

COMS 155: WORKPLACE SKILLS



Holly Manning
Johnson County Community College

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Holly Manning

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1: COMMUNICATION BASICS

1.1: Communication in Context

1.2: Elements in communication

1.3: Why Is It Important to Communicate Well?

1.4: Your Responsibilities as a Communicator

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1.1: Communication in Context

Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe five types of communication contexts.

Now that we have examined the eight components of communication, let's examine this in context. Is a quiet dinner conversation with someone you care about the same experience as a discussion in class or giving a speech? Is sending a text message to a friend the same experience as writing a professional project proposal or a purchase order? Each context has an influence on the communication process. Contexts can overlap, creating an even more dynamic process. You have been communicating in many of these contexts across your lifetime, and you'll be able to apply what you've learned through experience in each context to business communication.

Intrapersonal Communication

Have you ever listened to a speech or lecture and gotten caught up in your thoughts so that, while the speaker continued, you were no longer listening? During a phone conversation, have you ever been thinking about what you are going to say, or what question you might ask, instead of listening to the other person? Finally, have you ever told yourself how you did after you wrote a document or gave a presentation? As you "talk with yourself" you are engaged in intrapersonal communication.

Intrapersonal communication involves one person; it is often called "self-talk." (Wood, 1997) Donna Vocate's book on intrapersonal communication explains how, as we use language to reflect on our own experiences, we talk ourselves through situations. For example, the voice within you that tells you, "Keep on Going! I can DO IT!" when you are putting your all into completing a five-mile race; or that says, "This report I've written is pretty good." Your intrapersonal communication can be positive or negative, and directly influences how you perceive and react to situations and communication with others.

What you perceive in communication with others is also influenced by your culture, native language, and your world view. As the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas said, "Every process of reaching understanding takes place against the background of a culturally ingrained preunderstanding." (Habermas, 1984)

For example, you may have certain expectations of time and punctuality. You weren't born with them, so where did you learn them? From those around you as you grew up. What was normal for them became normal for you, but not everyone's idea of normal is the same.

When your supervisor invites you to a meeting and says it will start at 7 p.m., does that mean 7:00 sharp, 7-ish, or even 7:30? In the business context, when a meeting is supposed to start at 9 a.m., is it promptly a 9 a.m.? Variations in time expectations depend on regional and national culture as well as individual corporate cultures. In some companies, everyone may be expected to arrive ten to fifteen minutes before the announced start time to take their seats and be ready to commence business at 9:00 sharp. In other companies, "meeting and greeting" from about 9 to 9:05 or even 9:10 is the norm. When you are unfamiliar with the expectations for a business event, it is always wise to err on the side of being punctual, regardless of what your internal assumptions about time and punctuality may be.

Interpersonal Communication

The second major context within the field of communication is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication normally involves two people, and can range from intimate and very personal to formal and impersonal. You may carry on a conversation with a loved one, sharing a serious concern. Later, at work, you may have a brief conversation about plans for the weekend with the security guard on your way home. What's the difference? Both scenarios involve interpersonal communication, but are different in levels of intimacy. The first example implies a trusting relationship established over time between two caring individuals. The second example level implies some previous familiarity, and is really more about acknowledging each other than any actual exchange of information, much like saying hello or goodbye.

Group Communication

Have you ever noticed how a small group of people in class sit near each other? Perhaps they are members of the same sports program, or just friends, but no doubt they often engage in group communication.

“Group communication is a dynamic process where a small number of people engage in a conversation.” (McLean, 2005) Group communication is generally defined as involving three to eight people. The larger the group, the more likely it is to break down into smaller groups.

To take a page from marketing, does your audience have segments or any points of convergence/divergence? We could consider factors like age, education, sex, and location to learn more about groups and their general preferences as well as dislikes. You may find several groups within the larger audience, such as specific areas of education, and use this knowledge to increase your effectiveness as a business communicator.

Public Communication

In public communication, one person speaks to a group of people; the same is true of public written communication, where one person writes a message to be read by a small or large group. The speaker or writer may ask questions, and engage the audience in a discussion (in writing, examples are an e-mail discussion or a point-counter-point series of letters to the editor), but the dynamics of the conversation are distinct from group communication, where different rules apply. In a public speaking situation, the group normally defers to the speaker. For example, the boss speaks to everyone, and the sales team quietly listens without interruption.

