and the person. Staring at another person in some contexts could communicate intimidation, while in other contexts it could communicate flirtation. As we learned, eye contact is a key immediacy behavior, and it signals to others that we are available for communication. Once communication begins, if it does, eye contact helps establish rapport or connection. We can also use our eye contact to signal that we do not want to make a connection with others. For example, in a public setting like an airport or a gym where people often make small talk, we can avoid making eye contact with others to indicate that we do not want to engage in small talk with strangers. Another person could use eye contact to try to coax you into speaking, though. For example, when one person continues to stare at another person who is not reciprocating eye contact, the person avoiding eye contact might eventually give in, become curious, or become irritated and say, "Can I help you with something?" As you can see, eye contact sends and receives important communicative messages that help us interpret others' behaviors, convey information about our thoughts and feelings, and facilitate or impede rapport or connection. This list reviews the specific functions of eye contact:

- Regulate interaction and provide turn-taking signals
- Monitor communication by receiving nonverbal communication from others
- Signal cognitive activity (we look away when processing information)
- Express engagement (we show people we are listening with our eyes)
- Convey intimidation
- Express flirtation
- Establish rapport or connection

Pupil dilation is a subtle component of oculesics that doesn't get as much scholarly attention in communication as eye contact does. Pupil dilation refers to the expansion and contraction of the black part of the center of our eyes and is considered a biometric form of measurement; it is involuntary and therefore seen as a valid and reliable form of data collection as opposed to self-reports on surveys or interviews that can be biased or misleading. Our pupils dilate when there is a lack of lighting and contract when light is plentiful. Laura K. Guerrero and Kory Floyd, Nonverbal Communication in Close Relationships (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006): 176. Pain, sexual attraction, general arousal, anxiety/stress, and information processing (thinking) also affect pupil dilation. Researchers measure pupil dilation for a number of reasons. For example, advertisers use pupil dilation as an indicator of consumer preferences, assuming that more dilation indicates arousal and attraction to a product. We don't consciously read others' pupil dilation in our everyday interactions, but experimental research has shown that we subconsciously perceive pupil dilation, which affects our impressions and communication. In general, dilated pupils increase a person's attractiveness. Even though we may not be aware of this subtle nonverbal signal, we have social norms and practices that may be subconsciously based on pupil dilation. Take for example the notion of mood lighting and the common practice of creating a "romantic" ambiance with candlelight or the light from a fireplace. Softer and more indirect light leads to pupil dilation, and although we intentionally manipulate lighting to create a romantic ambiance, not to dilate our pupils, the dilated pupils are still subconsciously perceived, which increases perceptions of attraction. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 40–41.

Facial Expressions

Our faces are the most expressive part of our bodies. Think of how photos are often intended to capture a particular expression "in a flash" to preserve for later viewing. Even though a photo is a snapshot in time, we can still interpret much meaning from a human face caught in a moment of expression, and basic facial expressions are recognizable by humans all over the world. Much research has supported the universality of a core group of facial expressions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust. The first four are especially identifiable across cultures. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 35. However, the triggers for these expressions and the cultural and social norms that influence their displays are still culturally diverse. If you've spent much time with babies you know that they're capable of expressing all these emotions.

Getting to see the pure and innate expressions of joy and surprise on a baby's face is what makes playing peek-a-boo so entertaining for adults. As we get older, we learn and begin to follow display rules for facial expressions and other signals of emotion and also learn to better control our emotional expression based on the norms of our culture.

Smiles are powerful communicative signals and, as you'll recall, are a key immediacy behavior. Although facial expressions are typically viewed as innate and several are universally recognizable, they are not always connected to an emotional or internal biological stimulus; they can actually serve a more social purpose. For example, most of the smiles we produce are primarily made for others and are not just an involuntary reflection of an internal emotional state. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 35. These social smiles, however, are slightly but perceptibly different from more genuine smiles. People generally perceive smiles as more genuine when the other person smiles "with their eyes." This particular type of smile is difficult if not impossible to fake because the muscles around the eye that are activated when we spontaneously or genuinely smile are not under our voluntary control. It is the involuntary and spontaneous contraction of these muscles that moves the skin around our cheeks, eyes, and nose to create a smile that's distinct from a fake or polite smile. Dylan Evans, Emotion: The Science of Sentiment (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 107. People are able to distinguish the difference between these smiles, which is why photographers often engage in cheesy joking with adults or use props with children to induce a genuine smile before they snap a picture.

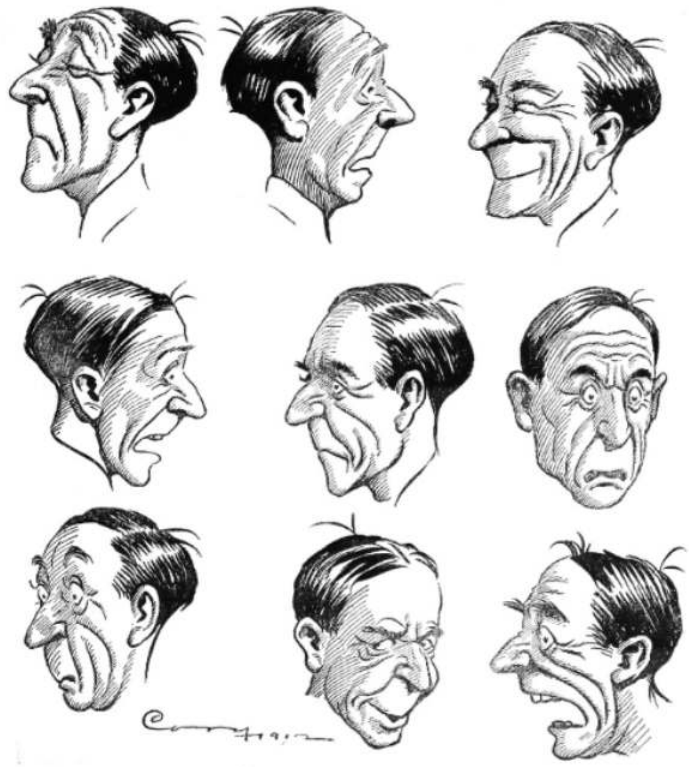

Figure 6.3.1: Our faces are the most expressive part of our body and can communicate an array of different emotions. The Cartoonists Art is in the public domain.

Since you are likely giving speeches in this class, let's learn about the role of the face in public speaking. Facial expressions help set the emotional tone for a speech. In order to set a positive tone before you start speaking, briefly look at the audience and smile to communicate friendliness, openness, and confidence. Beyond your opening and welcoming facial expressions, facial expressions communicate a range of emotions and can be used to infer personality traits and make judgments about a speaker's credibility and competence. Facial expressions can communicate that a speaker is tired, excited, angry, confused, frustrated, sad, confident, smug, shy, or bored. Even if you aren't bored, for example, a slack face with little animation may lead an audience to think that you are bored with your own speech, which isn't likely to motivate them to be interested. So make sure your facial expressions are communicating an emotion, mood, or personality trait that you think your audience will view favorably, and that will help you achieve your speech goals. Also make sure your facial expressions match the content of your speech. When delivering something light-hearted or humorous, a smile, bright eyes, and slightly raised eyebrows will nonverbally enhance your verbal message. When delivering something serious or somber, a furrowed brow, a tighter mouth, and even a slight head nod can enhance that message. If

your facial expressions and speech content are not consistent, your audience could become confused by the mixed messages, which could lead them to question your honesty and credibility.

Haptics

Think of how touch has the power to comfort someone in moment of sorrow when words alone cannot. This positive power of touch is countered by the potential for touch to be threatening because of its connection to sex and violence. To learn about the power of touch, we turn to haptics, which refers to the study of communication by touch. We probably get more explicit advice and instruction on how to use touch than any other form of nonverbal communication. A lack of nonverbal communication competence related to touch could have negative interpersonal consequences; for example, if we don't follow the advice we've been given about the importance of a firm handshake, a person might make negative judgments about our confidence or credibility. A lack of competence could have more dire negative consequences, including legal punishment, if we touch someone inappropriately (intentionally or unintentionally). Touch is necessary for human social development, and it can be welcoming, threatening, or persuasive. Research projects have found that students evaluated a library and its staff more favorably if the librarian briefly touched the patron while returning his or her library card, that female restaurant servers received larger tips when they touched patrons, and that people were more likely to sign a petition when the petitioner touched them during their interaction. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 46.

There are several types of touch, including functional-professional, social-polite, friendship-warmth, love-intimacy, and sexual-arousal touch. Richard Heslin and Tari Apler, "Touch: A Bonding Gesture," in Nonverbal Interaction, eds. John M. Weimann and Randall Harrison (Longon: Sage, 1983), 47–76. At the functional-professional level, touch is related to a goal or part of a routine professional interaction, which makes it less threatening and more expected. For example, we let barbers, hairstylists, doctors, nurses, tattoo artists, and security screeners touch us in ways that would otherwise be seen as intimate or inappropriate if not in a professional context. At the social-polite level, socially sanctioned touching behaviors help initiate interactions and show that others are included and respected. A handshake, a pat on the arm, and a pat on the shoulder are examples of social-polite touching. A handshake is actually an abbreviated hand-holding gesture, but we know that prolonged hand-holding would be considered too intimate and therefore inappropriate at the functional-professional or social-polite level. At the functional-professional and social-polite levels, touch still has interpersonal implications. The touch, although professional and not intimate, between hair stylist and client, or between nurse and patient, has the potential to be therapeutic and comforting. In addition, a social-polite touch exchange plays into initial impression formation, which can have important implications for how an interaction and a relationship unfold.

Of course, touch is also important at more intimate levels. At the friendship-warmth level, touch is more important and more ambiguous than at the social-polite level. At this level, touch interactions are important because they serve a relational maintenance purpose and communicate closeness, liking, care, and concern. The types of touching at this level also vary greatly from more formal and ritualized to more intimate, which means friends must sometimes negotiate their own comfort level with various types of touch and may encounter some ambiguity if their preferences don't match up with their relational partner's. In a friendship, for example, too much touch can signal sexual or romantic interest, and too little touch can signal distance or unfriendliness. At the love-intimacy level, touch is more personal and is typically only exchanged between significant others, such as best friends, close family members, and romantic partners. Touching faces, holding hands, and full frontal embraces are examples of touch at this level. Although this level of touch is not sexual, it does enhance feelings of closeness and intimacy and can lead to sexual-arousal touch, which is the most intimate form of touch, as it is intended to physically stimulate another person.

Touch is also used in many other contexts—for example, during play (e.g., arm wrestling), during physical conflict (e.g., slapping), and during conversations (e.g., to get someone's attention). Stanley E. Jones, "Communicating with Touch," in The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Readings, 2nd ed., eds. Laura K. Guerrero, Joseph A. Devito, and Michael L. Hecht (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1999). We also inadvertently send messages through accidental touch (e.g., bumping into someone). One of my interpersonal communication professors admitted that she enjoyed going to restaurants to observe "first-date behavior" and boasted that she could predict whether or not there was going to be a second date based on the couple's nonverbal communication. What sort of touching behaviors would indicate a good or bad first date?

Figure 6.3.2: Though hand holding may not occur on a first date, hand holding can be a powerful way for individuals to non-verbally confirm romantic interest. Image by Stanley Dai on Unsplash.

During a first date or less formal initial interactions, quick fleeting touches give an indication of interest. For example, a pat on the back is an abbreviated hug. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 4. In general, the presence or absence of touching cues us into people's emotions. So as the daters sit across from each other, one person may lightly tap the other's arm after he or she said something funny. If the daters are sitting side by side, one person may cross his or her legs and lean toward the other person so that each person's knees or feet occasionally touch. Touching behavior as a way to express feelings is often reciprocal. A light touch from one dater will be followed by a light touch from the other to indicate that the first touch was OK. While verbal communication could also be used to indicate romantic interest, many people feel too vulnerable at this early stage in a relationship to put something out there in words. If your date advances a touch and you are not interested, it is also unlikely that you will come right out and say, "Sorry, but I'm not really interested." Instead, due to common politeness rituals, you would be more likely to respond with other forms of nonverbal communication like scooting back, crossing your arms, or simply not acknowledging the touch.

I find hugging behavior particularly interesting, perhaps because of my experiences growing up in a very hug-friendly environment in the Southern United States and then living elsewhere where there are different norms. A hug can be obligatory, meaning that you do it because you feel like you have to, not because you want to. Even though you may think that this type of hug doesn't communicate emotions, it definitely does. A limp, weak, or retreating hug may communicate anger, ambivalence, or annoyance. Think of other types of hugs and how you hug different people. Some types of hugs are the crisscross hug, the neck-waist hug, and the engulfing hug.Kory Floyd, Communicating Affection: Interpersonal Behavior and Social Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33–34. The crisscross hug is a rather typical hug where each person's arm is below or above the other person's arm. This hug is common among friends, romantic partners, and family members, and perhaps even coworkers. The neck-waist hug usually occurs in more intimate relationships as it involves one person's arms around the other's neck and the other person's arms around the other's waist. I think of this type of hug as the "slow-dance hug." The engulfing hug is similar to a bear hug in that one person completely wraps the arms around the other as that person basically stands there. This hugging behavior usually occurs when someone is very excited and hugs the other person without warning.

Some other types of hugs are the "shake-first-then-tap hug" and the "back-slap hug." I observe that these hugs are most often between men. The shake-first-then-tap hug involves a modified hand-shake where the hands are joined more with the thumb and fingers than the palm and the elbows are bent so that the shake occurs between the two huggers' chests. The hug comes after the shake has been initiated with one arm going around the other person for usually just one tap, then a step back and release of the handshake. In this hugging behavior, the handshake that is maintained between the chests minimizes physical closeness and the intimacy that may be interpreted from the crisscross or engulfing hug where the majority of the huggers' torsos are touching. This move away from physical closeness likely stems from a US norm that restricts men's physical expression of affection due to

homophobia or the worry of being perceived as gay. The slap hug is also a less physically intimate hug and involves a hug with one or both people slapping the other person's back repeatedly, often while talking to each other. I've seen this type of hug go on for many seconds and with varying degrees of force involved in the slap. When the slap is more of a tap, it is actually an indication that one person wants to let go. The video footage of then-president Bill Clinton hugging Monica Lewinsky that emerged as allegations that they had an affair were being investigated shows her holding on, while he was tapping from the beginning of the hug.

"Getting Critical" - Airport Pat-Downs: The Law, Privacy, and Touch

Everyone who has flown over the past ten years has experienced the steady increase in security screenings. Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, airports around the world have had increased security. While passengers have long been subject to pat-downs if they set off the metal detector or arouse suspicion, recently foiled terrorist plots have made passenger screening more personal. The "shoe bomber" led to mandatory shoe removal and screening, and the more recent use of nonmetallic explosives hidden in clothing or in body cavities led to the use of body scanners that can see through clothing to check for concealed objects. Andrew R. Thomas, Soft Landing: Airline Industry Strategy, Service, and Safety (New York, NY: Apress, 2011), 117–23. Protests against and anxiety about the body scanners, more colloquially known as "naked x-ray machines," led to the new "enhanced pat-down" techniques for passengers who refuse to go through the scanners or passengers who are randomly selected or arouse suspicion in other ways. The strong reactions are expected given what we've learned about the power of touch as a form of nonverbal communication. The new pat-downs routinely involve touching the areas around a passenger's breasts and/or genitals with a sliding hand motion. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) notes that the areas being examined haven't changed, but the degree of the touch has, as screeners now press and rub more firmly but used to use a lighter touch. Derek Kravitz, "Airport 'Pat-Downs' Cause Growing Passenger Backlash," The Washington Post, November 13, 2010, accessed June 23, 2012, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/12/AR2010111206580.html?sid=ST2010113005385. Interestingly, police have long been able to use more invasive pat-downs, but only with probable cause. In the case of random selection at the airport, no probable cause provision has to be met, giving TSA agents more leeway with touch than police officers. Experts in aviation security differ in their assessment of the value of the pat-downs and other security procedures. Several experts have called for a revision of the random selection process in favor of more targeted screenings. What civil rights organizations critique as racial profiling, consumer rights activists and some security experts say allows more efficient use of resources and less inconvenience for the majority of passengers. Andrew R. Thomas, Soft Landing: Airline Industry Strategy, Service, and Safety (New York, NY: Apress, 2011), 120. Although the TSA has made some changes to security screening procedures and have announced more to come, some passengers have started a backlash of their own. There have been multiple cases of passengers stripping down to their underwear or getting completely naked to protest the pat-downs, while several other passengers have been charged with assault for "groping" TSA agents in retaliation. Footage of pat-downs of toddlers and grandmothers in wheelchairs and self-uploaded videos of people recounting their pat-down experiences have gone viral on YouTube.

1. What limits, if any, do you think there should be on the use of touch in airport screening procedures?
2. In June of 2012 a passenger was charged with battery after "groping" a TSA supervisor to, as she claims, demonstrate the treatment that she had received while being screened. You can read more about the story and see the video here: http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/carol-jean-price-accused-groping-tsa-agent-florida-woman-demonstrating-treatment-received- article-1.1098521. Do you think that her actions we justified? Why or why not?
3. Do you think that more targeted screening, as opposed to random screenings in which each person has an equal chance of being selected for enhanced pat-downs, is a good idea? Why? Do you think such targeted screening could be seen as a case of unethical racial profiling? Why or why not?

Vocalics

We learned earlier that paralanguage refers to the vocalized but nonverbal parts of a message. Vocalics is the study of paralanguage, which includes the vocal qualities that go along with verbal messages, such as pitch, volume, rate, vocal quality, and verbal fillers. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 69–70.

Pitch helps convey meaning, regulate conversational flow, and communicate the intensity of a message. Even babies recognize a sentence with a higher pitched ending as a question. We also learn that greetings have a rising emphasis and farewells have falling emphasis. Of course, no one ever tells us these things explicitly; we learn them through observation and practice. We do not pick up on some more subtle and/or complex patterns of paralanguage involving pitch until we are older. Children, for example, have a difficult time perceiving sarcasm, which is usually conveyed through paralinguistic characteristics like pitch and tone rather than the actual words being spoken. Adults with lower than average intelligence and children have difficulty reading sarcasm in another

person's voice and instead may interpret literally what they say. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 26.

Paralanguage provides important context for the verbal content of speech. For example, volume helps communicate intensity. A louder voice is usually thought of as more intense, although a soft voice combined with a certain tone and facial expression can be just as intense. We typically adjust our volume based on our setting, the distance between people, and the relationship. In our age of computer-mediated communication, TYPING IN ALL CAPS is usually seen as offensive, as it is equated with yelling. A voice at a low volume or a whisper can be very appropriate when sending a covert message or flirting with a romantic partner, but it wouldn't enhance a person's credibility if used during a professional presentation.

Speaking rate refers to how fast or slow a person speaks and can lead others to form impressions about our emotional state, credibility, and intelligence. As with volume, variations in speaking rate can interfere with the ability of others to receive and understand verbal messages. A slow speaker could bore others and lead their attention to wander. A fast speaker may be difficult to follow, and the fast delivery can actually distract from the message. Speaking a little faster than the normal 120–150 words a minute, however, can be beneficial, as people tend to find speakers whose rate is above average more credible and intelligent. David B. Buller and Judee K. Burgoon, "The Effects of Vocalics and Nonverbal Sensitivity on Compliance," Human Communication Research 13, no. 1 (1986): 126–44. When speaking at a faster-than-normal rate, it is important that a speaker also clearly articulate and pronounce his or her words. Boomhauer, a character on the show King of the Hill, is an example of a speaker whose fast rate of speech combines with a lack of articulation and pronunciation to create a stream of words that only he can understand. A higher rate of speech combined with a pleasant tone of voice can also be beneficial for compliance gaining and can aid in persuasion.

Our tone of voice can be controlled somewhat with pitch, volume, and emphasis, but each voice has a distinct quality known as a vocal signature. Voices vary in terms of resonance, pitch, and tone, and some voices are more pleasing than others. People typically find pleasing voices that employ vocal variety and are not monotone, are lower pitched (particularly for males), and do not exhibit particular regional accents. Many people perceive nasal voices negatively and assign negative personality characteristics to them. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 71. Think about people who have very distinct voices. Whether they are a public figure like President Bill Clinton, a celebrity like Snooki from the Jersey Shore, or a fictional character like Peter Griffin from Family Guy, some people's voices stick with us and make a favorable or unfavorable impression.

Verbal fillers are sounds that fill gaps in our speech as we think about what to say next. They are considered a part of nonverbal communication because they are not like typical words that stand in for a specific meaning or meanings. Verbal fillers such as "um," "uh," "like," and "ah" are common in regular conversation and are not typically disruptive. As we learned earlier, the use of verbal fillers can help a person "keep the floor" during a conversation if they need to pause for a moment to think before continuing on with verbal communication. Verbal fillers in more formal settings, like a public speech, can hurt a speaker's credibility.

The following is a review of the various communicative functions of vocalics:

- **Repetition**. Vocalic cues reinforce other verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g., saying "I'm not sure" with an uncertain tone).
- **Complementing**. Vocalic cues elaborate on or modify verbal and nonverbal meaning (e.g., the pitch and volume used to say "I love sweet potatoes" would add context to the meaning of the sentence, such as the degree to which the person loves sweet potatoes or the use of sarcasm).
- **Accenting**. Vocalic cues allow us to emphasie particular parts of a message, which helps determine meaning (e.g., "She is my friend," or "She is my friend," or "She is my friend").
- **Substituting**. Vocalic cues can take the place of other verbal or nonverbal cues (e.g., saying "uh huh" instead of "I am listening and understand what you're saying").
- **Regulating**. Vocalic cues help regulate the flow of conversations (e.g., falling pitch and slowing rate of speaking usually indicate the end of a speaking turn).
- **Contradicting**. Vocalic cues may contradict other verbal or nonverbal signals (e.g., a person could say "I'm fine" in a quick, short tone that indicates otherwise).

Proxemics

Proxemics refers to the study of how space and distance influence communication. We only need look at the ways in which space shows up in common metaphors to see that space, communication, and relationships are closely related. For example, when we are content with and attracted to someone, we say we are "close" to him or her. When we lose connection with someone, we may say

he or she is “distant.” In general, space influences how people communicate and behave. Smaller spaces with a higher density of people often lead to breaches of our personal space bubbles. If this is a setting in which this type of density is expected beforehand, like at a crowded concert or on a train during rush hour, then we make various communicative adjustments to manage the space issue. Unexpected breaches of personal space can lead to negative reactions, especially if we feel someone has violated our space voluntarily, meaning that a crowding situation didn’t force them into our space. Additionally, research has shown that crowding can lead to criminal or delinquent behavior, known as a “mob mentality.” Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 44. To better understand how proxemics functions in nonverbal communication, we will more closely examine the proxemic distances associated with personal space and the concept of territoriality.

Proxemic Distances

We all have varying definitions of what our “personal space” is, and these definitions are contextual and depend on the situation and the relationship. Although our bubbles are invisible, people are socialized into the norms of personal space within their cultural group. Scholars have identified four zones for US Americans, which are public, social, personal, and intimate distance. Edward T. Hall, “Proxemics,” Current Anthropology 9, no. 2 (1968): 83–95. The zones are more elliptical than circular, taking up more space in our front, where our line of sight is, than at our side or back where we can’t monitor what people are doing. You can see how these zones relate to each other and to the individual in Figure 6.5. Even within a particular zone, interactions may differ depending on whether someone is in the outer or inner part of the zone.

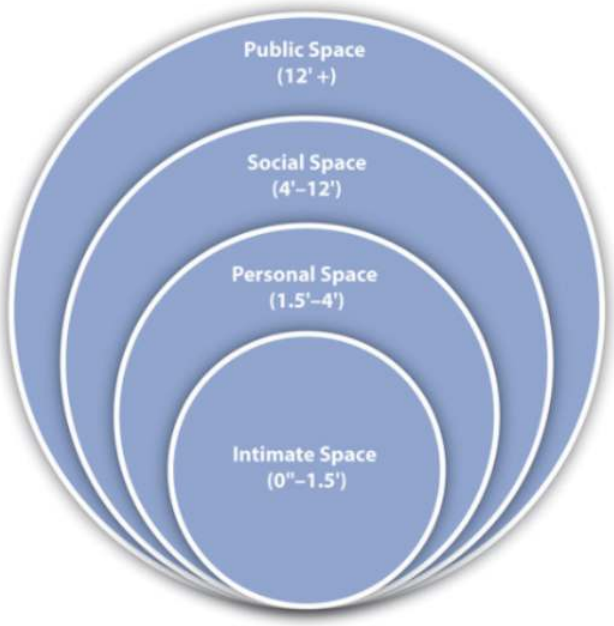

Figure 6.3.3: Proxemic Zones of Personal Space

Public Space (12 Feet or More)

Public and social zones refer to the space four or more feet away from our body, and the communication that typically occurs in these zones is formal and not intimate. Public space starts about twelve feet from a person and extends out from there. This is the least personal of the four zones and would typically be used when a person is engaging in a formal speech and is removed from the audience to allow the audience to see or when a high-profile or powerful person like a celebrity or executive maintains such a distance as a sign of power or for safety and security reasons. In terms of regular interaction, we are often not obligated or expected to acknowledge or interact with people who enter our public zone. It would be difficult to have a deep conversation with someone at this level because you have to speak louder and don’t have the physical closeness that is often needed to promote emotional closeness and/or establish rapport.

Social Space (4–12 Feet)

Communication that occurs in the social zone, which is four to twelve feet away from our body, is typically in the context of a professional or casual interaction, but not intimate or public. This distance is preferred in many professional settings because it reduces the suspicion of any impropriety. The expression “keep someone at an arm’s length” means that someone is kept out of the

personal space and kept in the social/professional space. If two people held up their arms and stood so just the tips of their fingers were touching, they would be around four feet away from each other, which is perceived as a safe distance because the possibility for intentional or unintentional touching doesn't exist. It is also possible to have people in the outer portion of our social zone but not feel obligated to interact with them, but when people come much closer than six feet to us then we often feel obligated to at least acknowledge their presence. In many typically sized classrooms, much of your audience for a speech will actually be in your social zone rather than your public zone, which is actually beneficial because it helps you establish a better connection with them. Students in large lecture classes should consider sitting within the social zone of the professor, since students who sit within this zone are more likely to be remembered by the professor, be acknowledged in class, and retain more information because they are close enough to take in important nonverbal and visual cues. Students who talk to me after class typically stand about four to five feet away when they speak to me, which keeps them in the outer part of the social zone, typical for professional interactions. When students have more personal information to discuss, they will come closer, which brings them into the inner part of the social zone.

Personal Space (1.5–4 Feet)

Personal and intimate zones refer to the space that starts at our physical body and extends four feet. These zones are reserved for friends, close acquaintances, and significant others. Much of our communication occurs in the personal zone, which is what we typically think of as our "personal space bubble" and extends from 1.5 feet to 4 feet away from our body. Even though we are getting closer to the physical body of another person, we may use verbal communication at this point to signal that our presence in this zone is friendly and not intimate. Even people who know each other could be uncomfortable spending too much time in this zone unnecessarily. This zone is broken up into two subzones, which helps us negotiate close interactions with people we may not be close to interpersonally. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 59. The outer-personal zone extends from 2.5 feet to 4 feet and is useful for conversations that need to be private but that occur between people who are not interpersonally close. This zone allows for relatively intimate communication but doesn't convey the intimacy that a closer distance would, which can be beneficial in professional settings. The inner-personal zone extends from 1.5 feet to 2.5 feet and is a space reserved for communication with people we are interpersonally close to or trying to get to know. In this subzone, we can easily touch the other person as we talk to them, briefly placing a hand on his or her arm or engaging in other light social touching that facilitates conversation, self-disclosure, and feelings of closeness.

Intimate Space

As we breach the invisible line that is 1.5 feet from our body, we enter the intimate zone, which is reserved for only the closest friends, family, and romantic/intimate partners. It is impossible to completely ignore people when they are in this space, even if we are trying to pretend that we're ignoring them. A breach of this space can be comforting in some contexts and annoying or frightening in others. We need regular human contact that isn't just verbal but also physical. We have already discussed the importance of touch in nonverbal communication, and in order for that much-needed touch to occur, people have to enter our intimate space. Being close to someone and feeling their physical presence can be very comforting when words fail. There are also social norms regarding the amount of this type of closeness that can be displayed in public, as some people get uncomfortable even seeing others interacting in the intimate zone. While some people are comfortable engaging in or watching others engage in PDAs (public displays of affection) others are not.

So what happens when our space is violated? Although these zones are well established in research for personal space preferences of US Americans, individuals vary in terms of their reactions to people entering certain zones, and determining what constitutes a "violation" of space is subjective and contextual. For example, another person's presence in our social or public zones doesn't typically arouse suspicion or negative physical or communicative reactions, but it could in some situations or with certain people. However, many situations lead to our personal and intimate space being breached by others against our will, and these breaches are more likely to be upsetting, even when they are expected. We've all had to get into a crowded elevator or wait in a long line. In such situations, we may rely on some verbal communication to reduce immediacy and indicate that we are not interested in closeness and are aware that a breach has occurred. People make comments about the crowd, saying, "We're really packed in here like sardines," or use humor to indicate that they are pleasant and well adjusted and uncomfortable with the breach like any "normal" person would be. Interestingly, as we will learn in our discussion of territoriality, we do not often use verbal communication to defend our personal space during regular interactions. Instead, we rely on more nonverbal communication like moving, crossing our arms, or avoiding eye contact to deal with breaches of space.

Territoriality

Territoriality is an innate drive to take up and defend spaces. This drive is shared by many creatures and entities, ranging from packs of animals to individual humans to nations. Whether it's a gang territory, a neighborhood claimed by a particular salesperson, your preferred place to sit in a restaurant, your usual desk in the classroom, or the seat you've marked to save while getting concessions at a sporting event, we claim certain spaces as our own. There are three main divisions for territory: primary, secondary, and public. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 70–71. Sometimes our claim to a space is official. These spaces are known as our primary territories because they are marked or understood to be exclusively ours and under our control. A person's house, yard, room, desk, side of the bed, or shelf in the medicine cabinet could be considered primary territories.

Secondary territories don't belong to us and aren't exclusively under our control, but they are associated with us, which may lead us to assume that the space will be open and available to us when we need it without us taking any further steps to reserve it. This happens in classrooms regularly. Students often sit in the same desk or at least same general area as they did on the first day of class. There may be some small adjustments during the first couple of weeks, but by a month into the semester, I don't notice students moving much voluntarily. When someone else takes a student's regular desk, she or he is typically annoyed. I do classroom observations for the graduate teaching assistants I supervise, which means I come into the classroom toward the middle of the semester and take a seat in the back to evaluate the class session. Although I don't intend to take someone's seat, on more than one occasion, I've been met by the confused or even glaring eyes of a student whose routine is suddenly interrupted when they see me sitting in "their seat."

Public territories are open to all people. People are allowed to mark public territory and use it for a limited period of time, but space is often up for grabs, which makes public space difficult to manage for some people and can lead to conflict. To avoid this type of situation, people use a variety of objects that are typically recognized by others as nonverbal cues that mark a place as temporarily reserved—for example, jackets, bags, papers, or a drink. There is some ambiguity in the use of markers, though. A half-empty cup of coffee may be seen as trash and thrown away, which would be an annoying surprise to a person who left it to mark his or her table while visiting the restroom. One scholar's informal observations revealed that a full drink sitting on a table could reserve a space in a university cafeteria for more than an hour, but a cup only half full usually only worked as a marker of territory for less than ten minutes. People have to decide how much value they want their marker to have. Obviously, leaving a laptop on a table indicates that the table is occupied, but it could also lead to the laptop getting stolen. A pencil, on the other hand, could just be moved out of the way and the space usurped.

Chronemics

Chronemics refers to the study of how time affects communication. Time can be classified into several different categories, including biological, personal, physical, and cultural time. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 65–66. Biological time refers to the rhythms of living things. Humans follow a circadian rhythm, meaning that we are on a daily cycle that influences when we eat, sleep, and wake. When our natural rhythms are disturbed, by all-nighters, jet lag, or other scheduling abnormalities, our physical and mental health and our communication competence and personal relationships can suffer. Keep biological time in mind as you communicate with others. Remember that early morning conversations and speeches may require more preparation to get yourself awake enough to communicate well and a more patient or energetic delivery to accommodate others who may still be getting warmed up for their day.

Personal time refers to the ways in which individuals experience time. The way we experience time varies based on our mood, our interest level, and other factors. Think about how quickly time passes when you are interested in and therefore engaged in something. I have taught fifty-minute classes that seemed to drag on forever and three-hour classes that zipped by. Individuals also vary based on whether or not they are future or past oriented. People with past-time orientations may want to reminisce about the past, reunite with old friends, and put considerable time into preserving memories and keepsakes in scrapbooks and photo albums. People with future-time orientations may spend the same amount of time making career and personal plans, writing out to-do lists, or researching future vacations, potential retirement spots, or what book they're going to read next.

Physical time refers to the fixed cycles of days, years, and seasons. Physical time, especially seasons, can affect our mood and psychological states. Some people experience seasonal affective disorder that leads them to experience emotional distress and anxiety during the changes of seasons, primarily from warm and bright to dark and cold (summer to fall and winter).

Cultural time refers to how a large group of people view time. Polychronic people do not view time as a linear progression that needs to be divided into small units and scheduled in advance. Polychronic people keep more flexible schedules and may engage in

several activities at once. Monochronic people tend to schedule their time more rigidly and do one thing at a time. A polychronic or monochronic orientation to time influences our social realities and how we interact with others.

Additionally, the way we use time depends in some ways on our status. For example, doctors can make their patients wait for extended periods of time, and executives and celebrities may run consistently behind schedule, making others wait for them. Promptness and the amount of time that is socially acceptable for lateness and waiting varies among individuals and contexts. Chronemics also covers the amount of time we spend talking. We've already learned that conversational turns and turn-taking patterns are influenced by social norms and help our conversations progress. We all know how annoying it can be when a person dominates a conversation or when we can't get a person to contribute anything.

Personal Presentation and Environment

Personal presentation involves two components: our physical characteristics and the artifacts with which we adorn and surround ourselves. Physical characteristics include body shape, height, weight, attractiveness, and other physical features of our bodies. We do not have as much control over how these nonverbal cues are encoded as we do with many other aspects of nonverbal communication. These characteristics play a large role in initial impression formation even though we know we "shouldn't judge a book by its cover." Although ideals of attractiveness vary among cultures and individuals, research consistently indicates that people who are deemed attractive based on physical characteristics have distinct advantages in many aspects of life. This fact, along with media images that project often unrealistic ideals of beauty, have contributed to booming health and beauty, dieting, gym, and plastic surgery industries. While there have been some controversial reality shows that seek to transform people's physical characteristics, like Extreme Makeover, The Swan, and The Biggest Loser, the relative ease with which we can change the artifacts that send nonverbal cues about us has led to many more style and space makeover shows.

Have you ever tried to consciously change your "look?" I can distinctly remember two times in my life when I made pretty big changes in how I presented myself in terms of clothing and accessories. In high school, at the height of the "thrift store" craze, I started wearing clothes from the local thrift store daily. Of course, most of them were older clothes, so I was basically going for a "retro" look, which I thought really suited me at the time. Then in my junior year of college, as graduation finally seemed on the horizon and I felt myself entering a new stage of adulthood, I started wearing business-casual clothes to school every day, embracing the "dress for the job you want" philosophy. In both cases, these changes definitely impacted how others perceived me. Television programs like What Not to Wear seek to show the power of wardrobe and personal style changes in how people communicate with others.

Aside from clothes, jewelry, visible body art, hairstyles, and other political, social, and cultural symbols send messages to others about who we are. In the United States, body piercings and tattoos have been shifting from subcultural to mainstream over the past few decades. The physical location, size, and number of tattoos and piercings play a large role in whether or not they are deemed appropriate for professional contexts, and many people with tattoos and/or piercings make conscious choices about when and where they display their body art. Hair also sends messages whether it is on our heads or our bodies. Men with short hair are generally judged to be more conservative than men with long hair, but men with shaved heads may be seen as aggressive. Whether a person has a part in their hair, a mohawk, faux-hawk, ponytail, curls, or bright pink hair also sends nonverbal signals to others.

Jewelry can also send messages with varying degrees of direct meaning. A ring on the "ring finger" of a person's left hand typically indicates that they are married or in an otherwise committed relationship. A thumb ring or a right-hand ring on the "ring finger" doesn't send such a direct message. People also adorn their clothes, body, or belongings with religious or cultural symbols, like a cross to indicate a person's Christian faith or a rainbow flag to indicate that a person is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or an ally to one or more of those groups. People now wear various types of rubber bracelets, which have become a popular form of social cause marketing, to indicate that they identify with the "Livestrong" movement or support breast cancer awareness and research.

Figure 6.3.4: The objects that surround us send nonverbal cues that may influence how people perceive us. What impression does a messy, crowded office make? Image by Ferenc Horvath on Unsplash.

Last, the environment in which we interact affects our verbal and nonverbal communication. This is included because we can often manipulate the nonverbal environment similar to how we would manipulate our gestures or tone of voice to suit our communicative needs. The books that we display on our coffee table, the magazines a doctor keeps in his or her waiting room, the placement of fresh flowers in a foyer, or a piece of mint chocolate on a hotel bed pillow all send particular messages and can easily be changed. The placement of objects and furniture in a physical space can help create a formal, distant, friendly, or intimate climate. In terms of formality, we can use nonverbal communication to convey dominance and status, which helps define and negotiate power and roles within relationships. Fancy cars and expensive watches can serve as symbols that distinguish a CEO from an entry-level employee. A room with soft lighting, a small fountain that creates ambient sounds of water flowing, and a comfy chair can help facilitate interactions between a therapist and a patient. In summary, whether we know it or not, our physical characteristics and the artifacts that surround us communicate much.

"Getting Plugged In"- Avatars

Avatars are computer-generated images that represent users in online environments or are created to interact with users in online and offline situations. Avatars can be created in the likeness of humans, animals, aliens, or other nonhuman creatures. Katrin Allmendinger, "Social Presence in Synchronous Virtual Learning Situations: The Role of Nonverbal Signals Displayed by Avatars," Educational Psychology Review 22, no. 1 (2010): 42. Avatars vary in terms of functionality and technical sophistication and can include stationary pictures like buddy icons, cartoonish but humanlike animations like a Mii character on the Wii, or very humanlike animations designed to teach or assist people in virtual environments. More recently, 3-D holographic avatars have been put to work helping travelers at airports in Paris and New York. Steve Strunksy, "New Airport Service Rep Is Stiff and Phony, but She's Friendly," NJ.COM, May 22, 2012, accessed June 28, 2012, http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/05/new_airport_service_rep_is_sti.html; Tecca, "New York City Airports Install New, Expensive Holograms to Help You Find Your Way," Y! Tech: A Yahoo! News Blog, May 22, 2012, accessed June 28, 2012, news.yahoo.com/blogs/technology-blog/york-city-airports-install-expensive-holograms-help-way-024937526.html. Research has shown, though, that humanlike avatars influence people even when they are not sophisticated in terms of functionality and adaptability. Amy L. Baylor, "The Design of Motivational Agents and Avatars," Educational Technology Research and Development 59, no. 2 (2011): 291–300. Avatars are especially motivating and influential when they are similar to the observer or user but more closely represent the person's ideal self. Appearance has been noted as one of the most important attributes of an avatar designed to influence or motivate. Attractiveness, coolness (in terms of clothing and hairstyle), and age were shown to be factors that increase or decrease the influence an avatar has over users. Amy L. Baylor, "The Design of Motivational Agents and Avatars," Educational Technology Research and Development 59, no. 2 (2011): 291–300.

People also create their own avatars as self-representations in a variety of online environments ranging from online role-playing games like World of Warcraft and Second Life to some online learning management systems used by colleges and universities. Research shows that the line between reality and virtual reality can become blurry when it comes to avatar design and identification. This can become even more pronounced when we consider that some users, especially of online role-playing games, spend about twenty hours a week as their avatar.

Avatars do more than represent people in online worlds; they also affect their behaviors offline. For example, one study found that people who watched an avatar that looked like them exercising and losing weight in an online environment exercised more and ate healthier in the real world.Jesse Fox and Jeremy M. Bailenson, "Virtual Self-Modeling: The Effects of Vicarious Reinforcement and Identification on Exercise Behaviors," Media Psychology 12, no. 1 (2009): 1–25. Seeing an older version of them online led participants to form a more concrete social and psychological connection with their future selves, which led them to invest more money in a retirement account. People's actions online also mirror the expectations for certain physical characteristics, even when the user doesn't exhibit those characteristics and didn't get to choose them for his or her avatar. For example, experimental research showed that people using more attractive avatars were more extroverted and friendly than those with less attractive avatars, which is also a nonverbal communication pattern that exists among real people. In summary, people have the ability to self-select physical characteristics and personal presentation for their avatars in a way that they can't in their real life. People come to see their avatars as part of themselves, which opens the possibility for avatars to affect users' online and offline communication. Changsoo Kim, Sang-Gun Lee, and Minchoel Kang, "I Became an Attractive Person in the Virtual World: Users' Identification with Virtual Communities and Avatars," Computers in Human Behavior, 28, no. 5 (2012): 1663–69

1. Describe an avatar that you have created for yourself. What led you to construct the avatar the way you did, and how do you think your choices reflect your typical nonverbal self-presentation? If you haven't ever constructed an avatar, what would you make your avatar look like and why?
2. In 2009, a man in Japan became the first human to marry an avatar (that we know of). Although he claims that his avatar is better than any human girlfriend, he has been criticized as being out of touch with reality. You can read more about this human-avatar union through the following link: articles.cnn.com/2009-12-16/world/japan.virtual.wedding_1_virtual-world-sal-marry?_s=PM:WORLD. Do you think the boundaries between human reality and avatar fantasy will continue to fade as we become a more technologically fused world? How do you feel about interacting more with avatars in customer service situations like the airport avatar mentioned above? What do you think about having avatars as mentors, role models, or teachers?

Key Takeaways

- *Kinesics* refers to body movements and posture and includes the following components:
  - Gestures are arm and hand movements and include adaptors like clicking a pen or scratching your face, emblems like a thumbs-up to say "OK," and illustrators like bouncing your hand along with the rhythm of your speaking.
  - Head movements and posture include the orientation of movements of our head and the orientation and positioning of our body and the various meanings they send. Head movements such as nodding can indicate agreement, disagreement, and interest, among other things. Posture can indicate assertiveness, defensiveness, interest, readiness, or intimidation, among other things.
  - Eye contact is studied under the category of oculesics and specifically refers to eye contact with another person's face, head, and eyes and the patterns of looking away and back at the other person during interaction. Eye contact provides turn-taking signals, signals when we are engaged in cognitive activity, and helps establish rapport and connection, among other things.
  - Facial expressions refer to the use of the forehead, brow, and facial muscles around the nose and mouth to convey meaning. Facial expressions can convey happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and other emotions.
- *Haptics* refers to touch behaviors that convey meaning during interactions. Touch operates at many levels, including functional-professional, social-polite, friendship-warmth, and love-intimacy.
- *Vocalics* refers to the vocalized but not verbal aspects of nonverbal communication, including our speaking rate, pitch, volume, tone of voice, and vocal quality. These qualities, also known as paralanguage, reinforce the meaning of verbal communication, allow us to emphasize particular parts of a message, or can contradict verbal messages.
- *Proxemics* refers to the use of space and distance within communication. US Americans, in general, have four zones that constitute our personal space: the public zone (12 or more feet from our body), social zone (4–12 feet from our body), the personal zone (1.5–4 feet from our body), and the intimate zone (from body contact to 1.5 feet away). Proxemics also studies territoriality, or how people take up and defend personal space.

- *Chronemics* refers the study of how time affects communication and includes how different time cycles affect our communication, including the differences between people who are past or future oriented and cultural perspectives on time as fixed and measured (monochronic) or fluid and adaptable (polychronic).
- *Personal presentation and environment* refers to how the objects we adorn ourselves and our surroundings with, referred to as artifacts, provide nonverbal cues that others make meaning from and how our physical environment—for example, the layout of a room and seating positions and arrangements—influences communication.

Exercises

1. Provide some examples of how eye contact plays a role in your communication throughout the day.
2. One of the key functions of vocalics is to add emphasis to our verbal messages to influence the meaning. Provide a meaning for each of the following statements based on which word is emphasized: “She is my friend.” “She is my friend.” “She is my friend.”
3. Getting integrated: Many people do not think of time as an important part of our nonverbal communication. Provide an example of how chronemics sends nonverbal messages in academic settings, professional settings, and personal settings.

Contributors and Attributions

- Template:ContribCCComm120

6.4: Nonverbal Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

- Identify and employ strategies for improving competence with sending nonverbal messages.
- Identify and employ strategies for improving competence with interpreting nonverbal messages.

As we age, we internalize social and cultural norms related to sending (encoding) and interpreting (decoding) nonverbal communication. In terms of sending, the tendency of children to send unmonitored nonverbal signals reduces as we get older and begin to monitor and perhaps censor or mask them. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 125. Likewise, as we become more experienced communicators we tend to think that we become better at interpreting nonverbal messages. In this section we will discuss some strategies for effectively encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. As we've already learned, we receive little, if any, official instruction in nonverbal communication, but you can think of this chapter as a training manual to help improve your own nonverbal communication competence. As with all aspects of communication, improving your nonverbal communication takes commitment and continued effort. However, research shows that education and training in nonverbal communication can lead to quick gains in knowledge and skill. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 23. Additionally, once the initial effort is put into improving your nonverbal encoding and decoding skills and those new skills are put into practice, people are encouraged by the positive reactions from others. Remember that people enjoy interacting with others who are skilled at nonverbal encoding and decoding, which will be evident in their reactions, providing further motivation and encouragement to hone your skills.

Guidelines for Sending Nonverbal Messages

As individuals life teaches us that first impressions matter. Nonverbal cues account for much of the content from which we form initial impressions, so it's important to know that people make judgments about our identities and skills after only brief exposure. Our competence regarding and awareness of nonverbal communication can help determine how an interaction will proceed and, in fact, whether it will take place at all. People who are skilled at encoding nonverbal messages are more favorably evaluated after initial encounters. This is likely due to the fact that people who are more nonverbally expressive are also more attention getting and engaging and make people feel more welcome and warm due to increased immediacy behaviors, all of which enhance perceptions of charisma.

Figure 6.4.1: People who are more nonverbally expressive typically form more positive initial impressions, because expressivity in the form of immediacy behaviors is attention getting and welcoming. Image by MICHAEL FRATTAROLI on Unsplash.

Understand That Nonverbal Communication Is Multichannel

Be aware of the multichannel nature of nonverbal communication. We rarely send a nonverbal message in isolation. For example, a posture may be combined with a touch or eye behavior to create what is called a nonverbal cluster. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 21. Nonverbal congruence refers to consistency among different nonverbal expressions within a cluster. Congruent nonverbal communication is more credible and effective than ambiguous or conflicting nonverbal cues. Even though you may intend for your nonverbal messages to be congruent, they could still be decoded in a way that doesn't match up with your intent, especially since nonverbal expressions vary in terms of their degree of conscious encoding. In this sense, the multichannel nature of nonverbal communication creates the potential of both increased credibility and increased ambiguity.

When we become more aware of the messages we are sending, we can monitor for nonverbal signals that are incongruent with other messages or may be perceived as such. If a student is talking to his professor about his performance in the class and concerns about his grade, the professor may lean forward and nod, encoding a combination of a body orientation and a head movement that conveys attention. If the professor, however, regularly breaks off eye contact and looks anxiously at her office door, then she is sending a message that could be perceived as disinterest, which is incongruent with the overall message of care and concern she probably wants to encode. Increasing our awareness of the multiple channels through which we send nonverbal cues can help us make our signals more congruent in the moment.

Understand That Nonverbal Communication Affects Our Interactions

Nonverbal communication affects our own and others' behaviors and communication. Changing our nonverbal signals can affect our thoughts and emotions. Knowing this allows us to have more control over the trajectory of our communication, possibly allowing us to intervene in a negative cycle. For example, if you are waiting in line to get your driver's license renewed and the agents in front of you are moving slower than you'd like and the man in front of you doesn't have his materials organized and is asking unnecessary questions, you might start to exhibit nonverbal clusters that signal frustration. You might cross your arms, a closing-off gesture, and combine that with wrapping your fingers tightly around one bicep and occasionally squeezing, which is a self-touch adaptor that results from anxiety and stress. The longer you stand like that, the more frustrated and defensive you will become, because that nonverbal cluster reinforces and heightens your feelings. Increased awareness about these cycles can help you make conscious moves to change your nonverbal communication and, subsequently, your cognitive and emotional states. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 54.

As your nonverbal encoding competence increases, you can strategically manipulate your behaviors. During my years as a restaurant server I got pretty good at knowing what tables to engage with and "schmooze" a little more to get a better tip. Restaurant servers, bartenders, car salespeople, realtors, exotic dancers, and many others who work in a service or sales capacity know that part of "sealing the deal" is making people feel liked, valued, and important. The strategic use of nonverbal communication to convey these messages is largely accepted and expected in our society, and as customers or patrons, we often play along because it feels good in the moment to think that the other person actually cares about us. Using non-verbals that are intentionally deceptive and misleading can have negative consequences and cross the line into unethical communication.

As you get better at monitoring and controlling your nonverbal behaviors and understanding how nonverbal cues affect our interaction, you may show more competence in multiple types of communication. For example, people who are more skilled at monitoring and controlling nonverbal displays of emotion report that they are more comfortable public speakers. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 12. Since speakers become more nervous when they think that audience members are able to detect their nervousness based on outwardly visible, mostly nonverbal cues, it is logical that confidence in one's ability to control those outwardly visible cues would result in a lessening of that common fear.

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Creates Rapport

Humans have evolved an innate urge to mirror each other's nonverbal behavior, and although we aren't often aware of it, this urge influences our behavior daily. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 251. Think, for example, about how people "fall into formation" when waiting in a line. Our nonverbal communication works to create an unspoken and subconscious cooperation, as people move and behave in similar ways. When one person leans to the left the next person in line may also lean to the left, and this shift in posture may continue all the way down the line to the end, until someone else makes another movement and the whole line shifts again. This phenomenon is known as mirroring, which refers

to the often subconscious practice of using nonverbal cues in a way that match those of others around us. Mirroring sends implicit messages to others that say, “Look! I’m just like you.” Mirroring evolved as an important social function in that it allowed early humans to more easily fit in with larger groups. Logically, early humans who were more successful at mirroring were more likely to secure food, shelter, and security and therefore passed that genetic disposition on down the line to us.

Last summer, during a backyard game of “corn hole” with my family, my mom and sister were standing at the other board and kept whispering to each other and laughing at my dad and me. Corn hole, which is also called “bags,” involves throwing a cloth sack filled with corn toward another team’s board with the goal of getting it in the hole or on the board to score points. They later told us that they were amazed at how we stood, threw our bags, and shifted position between rounds in unison. Although my dad and I didn’t realize we were doing it, our subconscious mirroring was obviously noticeable to others. Mirroring is largely innate and subconscious, but we can more consciously use it and a variety of other nonverbal signals, like the immediacy behaviors we discussed earlier, to help create social bonds and mutual liking.

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversations

The ability to encode appropriate turn-taking signals can help ensure that we can hold the floor when needed in a conversation or work our way into a conversation smoothly, without inappropriately interrupting someone or otherwise being seen as rude. People with nonverbal encoding competence are typically more “in control” of conversations. This regulating function can be useful in initial encounters when we are trying to learn more about another person and in situations where status differentials are present or compliance gaining or dominance are goals. Although close friends, family, and relational partners can sometimes be an exception, interrupting is generally considered rude and should be avoided. Even though verbal communication is most often used to interrupt another person, interruptions are still studied as a part of chronemics because it interferes with another person’s talk time. Instead of interrupting, you can use nonverbal signals like leaning in, increasing your eye contact, or using a brief gesture like subtly raising one hand or the index finger to signal to another person that you’d like to soon take the floor.

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Relates to Listening

Part of being a good listener involves nonverbal-encoding competence, as nonverbal feedback in the form of head nods, eye contact, and posture can signal that a listener is paying attention and the speaker’s message is received and understood. Active listening, for example, combines good cognitive listening practices with outwardly visible cues that signal to others that we are listening. We all know from experience which nonverbal signals convey attentiveness and which convey a lack of attentiveness. Listeners are expected to make more eye contact with the speaker than the speaker makes with them, so it’s important to “listen with your eyes” by maintaining eye contact, which signals attentiveness. Listeners should also avoid distracting movements in the form of self, other, and object adaptors. Being a higher self-monitor can help you catch nonverbal signals that might signal that you aren’t listening, at which point you could consciously switch to more active listening signals.

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Relates to Impression Management

The nonverbal messages we encode also help us express our identities and play into impression management is a key part of communicating to achieve identity goals. Being able to control nonverbal expressions and competently encode them allows us to better manage our persona and project a desired self to others—for example, a self that is perceived as competent, socially attractive, and engaging. Being nonverbally expressive during initial interactions usually leads to more favorable impressions. So smiling, keeping an attentive posture, and offering a solid handshake help communicate confidence and enthusiasm that can be useful on a first date, during a job interview, when visiting family for the holidays, or when running into an acquaintance at the grocery store. Nonverbal communication can also impact the impressions you make as a student. Research has also found that students who are more nonverbally expressive are liked more by their teachers and are more likely to have their requests met by their teachers. Timothy P. Mottet, Steven A. Beebe, Paul C. Raffeld, and Michelle L. Paulsel, “The Effects of Student Verbal and Nonverbal Responsiveness on Teachers’ Liking of Students and Willingness to Comply with Student Requests,” Communication Quarterly 52, no. 1 (2004): 27–38.

Increase Competence in Specific Channels of Nonverbal Communication

While it is important to recognize that we send nonverbal signals through multiple channels simultaneously, we can also increase our nonverbal communication competence by becoming more aware of how it operates in specific channels. Although no one can truly offer you a rulebook on how to effectively send every type of nonverbal signal, there are several nonverbal guidebooks that are written from more anecdotal and less academic perspectives. While these books vary tremendously in terms of their credibility

and quality, some, like Allan Pease and Barbara Pease's The Definitive Book of Body Language, are informative and interesting to read.

Kinesics

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal messages sent using your hands, arms, body, and face.

Gestures

- Illustrators make our verbal communication more engaging. I recommend that people doing phone interviews or speaking on the radio make an effort to gesture as they speak, even though people can't see the gestures, because it will make their words sound more engaging.
- Remember that adaptors can hurt your credibility in more formal or serious interactions. Figure out what your common adaptors are and monitor them so you can avoid creating unfavorable impressions.
- Gestures send messages about your emotional state. Since many gestures are spontaneous or subconscious, it is important to raise your awareness of them and monitor them. Be aware that clenched hands may signal aggression or anger, nail biting or fidgeting may signal nervousness, and finger tapping may signal boredom.

Eye Contact

- Eye contact is useful for initiating and regulating conversations. To make sure someone is available for interaction and to avoid being perceived as rude, it is usually a good idea to "catch their eye" before you start talking to them.
- Avoiding eye contact or shifting your eye contact from place to place can lead others to think you are being deceptive or inattentive. Minimize distractions by moving a clock, closing a door, or closing window blinds to help minimize distractions that may lure your eye contact away.
- Although avoiding eye contact can be perceived as sign of disinterest, low confidence, or negative emotionality, eye contact avoidance can be used positively as a face-saving strategy. The notion of civil inattention refers to a social norm that leads us to avoid making eye contact with people in situations that deviate from expected social norms, such as witnessing someone fall or being in close proximity to a stranger expressing negative emotions (like crying). We also use civil inattention when we avoid making eye contact with others in crowded spaces. Erving Goffman, Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 322–31.