This generalization is changing as norms and expectations change, and many cultures have a tradition of “call outs” or interjections that are not to be interpreted as interruptions or competition for the floor, but instead as affirmations. The boss may say, as part of a charged-up motivational speech, “Do you hear me?” and the sales team is expected to call back “Yes Sir!” The boss, as a public speaker, recognizes that intrapersonal communication (thoughts of the individual members) or interpersonal communication (communication between team members) may interfere with this classic public speaking dynamic of all to one, or the audience devoting all its attention to the speaker, and incorporate attention getting and engagement strategies to keep the sales team focused on the message.

Mass Communication

How do you tell everyone on campus where and when all the classes are held? Would a speech from the front steps work? Perhaps it might meet the need if your school is a very small one. A written schedule that lists all classes would be a better alternative. How do you let everyone know there is a sale on in your store, or that your new product will meet their needs, or that your position on a political issue is the same as your constituents? You send a message to as many people as you can through mass communication. Does everyone receive mass communication the same way they might receive a personal phone call? Not likely. Some people who receive mass mailings assume that they are “junk mail” (i.e., that they do not meet the recipients’ needs) and throw them away unopened. People may tune out a television advertisement with a click of the mute button, delete tweets or ignore friend requests on Facebook by the hundreds, or send all unsolicited e-mail straight to the spam folder unread.

Mass media is a powerful force in modern society and our daily lives, and is adapting rapidly to new technologies. Mass communication involves sending a single message to a group. It allows us to communicate our message to a large number of people, but we are limited in our ability to tailor our message to specific audiences, groups, or individuals. As a business communicator, you can use multimedia as a visual aid or reference common programs, films, or other images that your audience finds familiar yet engaging. You can tweet a picture that is worth far more than 140 characters, and you are just as likely to elicit a significant response. By choosing messages or references that many audience members will recognize or can identify with, you can develop common ground and increase the appeal of your message.

Key Takeaway

Communication contexts include intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication. Each context has its advantages and disadvantages, and its appropriate and inappropriate uses.

Exercises

1. Please recall a time when you gave a speech in front of a group. How did you feel? What was your experience? What did you learn from your experience?
2. If you were asked to get the attention of your peers, what image or word would you choose and why?
3. If you were asked to get the attention of someone like yourself, what image or word would you choose and why?
4. Make a list of mass communication messages you observe for a one hour period of time. Share your list with classmates.

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1.2: Elements in communication

Communication can mean different things to different people. It is affected by and influenced by our experiences, perceptions, culture, and more. To start, let's reflect on our beliefs about communication.

- Think about communication in your daily life. When you make a phone call, send a text message, or like a post on Facebook, what is the purpose of that activity?
- Have you ever felt confused by what someone is telling you or argued over a misunderstood email?
- What does “communication” mean to you?
- What does “successful” communication look like to you?
- What are some barriers you've experienced when communicating with others in-person, online, or through writing?

There are many current models and theories that explain, plan, and predict communication processes and their successes or failures. In the workplace, we might be more concerned about practical knowledge and skills than theory. However, good practice is built on a solid foundation of understanding and skill.

Defining communication

The word communication is derived from a Latin word meaning “to share.” Communication can be defined as “purposefully and actively exchanging information between two or more people to convey or receive the intended meanings through a shared system of signs and (symbols)” (“Communication,” 2015, para. 1).

Let us break this definition down by way of example. Imagine you are in a coffee shop with a friend, and they are telling you a story about the first goal they scored in hockey as a child. What images come to mind as you hear their story? Is your friend using words you understand to describe the situation? Are they speaking in long, complicated sentences or short, descriptive sentences? Are they leaning back in their chair and speaking calmly, or can you tell they are excited? Are they using words to describe the events leading up to their big goal, or did they draw a diagram of the rink and positions of the players on a napkin? Did your friend pause and wait for you to comment throughout their story or just blast right through? Did you have trouble hearing your friend at any point in the story because other people were talking or because the milk steamer in the coffee shop was whistling?

All of these questions directly relate to the considerations for communication in this course, including analyzing the audience, choosing a communications channel, using plain language, and using visual aids.

Before we examine each of these considerations in more detail, we should consider the elements of the communication process.

The Communication Process

The communication process includes the steps we take in order to ensure we have succeeded in communicating. The communication process comprises essential and interconnected elements detailed in Fig. 1.2.1. We will continue to reflect on the story of your friend in the coffee shop to explore each element in detail.

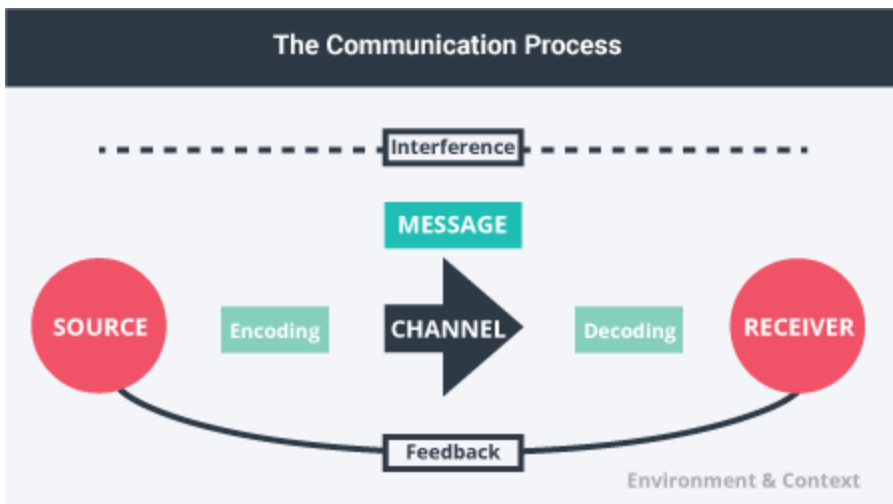


Fig. 1.2.1 The communication process by Laura Underwood

Source: The source comes up with an idea and sends a message in order to share information with others. The source could be one other person or a group of people. In our example above, your friend is trying to share the events leading up to their first hockey goal and, likely, the feelings they had at the time as well.

Message: The message is the information or subject matter the source is intending to share. The information may be an opinion, feelings, instructions, requests, or suggestions. In our example above, your friend identified information worth sharing, maybe the size of one of the defence players on the other team, in order to help you visualize the situation.

Channels: The source may encode information in the form of words, images, sounds, body language, and more. There are many definitions and categories of communication channels to describe their role in the communication process, including verbal, non-verbal, written, and digital. In our example above, your friends might make sounds or use body language in addition to their words to emphasize specific bits of information. For example, when describing a large defense player on the other team, they may extend their arms to explain the height of the other team's defense player.

Receiver: The receiver is the person for whom the message is intended. This person is charged with decoding the message in an attempt to understand the intentions of the source. In our example above, you as the receiver may understand the overall concept of your friend scoring a goal in hockey and can envision the techniques your friend used. However, there may also be some information you do not understand—such as a certain term—or perhaps your friend describes some events in a confusing order. One thing the receiver might try is to provide some kind of feedback to communicate back to the source that the communication did not achieve full understanding and that the source should try again.

Environment: The environment is the physical and psychological space in which the communication is happening (McLean, 2005). It might also describe if the space is formal or informal. In our example above, it is the coffee shop you and your friend are visiting in.

Context: The context is the setting, scene, and psychological and psychosocial expectations of the source and the receiver(s) (McLean, 2005). This is strongly linked to expectations of those who are sending the message and those who are receiving the message. In our example above, you might expect natural pauses in your friend's storytelling that will allow you to confirm your understanding or ask a question.

Interference: There are many kinds of interference (also called "noise") that inhibit effective communication. Interference may include poor audio quality or too much sound, poor image quality, too much or too little light, attention, etc. In our working example, the coffee shop might be quite busy and thus very loud. You would have trouble hearing your friend clearly, which in turn might cause you to miss a critical word or phrase important to the story.

Those involved in the communication process move fluidly between each of these eight elements until the process ends.

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1.3: Why Is It Important to Communicate Well?

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the importance of communication in gaining a better understanding of yourself and others.
- Explain how communication skills help you solve problems, learn new things, and build your career.