Facial Expressions

- You can use facial expressions to manage your expressions of emotions to intensify what you're feeling, to diminish what you're feeling, to cover up what you're feeling, to express a different emotion than you're feeling, or to simulate an emotion that you're not feeling. Sandra Metts and Sally Planlap, "Emotional Communication," in Handbook of Interpersonal Communication, 3rd ed., eds. Mark L. Knapp and Kerry J. Daly (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002): 339–73.
- Be aware of the power of emotional contagion, or the spread of emotion from one person to another. Since facial expressions are key for emotional communication, you may be able to strategically use your facial expressions to cheer someone up, lighten a mood, or create a more serious and somber tone.
- Smiles are especially powerful as an immediacy behavior and a rapport-building tool. Smiles can also help to disarm a potentially hostile person or deescalate conflict. When I have a problem or complain in a customer service situation, I always make sure to smile at the clerk, manager, or other person before I begin talking to help minimize my own annoyance and set a more positive tone for the interaction.

Haptics

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals using touch:

- Remember that culture, status, gender, age, and setting influence how we send and interpret touch messages.
- In professional and social settings, it is generally OK to touch others on the arm or shoulder. Although we touch others on the arm or shoulder with our hand, it is often too intimate to touch your hand to another person's hand in a professional or social/casual setting.

These are types of touch to avoid:

- Avoid touching strangers unless being introduced or offering assistance.
- Avoid hurtful touches and apologize if they occur, even if accidentally.
- Avoid startling/surprising another person with your touch.

- Avoid interrupting touches such as hugging someone while they are talking to someone else.
- Avoid moving people out of the way with only touch—pair your touch with a verbal message like “excuse me.”
- Avoid overly aggressive touch, especially when disguised as playful touch (e.g., horseplay taken too far).
- Avoid combining touch with negative criticism; a hand on the shoulder during a critical statement can increase a person’s defensiveness and seem condescending or aggressive.

Vocalics

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals using paralanguage.

- Verbal fillers are often used subconsciously and can negatively affect your credibility and reduce the clarity of your message when speaking in more formal situations. In fact, verbal fluency is one of the strongest predictors of persuasiveness. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 81. Becoming a higher self-monitor can help you notice your use of verbal fillers and begin to eliminate them. Beginner speakers can often reduce their use of verbal fillers noticeably over just a short period of time.
- Vocal variety increases listener and speaker engagement, understanding, information recall, and motivation. So having a more expressive voice that varies appropriately in terms of rate, pitch, and volume can help you achieve communication goals related to maintaining attention, effectively conveying information, and getting others to act in a particular way.

Proxemics

The following may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals related to interpersonal distances.

- When breaches of personal space occur, it is a social norm to make nonverbal adjustments such as lowering our level of immediacy, changing our body orientations, and using objects to separate ourselves from others. To reduce immediacy, we engage in civil inattention and reduce the amount of eye contact we make with others. We also shift the front of our body away from others since it has most of our sensory inputs and also allows access to body parts that are considered vulnerable, such as the stomach, face, and genitals. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 45. When we can’t shift our bodies, we often use coats, bags, books, or our hands to physically separate or block off the front of our bodies from others.
- Although pets and children are often granted more leeway to breach other people’s space, since they are still learning social norms and rules, as a pet owner, parent, or temporary caretaker, be aware of this possibility and try to prevent such breaches or correct them when they occur.

Chronemics

The following guideline may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals related to time.

- In terms of talk time and turn taking, research shows that people who take a little longer with their turn, holding the floor slightly longer than normal, are actually seen as more credible than people who talk too much or too little. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 64.
- Our lateness or promptness can send messages about our professionalism, dependability, or other personality traits. Formal time usually applies to professional situations in which we are expected to be on time or even a few minutes early. You generally wouldn’t want to be late for work, a job interview, a medical appointment, and so on. Informal time applies to casual and interpersonal situations in which there is much more variation in terms of expectations for promptness. For example, when I lived in a large city, people often arrived to dinner parties or other social gatherings about thirty minutes after the announced time, given the possibility of interference by heavy traffic or people’s hectic schedules. Now that I live in a smaller town in the Midwest, I’ve learned that people are expected to arrive at or close to the announced time. For most social meetings with one other person or a small group, you can be five minutes late without having to offer much of an apology or explanation. For larger social gatherings you can usually be fifteen minutes late as long as your late arrival doesn’t interfere with the host’s plans or preparations.
- Quality time is an important part of interpersonal relationships, and sometimes time has to be budgeted so that it can be saved and spent with certain people or on certain occasions—like date nights for couples or family time for parents and children or other relatives.

Personal Presentation and Environment

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals related to personal presentation and environment.

- Recognize that personal presentation carries much weight in terms of initial impressions, so meeting the expectations and social norms for dress, grooming, and other arti-factual communication is especially important for impression management.
- Recognize that some environments facilitate communication and some do not. A traditional front-facing business or educational setup is designed for one person to communicate with a larger audience. People in the audience cannot as easily interact with each other because they can't see each other face-to-face without turning. A horseshoe or circular arrangement allows everyone to make eye contact and facilitates interaction. Even close proximity doesn't necessarily facilitate interaction. For example, a comfortable sofa may bring four people together, but eye contact among all four is nearly impossible if they're all facing the same direction.
- Where you choose to sit can also impact perceived characteristics and leadership decisions. People who sit at the head or center of a table are often chosen to be leaders by others because of their nonverbal accessibility—a decision which may have more to do with where the person chose to sit than the person's perceived or actual leadership abilities. Research has found that juries often select their foreperson based on where he or she happens to sit. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 57–58. Keep this in mind the next time you take your seat at a meeting.

Guidelines for Interpreting Nonverbal Messages

We learn to decode or interpret nonverbal messages through practice and by internalizing social norms. Following the suggestions to become a better encoder of nonverbal communication will lead to better decoding competence through increased awareness. Since nonverbal communication is more ambiguous than verbal communication, we have to learn to interpret these cues as clusters within contexts. My favorite way to increase my knowledge about nonverbal communication is to engage in people watching. Just by consciously taking in the variety of nonverbal signals around us, we can build our awareness and occasionally be entertained. Skilled decoders of nonverbal messages are said to have nonverbal sensitivity, which, very similarly to skilled encoders, leads them to have larger social networks, be more popular, and exhibit less social anxiety. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 15.

There Is No Nonverbal Dictionary

The first guideline for decoding nonverbal communication is to realize that there is no nonverbal dictionary. Some nonverbal scholars and many nonverbal skill trainers have tried to catalog nonverbal communication like we do verbal communication to create dictionary-like guides that people can use to interpret nonverbal signals. Although those guides may contain many valid "rules" of nonverbal communication, those rules are always relative to the individual, social, and cultural contexts in which an interaction takes place. In short, you can't read people's nonverbal communication like a book, and there are no A-to-Z guides that capture the complexity of nonverbal communication. Peter J. DePaulo, "Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Research in Marketing and Management," Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 64. Rather than using a list of specific rules, I suggest people develop more general tools that will be useful in and adaptable to a variety of contexts.

Recognize That Certain Nonverbal Signals Are Related

The second guideline for decoding nonverbal signals is to recognize that certain nonverbal signals are related. Nonverbal rulebooks aren't effective because they typically view a nonverbal signal in isolation, similar to how dictionaries separately list denotative definitions of words. To get a more nuanced understanding of the meaning behind nonverbal cues, we can look at them as progressive or layered. For example, people engaging in negative critical evaluation of a speaker may cross their legs, cross one arm over their stomach, and put the other arm up so the index finger is resting close to the eye while the chin rests on the thumb. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 22. A person wouldn't likely perform all those signals simultaneously. Instead, he or she would likely start with one and then layer more cues on as the feelings intensified. If we notice that a person is starting to build related signals like the ones above onto one another, we might be able to intervene in the negative reaction that is building. Of course, as nonverbal cues are layered on, they may contradict other signals, in which case we can turn to context clues to aid our interpretation.

Figure 6.4.2: although cultural patterns exist, people also exhibit idiosyncratic nonverbal behavior, meaning they don't always follow the norms of the group. Image by Nick Fewings on Unsplash.

Read Nonverbal Cues in Context

We can gain insight into how to interpret nonverbal cues through personal contexts. People have idiosyncratic nonverbal behaviors, which create an individual context that varies with each person. Even though we generally fit into certain social and cultural patterns, some people deviate from those norms. For example, some cultures tend toward less touching and greater interpersonal distances during interactions. The United States falls into this general category, but there are people who were socialized into these norms who as individuals deviate from them and touch more and stand closer to others while conversing. As the idiosyncratic communicator inches toward his or her conversational partner, the partner may inch back to reestablish the interpersonal distance norm. Such deviations may lead people to misinterpret sexual or romantic interest or feel uncomfortable. While these actions could indicate such interest, they could also be idiosyncratic. As this example shows, these individual differences can increase the ambiguity of nonverbal communication, but when observed over a period of time, they can actually help us generate meaning. Try to compare observed nonverbal cues to a person's typical or baseline nonverbal behavior to help avoid misinterpretation. In some instances it is impossible to know what sorts of individual nonverbal behaviors or idiosyncrasies people have because there isn't a relational history. In such cases, we have to turn to our knowledge about specific types of nonverbal communication or draw from more general contextual knowledge.

Interpreting Cues within Specific Channels

When nonverbal cues are ambiguous or contextual clues aren't useful in interpreting nonverbal clusters, we may have to look at nonverbal behaviors within specific channels. Keep in mind that the following tips aren't hard and fast rules and are usually more meaningful when adapted according to a specific person or context. In addition, many of the suggestions in the section on encoding competence can be adapted usefully to decoding.

Kinesics

Gestures

- While it doesn't always mean a person is being honest, displaying palms is largely unconsciously encoded and decoded as a sign of openness and truthfulness. Conversely, crossing your arms in front of your chest is decoded almost everywhere as a negative gesture that conveys defensiveness.
- We typically decode people putting their hands in their pocket as a gesture that indicates shyness or discomfort. Men often subconsciously put their hands in their pockets when they don't want to participate in a conversation. But displaying the thumb or thumbs while the rest of the hand is in the pocket is a signal of a dominant or authoritative attitude.
- Nervous communicators may have distracting mannerisms in the form of adaptors that you will likely need to tune out in order to focus more on other verbal and nonverbal cues.

Head Movements and Posture

- The head leaning over and being supported by a hand can typically be decoded as a sign of boredom, the thumb supporting the chin and the index finger touching the head close to the temple or eye as a sign of negative evaluative thoughts, and the chin stroke as a sign that a person is going through a decision-making process. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 155–59.
- In terms of seated posture, leaning back is usually decoded as a sign of informality and indifference, straddling a chair as a sign of dominance (but also some insecurity because the person is protecting the vulnerable front part of his or her body), and leaning forward as a signal of interest and attentiveness.

Eye Contact

- When someone is avoiding eye contact, don't immediately assume they are not listening or are hiding something, especially if you are conveying complex or surprising information. Since looking away also signals cognitive activity, they may be processing information, and you may need to pause and ask if they need a second to think or if they need you to repeat or explain anything more.
- A "sideways glance," which entails keeping the head and face pointed straight ahead while focusing the eyes to the left or right, has multiple contradictory meanings ranging from interest, to uncertainty, to hostility. When the sideways glance is paired with a slightly raised eyebrow or smile, it is sign of interest. When combined with a furrowed brow it generally conveys uncertainty. But add a frown to that mix and it can signal hostility. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 179.

Facial Expressions

- Be aware of discrepancies between facial expressions and other nonverbal gestures and verbal communication. Since facial expressions are often subconscious, they may be an indicator of incongruency within a speaker's message, and you may need to follow up with questions or consider contextual clues to increase your understanding.

Haptics

- Consider the status and power dynamics involved in a touch. In general, people who have or feel they have more social power in a situation typically engage in more touching behaviors with those with less social power. So you may decode a touch from a supervisor differently from the touch of an acquaintance.

Vocalics

- People often decode personality traits from a person's vocal quality. In general, a person's vocal signature is a result of the physiology of his or her neck, head, and mouth. Therefore a nasal voice or a deep voice may not have any relevant meaning within an interaction. Try not to focus on something you find unpleasant or pleasant about someone's voice; focus on the content rather than the vocal quality.

Proxemics

- The size of a person's "territory" often speaks to that person's status. At universities, deans may have suites, department chairs may have large offices with multiple sitting areas, lower-ranked professors may have "cozier" offices stuffed with books and file cabinets, and adjunct instructors may have a shared office or desk or no office space at all.
- Since infringements on others' territory can arouse angry reactions and even lead to violence (think of the countless stories of neighbors fighting over a fence or tree), be sensitive to territorial markers. In secondary and public territories, look for informal markers such as drinks, books, or jackets and be respectful of them when possible.

Personal Presentation and Environment

- Be aware of the physical attractiveness bias, which leads people to sometimes mistakenly equate attractiveness with goodness. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 75. A person's attractive or unattractive physical presentation can lead to irrelevant decoding that is distracting from other more meaningful nonverbal cues.

Detecting Deception

Although people rely on nonverbal communication more than verbal to determine whether or not a person is being deceptive, there is no set profile of deceptive behaviors that you can use to create your own nonverbally based lie detector. Research finds that people generally perceive themselves as good detectors of deception, but when tested people only accurately detect deception at

levels a little higher than what we would by random chance. Given that deception is so widespread and common, it is estimated that we actually only detect about half the lies that we are told, meaning we all operate on false information without even being aware of it. Although this may be disappointing to those of you reading who like to think of yourselves as human lie detectors, there are some forces working against our deception detecting abilities. One such force is the truth bias, which leads us to believe that a person is telling the truth, especially if we know and like that person. Conversely, people who have interpersonal trust issues and people in occupations like law enforcement may also have a lie bias, meaning they assume people are lying to them more often than not. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 293.

It is believed that deceptive nonverbal behaviors result from nonverbal leakage, which refers to nonverbal behaviors that occur as we try to control the cognitive and physical changes that happen during states of cognitive and physical arousal. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 52. Anxiety is a form of arousal that leads to bodily reactions like those we experience when we perceive danger or become excited for some other reason. Some of these reactions are visible, such as increased movements, and some are audible, such as changes in voice pitch, volume, or rate. Other reactions, such as changes in the electrical conductivity of the skin, increased breathing, and increased heart rate, are not always detectable. Polygraph machines, or lie detectors, work on the principle that the presence of signs of arousal is a reliable indicator of deception in situations where other factors that would also evoke such signals are absent.

So the nonverbal behaviors that we associate with deception don't actually stem from the deception but the attempts to control the leakage that results from the cognitive and physiological changes. These signals appear and increase because we are conflicted about the act of deception, since we are conditioned to believe that being honest is better than lying, we are afraid of getting caught and punished, and we are motivated to succeed with the act of deception—in essence, to get away with it. Leakage also occurs because of the increased cognitive demands associated with deception. Our cognitive activity increases when we have to decide whether to engage in deception or not, which often involves some internal debate. If we decide to engage in deception, we then have to compose a fabrication or execute some other manipulation strategy that we think is believable. To make things more complicated, we usually tailor our manipulation strategy to the person to whom we are speaking. In short, lying isn't easy, as it requires us to go against social norms and deviate from our comfortable and familiar communication scripts that we rely on for so much of our interaction. Of course, skilled and experienced deceivers develop new scripts that can also become familiar and comfortable and allow them to engage in deception without arousing as much anxiety or triggering the physical reactions to it.Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 288.

Figure 6.4.3: Unlike the puppet Pinocchio there is no one "tell" that gives away when a person is lying. Image by jackmac34 on Pixabay.

There are certain nonverbal cues that have been associated with deception, but the problem is that these cues are also associated with other behaviors, which could lead you to assume someone is being deceptive when they are actually nervous, guilty, or excited. In general, people who are more expressive are better deceivers and people who are typically anxious are not good liars. Also, people who are better self-monitors are better deceivers, because they are aware of verbal and nonverbal signals that may "give them away" and may be better able to control or account for them. Research also shows that people get better at lying as they get older, because they learn more about the intricacies of communication signals and they also get more time to practice. Peter A.

Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 281. Studies have found that actors, politicians, lawyers, and salespeople are also better liars, because they are generally higher self-monitors and have learned how to suppress internal feelings and monitor their external behaviors.

"Getting Competent" - Deception and Communication Competence

The research on deception and nonverbal communication indicates that heightened arousal and increased cognitive demands contribute to the presence of nonverbal behaviors that can be associated with deception. Remember, however, that these nonverbal behaviors are not solely related to deception and also manifest as a result of other emotional or cognitive states. Additionally, when people are falsely accused of deception, the signs that they exhibit as a result of the stress of being falsely accused are very similar to the signals exhibited by people who are actually engaging in deception.

There are common misconceptions about what behaviors are associated with deception. Behaviors mistakenly linked to deception include longer response times, slower speech rates, decreased eye contact, increased body movements, excessive swallowing, and less smiling. None of these have consistently been associated with deception. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 296. As we've learned, people also tend to give more weight to nonverbal than verbal cues when evaluating the truthfulness of a person or her or his message. This predisposition can lead us to focus on nonverbal cues while overlooking verbal signals of deception. A large study found that people were better able to detect deception by sound alone than they were when exposed to both auditory and visual cues. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 297. Aside from nonverbal cues, also listen for inconsistencies in or contradictions between statements, which can also be used to tell when others are being deceptive. The following are some nonverbal signals that have been associated with deception in research studies, but be cautious about viewing these as absolutes since individual and contextual differences should also be considered.

Gestures

One of the most powerful associations between nonverbal behaviors and deception is the presence of adaptors. Self-touches like wringing hands and object-adaptors like playing with a pencil or messing with clothing have been shown to correlate to deception. Some highly experienced deceivers, however, can control the presence of adaptors. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 284.

Eye contact

Deceivers tend to use more eye contact when lying to friends, perhaps to try to increase feelings of immediacy or warmth, and less eye contact when lying to strangers. A review of many studies of deception indicates that increased eye blinking is associated with deception, probably because of heightened arousal and cognitive activity. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 282–83.

Facial expressions

People can intentionally use facial expressions to try to deceive, and there are five primary ways that this may occur. People may show feelings that they do not actually have, show a higher intensity of feelings than they actually have, try to show no feelings, try to show less feeling than they actually have, or mask one feeling with another.

Vocalics

One of the most common nonverbal signs of deception is speech errors. As you'll recall, verbal fillers and other speech disfluencies are studied as part of vocalics; examples include false starts, stutters, and fillers. Studies also show that an increase in verbal pitch is associated with deception and is likely caused by heightened arousal and tension.

Chronemics

Speech turns are often thought to correspond to deception, but there is no consensus among researchers as to the exact relationship. Most studies reveal that deceivers talk less, especially in response to direct questions. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 283.

1. Studies show that people engage in deception much more than they care to admit. Do you consider yourself a good deceiver? Why or why not? Which, if any, of the nonverbal cues discussed do you think help you deceive others or give you away?
2. For each of the following scenarios, note (1) what behaviors may indicate deception, (2) alternative explanations for the behaviors (aside from deception), and (3) questions you could ask to get more information before making a judgment.

Scenario 1. A politician is questioned by a reporter about allegations that she used taxpayer money to fund personal vacations. She looks straight at the reporter, crosses one leg over the other, and says, “I’ve worked for the people of this community for ten years and no one has ever questioned my ethics until now.” As she speaks, she points her index finger at the politician and uses a stern and clear tone of voice.

Scenario 2. You ask your roommate if you can borrow his car to go pick up a friend from the train station about ten miles away. He says, “Um, well…I had already made plans to go to dinner with Cal and he drove last time so it’s kind of my turn to drive this time. I mean, is there someone else you could ask or someone else who could get her? You know I don’t mind sharing things with you, and I would totally let you, you know, if I didn’t have this thing to do. Sorry.” As he says, “Sorry,” he raises both of his hands, with his palms facing toward you, and shrugs.

Scenario 3. A professor asks a student to explain why he didn’t cite sources for several passages in his paper that came from various websites. The student scratches his head and says, “What do you mean? Those were my ideas. I did look at several websites, but I didn’t directly quote anything so I didn’t think I needed to put the citations in parentheses.” As he says this, he rubs the back of his neck and then scratches his face and only makes minimal eye contact with the professor.

Key Takeaways

- To improve your competence encoding nonverbal messages, increase your awareness of the messages you are sending and receiving and the contexts in which your communication is taking place. Since nonverbal communication is multichannel, it is important to be aware that nonverbal cues can complement, enhance, or contradict each other. Also realize that the norms and expectations for sending nonverbal messages, especially touch and personal space, vary widely between relational and professional contexts.
- To improve your competence decoding nonverbal messages, look for multiple nonverbal cues, avoid putting too much weight on any one cue, and evaluate nonverbal messages in relation to the context and your previous experiences with the other person. Although we put more weight on nonverbal communication than verbal when trying to detect deception, there is no set guide that can allow us to tell whether or not another person is being deceptive.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: As was indicated earlier, research shows that instruction in nonverbal communication can lead people to make gains in their nonverbal communication competence. List some nonverbal skills that you think are important in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.
2. Using concepts from this section, analyze your own nonverbal encoding competence. What are your strengths and weaknesses? Do the same for your nonverbal decoding competence
3. To understand how chronemics relates to nonverbal communication norms, answer the following questions: In what situations is it important to be early? In what situations can you arrive late? How long would you wait on someone you were meeting for a group project for a class? A date? A job interview?

Contributors and Attributions

- Template:ContribCCComm120

6.5: Nonverbal Communication in Context

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in relational contexts.
- Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in professional contexts.
- Provide examples of cultural differences in nonverbal communication.
- Provide examples of gender differences in nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal communication receives less attention than verbal communication as a part of our everyday lives. Learning more about nonverbal communication and becoming more aware of our own and others' use of nonverbal cues can help us be better relational partners and better professionals. In addition, learning about cultural differences in nonverbal communication is important for people traveling abroad but also due to our increasingly multinational business world and the expanding diversity and increased frequency of intercultural communication within our own borders.

Nonverbal Communication in Relational Contexts

A central, if not primary, function of nonverbal communication is the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Further, people who are skilled at encoding nonverbal messages have various interpersonal advantages, including being more popular, having larger social networks consisting of both acquaintances and close friends, and being less likely to be lonely or socially anxious. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," inApplications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 15.

Nonverbal communication increases our expressivity, and people generally find attractive and want to pay more attention to things that are expressive. This increases our chances of initiating interpersonal relationships. Relationships then form as a result of some initial exchanges of verbal and nonverbal information through mutual self-disclosure. As the depth of self-disclosure increases, messages become more meaningful if they are accompanied by congruent nonverbal cues. Impressions formed at this stage of interaction help determine whether or not a relationship will progress. As relationships progress from basic information exchange and the establishment of early interpersonal bonds to more substantial emotional connections, nonverbal communication plays a more central role. As we've learned, nonverbal communication conveys much emotional meaning, so the ability to effectively encode and decode appropriate nonverbal messages sent through facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and touch leads to high-quality interactions that are rewarding for the communicators involved.

Nonverbal communication helps maintain relationships once they have moved beyond the initial stages by helping us communicate emotions and seek and provide social and emotional support. In terms of communicating emotions, competent communicators know when it is appropriate to express emotions and when more self-regulation is needed. They also know how to adjust their emotional expressions to fit various contexts and individuals, which is useful in preventing emotional imbalances within a relationship. Emotional imbalances occur when one relational partner expresses too much emotion in a way that becomes a burden for the other person. Ideally, each person in a relationship is able to express his or her emotions in a way that isn't too taxing for the other person. Occasionally, one relational partner may be going through an extended period of emotional distress, which can become very difficult for other people in his or her life. Since people with nonverbal communication competence are already more likely to have larger social support networks, it is likely that they will be able to spread around their emotional communication, specifically related to negative emotions, in ways that do not burden others. Unfortunately, since people with less nonverbal skill are likely to have smaller social networks, they may end up targeting one or two people for their emotional communication, which could lead the other people to withdraw from the relationship.

Figure 6.5.1: Nonverbal communication allows us to give and request emotional support, which is a key part of relational communication. Image by Lucas Lenzi on Unsplash.

Expressing the need for support is also an important part of relational maintenance. People who lack nonverbal encoding skills may send unclear or subtle cues requesting support that are not picked up on by others, which can lead to increased feelings of loneliness. Skilled encoders of nonverbal messages, on the other hand, are able to appropriately communicate the need for support in recognizable ways. As relationships progress in terms of closeness and intimacy, nonverbal signals become a shorthand form of communicating, as information can be conveyed with a particular look, gesture, tone of voice, or posture. Family members, romantic couples, close friends, and close colleagues can bond over their familiarity with each other's nonverbal behaviors, which creates a shared relational reality that is unique to the relationship.

Nonverbal Communication in Professional Contexts

Surveys of current professionals and managers have found that most report that nonverbal skills are important to their jobs. Peter J. DePaulo, "Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Research in Marketing and Management," Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 63. Although important, there is rarely any training or instruction related to nonverbal communication, and a consistent issue that has been reported by employees has been difficulty with mixed messages coming from managers. Interpreting contradictory verbal and nonverbal messages is challenging in any context and can have negative effects on job satisfaction and productivity. As a supervisor who gives positive and negative feedback regularly and/or in periodic performance evaluations, it is important to be able to match nonverbal signals with the content of the message. For example, appropriate nonverbal cues can convey the seriousness of a customer or coworker complaint, help ease the delivery of constructive criticism, or reinforce positive feedback. Professionals also need to be aware of how context, status, and power intersect with specific channels of nonverbal communication. For example, even casual touching of supervisees, mentees, or employees may be considered condescending or inappropriate in certain situations. A well-deserved pat on the back is different from an unnecessary hand on the shoulder to say hello at the start of a business meeting.

In professional contexts, managers and mentors with nonverbal decoding skills can exhibit sensitivity to others' nonverbal behavior and better relate to employees and mentees. In general, interpreting emotions from nonverbal cues can have interpersonal and professional benefits. One study found that salespeople who were skilled at recognizing emotions through nonverbal cues sold more products and earned higher salaries. Kristin Byron, Sophia Terranova, and Stephen Nowicki Jr., "Nonverbal Emotion Recognition and Salespersons: Linking Ability to Perceived and Actual Success," Journal of Applied Social Psychology 37, no. 11

(2007): 2600–2619. Aside from bringing financial rewards, nonverbal communication also helps create supportive climates. Bosses, supervisors, and service providers like therapists can help create rapport and a positive climate by consciously mirroring the nonverbal communication of their employees or clients. In addition, mirroring the nonverbal communication of others during a job interview, during a sales pitch, or during a performance evaluation can help put the other person at ease and establish rapport. Much of the mirroring we do is natural, so trying to overcompensate may actually be detrimental, but engaging in self-monitoring and making small adjustments could be beneficial. Peter J. DePaulo, "Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Research in Marketing and Management," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 71–73.

You can also use nonverbal communication to bring positive attention to yourself. Being able to nonverbally encode turn-taking cues can allow people to contribute to conversations at relevant times, and getting an idea or a piece of information or feedback in at the right time can help bring attention to your professional competence. Being able to encode an appropriate amount of professionalism and enthusiasm during a job interview can also aid in desired impression formation since people make judgments about others' personalities based on their nonverbal cues. A person who comes across as too enthusiastic may be seen as pushy or fake, and a person who comes across as too relaxed may be seen as unprofessional and unmotivated.

Nonverbal Communication and Culture

As with other aspects of communication, norms for nonverbal communication vary from country to country and also among cultures within a particular country. We've already learned that some nonverbal communication behaviors appear to be somewhat innate because they are universally recognized. Two such universal signals are the "eyebrow flash" of recognition when we see someone we know and the open hand and the palm up gesture that signals a person would like something or needs help. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 271. Smiling is also a universal nonverbal behavior, but the triggers that lead a person to smile vary from culture to culture. The expansion of media, particularly from the United States and other Western countries around the world, is leading to more nonverbal similarities among cultures, but the biggest cultural differences in nonverbal communication occur within the categories of eye contact, touch, and personal space. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 112–13. Next, we will overview some interesting and instructive differences within several channels of nonverbal communication that we have discussed so far. As you read, remember that these are not absolute, in that nonverbal communication like other forms of communication is influenced by context and varies among individuals within a particular cultural group as well.