Communication Influences Your Thinking about Yourself and Others

We all share a fundamental drive to communicate. Communication can be defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning (Pearson & Nelson, 2000). You share meaning in what you say and how you say it, both in oral and written forms. If you could not communicate, what would life be like? A series of never-ending frustrations? Not being able to ask for what you need or even to understand the needs of others?

Being unable to communicate might even mean losing a part of yourself, for you communicate your self-concept—your sense of self and awareness of who you are—in many ways. Do you like to write? Do you find it easy to make a phone call to a stranger or to speak to a room full of people? Perhaps someone told you that you don't speak clearly or your grammar needs improvement. Does that make you more or less likely to want to communicate? For some, it may be a positive challenge, while for others it may be discouraging. But in all cases, your ability to communicate is central to your self-concept.

Take a look at your clothes. What are the brands you are wearing? What do you think they say about you? Do you feel that certain styles of shoes, jewelry, tattoos, music, or even automobiles express who you are? Part of your self-concept may be that you express yourself through texting, or through writing longer documents like essays and research papers, or through the way you speak.

On the other side of the coin, your communications skills help you to understand others—not just their words, but also their tone of voice, their nonverbal gestures, or the format of their written documents provide you with clues about who they are and what their values and priorities may be. Active listening and reading are also part of being a successful communicator.

Communication Influences How You Learn

When you were an infant, you learned to talk over a period of many months. When you got older, you didn't learn to ride a bike, drive a car, or even text a message on your cell phone in one brief moment. You need to begin the process of improving your speaking and writing with the frame of mind that it will require effort, persistence, and self-correction.

You learn to speak in public by first having conversations, then by answering questions and expressing your opinions in class, and finally by preparing and delivering a “stand-up” speech. Similarly, you learn to write by first learning to read, then by writing and learning to think critically. Your speaking and writing are reflections of your thoughts, experience, and education. Part of that combination is your level of experience listening to other speakers, reading documents and styles of writing, and studying formats similar to what you aim to produce.

As you study business communication, you may receive suggestions for improvement and clarification from speakers and writers more experienced than yourself. Take their suggestions as challenges to improve; don't give up when your first speech or first draft does not communicate the message you intend. Stick with it until you get it right. Your success in communicating is a skill that applies to almost every field of work, and it makes a difference in your relationships with others.

Remember, luck is simply a combination of preparation and timing. You want to be prepared to communicate well when given the opportunity. Each time you do a good job, your success will bring more success.

Communication Represents You and Your Employer

You want to make a good first impression on your friends and family, instructors, and employer. They all want you to convey a

positive image, as it reflects on them. In your career, you will represent your business or company in spoken and written form. Your professionalism and attention to detail will reflect positively on you and set you up for success.

In both oral and written situations, you will benefit from having the ability to communicate clearly. These are skills you will use for the rest of your life. Positive improvements in these skills will have a positive impact on your relationships, your prospects for employment, and your ability to make a difference in the world.

Communication Skills Are Desired by Business and Industry

Oral and written communication proficiencies are consistently ranked in the top ten desirable skills by employer surveys year after year. In fact, high-powered business executives sometimes hire consultants to coach them in sharpening their communication skills. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the following are the top five personal qualities or skills potential employers seek:

1. Communication skills (verbal and written)
2. Strong work ethic
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others, group communication)
4. Initiative
5. Analytical skills

Knowing this, you can see that one way for you to be successful and increase your promotion potential is to increase your abilities to speak and write effectively.



Figure 1.3.1: Effective communication skills are assets that will get you there. Maryland GovPics – [Baltimore Jewish Council Meeting](#) – CC BY 2.0.

In September 2004, the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges published a study on 120 human resource directors titled *Writing: A Ticket to Work... Or a Ticket Out, A Survey of Business Leaders*. The study found that "writing is both a 'marker' of high-skill, high-wage, professional work and a 'gatekeeper' with clear equity implications," said Bob Kerrey, president of New School University in New York and chair of the commission. "People unable to express themselves clearly in writing limit their opportunities for professional, salaried employment." (The College Board, 2004)

On the other end of the spectrum, it is estimated that over forty million Americans are illiterate, or unable to functionally read or write. If you are reading this book, you may not be part of an at-risk group in need of basic skill development, but you still may need additional training and practice as you raise your skill level.

An individual with excellent communication skills is an asset to every organization. No matter what career you plan to pursue, learning to express yourself professionally in speech and in writing will help you get there.