Kinesics

Cultural variations in the way we gesture, use head movements, and use eye contact fall under the nonverbal category of kinesics.

Gestures

Remember that emblems are gestures that correspond to a word and an agreed-on meaning. When we use our fingers to count, we are using emblematic gestures, but even our way of counting varies among cultures. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 108. I could fairly accurately separate British people and US Americans from French, Greek, and German people based on a simple and common gesture. Let's try this exercise: First, display with your hand the number five. Second, keeping the five displayed, change it to a two. If you are from the United States or Britain you are probably holding up your index finder and your middle finger. If you are from another European country you are probably holding up your thumb and index finger. While Americans and Brits start counting on their index finger and end with five on their thumb, other Europeans start counting on their thumb and end with five on their pinky finger.

Figure 6.5.2: This common gesture for “five” or as a signal to get someone’s attention is called a moutza in Greece and is an insult gesture that means you want to rub excrement in someone’s face. Image by Artem Maltsev on Unsplash.

How you use your hands can also get you into trouble if you’re unaware of cultural differences. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 110–11. For example, the “thumbs up” gesture, as we just learned, can mean “one” in mainland Europe, but it also means “up yours” in Greece (when thrust forward) and is recognized as a signal for hitchhiking or “good,” “good job / way to go,” or “OK” in many other cultures. Two hands up with the palms out can signal “ten” in many Western countries and is recognized as a signal for “I’m telling the truth” or “I surrender” in many cultures. The same gesture, however, means “up yours twice” in Greece. So using that familiar gesture to say you surrender might actually end up escalating rather than ending a conflict if used in Greece.

Pin It

Cross Cultural Awareness Quiz

You can take a cross-cultural awareness quiz here to learn some more interesting cultural variations in gestures.

Head Movements

Bowing is a nonverbal greeting ritual that is more common in Asian cultures than Western cultures, but the head nod, which is a common form of acknowledgement in many cultures, is actually an abbreviated bow. Japan is considered a noncontact culture, which refers to cultural groups in which people stand farther apart while talking, make less eye contact, and touch less during regular interactions. Because of this, bowing is the preferred nonverbal greeting over handshaking. Bows vary based on status, with higher status people bowing the least. For example, in order to indicate the status of another person, a Japanese businessperson may bow deeply. An interesting ritual associated with the bow is the exchange of business cards when greeting someone in Japan. This exchange allows each person to view the other’s occupation and title, which provides useful information about the other’s status and determines who should bow more. Since bowing gives each person a good view of the other person’s shoes, it is very important to have clean shoes that are in good condition, since they play an important part of initial impression formation.

Eye Contact

In some cultures, avoiding eye contact is considered a sign of respect. Such eye contact aversion, however, could be seen as a sign that the other person is being deceptive, is bored, or is being rude. Some Native American nations teach that people should avoid eye contact with elders, teachers, and other people with status. This can create issues in classrooms when teachers are unaware of this norm and may consider a Native American student's lack of eye contact as a sign of insubordination or lack of engagement, which could lead to false impressions that the student is a troublemaker or less intelligent.

Haptics

As we've learned, touch behaviors are important during initial interactions, and cultural differences in these nonverbal practices can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. Shaking hands as a typical touch greeting, for example, varies among cultures. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 114. It is customary for British, Australian, German, and US American colleagues to shake hands when seeing each other for the first time and then to shake again when departing company. In the United States, the colleagues do not normally shake hands again if they see each other again later in the day, but European colleagues may shake hands with each other several times a day. Once a certain level of familiarity and closeness is reached, US American colleagues will likely not even shake hands daily unless engaging in some more formal interaction, but many European colleagues will continue to shake each time they see each other. Some French businesspeople have been known to spend up to thirty minutes a day shaking hands. The squeezes and up-and-down shakes used during handshakes are often called "pumps," and the number of pumps used in a handshake also varies among cultures. Although the Germans and French shake hands more often throughout the day, they typically only give one or two pumps and then hold the shake for a couple seconds before letting go. Brits tend to give three to five pumps, and US Americans tend to give five to seven pumps. This can be humorous to watch at a multinational business event, but it also affects the initial impressions people make of each other. A US American may think that a German is being unfriendly or distant because of his or her single hand pump, while a German may think that a US American is overdoing it with seven.

Contact cultures are cultural groups in which people stand closer together, engage in more eye contact, touch more frequently, and speak more loudly. Italians are especially known for their vibrant nonverbal communication in terms of gestures, volume, eye contact, and touching, which not surprisingly places them in the contact culture category. Italians use hand motions and touching to regulate the flow of conversations, and when non-Italians don't know how to mirror an Italian's non-verbals they may not get to contribute much to the conversation, which likely feeds into the stereotype of Italians as domineering in conversations or over expressive. For example, Italians speak with their hands raised as a way to signal that they are holding the floor for their conversational turn. If their conversational partner starts to raise his or her hands, the Italian might gently touch the other person and keep on talking. Conversational partners often interpret this as a sign of affection or of the Italian's passion for what he or she is saying. In fact, it is a touch intended to keep the partner from raising his or her hands, which would signal that the Italian's conversational turn is over and the other person now has the floor. It has been suggested that in order to get a conversational turn, you must physically grab their hands in midair and pull them down. While this would seem very invasive and rude to northern Europeans and US Americans, it is a nonverbal norm in Italian culture and may be the only way to get to contribute to a conversation. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 115.

Vocalics

The volume at which we speak is influenced by specific contexts and is more generally influenced by our culture. In European countries like France, England, Sweden, and Germany, it is not uncommon to find restaurants that have small tables very close together. In many cases, two people dining together may be sitting at a table that is actually touching the table of another pair of diners. Most US Americans would consider this a violation of personal space, and Europeans often perceive US Americans to be rude in such contexts because they do not control the volume of their conversations more. Since personal space is usually more plentiful in the United States, Americans are used to speaking at a level that is considered loud to many cultures that are used to less personal space. I have personally experienced both sides of this while traveling abroad. One time, my friends and I were asked to leave a restaurant in Sweden because another table complained that we were being loud. Another time, at a restaurant in Argentina, I was disturbed, as were the others dining around me, by a "loud" table of Americans seated on the other side of the dining area. In this case, even though we were also Americans, we were bothered by the lack of cultural awareness being exhibited by the other Americans at the restaurant. These examples show how proxemics and vocalics can combine to make for troubling, but hopefully informative, nonverbal intercultural encounters.

Proxemics

Cultural norms for personal space vary much more than some other nonverbal communication channels such as facial expressions, which have more universal similarity and recognizability. We've already learned that contact and noncontact cultures differ in their preferences for touch and interpersonal distance. Countries in South America and southern Europe exhibit characteristics of contact cultures, while countries in northern Europe and Southeast Asia exhibit noncontact cultural characteristics. Because of the different comfort levels with personal space, a Guatemalan and a Canadian might come away with differing impressions of each other because of proxemic differences. The Guatemalan may feel the Canadian is standoffish, and the Canadian may feel the Guatemalan is pushy or aggressive.

Chronemics

The United States and many northern and western European countries have a monochronic orientation to time, meaning time is seen as a commodity that can be budgeted, saved, spent, and wasted. Events are to be scheduled in advance and have set beginning and ending times. Countries like Spain and Mexico have a polychronic orientation to time. Appointments may be scheduled at overlapping times, making an "orderly" schedule impossible. People may also miss appointments or deadlines without offering an apology, which would be considered very rude by a person with a monochronic orientation to time. People from cultures with a monochronic orientation to time are frustrated when people from polychromic cultures cancel appointments or close businesses for family obligations. Conversely, people from polychromic cultures feel that US Americans, for example, follow their schedules at the expense of personal relationships. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 278.

Nonverbal Communication and Gender

Gender and communication scholar Kathryn Dindia contests the notion that men and women are from different planets and instead uses another analogy. She says men are from South Dakota and women are from North Dakota. Although the states border each other and are similar in many ways, state pride and in-group identifications lead the people of South Dakota to perceive themselves to be different from the people of North Dakota and vice versa. But if we expand our perspective and take the position of someone from California or Illinois, North Dakotans and South Dakotans are pretty much alike. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 106. This comparison is intended to point out that in our daily lives we do experience men and women to be fairly different, but when we look at the differences between men and women compared to the differences between humans and other creatures, men and women are much more similar than different. For example, in terms of nonverbal communication, men and women all over the world make similar facial expressions and can recognize those facial expressions in one another. We use similar eye contact patterns, gestures, and, within cultural groups, have similar notions of the use of time and space. As I will reiterate throughout this book, it's important to understand how gender influences communication, but it's also important to remember that in terms of communication, men and women are about 99 percent similar and 1 percent different.

Kinesics

Although men and women are mostly similar in terms of nonverbal communication, we can gain a better understanding of the role that gender plays in influencing our social realities by exploring some of the channel-specific differences. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 118–21. Within the category of kinesics, we will discuss some gender differences in how men and women use gestures, posture, eye contact, and facial expressions.

Gestures

- Women use more gestures in regular conversation than do men, but men tend to use larger gestures than women when they do use them.
- Men are, however, more likely to use physical adaptors like restless foot and hand movements, probably because girls are socialized to avoid such movements because they are not "ladylike."

Posture

- Men are more likely to lean in during an interaction than are women.
- Women are more likely to have a face-to-face body orientation while interacting than are men.

Women's tendency to use a face-to-face body orientation influences the general conclusion that women are better at sending and receiving nonverbal messages than men. Women's more direct visual engagement during interactions allows them to take in more nonverbal cues, which allows them to better reflect on and more accurately learn from experience what particular nonverbal cues mean in what contexts.

Eye Contact

- In general, women make more eye contact than men. As we learned, women use face-to-face body orientations in conversations more often than men, which likely facilitates more sustained eye contact.
- Overall, women tend to do more looking and get looked at more than men.

Facial Expressions

- Women reveal emotion through facial expressions more frequently and more accurately than men.
- Men are more likely than women to exhibit angry facial expressions.

Men are often socialized to believe it is important to hide their emotions. This is especially evident in the case of smiling, with women smiling more than men. This also contributes to the stereotype of the more emotionally aware and nurturing woman, since people tend to like and view as warmer others who show positive emotion. Gender socialization plays a role in facial displays as girls are typically rewarded for emotional displays, especially positive ones, and boys are rewarded when they conceal emotions—for instance, when they are told to "suck it up," "take it like a man," or "show sportsmanship" by not gloating or celebrating openly.

Haptics

- Although it is often assumed that men touch women more than women touch men, this hasn't been a consistent research finding. In fact, differences in touch in cross-gender interactions are very small.
- Women do engage in more touching when interacting with same-gender conversational partners than do men.
- In general, men tend to read more sexual intent into touch than do women, who often under interpret sexual intent. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 125.

There is a touch taboo for men in the United States. In fact, research supports the claim that men's aversion to same-gender touching is higher in the United States than in other cultures, which shows that this taboo is culturally relative. For example, seeing two adult men holding hands in public in Saudi Arabia would signal that the men are close friends and equals, but it wouldn't signal that they are sexually attracted to each other. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 274. The touch taboo also extends to cross-gender interactions in certain contexts. It's important to be aware of the potential interpretations of touch, especially as they relate to sexual and aggressive interpretations.

Vocalics

- Women are socialized to use more vocal variety, which adds to the stereotype that women are more expressive than men.
- In terms of pitch, women tend more than men to end their sentences with an upward inflection of pitch, which implies a lack of certainty, even when there isn't.

A biological difference between men and women involves vocal pitch, with men's voices being lower pitched and women's being higher. Varying degrees of importance and social meaning are then placed on these biological differences, which lead some men and women to consciously or unconsciously exaggerate the difference. Men may speak in a lower register than they would naturally and women may speak in more soft, breathy tones to accentuate the pitch differences. These ways of speaking often start as a conscious choice after adolescence to better fit into socially and culturally proscribed gender performances, but they can become so engrained that people spend the rest of their lives speaking in a voice that is a modified version of their natural tone.

Proxemics

- Men are implicitly socialized to take up as much space as possible, and women are explicitly socialized to take up less space.
- In terms of interpersonal distance, research shows that women interact in closer proximity to one another than do men.
- Men do not respond as well as women in situations involving crowding. High-density environments evoke more negative feelings from men, which can even lead to physical violence in very crowded settings.

Men are generally larger than women, which is a biological difference that gains social and cultural meaning when certain behaviors and norms are associated with it. For example, women are told to sit in a "ladylike" way, which usually means to cross

and/or close their legs and keep their limbs close to their body. Men, on the other hand, sprawl out in casual, professional, and formal situations without their use of space being reprimanded or even noticed in many cases.

If you'll recall our earlier discussion of personal space, we identified two subzones within the personal zone that extends from 1.5 to 4 feet from our body. Men seem to be more comfortable with casual and social interactions that are in the outer subzone, which is 2.5 to 4 feet away, meaning men prefer to interact at an arm's length from another person. This also plays into the stereotypes of women as more intimate and nurturing and men as more distant and less intimate.

Figure 6.5.3: Men's displays of intimacy are often different from women's due to gender socialization that encourages females' expressions of intimacy and discourages males'. Image by Anna Vander Stel on Unsplash.

Self-Presentation

- Men and women present themselves differently, with women, in general, accentuating their physical attractiveness more and men accentuating signs of their status and wealth more.
- Men and women may engage in self-presentation that exaggerates existing biological differences between male and female bodies.

Most people want to present themselves in ways that accentuate their attractiveness, at least in some situations where impression management is important to fulfill certain instrumental, relational, or identity needs. Gender socialization over many years has influenced how we present ourselves in terms of attractiveness. Research shows that women's physical attractiveness is more important to men than men's physical attractiveness is to women. Women do take physical attractiveness into account, but a man's social status and wealth has been shown to be more important.

Men and women also exaggerate biological and socially based sex and gender differences on their own. In terms of biology, men and women's bodies are generally different, which contributes to the nonverbal area related to personal appearance. Many men and women choose clothing that accentuates these bodily differences. For example, women may accentuate their curves with specific clothing choices and men may accentuate their size—for example, by wearing a suit with shoulder padding to enhance the appearance of broad shoulders. These choices vary in terms of the level of consciousness at which they are made. Men are also hairier than women, and although it isn't always the case and grooming varies by culture, many women shave their legs and remove body hair while men may grow beards or go to great lengths to reverse baldness to accentuate these differences. Of course, the more recent trend of "manscaping" now has some men trimming or removing body hair from their chests, arms, and/or legs.

Key Takeaways

- A central function of nonverbal communication is the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Nonverbal communication helps initiate relationships through impression management and self-disclosure and then helps maintain relationships as it aids in emotional expressions that request and give emotional support.
- Professionals indicate that nonverbal communication is an important part of their jobs. Organizational leaders can use nonverbal decoding skills to tell when employees are under stress and in need of support and can then use encoding skills to exhibit nonverbal sensitivity. Nonverbal signals can aid in impression management in professional settings, such as in encoding an appropriate amount of enthusiasm and professionalism.

- Although some of our nonverbal signals appear to be more innate and culturally universal, many others vary considerably among cultures, especially in terms of the use of space (proxemics), eye contact (oculesics), and touch (haptics). Rather than learning a list of rules for cultural variations in nonverbal cues, it is better to develop more general knowledge about how nonverbal norms vary based on cultural values and to view this knowledge as tools that can be adapted for use in many different cultural contexts.
- In terms of gender, most of the nonverbal differences between men and women are exaggerations of biological differences onto which we have imposed certain meanings and values. Men and women's nonverbal communication, as with other aspects of communication, is much more similar than different. Research has consistently found, however, that women gesture, make eye contact, touch and stand close to same-gender conversational partners, and use positive facial expressions more than men.

Exercises

1. Identify some nonverbal behaviors that would signal a positive interaction on a first date and on a job interview. Then identify some nonverbal behaviors that would signal a negative interaction in each of those contexts.
2. Discuss an experience where you have had some kind of miscommunication or misunderstanding because of cultural or gender differences in encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. What did you learn in this chapter that could help you in similar future interactions?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Leadership and Leadership Theories

7.1: Leadership Theories

Learning Objectives

- Define and describe traits, situational, context-based, and transformative leadership theories.

There are many perspectives on leadership, but they generally fall into four main categories: leadership traits, situational or context-based leadership, functional leadership, and transformational leadership. Let's examine each in turn.

The first approach we'll consider is the oldest of all: universal leadership traits, or the view that there are inherent traits, that may be part of a person from birth as in talents, or acquired skills that express those in-born traits, that are somehow universal or constant across contexts and cultures. It is a significant challenge to even begin to consider the many contexts where leadership might be displayed, and so instead of focusing on the context, in this view we focus on the individual and his or her traits. Some studiesBass, B. (1981). Traits of Leadership: A follow-up to 1970. In R.M. Stogdill (ed.), Handbook of Leadership. New York: Free Press, pp. 73–96., Baker, D. (1990). A qualitative and quantitative analysis of verbal style and the elimination of potential leaders in small groups. Small Group Research, 38, pp. 13–26. have indicated that people in leadership possess the following ten traits as shown in Table 7.1.1 "Universal Leadership Traits".

Table 7.1.1: Universal Leadership Traits

	Trait	Explanation	Example
1	Achievement Orientation	A clear focus on achievement	She consistently makes time in her busy schedule for her school work. She is focused on completing her degree.
2	Adaptability	The ability to adapt to the context, including constraints or resources, to be successful	She understands the challenges of running a household and raising children on a budget, and still makes her studies a priority.
3	Energy	The ability to devote time, concentration, and effort to a challenge	Even though she is tired in the evening she makes time, after the children have gone to bed, to complete her studies each night.
4	Intelligence	The ability to perceive, understand, formulate a response to, and implement a plan of action to solve a challenge	There are never enough hours in the day, but she understands the challenges, sets priorities, and consistently gets the job done.
5	Innovation	The ability to perceive alternate plans of action to achieve similar or improved results	She understands the challenge and finds a faster, more efficient way to get the job done.
6	Persistence	The ability to persevere, or to stick with a challenge until it is solved.	She consistently completes her work on time, has completed all of her classes to date successfully, and is on track to graduate as planned.

	Trait	Explanation	Example
7	Responsibility	The ability to respond and the awareness of duty, obligation, or commitment to solve a challenge	She knows she has the ability to respond to the many challenges, recognizes the importance of a university degree to herself and her children, and completed her obligations.
8	Self-confidence	The confidence in one's ability to solve a challenge	She knows she can do it.
9	Sociability	The ability to interact with others effectively	She can work in groups effectively, even with challenging members.
10	Verbal Communication Ability	The ability to articulate effectively, or express one's thoughts, ideas, or opinions in ways that others can understand them with minimal or no miscommunication	She can express herself effectively. People understand her when she speaks.

As we review these terms we can observe many of them in ourselves and others in daily life. Are leaders those who possess all ten traits? Are these ten traits the only traits that represent leadership? No on both counts. Leaders may possess or exhibit some or all of these traits, but not all the time in every context. In addition, what we consider leadership in one context might be considered insubordination in another. Cultures vary as to their expectations for leaders and what traits they must possess, and we learn culture from each other. We are not born with it. We learn to communicate from and with each other. We are not built with an innate ability to communicate and our surroundings, including those who model behaviors for us, influence how we communicate with ourselves and others. If we are raised in a community where people take responsibility for their challenges and work together to solve them, we are more likely to model that behavior. If we are raised in a community that looks to an institution or an individual to solve problems for them, we are more likely to expect our problems to be solved for us. Since we can see that our environment influences our communication, our culture, and these traits, let's examine alternatives as we continue to explore the concept of leadership.

Our second approach to leadership shifts the focus or attention from the individual to the context, or situation. As we discussed previously, this makes for a significant challenge. How can we assess the myriad of situation factors at any given moment in time? In reality we cannot, but we can make the concerted effort to limit the factors we consider and explore the influence of context on our behaviors, including those associated with leadership within a specific cultural framework.

Situational leadership, or leadership in context, means that leadership itself depends on the situation at hand. In sharp contrast to the "natural born leader," "universal leadership traits" model of leadership we previously discussed, this viewpoint is relativist. Leadership is relative, or varies, based on the context. There is no one "universal trait" to which we can point or principle to which we can observe in action. There is no style of leadership that is more or less effective than another unless we consider the context. Then our challenge presents itself: how to match the most effective leadership strategy with the current context?

In order to match leadership strategies and context we first need to discuss the range of strategies as well as the range of contexts. While the strategies list may not be as long as we might imagine, the context list could go on forever. If we were able to accurately describe each context, and discuss each factor, we would quickly find the task led to more questions, more information, and the complexity would increase, making an accurate description or discussion impossible. Instead, we can focus our efforts on factors that each context contains and look for patterns, or common trends, that help us make generalizations about our observations.

For example, an emergency situation may require a leader to be direct, giving specific order to each person. Since each second counts the quick thinking and actions at the direction of a leader may be the most effective strategy. To stop and discuss, vote, or check everyone's feelings on the current emergency situation may waste valuable time. That same approach applied to common governance or law-making may indicate a dictator is in charge, and that individuals and their vote are of no consequence. Instead an effective leader in a democratic process may ask questions, gather view points, and seek common ground as lawmakers craft a law that applies to everyone equally.

Hersey and Blanchard Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977). Management of Organizational Behavior 3rd Edition—Utilizing Human Resources. New Jersey/Prentice Hall. take the situational framework and apply to an organizational perspective that reflects our emphasis on group communication. They assert that, in order to be an effective manager, one needs to change their leadership style based on the context, including the maturity of the people they are leading and the task details. Hersey and Blanchard Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977). Management of Organizational Behavior 3rd Edition—Utilizing Human Resources. New Jersey/Prentice Hall. focus on two key issues: tasks and relationships, and present the idea that we can to a greater or lesser degree focus on one or the other to achieve effective leadership in a given context. They offer four distinct leadership styles or strategies (abbreviated with an "S"):

1. **Telling (S1)**. Leaders tell people what to do and how to do it.
2. **Selling (S2)**. Leaders provide direction, information, and guidance, but sell their message to gain compliance among group members.
3. **Participating (S3)**. Leaders focus on the relationships with group members and shares decision-making responsibilities with them.
4. **Delegating (S4)**. Leaders focus on relationships, rely on professional expertise or group member skills, and monitor progress. They allow group members to more directly responsible for individual decisions but may still participate in the process.

Telling and selling strategies are all about getting the task done. Participating and delegating styles are about developing relationships and empowering group members to get the job done. Each style or approach is best suited, according to Hersey and Blanchard, Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977). Management of Organizational Behavior 3rd Edition—Utilizing Human Resources. New Jersey/Prentice Hall. to a specific context. Again, assessing a context can be a challenging task but they indicate the focus should be on the maturity of the group members. It is a responsibility of the leader to assess the group members and the degree to which they possess the maturity to work independently or together effective, including whether they have the right combination of skills and abilities that the task requires. Once again, they offer us four distinct levels (abbreviated with "M" for maturity):

1. **M1, or level one**. This is the most basic level where group members lack the skills, prior knowledge, skills, or self-confidence to accomplish the task effectively. They need specific directions, and systems of rewards and punishment (for failure) may be featured. They will need external motivation from the leader to accomplish the task.
2. **M2, or level two**. At this level the group members may possess the motivation, or the skills and abilities, but not both. They may need specific, additional instructions or may require external motivation to accomplish the task.
3. **M3, or level three**. In this level we can observe group members who are ready to accomplish the task, are willing to participate, but may lack confidence or direct experience, requiring external reinforcement and some supervision.
4. **M4, or level four**. Finally we can observe group members that are ready, prepared, willing, and confident in their ability to solve the challenge or complete the task. They require little supervision.

Now it is our task to match the style or leadership strategy to the maturity level of the group members as shown in Table 7.1.2 "Situational Leadership: Leadership Style and Maturity Level".

Table 7.1.2: Situational Leadership: Leadership Style and Maturity Level

	Leadership Style (S)	Maturity Level (M)
1	S1	M1
2	S2	M2
3	S3	M3
4	S4	M4

This is one approach to situational leadership that applies to our exploration of group communication, but it doesn't represent all approaches. What other factors might you consider other than style and maturity? How might we assess diversity, for example, in this approach? We might have a skilled professional who speaks English as their second language, and who comes from a culture where constant supervision is viewed as controlling or domineering, and if a leader takes a S1 approach to provide leadership, we can anticipate miscommunication and even frustration. There is no "One Size Fits All" leadership approach that works for every context, but the situational leadership viewpoint reminds us of the importance of being in the moment and assessing our surroundings, including our group members and their relative strengths and areas of emerging skill. The effective group

communicator recognizes the Hersey-Blanchard approach provides insight and possible solutions to consider, but also keeps the complexity of the context in mind when considering a course of action.

Our third approach to consider is called functional leadership, or leadership that focused on behaviors that address needs and help the group achieve its goals. Hackman, J. R., & Walton, R. E. (1986). Leading groups in organizations. In P. S. Goodman (Ed.), Designing effective work groups (pp. 72–119). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass., McGrath, J. E. (1962). Leadership behavior: Some requirements for leadership training. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Civil Service Commission., Adair, J. (1988). Effective Leadership. London. Pan Books., Kouzes, J. M. and Posner, B. Z. (2002). The leadership challenge. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. The leader needs to assess needs, including task, team, and individual group member needs. Balance and performance are emphasized, and the time the leader spends on a specific approach varies based on their assessment of the area of need. The highest priority is completion of the task in this approach, but it is balanced against team and individual group member needs. Each activity or approach targets each area of need, and the leader focuses on it emphasize the area, alternating their time on any given activity based on the existing needs.

Table 7.1.3: Functional Leadership

	Task Need	Team Need	Individual Need
1	Assessing the situation	Training	Training and Coaching
2	Understanding the task	Building team spirit	Recognizing individual skills and abilities; leveraging them on the task
3	Preparing the plan to address the task	Focus on the mission; sense of purpose	Focus on the mission; sense of purpose
4	Implementing the plan addressing the task	Motivation, praise, and rewards	Motivation, praise, and rewards
5	Allocating time and resources to the task	Focus on the tempo or pace of performance	Fostering interdependence while respecting individual performance, including roles and tasks
6	Re-evaluating the plan and making adjustments	Status recognition or performance acknowledgement	Status recognition or performance acknowledgement
7	Understanding Quality Standards	Discipline, including sanctions and punishment	Attending to personal problems
8	Quality control	Quality Control	Individual output
9	Evaluating outcomes	Redirection, review of the action plan	Individual role and task review
10	Sharing the outcomes (Communication)	Facilitating group interactions (Communication)	Individual interaction (Communication)

As we can see in Table 7.1.3 "Functional Leadership", the functional leader focuses on the short and long term needs of the group. If the group is lost, perhaps time invested in re-evaluating the plan and making adjustments, meeting a task and a team need at the same time, might prove effective. If an individual group member is struggling, perhaps supportive coaching and even additional training might yield results. Based on the leader's assessment of the needs, they will select the appropriate action and maintain a priority order. They will also be constantly attuned to change, ready to adapt and meet the ever-changing needs of the task, team, or individual.

Our final approach to consider, called transformational leadership, emphasizes the vision, mission, motivations, and goals of a group or team and motivates them to accomplish the task or achieve the result. This model of leadership asserts that people will follow a person who inspires them, who clearly communicates their vision with passion, and helps get things done with energy and enthusiasm.

James MacGregor Burns, a presidential biographer, first introduced the concept, discussing the dynamic relationship between the leader and the followers, as they together motivate and advance towards the goal or objective. Burns contributed to his theory, suggesting there are four key components of transformation leadership, as shown in Table 7.1.4 "Four Key Components of Transformational Leadership".

Table 7.1.4: Four Key Components of Transformational Leadership

	Component of Transformational Leadership	Explanation
1	Intellectual Stimulation	Transformational leaders encourage creativity and ingenuity, challenging the status quo and encouraging followers to explore new approaches and opportunities.
2	Individualized Consideration	Transformational Leaders recognize and celebrate each follower's unique contributions to the group.
3	Inspirational Motivation	Transformational Leaders communicate a clear vision, helping followers understand the individual steps necessary to accomplish the task or objective while sharing in the anticipation of completion.
4	Idealized Influence	Transformational Leaders serve as role models, demonstrating expertise, skills, and talent that others seek to emulate, inspiring positive actions while reinforcing trust and respect.

The leader conveys the group's goals and aspirations, displays passion for the challenge that lies ahead, and demonstrates a contagious enthusiasm that motivates group members to succeed. This approach focuses on the positive changes that need to occur in order for the group to be successful, and requires the leader to be energetic and involved with the process, even helping individual members complete their respective roles or tasks.

In this section we have discussed leadership traits, situational leadership, functional leadership, and finally transformative leadership theories. We can recognize that there are no universal traits associated with leadership, but there are traits that are associated with it that we develop across time through our experiences. We can also recognize that the context or situation makes a significant impact on leadership, and matching the situation to the leadership approach requires skill and expertise. Every challenge is unique in some way, and the effective leader can recognize that aligning their actions and support with the needs of the group makes sense. The functional perspective requires a leader to assess task needs, group needs, and individual needs, and then devote time, energy, and resources to them in priority order. Finally, a transformative leadership approach involves an articulate leader with a clear vision that is shared with energy and enthusiasm with followers, encouraging them to embrace the steps required as well as the end goal, objective, or mission result. Each approach offers us a viewpoint to consider as we approach leadership in teams, and all serve as important insights into how to better lead an effective group.

Key Takeaway

Leadership traits, situational leadership, functional leadership, and transformative leadership comprise four key approaches to leadership theory.

Exercises

1. Do you think natural leaders exist? Why or why not? Discuss your thoughts with classmates.
2. Describe a transformative leader that you know or have known in the past. How did they act and what did they do that was inspirational? Write a 2–3 paragraph discussion of your experience and share it with a classmate.
3. Think of a leader you admire and respect. Which approach do they best represent (traits, situational, functional, or transformative) and why? How would you characterize this leader's style and why? Please share your observations with your classmates.

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7.2: Contemporary Approaches to Leadership

Learning Objectives

- Learn about the difference between transformational and transactional leaders.
- Find out about charismatic leadership and how it relates to leader performance.
- Describe how high-quality leader-subordinate relationships develop.
- Define servant leadership and evaluate its potential for leadership effectiveness.
- Define authentic leadership and evaluate its potential for leadership effectiveness.

In 7.1 we discussed the fundamentals of leadership. This section provides a more contemporary look at what leadership theories make the greatest contributions to today's business environment? In this section, we will review the most recent developments in the field of leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theory is a recent addition to the literature, but more research has been conducted on this theory than all the contingency theories combined. The theory distinguishes between transformational and transactional leaders. Transformational leaders lead employees by aligning employee goals with the leader's goals. Thus, employees working for transformational leaders start focusing on the company's well-being rather than on what is best for them as individual employees. However, transactional leaders ensure that employees demonstrate the right behaviors because the leader provides resources in exchange.

Transformational leaders have four tools in their possession, which they use to influence employees and create commitment to the company goals. First, transformational leaders are charismatic. Charisma refers to behaviors leaders demonstrate that inspire confidence, commitment, and admiration toward the leader. Charismatic individuals have a "magnetic" personality that is appealing to followers. Leaders such as Barack Obama, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Mahatma Gandhi, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (founder of the Republic of Turkey), and Winston Churchill are viewed as charismatic. Second, transformational leaders use inspirational motivation or come up with a vision that is inspiring to others. Third is the use of intellectual stimulation, which means that they challenge organizational norms and status quo, and they encourage employees to think creatively and work harder. Finally, they use individualized consideration, which means that they show personal care and concern for the well-being of their followers. Examples of transformational business leaders include Steve Jobs of Apple; Lee Iacocca, who transformed Chrysler in the 1980s; and Jack Welch, who was the CEO of General Electric for 20 years. Each of these leaders is charismatic and is held responsible for the turnarounds of their companies.

While transformational leaders rely on their charisma, persuasiveness, and personal appeal to change and inspire their companies, transactional leaders use three other methods. Contingent rewards mean rewarding employees for their accomplishments. Active management by exception involves leaving employees to do their jobs without interference, but at the same time proactively predicting potential problems and preventing them from occurring. Passive management by exception is similar in that it involves leaving employees alone, but in this method, the manager waits until something goes wrong before coming to the rescue.

Which leadership style do you think is more effective, transformational or transactional? Research shows that transformational leadership is a powerful influence over leader effectiveness as well as employee satisfaction. In fact, transformational leaders increase the intrinsic motivation of their followers, build more effective relationships with employees, increase performance and creativity of their followers, increase team performance, and create higher levels of commitment to organizational change efforts. However, except for passive management by exception, the transactional leadership styles are also effective, and they also have positive influences over leader performance as well as employee attitudes. To maximize their effectiveness, leaders are encouraged to demonstrate both transformational and transactional styles. They should also monitor themselves to avoid demonstrating passive management by exception or leaving employees to their own devices until problems arise.

Why is transformational leadership more effective? The key factor may be trust. Trust is the belief that the leader will show integrity, fairness, and predictability in his or her dealings with others. Research shows that when leaders demonstrate transformational leadership behaviors, followers are more likely to trust the leader. The tendency to trust in transactional leaders is substantially lower. Because transformational leaders express greater levels of concern for people's well-being, and appeal to people's values, followers are more likely to believe that the leader has a trustworthy character.

Is transformational leadership genetic? Some people assume that charisma is something people are born with. You either have charisma or you don't. However, research does not support this idea. We must acknowledge that there is a connection between some personality traits and charisma. Specifically, people who have a neurotic personality tend to demonstrate lower levels of charisma, and people who are extraverted tend to have higher levels of charisma. However, personality explains only around 10% of the variance in charisma.A large body of research has shown that it is possible to train people to increase their charisma and increase their transformational leadership.

Figure 7.2.1: Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of Turkish Republic and its first president, is known as a charismatic leader. He is widely admired and respected in Turkey and around the world. His picture appears in all schools, state buildings, denominations of Turkish lira, and in many people's homes in Turkey. Image is in the public domain.

Even if charisma may be teachable, a more fundamental question remains: is it really needed? Charisma is only one element of transformational leadership and leaders can be effective without charisma. In fact, charisma has a dark side. For every charismatic hero such as Lee Iacocca, Steve Jobs, and Virgin's Sir Richard Branson, there are charismatic personalities who harmed their organizations or nations, such as Adolph Hitler of Germany and Jeff Skilling of Enron. Leadership experts warn that when organizations are in a crisis, a board of directors or hiring manager may turn to heroes who they hope will save the organization and sometimes hire people who have no other particular qualifications outside of perceived charisma.

An interesting study shows that when companies have performed well, their CEOs are perceived as charismatic, but CEO charisma has no relation to the future performance of a company. So, what we view as someone's charisma may be largely because of their association with a successful company, and the success of a company depends on a large set of factors, including industry effects and historical performance. While it is true that charismatic leaders may sometimes achieve great results, the search for charismatic leaders under all circumstances may be irrational.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory proposes that the type of relationship leaders have with their followers (members of the organization) is the key to understanding how leaders influence employees. Leaders form different types of relationships with their employees. In high-quality LMX relationships, the leader forms a trust-based relationship with the member. The leader and member like each other, help each other when needed, and respect one another. In these relationships, the leader and the member are both ready to go above and beyond their job descriptions to promote the other's ability to succeed. In contrast, in low-quality LMX relationships, the leader and the member have lower levels of trust, liking, and respect toward each other. These relationships do not have to involve actively disliking each other, but the leader and member do not go beyond their formal job descriptions in their exchanges. In other words, the member does his or her job, the leader provides rewards and punishments, and the relationship does not involve high levels of loyalty or obligation toward each other.

Figure 7.2.2: Factors Contributing to the Development of a High-Quality Leader-Member Exchange. Image by Trudi Radtke is under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

If you have work experience, you may have witnessed the different types of relationships managers form with their employees. In fact, many leaders end up developing differentiated relationships with their followers. Within the same work group, they may have in-group members who are close to them and out-group members who are more distant. If you have ever been in a high-quality LMX relationship with your manager, you may attest to its advantages. Research shows that high-quality LMX members are more satisfied with their jobs, more committed to their companies, have higher levels of clarity about what is expected of them, and perform at a higher level. Because of all the help, support, and guidance they receive, those employees who have a good relationship with the manager are in a better position to perform well. Given all they receive, these employees are motivated to reciprocate to the manager, and therefore they demonstrate higher levels of citizenship behaviors such as helping the leader and coworkers. Being in a high-quality LMX relationship is also advantageous because a high-quality relationship is a buffer against many stressors, such as being a misfit in a company, having personality traits that do not match job demands, and having unmet expectations. The list of benefits high-quality LMX employees receive is long, and it is not surprising that these employees are less likely to leave their jobs.

The problem, of course, is that not all employees have a high-quality relationship, and those who are in the leader's out-group may suffer as a result. But how do you end up developing such a high-quality relationship with the leader? That seems to depend on many factors. Managers can help develop such a high-quality and trust-based relationship by treating their employees in a fair and dignified manner. They can also test to see whether the employee is trustworthy by delegating certain tasks when the employee first starts working with the manager. Employees also have an active role in developing the relationship. Employees can seek feedback to improve their performance, be open to learning new things on the job, and engage in political behaviors such as flattery.

Interestingly, high performance on the employee's part does not seem to be enough to develop a high-quality exchange with the leader. Instead, interpersonal factors such as personality similarity and liking are more powerful influences over how the relationship develops. Finally, the relationship development occurs in a slightly different manner in different types of companies; corporate culture matters in how leaders develop these relationships. In performance-oriented cultures, how the leader distributes rewards seem to be the relevant factor, whereas in people-oriented cultures, whether the leader treats people with dignity is more relevant.

Should you worry if you do not have a high-quality relationship with your manager? One problem in a low-quality exchange is that you may not have access to the positive work environment available to the high-quality LMX members. Second, low LMX employees may feel that their situation is unfair. Even when their objective performance does not warrant it, those who have a good relationship with the leader tend to receive positive performance appraisals. Moreover, they are more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt. For example, when they succeed, the manager is more likely to think that they succeeded because they put forth a lot of effort and they had high abilities, whereas for low LMX members who perform objectively well, the manager is less likely to think so. In other words, the leader may interpret the same situation differently, depending on which employee is involved and may reward low LMX employees less even when they are performing well. In short, those with a low-quality relationship with the leader may experience a work environment that may not be very supportive or fair.

Despite its negative consequences, we cannot say that all employees want to have a high-quality relationship with the leader. Some employees may genuinely dislike the leader and may not value the rewards in the leader's possession. If the leader is not well liked in the company and is known as abusive or unethical, being close to such a person may imply guilt by association. For employees who have no interest in advancing their careers in the current company (such as a student employee who is working in retail but has no interest in retail as a career), having a low-quality exchange may afford the opportunity to just do one's job without having to go above and beyond these job requirements. Finally, not all leaders are equally capable of influencing their employees by having a good relationship with their employees: It also depends on the power and influence of the leader in the overall company and how the leader himself or herself is treated within the company. Leaders who are more powerful will have more to share with employees who are close to them.

What LMX theory implies for leaders is that one way of influencing employees is through the types of relationships leaders form with their employees. These relationships develop naturally because of the work-related and personal interactions between the manager and the employee. Because they occur naturally, some leaders may not be aware of the power that lies in them. These relationships have an important influence over employee attitudes and behaviors. In the worst case, they have the potential to create a negative work environment characterized by favoritism and unfairness. Therefore, managers are advised to be aware of how they build these relationships; put forth effort in cultivating these relationships consciously; be open to forming good relationships to people from all backgrounds regardless of their permanent characteristics such as sex, race, age, or disability status; and prevent these relationships from leading to an unfair work environment.

Self-Assessment: Rate Your LMX

Answer the following questions using 1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = fully agree

1. _____ I like my supervisor very much as a person.
2. _____ My supervisor is the kind of person one would like to have as a friend.
3. _____ My supervisor is a lot of fun to work with.
4. _____ My supervisor defends my work actions to a superior, even without complete knowledge of the issue in question.
5. _____ My supervisor would come to my defense if I were "attacked" by others.
6. _____ My supervisor would defend me to others in the organization if I made an honest mistake.
7. _____ I do work for my supervisor that goes beyond what is specified in my job description.
8. _____ I am willing to apply extra efforts, beyond those normally required, to further the interests of my work group.
9. _____ I do not mind working my hardest for my supervisor.
10. _____ I am impressed with my supervisor's knowledge of his/her job.
11. _____ I respect my supervisor's knowledge of and competence on the job.
12. _____ I admire my supervisor's professional skills.

Scoring:

Add your score for 1, 2, 3 = _____ This is your score on the Liking factor of LMX.

A score of 3 to 4 indicates a low LMX in terms of liking. A score of 5 to 6 indicates an average LMX in terms of liking. A score of 7+ indicates a high-quality LMX in terms of liking.

Add your score for 4, 5, 6 = _____ This is your score on the Loyalty factor of LMX.

A score of 3 to 4 indicates a low LMX in terms of loyalty. A score of 5 to 6 indicates an average LMX in terms of loyalty. A score of 7+ indicates a high-quality LMX in terms of loyalty.

Add your score for 7, 8, 9 = _____ This is your score on the Contribution factor of LMX.

A score of 3 to 4 indicates a low LMX in terms of contribution. A score of 5 to 6 indicates an average LMX in terms of contribution. A score of 7+ indicates a high-quality LMX in terms of contribution.

Add your score for 10, 11, 12 = _____ This is your score on the Professional Respect factor of LMX.

A score of 3 to 4 indicates a low LMX in terms of professional respect. A score of 5 to 6 indicates an average LMX in terms of professional respect. A score of 7+ indicates a high-quality LMX in terms of professional respect.

Servant Leadership

The early 21st century has been marked by a series of highly publicized corporate ethics scandals: between 2000 and 2003, we witnessed Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Andersen, Qwest, and Global Crossing shake investor confidence in corporations and leaders. The importance of ethical leadership and keeping long-term interests of stakeholders in mind is becoming more widely acknowledged.

Servant leadership approach defines the leader's role as serving the needs of others. According to this approach, the primary mission of the leader is to develop employees and help them reach their goals. Servant leaders put their employees first, understand their personal needs and desires, empower them, and help them develop in their careers. Unlike mainstream management approaches, the overriding objective in servant leadership is not necessarily getting employees to contribute to organizational goals. Instead, servant leaders feel an obligation to their employees, customers, and the external community. Employee happiness is seen as an end in itself, and servant leaders sometimes sacrifice their own well-being to help employees succeed. In addition to a clear focus on having a moral compass, servant leaders are also interested in serving the community. In other words, their efforts to help others are not restricted to company insiders, and they are genuinely concerned about the broader community surrounding their company.

Even though servant leadership has some overlap with other leadership approaches such as transformational leadership, its explicit focus on ethics, community development, and self-sacrifice are distinct characteristics of this leadership style. Research shows that servant leadership has a positive effect on employee commitment, employee citizenship behaviors toward the community (such as participating in community volunteering), and job performance. Leaders who follow the servant leadership approach create a climate of fairness in their departments, which leads to higher levels of interpersonal helping behavior. Servant leadership is a tough transition for many managers who are socialized to put their own needs first, be driven by success, and tell people what to do. In fact, many of today's corporate leaders are not known for their humility! However, leaders who have adopted this approach attest to its effectiveness. David Wolfskehl, of Action Fast Print in New Jersey, founded his printing company when he was 24. He marks the day he started asking employees what he can do for them as the beginning of his company's new culture. In the next two years, his company increased its productivity by 30%.

Authentic Leadership

Leaders have to be a lot of things to a lot of people. They operate within different structures, work with different types of people, and they have to be adaptable. At times, it may seem that a leader's smartest strategy would be to act as a social chameleon, changing his or her style whenever doing so seems advantageous. But this would lose sight of the fact that effective leaders have to stay true to themselves. The authentic leadership approach embraces this value: its key advice is "be yourself." Think about it: We all have different backgrounds, different life experiences, and different role models. These trigger events over the course of our lifetime that shape our values, preferences, and priorities. Instead of trying to fit into societal expectations about what a leader should be like, act like, or look like, authentic leaders derive their strength from their own past experiences. Thus, one key characteristic of authentic leaders is that they are self-aware. They are introspective, understand where they are coming from, and have a thorough understanding of their own values and priorities. Second, they are not afraid to act the way they are. In other words, they have high levels of personal integrity. They say what they think. They behave in a way consistent with their values—they practice what they preach. Instead of trying to imitate other great leaders, they find their style in their own personality and life experiences.

One example of an authentic leader is Martin Luther King Jr., one of the leaders of the American civil rights movement. Dr. King led by example and was not afraid to practice what he preached, even to the point of being arrested for his message of equality.

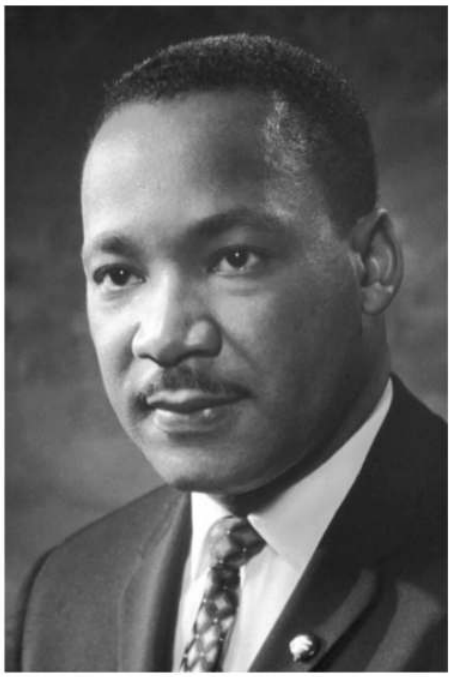

Figure 7.2.3: An example of an authentic leader is Martin Luther King Jr., the great civil rights leader. Martin Luther understood that quality leadership required humility, intelligence, self-confidence, self-awareness, and determination. Image is in the public domain.

Authentic leadership requires understanding oneself. Therefore, in addition to self-reflection, feedback from others is needed to gain a true understanding of one's behavior and effect on others. Authentic leadership is viewed as a potentially influential style because individuals are more likely to trust such a leader. Moreover, working for authentic leaders is likely to lead to greater levels of satisfaction, performance, and overall well-being on the part of employees. Best-selling author Jim Collins studied companies that had, in his opinion, gone from good to great, and he found they had one thing in common. All of these companies had what he calls Level 5 leaders who build organizations through their personal humility and professional will. He notes that Level 5 leaders are modest and understated. In many ways, they can be seen as truly authentic leaders.

Key Takeaway

Contemporary approaches to leadership include transformational leadership, leader-member exchange, servant leadership, and authentic leadership. The transformational leadership approach highlights the importance of leader charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration as methods of influence. Its counterpart is the transactional leadership approach, in which the leader focuses on getting employees to achieve organizational goals. According to leader-member exchange (LMX) approach, the unique, trust-based relationships leaders develop with employees is the key to leadership effectiveness. Recently, leadership scholars started to emphasize the importance of serving others and adopting a customer-oriented view in leadership; another recent focus is on the importance of being true to oneself as a leader. While each leadership approach focuses on a different element of leadership, effective leaders will need to change their style based on the demands of the situation as well as using their own values and moral compass.

Exercises

1. What are the characteristics of transformational leaders? Are transformational leaders more effective than transactional leaders?
2. What is charisma? What are the advantages and disadvantages of charismatic leadership? Should organizations look for charismatic leaders when selecting managers?
3. What are the differences (if any) between a leader having a high-quality exchange with employees and being friends with employees?
4. What does it mean to be a servant leader? Do you know any leaders whose style resembles servant leaders? What are the advantages of adopting such a leadership style?
5. What does it mean to be an authentic leader? How would such a style be developed?

Contributors and Attributions

- Template:ContribCCComm120

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: Problem Solving - Standard Agenda

Thumnbail: www.pexels.com/photo/woman-in-gray-long-sleeve-shirt-sitting-beside-woman-in-blue-long-sleeve-shirt-3860809/

8.1: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the common components and characteristics of problems.
- Explain the five steps of the group problem-solving process.
- Describe the brainstorming and discussion that should take place before the group makes a decision.
- Compare and contrast the different decision-making techniques.
- Discuss the various influences on decision making.

Although the steps of problem solving and decision making that we will discuss next may seem obvious, we often don't think to or choose not to use them. Instead, we start working on a problem and later realize we are lost and have to backtrack. I'm sure we've all reached a point in a project or task and had the "OK, now what?" moment. I've recently taken up some carpentry projects as a functional hobby, and I have developed a great respect for the importance of advanced planning. It's frustrating to get to a crucial point in building or fixing something only to realize that you have to unscrew a support board that you already screwed in, have to drive back to the hardware store to get something that you didn't think to get earlier, or have to completely start over. In this section, we will discuss the group problem-solving process, methods of decision making, and influences on these processes.

Group Problem Solving

The problem-solving process involves thoughts, discussions, actions, and decisions that occur from the first consideration of a problematic situation to the goal. The problems that groups face are varied, but some common problems include budgeting funds, raising funds, planning events, addressing customer or citizen complaints, creating or adapting products or services to fit needs, supporting members, and raising awareness about issues or causes.

Problems of all sorts have three common components:

1. **An undesirable situation**. When conditions are desirable, there isn't a problem.
2. **A desired situation**. Even though it may only be a vague idea, there is a drive to better the undesirable situation. The vague idea may develop into a more precise goal that can be achieved, although solutions are not yet generated.
3. **Obstacles between undesirable and desirable situation**. These are things that stand in the way between the current situation and the group's goal of addressing it. This component of a problem requires the most work, and it is the part where decision making occurs. Some examples of obstacles include limited funding, resources, personnel, time, or information. Obstacles can also take the form of people who are working against the group, including people resistant to change or people who disagree.

Discussion of these three elements of a problem helps the group tailor its problem-solving process, as each problem will vary. While these three general elements are present in each problem, the group should also address specific characteristics of the problem. Five common and important characteristics to consider are task difficulty, number of possible solutions, group member interest in problem, group member familiarity with problem, and the need for solution acceptance. Katherine Adams and Gloria G. Galanes, Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 222–23.

1. **Task difficulty**. Difficult tasks are also typically more complex. Groups should be prepared to spend time researching and discussing a difficult and complex task in order to develop a shared foundational knowledge. This typically requires individual work outside of the group and frequent group meetings to share information.
2. **Number of possible solutions**. There are usually multiple ways to solve a problem or complete a task, but some problems have more potential solutions than others. Figuring out how to prepare a beach house for an approaching hurricane is fairly complex and difficult, but there are still a limited number of things to do—for example, taping and boarding up windows; turning off water, electricity, and gas; trimming trees; and securing loose outside objects. Other problems may be more creatively based. For example, designing a new restaurant may entail using some standard solutions but could also entail many different types of innovation with layout and design.
3. **Group member interest in problem**. When group members are interested in the problem, they will be more engaged with the problem-solving process and invested in finding a quality solution. Groups with high interest in and knowledge about the problem may want more freedom to develop and implement solutions, while groups with low interest may prefer a leader who provides structure and direction.

4. **Group familiarity with problem**. Some groups encounter a problem regularly, while other problems are more unique or unexpected. A family who has lived in hurricane alley for decades probably has a better idea of how to prepare its house for a hurricane than does a family that just recently moved from the Midwest. Many groups that rely on funding have to revisit a budget every year, and in recent years, groups have had to get more creative with budgets as funding has been cut in nearly every sector. When group members aren't familiar with a problem, they will need to do background research on what similar groups have done and may also need to bring in outside experts.
5. **Need for solution acceptance**. In this step, groups must consider how many people the decision will affect and how much "buy-in" from others the group needs in order for their solution to be successfully implemented. Some small groups have many stakeholders on whom the success of a solution depends. Other groups are answerable only to themselves. When a small group is planning on building a new park in a crowded neighborhood or implementing a new policy in a large business, it can be very difficult to develop solutions that will be accepted by all. In such cases, groups will want to poll those who will be affected by the solution and may want to do a pilot implementation to see how people react. Imposing an excellent solution that doesn't have buy-in from stakeholders can still lead to failure.

Figure 8.1.1: To find group cohesion observe a marching band. Everyone works together and knows their role, acting in unison they make music that inspires their team. Image by Katrina Berban on Unsplash.

Group Problem-Solving Process

There are several variations of similar problem-solving models based on US American scholar John Dewey's reflective thinking process. Ernest G. Bormann and Nancy C. Bormann, Effective Small Group Communication, 4th ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Burgess CA, 1988), 112–13. As you read through the steps in the process, think about how you can apply what we learned regarding the general and specific elements of problems. Some of the following steps are straightforward, and they are things we would logically do when faced with a problem. However, taking a deliberate and systematic approach to problem solving has been shown to benefit group functioning and performance. A deliberate approach is especially beneficial for groups that do not have an established history of working together and will only be able to meet occasionally. Although a group should attend to each step of the process, group leaders or other group members who facilitate problem solving should be cautious not to dogmatically follow each element

of the process or force a group along. Such a lack of flexibility could limit group member input and negatively affect the group's cohesion and climate.

Step 1: Define the Problem

Define the problem by considering the three elements shared by every problem: the current undesirable situation, the goal or more desirable situation, and obstacles in the way. Katherine Adams and Gloria G. Galanes, Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 229. At this stage, group members share what they know about the current situation, without proposing solutions or evaluating the information. Here are some good questions to ask during this stage: What is the current difficulty? How did we come to know that the difficulty exists? Who/what is involved? Why is it meaningful/urgent/important? What have the effects been so far? What, if any, elements of the difficulty require clarification? At the end of this stage, the group should be able to compose a single sentence that summarizes the problem called a problem statement. Avoid wording in the problem statement or question that hints at potential solutions. A small group formed to investigate ethical violations of city officials could use the following problem statement: "Our state does not currently have a mechanism for citizens to report suspected ethical violations by city officials."

Step 2: Analyze the Problem

During this step a group should analyze the problem and the group's relationship to the problem. Whereas the first step involved exploring the "what" related to the problem, this step focuses on the "why." At this stage, group members can discuss the potential causes of the difficulty. Group members may also want to begin setting out an agenda or timeline for the group's problem-solving process, looking forward to the other steps. To fully analyze the problem, the group can discuss the five common problem variables discussed before. Here are two examples of questions that the group formed to address ethics violations might ask: Why doesn't our city have an ethics reporting mechanism? Do cities of similar size have such a mechanism? Once the problem has been analyzed, the group can pose a problem question that will guide the group as it generates possible solutions. "How can citizens report suspected ethical violations of city officials and how will such reports be processed and addressed?" As you can see, the problem question is more complex than the problem statement, since the group has moved on to more in-depth discussion of the problem during step 2.

Step 3: Generate Possible Solutions

During this step, group members generate possible solutions to the problem. Again, solutions should not be evaluated at this point, only proposed and clarified. The question should be what could we do to address this problem, not what should we do to address it. It is perfectly OK for a group member to question another person's idea by asking something like "What do you mean?" or "Could you explain your reasoning more?" Discussions at this stage may reveal a need to return to previous steps to better define or more fully analyze a problem. Since many problems are multifaceted, it is necessary for group members to generate solutions for each part of the problem separately, making sure to have multiple solutions for each part. Stopping the solution-generating process prematurely can lead to groupthink. For the problem question previously posed, the group would need to generate solutions for all three parts of the problem included in the question. Possible solutions for the first part of the problem (How can citizens report ethical violations?) may include "online reporting system, e-mail, in-person, anonymously, on-the-record," and so on. Possible solutions for the second part of the problem (How will reports be processed?) may include "daily by a newly appointed ethics officer, weekly by a nonpartisan nongovernment employee," and so on. Possible solutions for the third part of the problem (How will reports be addressed?) may include "by a newly appointed ethics commission, by the accused's supervisor, by the city manager," and so on.

Step 4: Evaluate Solutions

During this step, solutions can be critically evaluated based on their credibility, completeness, and worth. Once the potential solutions have been narrowed based on more obvious differences in relevance and/or merit, the group should analyze each solution based on its potential effects—especially negative effects. Groups that are required to report the rationale for their decision or whose decisions may be subject to public scrutiny would be wise to make a set list of criteria for evaluating each solution. Additionally, solutions can be evaluated based on how well they fit with the group's charge and the abilities of the group. To do this, group members may ask, "Does this solution live up to the original purpose or mission of the group?" and "Can the solution actually be implemented with our current resources and connections?" and "How will this solution be supported, funded, enforced, and assessed?" Secondary tensions and substantive conflict, two concepts discussed earlier, emerge during this step of problem solving, and group members will need to employ effective critical thinking and listening skills.

Decision making is part of the larger process of problem solving and it plays a prominent role in this step. While there are several fairly similar models for problem solving, there are many varied decision-making techniques that groups can use. For example, to narrow the list of proposed solutions, group members may decide by majority vote, by weighing the pros and cons, or by discussing them until a consensus is reached. There are also more complex decision-making models like the “six hats method,” which we will discuss later. Once the final decision is reached, the group leader or facilitator should confirm that the group is in agreement. It may be beneficial to let the group break for a while or even to delay the final decision until a later meeting to allow people time to evaluate it outside of the group context.

Step 5: Implement and Assess the Solution

Implementing the solution requires some advanced planning, and it should not be rushed unless the group is operating under strict time restraints or delay may lead to some kind of harm. Although some solutions can be implemented immediately, others may take days, months, or years. As was noted earlier, it may be beneficial for groups to poll those who will be affected by the solution as to their opinion of it or even to do a pilot test to observe the effectiveness of the solution and how people react to it. Before implementation, groups should also determine how and when they would assess the effectiveness of the solution by asking, “How will we know if the solution is working or not?” Since solution assessment will vary based on whether or not the group is disbanded, groups should also consider the following questions: If the group disbands after implementation, who will be responsible for assessing the solution? If the solution fails, will the same group reconvene or will a new group be formed?

Figure 8.1.2: Once a solution has been reached and the group has the “green light” to implement it, it should proceed deliberately and cautiously, making sure to consider possible consequences and address them as needed. Image by Harshal Desai on Unsplash.

Certain elements of the solution may need to be delegated out to various people inside and outside the group. Group members may also be assigned to implement a particular part of the solution based on their role in the decision making or because it connects to their area of expertise. Likewise, group members may be tasked with publicizing the solution or “selling” it to a particular group of stakeholders. Last, the group should consider its future. In some cases, the group will get to decide if it will stay together and continue working on other tasks or if it will disband. In other cases, outside forces determine the group’s fate.

"Getting Competent" - Problem Solving and Group Presentations

Giving a group presentation requires that individual group members and the group as a whole solve many problems and make many decisions. Although having more people involved in a presentation increases logistical difficulties and has the potential to create more conflict, a well-prepared and well-delivered group presentation can be more engaging and effective than a typical presentation. The main problems facing a group giving a presentation are (1) dividing responsibilities, (2) coordinating schedules and time management, and (3) working out the logistics of the presentation delivery.

In terms of dividing responsibilities, assigning individual work at the first meeting and then trying to fit it all together before the presentation (which is what many college students do when faced with a group project) is not the recommended method. Integrating content and visual aids created by several different people into a seamless final product takes time and effort, and the person "stuck" with this job at the end usually ends up developing some resentment toward his or her group members. While it's OK for group members to do work independently outside of group meetings, spend time working together to help set up some standards for content and formatting expectations that will help make later integration of work easier. Taking the time to complete one part of the presentation together can help set those standards for later individual work. Discuss the roles that various group members will play openly so there isn't role confusion. There could be one point person for keeping track of the group's progress and schedule, one point person for communication, one point person for content integration, one point person for visual aids, and so on. Each person shouldn't do all that work on his or her own but help focus the group's attention on his or her specific area during group meetings. Chaunce Stanton, "How to Deliver Group Presentations: The Unified Team Approach," Six Minutes Speaking and Presentation Skills, November 3, 2009, accessed August 28, 2012, http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/group-presentations-unified-team-approach.

Scheduling group meetings is one of the most challenging problems groups face, given people's busy lives. From the beginning, it should be clearly communicated that the group needs to spend considerable time in face-to-face meetings, and group members should know that they may have to make an occasional sacrifice to attend. Especially important is the commitment to scheduling time to rehearse the presentation. Consider creating a contract of group guidelines that includes expectations for meeting attendance to increase group members' commitment.

Group presentations require members to navigate many logistics of their presentation. While it may be easier for a group to assign each member to create a five-minute segment and then transition from one person to the next, this is definitely not the most engaging method. Creating a master presentation and then assigning individual speakers creates a more fluid and dynamic presentation and allows everyone to become familiar with the content, which can help if a person doesn't show up to present and during the question-and-answer section. Once the content of the presentation is complete, figure out introductions, transitions, visual aids, and the use of time and space. Chaunce Stanton, "How to Deliver Group Presentations: The Unified Team Approach," Six Minutes Speaking and Presentation Skills, November 3, 2009, accessed August 28, 2012, http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/group-presentations-unified-team-approach. In terms of introductions, figure out if one person will introduce all the speakers at the beginning, if speakers will introduce themselves at the beginning, or if introductions will occur as the presentation progresses. In terms of transitions, make sure each person has included in his or her speaking notes when presentation duties switch from one person to the next. Visual aids have the potential to cause hiccups in a group presentation if they aren't fluidly integrated. Practicing with visual aids and having one person control them may help prevent this. Know how long your presentation is and know how you're going to use the space. Presenters should know how long the whole presentation should be and how long each of their segments should be so that everyone can share the responsibility of keeping time. Also consider the size and layout of the presentation space. You don't want presenters huddled in a corner until it's their turn to speak or trapped behind furniture when their turn comes around.

1. Of the three main problems facing group presenters, which do you think is the most challenging and why?
2. Why do you think people tasked with a group presentation (especially students) prefer to divide the parts up and have members work on them independently before coming back together and integrating each part? What problems emerge from this method? In what ways might developing a master presentation and then assigning parts to different speakers be better than the more divided method? What are the drawbacks to the master presentation method?

Decision Making in Groups

We all engage in personal decision making daily, and we all know that some decisions are more difficult than others. When we make decisions in groups, we face some challenges that we do not face in our personal decision making, but we also stand to benefit from some advantages of group decision making. Rodney W. Napier and Matti K. Gershenfeld, Groups: Theory and

Experience, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 292. Group decision making can appear fair and democratic but really only be a gesture that covers up the fact that certain group members or the group leader have already decided. Group decision making also takes more time than individual decisions and can be burdensome if some group members do not do their assigned work, divert the group with self-centered or unproductive role behaviors, or miss meetings. Conversely, though, group decisions are often more informed, since all group members develop a shared understanding of a problem through discussion and debate. The shared understanding may also be more complex and deep than what an individual would develop, because the group members are exposed to a variety of viewpoints that can broaden their own perspectives. Group decisions also benefit from synergy, one of the key advantages of group communication that we discussed earlier. Most groups do not use a specific method of decision making, perhaps thinking that they'll work things out as they go. This can lead to unequal participation, social loafing, premature decisions, prolonged discussion, and a host of other negative consequences. So in this section we will learn some practices that will prepare us for good decision making and some specific techniques we can use to help us reach a final decision.

Brainstorming before Decision Making

Before groups can make a decision, they need to generate possible solutions to their problem. The most commonly used method is brainstorming, although most people don't follow the recommended steps of brainstorming. As you'll recall, brainstorming refers to the quick generation of ideas free of evaluation. The originator of the term brainstorming said the following four rules must be followed for the technique to be effective:

1. Evaluation of ideas is forbidden.
2. Wild and crazy ideas are encouraged.
3. Quantity of ideas, not quality, is the goal.
4. New combinations of ideas presented are encouraged.

To make brainstorming more of a decision-making method rather than an idea-generating method, group communication scholars have suggested additional steps that precede and follow brainstorming.

1. **Do a warm-up brainstorming session**. Some people are more apprehensive about publicly communicating their ideas than others are, and a warm-up session can help ease apprehension and prime group members for task-related idea generation. The warm-up can be initiated by anyone in the group and should only go on for a few minutes. To get things started, a person could ask, "If our group formed a band, what would we be called?" or "What other purposes could a mailbox serve?" In the previous examples, the first warm up gets the group's more abstract creative juices flowing, while the second focuses more on practical and concrete ideas.
2. **Do the actual brainstorming session**. This session shouldn't last more than thirty minutes and should follow the four rules of brainstorming mentioned previously. To ensure that the fourth rule is realized, the facilitator could encourage people to piggyback off each other's ideas.
3. **Eliminate duplicate ideas**. After the brainstorming session is over, group members can eliminate (without evaluating) ideas that are the same or very similar.
4. **Clarify, organize, and evaluate ideas**. Before evaluation, see if any ideas need clarification. Then try to theme or group ideas together in some orderly fashion. Since "wild and crazy" ideas are encouraged, some suggestions may need clarification. If it becomes clear that there isn't really a foundation to an idea and that it is too vague or abstract and can't be clarified, it may be eliminated. As a caution though, it may be wise to not throw out off-the-wall ideas that are hard to categorize and to instead put them in a miscellaneous or "wild and crazy" category.

Discussion before Decision Making

The nominal group technique guides decision making through a four-step process that includes idea generation and evaluation and seeks to elicit equal contributions from all group members. Andre L. Delbecq and Andrew H. Ven de Ven, "A Group Process Model for Problem Identification and Program Planning," The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 7, no. 4 (1971): 466–92. This method is useful because the procedure involves all group members systematically, which fixes the problem of uneven participation during discussions. Since everyone contributes to the discussion, this method can also help reduce instances of social loafing. To use the nominal group technique, do the following:

1. Silently and individually list ideas.
2. Create a master list of ideas.
3. Clarify ideas as needed.
4. Take a secret vote to rank group members' acceptance of ideas.

During the first step, have group members work quietly, in the same space, to write down every idea they have to address the task or problem they face. This shouldn't take more than twenty minutes. Whoever is facilitating the discussion should remind group members to use brainstorming techniques, which means they shouldn't evaluate ideas as they are generated. Ask group members to remain silent once they've finished their list so they do not distract others.

During the second step, the facilitator goes around the group in a consistent order asking each person to share one idea at a time. As the idea is shared, the facilitator records it on a master list that everyone can see. Keep track of how many times each idea comes up, as that could be an idea that warrants more discussion. Continue this process until all the ideas have been shared. As a note to facilitators, some group members may begin to edit their list or self-censor when asked to provide one of their ideas. To limit a person's apprehension with sharing his or her ideas and to ensure that each idea is shared, I have asked group members to exchange lists with someone else so they can share ideas from the list they receive without fear of being personally judged.

During step three, the facilitator should note that group members can now ask for clarification on ideas on the master list. Do not let this discussion stray into evaluation of ideas. To help avoid an unnecessarily long discussion, it may be useful to go from one person to the next to ask which ideas need clarifying and then go to the originator(s) of the idea in question for clarification.

During the fourth step, members use a voting ballot to rank the acceptability of the ideas on the master list. If the list is long, you may ask group members to rank only their top five or so choices. The facilitator then takes up the secret ballots and reviews them in a random order, noting the rankings of each idea. Ideally, the highest ranked idea can then be discussed and decided on. The nominal group technique does not carry a group all the way through to the point of decision; rather, it sets the group up for a roundtable discussion or use of some other method to evaluate the merits of the top ideas.

Specific Decision-Making Techniques

Some decision-making techniques involve determining a course of action based on the level of agreement among the group members. These methods include majority, expert, authority, and consensus rule. Table 8.1 reviews the pros and cons of each of these methods.

Figure 8.1.3: Majority rule is a simple method of decision making based on voting. In most cases a majority is considered half plus one. Image by Element5 Digital on Unsplash.

Majority rule is a commonly used decision-making technique in which a majority (one-half plus one) must agree before a decision is made. A show-of-hands vote, a paper ballot, or an electronic voting system can determine the majority choice. Many decision-making bodies, including the US House of Representatives, Senate, and Supreme Court, use majority rule to make decisions, which shows that it is often associated with democratic decision making, since each person gets one vote and each vote counts equally. Of course, other individuals and mediated messages can influence a person's vote, but since the voting power is spread out over all group members, it is not easy for one person or party to take control of the decision-making process. In some cases—for example, to override a presidential veto or to amend the constitution—a super majority of two-thirds may be required to make a decision.

Minority rule is a decision-making technique in which a designated authority or expert has final say over a decision and may or may not consider the input of other group members. When a designated expert makes a decision by minority rule, there may be buy-in from others in the group, especially if the members of the group didn't have relevant knowledge or expertise. When a designated authority makes decisions, buy-in will vary based on group members' level of respect for the authority. For example, decisions made by an elected authority may be more accepted by those who elected him or her than by those who didn't. As with majority rule, this technique can be time saving. Unlike majority rule, one person or party can have control over the decision-making process. This type of decision making is more similar to that used by monarchs and dictators. An obvious negative consequence of this method is that the needs or wants of one person can override the needs and wants of the majority. A minority deciding for the majority has led to negative consequences throughout history. The white Afrikaner minority that ruled South Africa for decades instituted apartheid, which was a system of racial segregation that disenfranchised and oppressed the majority population. The quality of the decision and its fairness really depends on the designated expert or authority.

Consensus rule is a decision-making technique in which all members of the group must agree on the same decision. On rare occasions, a decision may be ideal for all group members, which can lead to unanimous agreement without further debate and discussion. Although this can be positive, be cautious that this isn't a sign of groupthink. More typically, consensus is reached only after lengthy discussion. On the plus side, consensus often leads to high-quality decisions due to the time and effort it takes to get everyone in agreement. Group members are also more likely to be committed to the decision because of their investment in reaching it. On the negative side, the ultimate decision is often one that all group members can live with but not one that's ideal for all members. Additionally, the process of arriving at consensus also includes conflict, as people debate ideas and negotiate the interpersonal tensions that may result.

Table 8.1.1: Pros and Cons of Agreement-Based Decision-Making Techniques

Decision-Making Technique	Pros	Cons
Majority rule	• Quick • Efficient in large groups • Each vote counts equally	• Close decisions (5–4) may reduce internal and external "buy-in" • Doesn't take advantage of group synergy to develop alternatives that more members can support • Minority may feel alienated
Minority rule by expert	• Quick • Decision quality is better than what less knowledgeable people could produce • Experts are typically objective and less easy to influence	• Expertise must be verified • Experts can be difficult to find / pay for • Group members may feel useless
Minority rule by authority	• Quick • Buy-in could be high if authority is respected	• Authority may not be seen as legitimate, leading to less buy-in • Group members may try to sway the authority or compete for his or her attention • Unethical authorities could make decisions that benefit them and harm group members

Decision-Making Technique	Pros	Cons
Consensus rule	• High-quality decisions due to time invested • Higher level of commitment because of participation in decision • Satisfaction with decision because of shared agreement	• Time consuming • Difficult to manage idea and personal conflict that can emerge as ideas are debated • Decision may be OK but not ideal

"Getting Critical" - Six Hats Method of Decision Making

Edward de Bono developed the Six Hats method of thinking in the late 1980s, and it has since become a regular feature in decision-making training in business and professional contexts. Edward de Bono, Six Thinking Hats (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1985). The method's popularity lies in its ability to help people get out of habitual ways of thinking and to allow group members to play different roles and see a problem or decision from multiple points of view. The basic idea is that each of the six hats represents a different way of thinking, and when we figuratively switch hats, we switch the way we think. The hats and their style of thinking are as follows:

- **White hat**. Objective—focuses on seeking information such as data and facts and then processes that information in a neutral way.
- **Red hat**. Emotional—uses intuition, gut reactions, and feelings to judge information and suggestions.
- **Black hat**. Negative—focuses on potential risks, points out possibilities for failure, and evaluates information cautiously and defensively.
- **Yellow hat**. Positive—is optimistic about suggestions and future outcomes, gives constructive and positive feedback, points out benefits and advantages.
- **Green hat**. Creative—tries to generate new ideas and solutions, thinks "outside the box."
- **Blue hat**. Philosophical—uses meta-communication to organize and reflect on the thinking and communication taking place in the group, facilitates who wears what hat and when group members change hats.

Specific sequences or combinations of hats can be used to encourage strategic thinking. For example, the group leader may start off wearing the Blue Hat and suggest that the group start their decision-making process with some "White Hat thinking" in order to process through facts and other available information. During this stage, the group could also process through what other groups have done when faced with a similar problem. Then the leader could begin an evaluation sequence starting with two minutes of "Yellow Hat thinking" to identify potential positive outcomes, then "Black Hat thinking" to allow group members to express reservations about ideas and point out potential problems, then "Red Hat thinking" to get people's gut reactions to the previous discussion, then "Green Hat thinking" to identify other possible solutions that are more tailored to the group's situation or completely new approaches. At the end of a sequence, the Blue Hat would want to summarize what was said and begin a new sequence. To successfully use this method, the person wearing the Blue Hat should be familiar with different sequences and plan some of the thinking patterns ahead of time based on the problem and the group members. Each round of thinking should be limited to a certain time frame (two to five minutes) to keep the discussion moving.

1. This decision-making method has been praised because it allows group members to "switch gears" in their thinking and allows for role playing, which lets people express ideas more freely. How can this help enhance critical thinking? Which combination of hats do you think would be best for a critical thinking sequence?
2. What combinations of hats might be useful if the leader wanted to break the larger group up into pairs and why? For example, what kind of thinking would result from putting Yellow and Red together, Black and White together, or Red and White together, and so on?
3. Based on your preferred ways of thinking and your personality, which hat would be the best fit for you? Which would be the most challenging? Why?

Influences on Decision Making

Many factors influence the decision-making process. For example, how might a group's independence or access to resources affect the decisions they make? What potential advantages and disadvantages come with decisions made by groups that are more or less similar in terms of personality and cultural identities? In this section, we will explore how situational, personality, and cultural influences affect decision making in groups.

Situational Influences on Decision Making

A group's situational context affects decision making. One key situational element is the degree of freedom that the group has to make its own decisions, secure its own resources, and initiate its own actions. Some groups have to go through multiple approval processes before they can do anything, while others are self-directed, self-governing, and self-sustaining. Another situational influence is uncertainty. In general, groups deal with more uncertainty in decision making than do individuals because of the increased number of variables that comes with adding more people to a situation. Individual group members can't know what other group members are thinking, whether or not they are doing their work, and how committed they are to the group. So the size of a group is a powerful situational influence, as it adds to uncertainty and complicates communication.

Access to information also influences a group. First, the nature of the group's task or problem affects its ability to get information. Group members can more easily make decisions about a problem when other groups have similarly experienced it. Even if the problem is complex and serious, the group can learn from other situations and apply what it learns. Second, the group must have access to flows of information. Access to archives, electronic databases, and individuals with relevant experience is necessary to obtain any relevant information about similar problems or to do research on a new or unique problem. In this regard, group members' formal and information network connections also become important situational influences.

Figure 8.1.4: The urgency of a decision can have a major influence on the decision-making process. As a situation becomes more urgent, it requires more specific decision-making methods and types of communication. Image by Judith E. Bell is under a CC-BYSA 2.0 license.

The origin and urgency of a problem are also situational factors that influence decision making. In terms of origin, problems usually occur in one of four ways:

1. **Something goes wrong**. Group members must decide how to fix or stop something. Example—a firehouse crew finds out that half of the building is contaminated with mold and must be closed down.
2. **Expectations change or increase**. Group members must innovate more efficient or effective ways of doing something. Example—a firehouse crew finds out that the district they are responsible for is being expanded.
3. **Something goes wrong and expectations change or increase**. Group members must fix/stop and become more efficient/effective. Example—the firehouse crew has to close half the building and must start responding to more calls due to the expanding district.
4. **The problem existed from the beginning**. Group members must go back to the origins of the situation and walk through and analyze the steps again to decide what can be done differently. Example—a firehouse crew has consistently had to work with minimal resources in terms of building space and firefighting tools.

In each of the cases, the need for a decision may be more or less urgent depending on how badly something is going wrong, how high the expectations have been raised, or the degree to which people are fed up with a broken system. Decisions must be made in situations ranging from crisis level to mundane.

Personality Influences on Decision Making

A long-studied typology of value orientations that affect decision making consists of the following types of decision maker: the economic, the aesthetic, the theoretical, the social, the political, and the religious.

- The economic decision maker makes decisions based on what is practical and useful.
- The aesthetic decision maker makes decisions based on form and harmony, desiring a solution that is elegant and in sync with the surroundings.
- The theoretical decision maker wants to discover the truth through rationality.
- The social decision maker emphasizes the personal impact of a decision and sympathizes with those who may be affected by it.
- The political decision maker is interested in power and influence and views people and/or property as divided into groups that have different value.
- The religious decision maker seeks to identify with a larger purpose, works to unify others under that goal, and commits to a viewpoint, often denying one side and being dedicated to the other.

In the United States, economic, political, and theoretical decision making tend to be more prevalent decision-making orientations, which likely corresponds to the individualistic cultural orientation with its emphasis on competition and efficiency. But situational context, as we discussed before, can also influence our decision making.

The personalities of group members, especially leaders and other active members, affect the climate of the group. Group member personalities can be categorized based on where they fall on a continuum anchored by the following descriptors: dominant/submissive, friendly/unfriendly, and instrumental/emotional. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Groups: Theory, Practice, Skills, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), 139. The more group members there are in any extreme of these categories, the more likely that the group climate will also shift to resemble those characteristics.

- **Dominant versus submissive**. Group members that are more dominant act more independently and directly, initiate conversations, take up more space, make more direct eye contact, seek leadership positions, and take control over decision-making processes. More submissive members are reserved, contribute to the group only when asked to, avoid eye contact, and leave their personal needs and thoughts unvoiced or give into the suggestions of others.
- **Friendly versus unfriendly**. Group members on the friendly side of the continuum find a balance between talking and listening, don't try to win at the expense of other group members, are flexible but not weak, and value democratic decision making. Unfriendly group members are disagreeable, indifferent, withdrawn, and selfish, which leads them to either not invest in decision making or direct it in their own interest rather than in the interest of the group.
- **Instrumental versus emotional**. Instrumental group members are emotionally neutral, objective, analytical, task-oriented, and committed followers, which leads them to work hard and contribute to the group's decision making as long as it is orderly and follows agreed-on rules. Emotional group members are creative, playful, independent, unpredictable, and expressive, which leads them to make rash decisions, resist group norms or decision-making structures, and switch often from relational to task focus.

Cultural Context and Decision Making

Just like neighborhoods, schools, and countries, small groups vary in terms of their degree of similarity and difference. Demographic changes in the United States and increases in technology that can bring different people together make it more likely that we will be interacting in more and more heterogeneous groups. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 5. Some small groups are more homogenous, meaning the members are more similar, and some are more heterogeneous, meaning the members are more different. Diversity and difference within groups has advantages and disadvantages. In terms of advantages, research finds that, in general, groups that are culturally heterogeneous have better overall performance than more homogenous groups. Beth Bonniwell Haslett and Jenn Ruebush, "What Differences Do Individual Differences in Groups Make?: The Effects of Individuals, Culture, and Group Composition," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 133. Additionally, when group members have time to get to know each other and competently communicate across their differences, the advantages of diversity include better decision making due to different perspectives. David C. Thomas, "Cultural Diversity and Work Group Effectiveness: An Experimental Study," Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 30, no. 2 (1999): 242–63. Unfortunately, groups often operate under time constraints and other pressures that make the possibility for intercultural dialogue and understanding difficult. The main disadvantage of heterogeneous groups is the possibility for conflict, but given that all groups experience conflict, this isn't solely due to the presence of diversity. We will now look more specifically at how some of the cultural value orientations we've learned

about already in this book can play out in groups with international diversity and how domestic diversity in terms of demographics can also influence group decision making.

International Diversity in Group Interactions

Cultural value orientations such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, and high-/low-context communication styles all manifest on a continuum of communication behaviors and can influence group decision making. Group members from individualistic cultures are more likely to value task-oriented, efficient, and direct communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as dividing up tasks into individual projects before collaboration begins and then openly debating ideas during discussion and decision making. Additionally, people from cultures that value individualism are more likely to openly express dissent from a decision, essentially expressing their disagreement with the group. Group members from collectivistic cultures are more likely to value relationships over the task at hand. Because of this, they also tend to value conformity and face-saving (often indirect) communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as establishing norms that include periods of socializing to build relationships before task-oriented communication like negotiations begin or norms that limit public disagreement in favor of more indirect communication that doesn't challenge the face of other group members or the group's leader. In a group composed of people from a collectivistic culture, each member would likely play harmonizing roles, looking for signs of conflict and resolving them before they become public.

Power distance can also affect group interactions. Some cultures rank higher on power-distance scales, meaning they value hierarchy, make decisions based on status, and believe that people have a set place in society that is fairly unchangeable. Group members from high-power-distance cultures would likely appreciate a strong designated leader who exhibits a more directive leadership style and prefer groups in which members have clear and assigned roles. In a group that is homogenous in terms of having a high-power-distance orientation, members with higher status would be able to openly provide information, and those with lower status may not provide information unless a higher status member explicitly seeks it from them. Low-power-distance cultures do not place as much value and meaning on status and believe that all group members can participate in decision making. Group members from low-power-distance cultures would likely freely speak their mind during a group meeting and prefer a participative leadership style.

How much meaning is conveyed through the context surrounding verbal communication can also affect group communication. Some cultures have a high-context communication style in which much of the meaning in an interaction is conveyed through context such as nonverbal cues and silence. Group members from high-context cultures may avoid saying something directly, assuming that other group members will understand the intended meaning even if the message is indirect. So if someone disagrees with a proposed course of action, he or she may say, "Let's discuss this tomorrow," and mean, "I don't think we should do this." Such indirect communication is also a face-saving strategy that is common in collectivistic cultures. Other cultures have a low-context communication style that places more importance on the meaning conveyed through words than through context or nonverbal cues. Group members from low-context cultures often say what they mean and mean what they say. For example, if someone doesn't like an idea, they might say, "I think we should consider more options. This one doesn't seem like the best we can do."

In any of these cases, an individual from one culture operating in a group with people of a different cultural orientation could adapt to the expectations of the host culture, especially if that person possesses a high degree of intercultural communication competence (ICC). Additionally, people with high ICC can also adapt to a group member with a different cultural orientation than the host culture. Even though these cultural orientations connect to values that affect our communication in fairly consistent ways, individuals may exhibit different communication behaviors depending on their own individual communication style and the situation.

Domestic Diversity and Group Communication

While it is becoming more likely that we will interact in small groups with international diversity, we are guaranteed to interact in groups that are diverse in terms of the cultural identities found within a single country or the subcultures found within a larger cultural group.

Gender stereotypes sometimes influence the roles that people play within a group. For example, the stereotype that women are more nurturing than men may lead group members (both male and female) to expect that women will play the role of supporters or harmonizers within the group. Since women have primarily performed secretarial work since the 1900s, it may also be expected that women will play the role of recorder. In both of these cases, stereotypical notions of gender place women in roles that are typically not as valued in group communication. The opposite is true for men. In terms of leadership, despite notable exceptions,

research shows that men fill an overwhelmingly disproportionate amount of leadership positions. We are socialized to see certain behaviors by men as indicative of leadership abilities, even though they may not be. For example, men are often perceived to contribute more to a group because they tend to speak first when asked a question or to fill a silence and are perceived to talk more about task-related matters than relationally oriented matters. Both of these tendencies create a perception that men are more engaged with the task. Men are also socialized to be more competitive and self-congratulatory, meaning that their communication may be seen as dedicated and their behaviors seen as powerful, and that when their work isn't noticed they will be more likely to make it known to the group rather than take silent credit. Even though we know that the relational elements of a group are crucial for success, even in high-performance teams, that work is not as valued in our society as the task-related work.

Despite the fact that some communication patterns and behaviors related to our typical (and stereotypical) gender socialization affect how we interact in and form perceptions of others in groups, the differences in group communication that used to be attributed to gender in early group communication research seem to be diminishing. This is likely due to the changing organizational cultures from which much group work emerges, which have now had more than sixty years to adjust to women in the workplace. It is also due to a more nuanced understanding of gender-based research, which doesn't take a stereotypical view from the beginning as many of the early male researchers did. Now, instead of biological sex being assumed as a factor that creates inherent communication differences, group communication scholars see that men and women both exhibit a range of behaviors that are more or less feminine or masculine. It is these gendered behaviors, and not a person's gender, that seem to have more of an influence on perceptions of group communication. Interestingly, group interactions are still masculinist in that male and female group members prefer a more masculine communication style for task leaders and that both males and females in this role are more likely to adapt to a more masculine communication style. Conversely, men who take on social-emotional leadership behaviors adopt a more feminine communication style. In short, it seems that although masculine communication traits are more often associated with high status positions in groups, both men and women adapt to this expectation and are evaluated similarly.Beth Bonniwell Haslett and Jenn Ruebush, "What Differences Do Individual Differences in Groups Make?: The Effects of Individuals, Culture, and Group Composition," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 122.

Other demographic categories are also influential in group communication and decision making. In general, group members have an easier time communicating when they are more similar than different in terms of race and age. This ease of communication can make group work more efficient, but the homogeneity may sacrifice some creativity. As we learned earlier, groups that are diverse (e.g., they have members of different races and generations) benefit from the diversity of perspectives in terms of the quality of decision making and creativity of output.

In terms of age, for the first time since industrialization began, it is common to have three generations of people (and sometimes four) working side by side in an organizational setting. Although four generations often worked together in early factories, they were segregated based on their age group, and a hierarchy existed with older workers at the top and younger workers at the bottom. Today, however, generations interact regularly, and it is not uncommon for an older person to have a leader or supervisor who is younger than him or her.Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 176. The current generations in the US workplace and consequently in work-based groups include the following:

- **The Silent Generation**. Born between 1925 and 1942, currently in their mid-sixties to mid-eighties, this is the smallest generation in the workforce right now, as many have retired or left for other reasons. This generation includes people who were born during the Great Depression or the early part of World War II, many of whom later fought in the Korean War. Gerald Clarke, "The Silent Generation Revisited," Time, June 29, 1970, 46.
- **The Baby Boomers**. Born between 1946 and 1964, currently in their late forties to mid-sixties, this is the largest generation in the workforce right now. Baby boomers are the most populous generation born in US history, and they are working longer than previous generations, which means they will remain the predominant force in organizations for ten to twenty more years.
- **Generation X**. Born between 1965 and 1981, currently in their early thirties to mid-forties, this generation was the first to see technology like cell phones and the Internet make its way into classrooms and our daily lives. Compared to previous generations, "Gen-Xers" are more diverse in terms of race, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation and also have a greater appreciation for and understanding of diversity.
- **Generation Y**. Born between 1982 and 2000, "Millennials" as they are also called are currently in their late teens up to about thirty years old. This generation is not as likely to remember a time without technology such as computers and cell phones. They are just starting to enter into the workforce and have been greatly affected by the economic crisis of the late 2000s, experiencing significantly high unemployment rates.

The benefits and challenges that come with diversity of group members are important to consider. Since we will all work in diverse groups, we should be prepared to address potential challenges in order to reap the benefits. Diverse groups may be wise to coordinate social interactions outside of group time in order to find common ground that can help facilitate interaction and increase group cohesion. We should be sensitive but not let sensitivity create fear of "doing something wrong" that then prevents us from having meaningful interactions.

Key Takeaways

- Every problem has common components: an undesirable situation, a desired situation, and obstacles between the undesirable and desirable situations. Every problem also has a set of characteristics that vary among problems, including task difficulty, number of possible solutions, group member interest in the problem, group familiarity with the problem, and the need for solution acceptance.
- The group problem-solving process has five steps:
    1. Define the problem by creating a problem statement that summarizes it.
    2. Analyze the problem and create a problem question that can guide solution generation.
    3. Generate possible solutions. Possible solutions should be offered and listed without stopping to evaluate each one.
    4. Evaluate the solutions based on their credibility, completeness, and worth. Groups should also assess the potential effects of the narrowed list of solutions.
    5. Implement and assess the solution. Aside from enacting the solution, groups should determine how they will know the solution is working or not.
- Before a group makes a decision, it should brainstorm possible solutions. Group communication scholars suggest that groups (1) do a warm-up brainstorming session; (2) do an actual brainstorming session in which ideas are not evaluated, wild ideas are encouraged, quantity not quality of ideas is the goal, and new combinations of ideas are encouraged; (3) eliminate duplicate ideas; and (4) clarify, organize, and evaluate ideas. In order to guide the idea-generation process and invite equal participation from group members, the group may also elect to use the nominal group technique.
- Common decision-making techniques include majority rule, minority rule, and consensus rule. With majority rule, only a majority, usually one-half plus one, must agree before a decision is made. With minority rule, a designated authority or expert has final say over a decision, and the input of group members may or may not be invited or considered. With consensus rule, all members of the group must agree on the same decision.
- Several factors influence the decision-making process:
    - Situational factors include the degree of freedom a group has to make its own decisions, the level of uncertainty facing the group and its task, the size of the group, the group's access to information, and the origin and urgency of the problem.
    - Personality influences on decision making include a person's value orientation (economic, aesthetic, theoretical, political, or religious), and personality traits (dominant/submissive, friendly/unfriendly, and instrumental/emotional).
    - Cultural influences on decision making include the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the group makeup; cultural values and characteristics such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, and high-/low-context communication styles; and gender and age differences.

Exercises

1. In terms of situational influences on group problem solving, task difficulty, number of possible solutions, group interest in problem, group familiarity with problem, and need for solution acceptance are five key variables discussed in this chapter. For each of the two following scenarios, discuss how the situational context created by these variables might affect the group's communication climate and the way it goes about addressing its problem.
    a. **Scenario 1**. Task difficulty is high, number of possible solutions is high, group interest in problem is high, group familiarity with problem is low, and need for solution acceptance is high.
    b. **Scenario 2**. Task difficulty is low, number of possible solutions is low, group interest in problem is low, group familiarity with problem is high, and need for solution acceptance is low.
2. Getting integrated: Certain decision-making techniques may work better than others in academic, professional, personal, or civic contexts. For each of the following scenarios, identify the decision-making technique that you think would be best and explain why.
    a. **Scenario 1**: Academic. A professor asks his or her class to decide whether the final exam should be an in-class or take-home exam.

b. **Scenario 2**: Professional. A group of coworkers must decide which person from their department to nominate for a company-wide award.
c. **Scenario 3**: Personal. A family needs to decide how to divide the belongings and estate of a deceased family member who did not leave a will.
d. **Scenario 4**: Civic. A local branch of a political party needs to decide what five key issues it wants to include in the national party's platform.

3. Group communication researchers have found that heterogeneous groups (composed of diverse members) have advantages over homogenous (more similar) groups. Discuss a group situation you have been in where diversity enhanced your and/or the group's experience.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: Managing Conflict in Teams

9.1: Styles of Interpersonal Conflict

Learning Objectives

- Explain the distinction between substantive and affective conflicts and between intra- and inter-organizational conflicts.

Conflict is a feature common to social life. In organizations, conflict is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, and/or interests between people working together. Conflict on teams takes many forms and can be minor, causing only brief disruption, or major, threatening the team's ability to function and attain its goals. We can distinguish between two type of conflict: substantive and affective.

Substantive and Affective Conflict

Substantive conflicts deal with aspects of a team's work. For example, conflicts can arise over questions about an individual's performance, differing views about the scope of a task or assignment, disparate definitions of acceptable quality, or the nature of a project goal. Other substantive conflicts involve how team members work together. These process conflicts often involve disagreements over the strategies, policies, and procedures the group should use in order to complete its tasks.

Affective conflict relates to trouble that develops in interpersonal relationships among team members. While these personal conflicts emerge as people work together, they may have their roots in factors separate from the team's purpose and activities. Affective conflicts are often based on personality conflicts, differing communication styles, perceptions about level of effort, or personal dislikes based on negative past experiences.

Intra-Organizational and Inter-Organizational Conflict

Both substantive and affective conflicts can be separated into those that happen within an organization and those that happen between two or more different organizations. Intra-organizational conflicts occur across departments in an organization, within work teams and other groups, and between individuals. Inter-organizational conflicts are disagreements between people—business partners, for example, or other collaborators, vendors, and distributors—in two or more organizations.

Figure 9.1.1: Arguing wolves: These wolves are expressing disagreement over territory or having some other type of conflict. Image by Carsten Tolkmit is under a CC BY-SA 2.0 license.

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- Conflict is a state of discord between people, or groups of people working together, caused by an actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, and/or interests.
- Substantive conflicts deal with aspects of performance or tasks and often relate specifically to the project or goals of a team or organization.
- Affective conflicts, also known as personal conflicts, revolve around personal disagreements or dislikes between individuals in a team.
- Organizational conflict may be intra-organizational, meaning it takes place across departments or within teams, or it may be inter-organizational, meaning it arises from disagreements between two or more organizations.

Key Terms

- affective: Relating to, resulting from, or influenced by emotions.
- substantive: Of the core essence or essential element of a thing or topic.

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9.2: The Impact of Interpersonal Conflict on Team Performance

Learning Objectives

- Analyze the way in which conflict can both help and hurt a team's performance
- Identify the causes of conflict within an organization as a conflict manager.

Conflict can have damaging or productive effects on the performance of a team.

Conflict occurs often in teamwork, especially during the storming phase of team development. While at first we might think of all conflict between team members as undesirable and harmful, the process of resolving conflicts can actually provide benefits to team performance. Whether a conflict is productive or not can depend on how team members perceive it, as well as how it affects progress toward the team's goals.

Benefits of Team Conflict

Substantive conflicts can affect performance for the better by removing barriers caused by different assumptions or misunderstandings about a team's tasks, strategy, or goals. Conflict can be constructive when it creates broader awareness about how team members are experiencing their work and thus leads to changes that improve members' productivity. Conflict can also lead to process improvements, such as when it reveals a deficiency in how the team communicates, which can then be corrected. Clashes of ideas can lead to more creative solutions or otherwise provide perspectives that persuade the team to take a different approach that is more likely to lead to success.

Addressing personal conflicts that arise between members can facilitate cooperation by helping individuals adapt their behavior to better suit the needs of others. Although most people find conflict uncomfortable while they are experiencing it, they can come to recognize its value as the team progresses in its development.

Negative Consequences of Team Conflict

While sometimes conflict can lead to a solution to a problem, conflicts can also create problems. Discord caused by enmity between individuals can reduce team cohesion and the ability of team members to work together. Conflicts can create distractions that require time and effort to resolve, which can delay completion of tasks and even put a team's goals at risk.

Communication can suffer when people withdraw their attention or participation, leading to poor coordination of interdependent tasks. Tension and heightened emotions can lower team members' satisfaction, increase frustration, and lead to bad judgments. They can even prompt individuals to withdraw from the team, requiring the assignment of a new member or creating a resource scarcity that makes it more difficult for the team to fulfill its purpose. In extreme cases, conflict among members, if left unaddressed, can lead to the complete inability of the team to function, and thus to its disbandment.

Common Causes of Team Conflict

Team conflict is caused by factors related to individual behavior as well as disagreements about the team's work.

Conflict between team members comes from several sources. Some conflicts have their basis in how people behave, while others come from disagreements about the nature of the team's work and how it is being accomplished.

- **Competing interests**: Conflict can arise when people have mutually incompatible desires or needs. For example, two team members with similar skills may both want a certain assignment, leaving the one who doesn't receive it resentful.
- **Different behavioral styles or preferences**: Individuals may clash over their respective work habits, attention to detail, communication practices, or tone of expression. While these can affect coordination of interdependent tasks, they can especially inhibit direct collaboration.
- **Competition over resources**: Members may fight over the limited resources available to accomplish the team's tasks. For example, if two people both rely on the action of a third person to meet identical deadlines, disagreements might arise over whose work should receive that person's attention first.
- **Failure to follow team norms**: A team member creates conflict when she displays attitudes or behaviors that go against the team's agreement about how it will function. If a group norm calls for prompt arrival at meetings and prohibits the use of mobile devices during discussions, ignoring these practices can engender conflict.

- **Performance deficiencies**: When some team members are either not contributing their share of effort or not performing at the expected level of quality, the impositions that result can create friction, which may be heightened when critical or highly visible tasks are involved.
- **Poor communication**: When team members do not share relevant information with each other, people may make decisions or take actions that others consider inappropriate or even harmful. Blame and questions about motives can result, creating discord among the team.
- **Ambiguity about means and ends**: Lack of clarity about tasks, strategies, and/or goals can lead people to make assumptions that others do not share or agree with, which can result in conflict.

Figure 9.2.1: Card game argument: Behavioral differences and personality clashes can cause conflict even among friends. Image is in the public domain.

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- Conflict is common within teams, especially during the storming phase of team development.
- Team conflict provides benefits including resolving misunderstandings, improving processes, and changing behaviors.
- Team conflict can have negative consequences such as reduced group cohesion and lower productivity, and it can even threaten the team's existence.
- Team conflict arises from how people perceive the actions of others and from differing views of the team's work and how it should be accomplished.
- Common causes of team conflict include conflicting interests, incompatible work styles, competition over resources, failure to follow norms, poor communication, and performance deficiencies.

Key Terms

- interdependent: Mutually dependent; reliant on one another.
- affective: Relating to, resulting from, or influenced by emotions.

- ambiguity: Something liable to more than one interpretation, explanation, or meaning.
- affective: Relating to, resulting from, or influenced by emotions.

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9.3: Constructive Team Conflict

Learning Objectives

- Explain how conflict can be used as a strategy for improving team performance
- Differentiate between conflict resolution and conflict management

Teams can use conflict as a strategy for enhancing performance.

Teams may use conflict as a strategy for continuous improvement and learning. Recognizing the benefits of conflict and using them as part of the team's process can enhance team performance. Conflict can uncover barriers to collaboration that changes in behavior can remove. It can also foster better decisions because it makes team members consider the perspectives of others and even helps them see things in new and innovative ways.

Addressing conflict can increase team cohesion by engaging members in discussions about important issues. Team members may feel more valued when they know they are contributing to something vital to the team's success. Conflict can reveal assumptions that may not apply in the current situation and thus allow the team to agree on a new course. It can also draw attention to norms that have developed without the explicit agreement of team members and create the opportunity to endorse or discard them.

Generating Constructive Conflict

Team members and others can follow a few guidelines for encouraging constructive conflict. First, they can start by explicitly calling for it as something that will help improve the team's performance. This helps people view conflict as acceptable and can thus free them to speak up.

Teams can lower the emotional intensity of any conflict be establishing clear guidelines for how to express disagreements and challenge colleagues. One helpful norm is to focus on the task-related element of a conflict rather than criticizing the traits of particular individuals. Another is to emphasize common goals and shared commitments, which can keep conflict in perspective and prevent it from overwhelming the team's efforts.

Team Conflict Resolution and Management

Some ways of dealing with conflict seek resolution; others aim to minimize negative effects on the team.

The way a team deals with conflicts that arise among members can influence whether and how those conflicts are resolved and, as a result, the team's subsequent performance. There are several ways to approach managing and resolving team conflict—some leave the team and its members better able to continue their work, while others can undermine its effectiveness as a performing unit.

Conflict Resolution

Teams use one of three primary approaches to conflict resolution: integrative, distributive, and mediating.

1. Integrative approaches focus on the issue to be solved and aim to find a resolution that meets everyone's needs. Success with this tactic requires the exchange of information, openness to alternatives, and a willingness to consider what is best for the group as a whole rather than for any particular individual.
2. Distributive approaches find ways to divide a fixed number of positive outcomes or resources in which one side comes out ahead of the other. Since team members have repeated interactions with each other and are committed to shared goals, the expectation of reciprocity can make this solution acceptable since those who don't get their way today may end up "winning" tomorrow.
3. Mediating approaches bring in a third party to facilitate a non-confrontational, non-adversarial discussion with the goal of helping the team reach a consensus about how to resolve the conflict. A mediator from outside the team brings no emotional ties or preconceived ideas to the conflict and therefore can help the team identify a broader set of solutions that would be satisfactory to all.

Although these three approaches all bring overt conflict to an end, team cohesion can suffer if members perceive the process itself as unfair, disrespectful, or overly contentious. The result can be resentment that festers and leads to subsequent additional conflict that a more conciliatory process might have avoided.

Conflict Management

The primary aim of conflict management is to promote the positive effects and reduce the negative effects that disputes can have on team performance without necessarily fully resolving the conflict itself. Teams use one of three main tactics to manage conflict: smoothing, yielding, and avoiding.

1. The smoothing approach attempts to minimize the differences among the people who are in conflict with each other. This strategy often focuses on reducing the emotional charge and intensity of how the people speak to each other by emphasizing their shared goals and commitments.
2. The yielding approach describes the choice some team members make to simply give in when others disagree with them rather than engage in conflict. This is more common when the stakes are perceived to be small or when the team member's emotional ties to the issue at hand are not particularly strong.
3. In the avoiding approach, teams members may choose to simply ignore all but the most contentious disagreements. While this can have short-term benefits and may be the best option when the team is under time pressure, it is the approach least likely to produce a sense of harmony among the team.

While conflict can increase the engagement of team members, it can also create distractions and draw attention away from important tasks. Because conflict management seeks to contain such disruptions and threats to team performance, conflicts do not disappear so much as exist alongside the teamwork.

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- Team performance can benefit by using conflict to foster learning and process improvement.
- Team members can establish guidelines and norms that encourage constructive conflict.
- Conflict resolution aims to eliminate disagreements and disputes among team members; in contrast, conflict management seeks to minimize the negative effects of conflict on team performance.
- There are three main approaches to conflict resolution: integrative, distributive, and mediating.
- There are three main conflict-management tactics: smoothing, yielding, and avoiding.

Key Terms

- **innovation**: A change in customs; something new and contrary to established patterns, manners, or rites.
- **conflict**: A clash or disagreement between two opposing groups or individuals.
- **dispute**: An argument or disagreement.
- **resolution**: The moment in which a conflict ends and the outcome is clear.
- **adversarial**: Characteristic of an opponent; combative, hostile.

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9.4: Planning and Running a Meeting

We will now turn our focus to preparing for, and conducting a team meeting. Initially you may find running a meeting a bit intimidating, especially if you have never done so before. With a little preparation, however, getting ready for and conducting a meeting is a fairly straightforward process.

First, you need to prepare for the meeting. Preparation can include such things as:

- Finding a time and place to meet;
- Developing and distributing an agenda;
- Gathering and preparing any supporting materials or documentation;
- Making plans for technology, if needed (such as PowerPoint, Skype)
- Making sure minutes (notes) from earlier meetings are available and accurate
- Announce what time the meeting will start and end. Do not leave it open-ended. You can always end early, but going long is rarely an option.

An **agenda** is simply a plan for the meeting. In more formal organizations, the concepts of Parliamentary Procedure are employed, quite commonly using Robert's Rules of Order, but for purposes of this course just consider it a logical plan for the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of a meeting are the official record of what happened. For formal organizations such as businesses, corporations, non-profit organizations, or governmental entities, accurate minutes are extremely important. They are considered a legally binding record of the actions of that meeting, so that's why there's an "approve the minutes" step in most formal agendas. For small task groups, such formality is typically not needed.

For example, something simple like the following will work well for many small task groups:

1. Review of what happened at the last meeting.
2. Complete action on any items carried over from previous meetings.
3. Address new items.
4. Plan the next meeting.

Of course, the specific agenda you use will be up to the task, the group, and what is happening at the time. By distributing agendas ahead of time, you give members a chance to think and prepare themselves for the various items.

Second, when the meeting time arrives, it is typically the leader's job to get things rolling. Some things to consider:

- Be a little early. Make sure the room is available and things are ready to go. Lateness should not become an acceptable group norm.
- Allow for small talk. Remember we are people first and workers second. A few minutes of small talk, jokes, and stories can settle everyone down, reaffirm the cohesiveness of the group, and create a comfortable environment.
- Once you feel the group has had enough time for small talk, gently move them into the task dimension with something like, "Shall we get started?" It is far easier to gently lead group members than to push them aggressively.
- Once you have started into the task, group discussion will cycle back and forth between task and social dimension. While you do not want the group to stay in the social dimension, some socializing may help reduce tension and give people time to gather their thoughts.
- Think of yourself as more of an observer and facilitator than participant. Place the focus more on process and procedure, and let the group members carry the bulk of conversation.
- Listen and summarize. When you can tell the conversation has peaked on a given topic, summarize what has been discussed and gently move the group on to the next step. You do not want to cut off discussion too early, nor do you want to let it dwindle.
- Defer to the group. Make sure you are getting the group to decide on issues and items, and you are not just guiding them to what you want. If they feel a sense of ownership of the action of the group, cohesiveness and commitment increases.
- Plan the next meeting. As long as you have your members there, set a time for the next meeting. It is far easier to do it with those in the room than attempting to work it out via text or email.

- End on time. We have a sense of how long something is supposed to last, and if you try to run overtime, members will tune out. Also, if you regularly run overtime, attendance will likely drop as members become frustrated.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Stages of the Listening Process

10.1: The Importance of Listening

Learning Objectives

- Define active listening and list the five stages of the listening process
- Illustrate the relationship between critical thinking and listening
- Give examples of the four main barriers to effective listening

Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.

Listening Is More than Just Hearing

Listening is a skill of critical significance in all aspects of our lives–from maintaining our personal relationships, to getting our jobs done, to taking notes in class, to figuring out which bus to take to the airport. Regardless of how we're engaged with listening, it's important to understand that listening involves more than just hearing the words that are directed at us. Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.

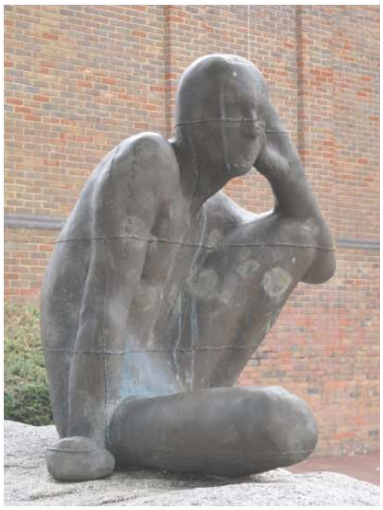

Figure 10.1.1: Learning to Listen: Antony Gormley's statue "Untitled [Listening]," Maygrove Peace Park. Image is under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license.

The listening process involves five stages: receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding. These stages will be discussed in more detail in later sections. Basically, an effective listener must hear and identify the speech sounds directed toward them, understand the message of those sounds, critically evaluate or assess that message, remember what's been said, and respond (either verbally or nonverbally) to information they've received.

Effectively engaging with all five stages of the listening process lets us best gather the information we need from the world around us.

Active Listening

Active listening is a particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker, by way of restating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own words. The goal of this repetition is to confirm what the listener has heard and to confirm the understanding of both parties. The ability to actively listen demonstrates sincerity, and that nothing is being assumed or taken for granted. Active listening is most often used to improve personal relationships, reduce misunderstanding and conflicts, strengthen cooperation, and foster understanding.

When engaging with a particular speaker, a listener can use several degrees of active listening, each resulting in a different quality of communication with the speaker. This active listening chart shows three main degrees of listening: repeating, paraphrasing, and reflecting.

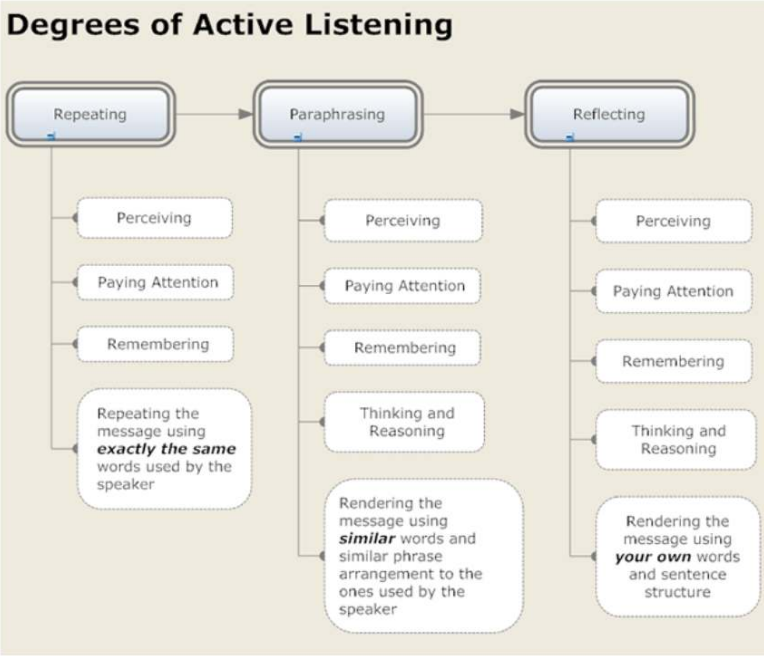

Figure 10.1.2: Degree of Active listening. Image is under a CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike license.

Degrees of Active Listening

There are several degrees of active listening.

Active listening can also involve paying attention to the speaker's behavior and body language. Having the ability to interpret a person's body language lets the listener develop a more accurate understanding of the speaker's message.

Listening and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking skills are essential and connected to the ability to listen effectively and process the information that one hears.

Critical Thinking

One definition for critical thinking is "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. "

Figure 10.1.3: Roosevelt and Churchill in Conversation: Effective listening leads to better critical understanding. Image is under a CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike license.

In other words, critical thinking is the process by which people qualitatively and quantitatively assess the information they have accumulated, and how they in turn use that information to solve problems and forge new patterns of understanding. Critical thinking clarifies goals, examines assumptions, discerns hidden values, evaluates evidence, accomplishes actions, and assesses conclusions.

Critical thinking has many practical applications, such as formulating a workable solution to a complex personal problem, deliberating in a group setting about what course of action to take, or analyzing the assumptions and methods used in arriving at a scientific hypothesis. People use critical thinking to solve complex math problems or compare prices at the grocery store. It is a process that informs all aspects of one's daily life, not just the time spent taking a class or writing an essay.

Critical thinking is imperative to effective communication, and thus, public speaking.

Connection of Critical Thinking to Listening

Critical thinking occurs whenever people figure out what to believe or what to do, and do so in a reasonable, reflective way. The concepts and principles of critical thinking can be applied to any context or case, but only by reflecting upon the nature of that application. Expressed in most general terms, critical thinking is "a way of taking up the problems of life. " As such, reading, writing, speaking, and listening can all be done critically or uncritically insofar as core critical thinking skills can be applied to all of those activities. Critical thinking skills include observation, interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and metacognition.

Critical thinkers are those who are able to do the following:

- Recognize problems and find workable solutions to those problems
- Understand the importance of prioritization in the hierarchy of problem solving tasks
- Gather relevant information
- Read between the lines by recognizing what is not said or stated
- Use language clearly, efficiently, and with efficacy
- Interpret data and form conclusions based on that data
- Determine the presence of lack of logical relationships
- Make sound conclusions and/or generalizations based on given data
- Test conclusions and generalizations
- Reconstruct one's patterns of beliefs on the basis of wider experience
- Render accurate judgments about specific things and qualities in everyday life

Therefore, critical thinkers must engage in highly active listening to further their critical thinking skills. People can use critical thinking skills to understand, interpret, and assess what they hear in order to formulate appropriate reactions or responses. These skills allow people to organize the information that they hear, understand its context or relevance, recognize unstated assumptions, make logical connections between ideas, determine the truth values, and draw conclusions. Conversely, engaging in focused, effective listening also lets people collect information in a way that best promotes critical thinking and, ultimately, successful communication.

Causes of Poor Listening

Listening is negatively affected by low concentration, trying too hard, jumping ahead, and/or focusing on style instead of substance.

Figure 10.1.4: There are many barriers that can impede effective listening. Image is under a CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike license.

The act of "listening" may be affected by barriers that impede the flow of information. These barriers include distractions, an inability to prioritize information, a tendency to assume or judge based on little or no information (i.e., "jumping to conclusions), and general confusion about the topic being discussed. Listening barriers may be psychological (e.g., the listener's emotions) or physical (e.g., noise and visual distraction). However, some of the most common barriers to effective listening include low concentration, lack of prioritization, poor judgement, and focusing on style rather than substance.

Low Concentration

Low concentration, or not paying close attention to speakers, is detrimental to effective listening. It can result from various psychological or physical situations such as visual or auditory distractions, physical discomfort, inadequate volume, lack of interest in the subject material, stress, or personal bias. Regardless of the cause, when a listener is not paying attention to a speaker's dialogue, effective communication is significantly diminished. Both listeners and speakers should be aware of these kinds of impediments and work to eliminate or mitigate them.

When listening to speech, there is a time delay between the time a speaker utters a sentence to the moment the listener comprehends the speaker's meaning. Normally, this happens within the span of a few seconds. If this process takes longer, the listener has to catch up to the speaker's words if he or she continues to speak at a pace faster than the listener can comprehend. Often, it is easier for listeners to stop listening when they do not understand. Therefore, a speaker needs to know which parts of a speech may be more comprehension intensive than others, and adjust his or her speed, vocabulary, and sentence structure accordingly.

Lack of Prioritization

Just as lack of attention to detail in a conversation can lead to ineffective listening, so can focusing too much attention on the least important information. Listeners need to be able to pick up on social cues and prioritize the information they hear to identify the most important points within the context of the conversation.

Often, the information the audience needs to know is delivered along with less pertinent or irrelevant information. When listeners give equal weight to everything they hear, it makes it difficult to organize and retain the information they need. For instance, students who take notes in class must know which information to writing down within the context of an entire lecture. Writing down the lecture word for word is impossible as well as inefficient.

Poor Judgement

When listening to a speaker's message, it is common to sometimes overlook aspects of the conversation or make judgments before all of the information is presented. Listeners often engage in confirmation bias, which is the tendency to isolate aspects of a conversation to support one's own preexisting beliefs and values. This psychological process has a detrimental effect on listening for several reasons.

First, confirmation bias tends to cause listeners to enter the conversation before the speaker finishes her message and, thus, form opinions without first obtaining all pertinent information. Second, confirmation bias detracts from a listener's ability to make accurate critical assessments. For example, a listener may hear something at the beginning of a speech that arouses a specific emotion. Whether anger, frustration, or anything else, this emotion could have a profound impact on the listener's perception of the rest of the conversation.

Focusing on Style, Not Substance

The vividness effect explains how vivid or highly graphic an individual's perception of a situation. When observing an event in person, an observer is automatically drawn toward the sensational, vivid or memorable aspects of a conversation or speech.

In the case of listening, distracting or larger-than-life elements in a speech or presentation can deflect attention away from the most important information in the conversation or presentation. These distractions can also influence the listener's opinion. For example, if a Shakespearean professor delivered an entire lecture in an exaggerated Elizabethan accent, the class would likely not take the professor seriously, regardless of the actual academic merit of the lecture.

Cultural differences (including speakers' accents, vocabulary, and misunderstandings due to cultural assumptions) can also obstruct the listening process. The same biases apply to the speaker's physical appearance. To avoid this obstruction, listeners should be aware of these biases and focus on the substance, rather than the style of delivery, or the speaker's voice and appearance.

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- The listening process involves five stages: receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding.
- Active listening is a particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker.
- Three main degrees of active listening are repeating, paraphrasing, and reflecting.
- Critical thinking is the process by which people qualitatively and quantitatively assess the information they accumulate.
- Critical thinking skills include observation, interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and metacognition.
- The concepts and principles of critical thinking can be applied to any context or case, including the process of listening.
- Effective listening lets people collect information in a way that promotes critical thinking and successful communication.
- Low concentration can be the result of various psychological or physical situations such as visual or auditory distractions, physical discomfort, inadequate volume, lack of interest in the subject material, stress, or personal bias.
- When listeners give equal weight to everything they hear, it makes it difficult to organize and retain the information they need. When the audience is trying too hard to listen, they often cannot take in the most important information they need.
- Jumping ahead can be detrimental to the listening experience; when listening to a speaker's message, the audience overlooks aspects of the conversation or makes judgments before all of the information is presented.
- Confirmation bias is the tendency to pick out aspects of a conversation that support one's own preexisting beliefs and values.
- A flashy speech can actually be more detrimental to the overall success and comprehension of the message because a speech that focuses on style offers little in the way of substance.
- Recognizing obstacles ahead of time can go a long way toward overcoming them.

Key Terms

- **listening**: The active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.
- **active listening**: A particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker.
- **critical thinking**: The process by which people qualitatively and quantitatively assess the information they have accumulated.
- **Metacognition**: "Cognition about cognition", or "knowing about knowing. " It can take many forms, including knowledge about when and how to use particular strategies for learning or for problem solving.

- **confirmation bias**: The tendency to pick out aspects of a conversation that support our one's own preexisting beliefs and values.
- **Vividness effect**: The phenomenon of how vivid or highly graphic and dramatic events affect an individual's perception of a situation.

Contributors and Attributions

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10.2: Understanding How and Why We Listen

Learning Objectives

- Describe the stages of the listening process.
- Discuss the four main types of listening.
- Compare and contrast the four main listening styles.

Listening is the learned process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. We begin to engage with the listening process long before we engage in any recognizable verbal or nonverbal communication. It is only after listening for months as infants that we begin to consciously practice our own forms of expression. In this section we will learn more about each stage of the listening process, the main types of listening, and the main listening styles.

The Listening Process

Listening is a process and as such doesn't have a defined start and finish. Like the communication process, listening has cognitive, behavioral, and relational elements and doesn't unfold in a linear, step-by-step fashion. Models of processes are informative in that they help us visualize specific components, but keep in mind that they do not capture the speed, overlapping nature, or overall complexity of the actual process in action. The stages of the listening process are receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding.

Receiving

Before we can engage other steps in the listening process, we must take in stimuli through our senses. In any given communication encounter, it is likely that we will return to the receiving stage many times as we process incoming feedback and new messages. This part of the listening process is more physiological than other parts, which include cognitive and relational elements. We primarily take in information needed for listening through auditory and visual channels. Although we don't often think about visual cues as a part of listening, they influence how we interpret messages. For example, seeing a person's face when we hear their voice allows us to take in nonverbal cues from facial expressions and eye contact. The fact that these visual cues are missing in e-mail, text, and phone interactions presents some difficulties for reading contextual clues into meaning received through only auditory channels.

Perception can affect some of the ways in which incoming stimuli are filtered. These perceptual filters also play a role in listening. Some stimuli never make it in, some are filtered into sub consciousness, and others are filtered into various levels of consciousness based on their salience. Recall that salience is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context and that we tend to find salient things that are visually or audibly stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Think about how it's much easier to listen to a lecture on a subject that you find very interesting.

It is important to consider noise as a factor that influences how we receive messages. Some noise interferes primarily with hearing, which is the physical process of receiving stimuli through internal and external components of the ears and eyes, and some interferes with listening, which is the cognitive process of processing the stimuli taken in during hearing. While hearing leads to listening, they are not the same thing. Environmental noise such as other people talking, the sounds of traffic, and music interfere with the physiological aspects of hearing. Psychological noise like stress and anger interfere primarily with the cognitive processes of listening. We can enhance our ability to receive, and in turn listen, by trying to minimize noise.

Interpreting

During the interpreting stage of listening, we combine the visual and auditory information we receive and try to make meaning out of that information using schemata. The interpreting stage engages cognitive and relational processing as we take in informational, contextual, and relational cues and try to connect them in meaningful ways to previous experiences. It is through the interpreting stage that we may begin to understand the stimuli we have received. When we understand something, we are able to attach meaning by connecting information to previous experiences. Through the process of comparing new information with old information, we may also update or revise particular schemata if we find the new information relevant and credible. If we have difficulty interpreting information, meaning we don't have previous experience or information in our existing schemata to make sense of it, then it is difficult to transfer the information into our long-term memory for later recall. In situations where understanding the information we receive isn't important or isn't a goal, this stage may be fairly short or even skipped. After all, we

can move something to our long-term memory by repetition and then later recall it without ever having understood it. I remember earning perfect scores on exams in my anatomy class in college because I was able to memorize and recall, for example, all the organs in the digestive system. In fact, I might still be able to do that now over a decade later. But neither then nor now could I tell you the significance or function of most of those organs, meaning I didn't really get to a level of understanding but simply stored the information for later recall.

Recalling

Our ability to recall information is dependent on some of the physiological limits of how memory works. Overall, our memories are known to be fallible. We forget about half of what we hear immediately after hearing it, recall 35 percent after eight hours, and recall 20 percent after a day. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 189–99. Our memory consists of multiple "storage units," including sensory storage, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 184.

Our sensory storage is very large in terms of capacity but limited in terms of length of storage. We can hold large amounts of unsorted visual information but only for about a tenth of a second. By comparison, we can hold large amounts of unsorted auditory information for longer—up to four seconds. This initial memory storage unit doesn't provide much use for our study of communication, as these large but quickly expiring chunks of sensory data are primarily used in reactionary and instinctual ways.

As stimuli are organized and interpreted, they make their way to short-term memory where they either expire and are forgotten or are transferred to long-term memory. Short-term memory is a mental storage capability that can retain stimuli for twenty seconds to one minute. Long-term memory is a mental storage capability to which stimuli in short-term memory can be transferred if they are connected to existing schema and in which information can be stored indefinitely.

Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 184. Working memory is a temporarily accessed memory storage space that is activated during times of high cognitive demand. When using working memory, we can temporarily store information and process and use it at the same time. This is different from our typical memory function in that information usually has to make it to long-term memory before we can call it back up to apply to a current situation. People with good working memories are able to keep recent information in mind and process it and apply it to other incoming information. This can be very useful during high-stress situations. A person in control of a command center like the White House Situation Room should have a good working memory in order to take in, organize, evaluate, and then immediately use new information instead of having to wait for that information to make it to long-term memory and then be retrieved and used.

Although recall is an important part of the listening process, there isn't a direct correlation between being good at recalling information and being a good listener. Some people have excellent memories and recall abilities and can tell you a very accurate story from many years earlier during a situation in which they should actually be listening and not showing off their recall abilities. Recall is an important part of the listening process because it is most often used to assess listening abilities and effectiveness. Many quizzes and tests in school are based on recall and are often used to assess how well students comprehended information presented in class, which is seen as an indication of how well they listened. When recall is our only goal, we excel at it. Experiments have found that people can memorize and later recall a set of faces and names with near 100 percent recall when sitting in a quiet lab and asked to do so. But throw in external noise, more visual stimuli, and multiple contextual influences, and we can't remember the name of the person we were just introduced to one minute earlier. Even in interpersonal encounters, we rely on recall to test whether or not someone was listening. Imagine that Azam is talking to his friend Belle, who is sitting across from him in a restaurant booth. Azam, annoyed that Belle keeps checking her phone, stops and asks, "Are you listening?" Belle inevitably replies, "Yes," since we rarely fess up to our poor listening habits, and Azam replies, "Well, what did I just say?"

Evaluating

When we evaluate something, we make judgments about its credibility, completeness, and worth. In terms of credibility, we try to determine the degree to which we believe a speaker's statements are correct and/or true. In terms of completeness, we try to "read between the lines" and evaluate the message in relation to what we know about the topic or situation being discussed. We evaluate the worth of a message by making a value judgment about whether we think the message or idea is good/bad, right/wrong, or desirable/undesirable. All these aspects of evaluating require critical thinking skills, which we aren't born with but must develop over time through our own personal and intellectual development.

Studying communication is a great way to build your critical thinking skills, because you learn much more about the taken-for-granted aspects of how communication works, which gives you tools to analyze and critique messages, senders, and contexts.

Critical thinking and listening skills also help you take a more proactive role in the communication process rather than being a passive receiver of messages that may not be credible, complete, or worthwhile. One danger within the evaluation stage of listening is to focus your evaluative lenses more on the speaker than the message. This can quickly become a barrier to effective listening if we begin to prejudge a speaker based on his or her identity or characteristics rather than on the content of his or her message. We will learn more about how to avoid slipping into a person-centered rather than message-centered evaluative stance later in the chapter.

Responding

Responding entails sending verbal and nonverbal messages that indicate attentiveness and understanding or a lack thereof. From our earlier discussion of the communication model, you may be able to connect this part of the listening process to feedback. Later, we will learn more specifics about how to encode and decode the verbal and nonverbal cues sent during the responding stage, but we all know from experience some signs that indicate whether a person is paying attention and understanding a message or not.

We send verbal and nonverbal feedback while another person is talking and after they are done. Back-channel cues are the verbal and nonverbal signals we send while someone is talking and can consist of verbal cues like “uh-huh,” “oh,” and “right,” and/or nonverbal cues like direct eye contact, head nods, and leaning forward. Back-channel cues are generally a form of positive feedback that indicates others are actively listening. People also send cues intentionally and unintentionally that indicate they aren’t listening. If another person is looking away, fidgeting, texting, or turned away, we will likely interpret those responses negatively.

Figure 10.2.1: Listeners respond to speakers nonverbally during a message using back-channel cues and verbally after a message using paraphrasing and clarifying questions. Image by Mimi Thian on Unsplash.

Paraphrasing is a responding behavior that can also show that you understand what was communicated. When you paraphrase information, you rephrase the message into your own words. For example, you might say the following to start off a paraphrased response: “What I heard you say was…” or “It seems like you’re saying…” You can also ask clarifying questions to get more information. It is often a good idea to pair a paraphrase with a question to keep a conversation flowing. For example, you might pose the following paraphrase and question pair: “It seems like you believe you were treated unfairly. Is that right?” Or you might ask a standalone question like “What did your boss do that made you think he was ‘playing favorites?’” Make sure to paraphrase and/or ask questions once a person’s turn is over, because interrupting can also be interpreted as a sign of not listening. Paraphrasing is also a good tool to use in computer-mediated communication, especially since miscommunication can occur due to a lack of nonverbal and other contextual cues.

The Importance of Listening

Understanding how listening works provides the foundation we need to explore why we listen, including various types and styles of listening. In general, listening helps us achieve all the communication goals and is also important in academic, professional, and personal contexts.

In terms of academics, poor listening skills were shown to contribute significantly to failure in a person's first year of college. Wendy S. Zabava and Andrew D. Wolvin, "The Differential Impact of a Basic Communication Course on Perceived Communication Competencies in Class, Work, and Social Contexts," Communication Education 42 (1993): 215–17. In general, students with high scores for listening ability have greater academic achievement. Interpersonal communication skills including listening are also highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys. National Association of Colleges and Employers, Job Outlook 2011 (2010): 25.

Poor listening skills, lack of conciseness, and inability to give constructive feedback have been identified as potential communication challenges in professional contexts. Even though listening education is lacking in our society, research has shown that introductory communication courses provide important skills necessary for functioning in entry-level jobs, including listening, writing, motivating/persuading, interpersonal skills, informational interviewing, and small-group problem solving. Vincent S. DiSalvo, "A Summary of Current Research Identifying Communication Skills in Various Organizational Contexts," Communication Education 29 (1980), 283–90. Training and improvements in listening will continue to pay off, as employers desire employees with good communication skills, and employees who have good listening skills are more likely to get promoted.

Listening also has implications for our personal lives and relationships. We shouldn't underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Empathetic listening can help us expand our self and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and by helping us take on different perspectives. Emotional support in the form of empathetic listening and validation during times of conflict can help relational partners manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate. Robert M. Milardo and Heather Helms-Erikson, "Network Overlap and Third-Party Influence in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 37. The following list reviews some of the main functions of listening that are relevant in multiple contexts.

The main purposes of listening are:

- to focus on messages sent by other people or noises coming from our surroundings;
- to better our understanding of other people's communication;
- to critically evaluate other people's messages;
- to monitor nonverbal signals;
- to indicate that we are interested or paying attention;
- to empathize with others and show we care for them (relational maintenance); and
- to engage in negotiation, dialogue, or other exchanges that result in shared understanding of or agreement on an issue.

Listening Types

Listening serves many purposes, and different situations require different types of listening. The type of listening we engage in affects our communication and how others respond to us. For example, when we listen to empathize with others, our communication will likely be supportive and open, which will then lead the other person to feel "heard" and supported and hopefully view the interaction positively. Graham D. Bodie and William A. Villaume, "Aspects of Receiving Information: The Relationships between Listening Preferences, Communication Apprehension, Receiver Apprehension, and Communicator Style," International Journal of Listening 17, no. 1 (2003): 48. The main types of listening we will discuss are discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic. Kittie W. Watson, Larry L. Barker, and James B. Weaver III, "The Listening Styles Profile (LS-16): Development and Validation of an Instrument to Assess Four Listening Styles," International Journal of Listening 9 (1995): 1–13.

Discriminative Listening

Discriminative listening is a focused and usually instrumental type of listening that is primarily physiological and occurs mostly at the receiving stage of the listening process. Here we engage in listening to scan and monitor our surroundings in order to isolate particular auditory or visual stimuli. For example, we may focus our listening on a dark part of the yard while walking the dog at night to determine if the noise we just heard presents us with any danger. Or we may look for a particular nonverbal cue to let us know our conversational partner received our message. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 185. In the absence of a hearing impairment, we have an innate and physiological ability to engage in discriminative listening. Although this is the most basic form of listening, it provides the foundation on which more intentional listening skills are built. This type of listening can be refined and honed. Think of how musicians, singers, and

mechanics exercise specialized discriminative listening to isolate specific aural stimuli and how actors, detectives, and sculptors discriminate visual cues that allow them to analyze, make meaning from, or recreate nuanced behavior. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, "A Listening Taxonomy," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 18–19.

Informational Listening

Informational listening entails listening with the goal of comprehending and retaining information. This type of listening is not evaluative and is common in teaching and learning contexts ranging from a student listening to an informative speech to an out-of-towner listening to directions to the nearest gas station. We also use informational listening when we listen to news reports, voice mail, and briefings at work. Since retention and recall are important components of informational listening, good concentration and memory skills are key. These also happen to be skills that many college students struggle with, at least in the first years of college, but will be expected to have mastered once they get into professional contexts. In many professional contexts, informational listening is important, especially when receiving instructions. I caution my students that they will be expected to process verbal instructions more frequently in their profession than they are in college. Most college professors provide detailed instructions and handouts with assignments so students can review them as needed, but many supervisors and managers will expect you to take the initiative to remember or record vital information. Additionally, many bosses are not as open to questions or requests to repeat themselves as professors are.

Critical Listening

Critical listening entails listening with the goal of analyzing or evaluating a message based on information presented verbally and information that can be inferred from context. A critical listener evaluates a message and accepts it, rejects it, or decides to withhold judgment and seek more information. As constant consumers of messages, we need to be able to assess the credibility of speakers and their messages and identify various persuasive appeals and faulty logic (known as fallacies). Critical listening is important during persuasive exchanges, but I recommend always employing some degree of critical listening, because you may find yourself in a persuasive interaction that you thought was informative remember that individuals can often disguise inferences as facts. Critical-listening skills are useful when listening to a persuasive speech in this class and when processing any of the persuasive media messages we receive daily. You can see judges employ critical listening, with varying degrees of competence, on talent competition shows like Rupaul's Drag Race, America's Got Talent, and The Voice. While the exchanges between judge and contestant on these shows is expected to be subjective and critical, critical listening is also important when listening to speakers that have stated or implied objectivity, such as parents, teachers, political leaders, doctors, and religious leaders. We will learn more about how to improve your critical thinking skills later in this chapter.

Empathetic Listening

Empathetic listening is the most challenging form of listening and occurs when we try to understand or experience what a speaker is thinking or feeling. Empathetic listening is distinct from sympathetic listening. While the word empathy means to "feel into" or "feel with" another person, sympathy means to "feel for" someone. Sympathy is generally more self-oriented and distant than empathy. Tom Bruneau, "Empathy and Listening," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 188. Empathetic listening is other oriented and should be genuine. Because of our own centrality in our perceptual world, empathetic listening can be difficult. It's often much easier for us to tell our own story or to give advice than it is to really listen to and empathize with someone else. We should keep in mind that sometimes others just need to be heard and our feedback isn't actually desired.

Figure 10.2.2: We support others through empathetic listening by trying to “feel with” them. Image by Toimetaja tõlkebüroo on Unsplash.

Empathetic listening is key for dialogue and helps maintain interpersonal relationships. In order to reach dialogue, people must have a degree of open-mindedness and a commitment to civility that allows them to be empathetic while still allowing them to believe in and advocate for their own position. An excellent example of critical and empathetic listening in action is the international Truth and Reconciliation movement. The most well-known example of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) occurred in South Africa as a way to address the various conflicts that occurred during apartheid. Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Truth and Reconciliation Commission website, accessed July 13, 2012, http://www.justice.gov.za/trc. The first TRC in the United States occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina, as a means of processing the events and aftermath of November 3, 1979, when members of the Ku Klux Klan shot and killed five members of the Communist Worker’s Party during a daytime confrontation witnessed by news crews and many bystanders. The goal of such commissions is to allow people to tell their stories, share their perspectives in an open environment, and be listened to. The Greensboro TRC states its purpose as such: “About,” Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission website, accessed July 13, 2012, www.greensborotrc.org/truth_reconciliation.php.

The truth and reconciliation process seeks to heal relations between opposing sides by uncovering all pertinent facts, distinguishing truth from lies, and allowing for acknowledgement, appropriate public mourning, forgiveness and healing…The focus often is on giving victims, witnesses and even perpetrators a chance to publicly tell their stories without fear of prosecution.

Listening Styles

Just as there are different types of listening, there are also different styles of listening. People may be categorized as one or more of the following listeners: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented listeners. Research finds that 40 percent of people have more than one preferred listening style, and that they choose a style based on the listening situation. Graham D. Bodie and William A. Villaume, “Aspects of Receiving Information: The Relationships between Listening Preferences, Communication Apprehension, Receiver Apprehension, and Communicator Style,” International Journal of Listening 17, no. 1 (2003): 50. Other research finds that people often still revert back to a single preferred style in times of emotional or cognitive stress, even if they know a different style of listening would be better. Debra L. Worthington, “Exploring the Relationship between Listening Style Preference and Personality,” International Journal of Listening 17, no. 1 (2003): 82. Following a brief overview of each listening style, we will explore some of their applications, strengths, and weaknesses.

- **People-oriented listeners** are concerned about the needs and feelings of others and may get distracted from a specific task or the content of a message in order to address feelings.
- **Action-oriented listeners** prefer well-organized, precise, and accurate information. They can become frustrated with they perceive communication to be unorganized or inconsistent, or a speaker to be “long-winded.”
- **Content-oriented listeners** are analytic and enjoy processing complex messages. They like in-depth information and like to learn about multiple sides of a topic or hear multiple perspectives on an issue. Their thoroughness can be difficult to manage if there are time constraints.
- **Time-oriented** listeners are concerned with completing tasks and achieving goals. They do not like information perceived as irrelevant and like to stick to a timeline. They may cut people off and make quick decisions (taking short cuts or cutting

corners) when they think they have enough information.

People-Oriented Listeners

People-oriented listeners are concerned about the emotional states of others and listen with the purpose of offering support in interpersonal relationships. People-oriented listeners can be characterized as "supporters" who are caring and understanding. These listeners are sought out because they are known as people who will "lend an ear." They may or may not be valued for the advice they give, but all people often want is a good listener. This type of listening may be especially valuable in interpersonal communication involving emotional exchanges, as a person-oriented listener can create a space where people can make themselves vulnerable without fear of being cut off or judged. People-oriented listeners are likely skilled empathetic listeners and may find success in supportive fields like counseling, social work, or nursing. Interestingly, such fields are typically feminized, in that people often associate the characteristics of people-oriented listeners with roles filled by women.

Action-Oriented Listeners

Action-oriented listeners focus on what action needs to take place in regards to a received message and try to formulate an organized way to initiate that action. These listeners are frustrated by disorganization, because it detracts from the possibility of actually doing something. Action-oriented listeners can be thought of as "builders"—like an engineer, a construction site foreperson, or a skilled project manager. This style of listening can be very effective when a task needs to be completed under time, budgetary, or other logistical constraints. One research study found that people prefer an action-oriented style of listening in instructional contexts. Margarete Imhof, "Who Are We as We Listen? Individual Listening Profiles in Varying Contexts," International Journal of Listening 18, no. 1 (2004): 39. In other situations, such as interpersonal communication, action-oriented listeners may not actually be very interested in listening, instead taking a "What do you want me to do?" approach. A friend and colleague of mine who exhibits some qualities of an action-oriented listener once told me about an encounter she had with a close friend who had a stillborn baby. My friend said she immediately went into "action mode." Although it was difficult for her to connect with her friend at an emotional/empathetic level, she was able to use her action-oriented approach to help out in other ways as she helped make funeral arrangements, coordinated with other family and friends, and handled the details that accompanied this tragic emotional experience. As you can see from this example, the action-oriented listening style often contrasts with the people-oriented listening style.

Content-Oriented Listeners

Content-oriented listeners like to listen to complex information and evaluate the content of a message, often from multiple perspectives, before drawing conclusions. These listeners can be thought of as "learners," and they also ask questions to solicit more information to fill out their understanding of an issue. Content-oriented listeners often enjoy high perceived credibility because of their thorough, balanced, and objective approach to engaging with information. Content-oriented listeners are likely skilled informational and critical listeners and may find success in academic careers in the humanities, social sciences, or sciences. Ideally, judges and politicians would also possess these characteristics.

Time-Oriented Listeners

Time-oriented listeners are more concerned about time limits and timelines than they are with the content or senders of a message. These listeners can be thought of as "executives," and they tend to actually verbalize the time constraints under which they are operating.

For example, a time-oriented supervisor may say the following to an employee who has just entered his office and asked to talk: "Sure, I can talk, but I only have about five minutes." These listeners may also exhibit nonverbal cues that indicate time and/or attention shortages, such as looking at a clock, avoiding eye contact, or nonverbally trying to close down an interaction. Time-oriented listeners are also more likely to interrupt others, which may make them seem insensitive to emotional/personal needs. People often get action-oriented and time-oriented listeners confused. Action-oriented listeners would be happy to get to a conclusion or decision quickly if they perceive that they are acting on well-organized and accurate information. They would, however, not mind taking longer to reach a conclusion when dealing with a complex topic, and they would delay making a decision if the information presented to them didn't meet their standards of organization. Unlike time-oriented listeners, action-oriented listeners are not as likely to cut people off (especially if people are presenting relevant information) and are not as likely to take short cuts.

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Listening is a learned process and skill that we can improve on with concerted effort. Improving our listening skills can benefit us in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
- Listening is the process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. In the receiving stage, we select and attend to various stimuli based on salience. We then interpret auditory and visual stimuli in order to make meaning out of them based on our existing schemata. Short-term and long-term memory store stimuli until they are discarded or processed for later recall. We then evaluate the credibility, completeness, and worth of a message before responding with verbal and nonverbal signals.
- Discriminative listening is the most basic form of listening, and we use it to distinguish between and focus on specific sounds. We use informational listening to try to comprehend and retain information. Through critical listening, we analyze and evaluate messages at various levels. We use empathetic listening to try to understand or experience what a speaker is feeling.
- People-oriented listeners are concerned with others' needs and feelings, which may distract from a task or the content of a message. Action-oriented listeners prefer listening to well-organized and precise information and are more concerned about solving an issue than they are about supporting the speaker. Content-oriented listeners enjoy processing complicated information and are typically viewed as credible because they view an issue from multiple perspectives before making a decision. Although content-oriented listeners may not be very effective in situations with time constraints, time-oriented listeners are fixated on time limits and listen in limited segments regardless of the complexity of the information or the emotions involved, which can make them appear cold and distant to some.

Exercises

1. The recalling stage of the listening process is a place where many people experience difficulties. What techniques do you use or could you use to improve your recall of certain information such as people's names, key concepts from your classes, or instructions or directions given verbally?
2. Getting integrated: Identify how critical listening might be useful for you in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.
3. Listening scholars have noted that empathetic listening is the most difficult type of listening. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Which style of listening best describes you and why? Which style do you have the most difficulty with or like the least and why?

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