Key Takeaway

Communication forms a part of your self-concept, and it helps you understand yourself and others, solve problems and learn new things, and build your career.

Exercises

1. Imagine that you have been hired to make “cold calls” to ask people whether they are familiar with a new restaurant that has just opened in your neighborhood. Write a script for the phone call. Ask a classmate to copresent as you deliver the script orally in class, as if you were making a phone call to the classmate. Discuss your experience with the rest of the class.
2. Imagine you have been assigned the task of creating a job description. Identify a job, locate at least two sample job descriptions, and create one. Please present the job description to the class and note to what degree communication skills play a role in the tasks or duties you have included.

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1.4: Your Responsibilities as a Communicator

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss and provide several examples of each of the two main responsibilities of a business communicator.

Whenever you speak or write in a business environment, you have certain responsibilities to your audience, your employer, and your profession. Your audience comes to you with an inherent set of expectations that you will fulfill these responsibilities. The specific expectations may change given the context or environment, but two central ideas will remain: be prepared, and be ethical.

Communicator is Prepared

As the business communicator's first responsibility, preparation includes several facets which we will examine: organization, clarity, and being concise and punctual.

Being prepared means that you have selected a topic appropriate to your audience, gathered enough information to cover the topic well, put your information into a logical sequence, and considered how best to present it. If your communication is a written one, you have written an outline and at least one rough draft, read it over to improve your writing and correct errors, and sought feedback where appropriate. If your communication is oral, you have practiced several times before your actual performance.

The Prepared Communicator is Organized

Part of being prepared is being organized. Aristotle called this *logos*, or logic, and it involves the steps or points that lead your communication to a conclusion. Once you've invested time in researching your topic, you will want to narrow your focus to a few key points and consider how you'll present them. On any given topic there is a wealth of information; your job is to narrow that content down to a manageable level, serving the role of gatekeeper by selecting some information and "de-selecting," or choosing to not include other points or ideas.

You also need to consider how to link your main points together for your audience. Use transitions to provide signposts or cues for your audience to follow along. "Now that we've examined X, let's consider Y" is a transitional statement that provides a cue that you are moving from topic to topic. Your listeners or readers will appreciate your being well organized so that they can follow your message from point to point.

The Prepared Communicator is Clear

You have probably had the unhappy experience of reading or listening to a communication that was vague and wandering. Part of being prepared is being clear. If your message is unclear, the audience will lose interest and tune you out, bringing an end to effective communication.

Interestingly, clarity begins with intrapersonal communication: you need to have a clear idea in your mind of what you want to say before you can say it clearly to someone else. At the interpersonal level, clarity involves considering your audience, as you will want to choose words and phrases they understand and avoid jargon or slang that may be unfamiliar to them.

Clarity also involves presentation. A brilliant message scrawled in illegible handwriting, or in pale gray type on gray paper, will not be clear. When it comes to oral communication, if you mumble your words, speak too quickly or use a monotonous tone of voice, or stumble over certain words or phrases, the clarity of your presentation will suffer.

Technology also plays a part; if you are using a microphone or conducting a teleconference, clarity will depend on this equipment functioning properly—which brings us back to the importance of preparation. In this case, in addition to preparing your speech, you need to prepare by testing the equipment ahead of time.

The Prepared Communicator is Concise and Punctual

Concise means brief and to the point. In most business communications you are expected to “get down to business” right away. Being prepared includes being able to state your points clearly and support them with clear evidence in a relatively straightforward, linear way.

It may be tempting to show how much you know by incorporating additional information into your document or speech, but in so doing you run the risk of boring, confusing, or overloading your audience. Talking in circles or indulging in tangents, where you get off topic or go too deep, can hinder an audience’s ability to grasp your message. Be to the point and concise in your choice of words, organization, and even visual aids.

Being concise also involves being sensitive to time constraints. How many times have you listened to a speaker say “in conclusion” only to continue speaking for what seems like forever? How many meetings and conference calls have you attended that got started late or ran beyond the planned ending time? The solution, of course, is to be prepared to be punctual. If you are asked to give a five-minute presentation at a meeting, your coworkers will not appreciate your taking fifteen minutes, any more than your supervisor would appreciate your submitting a fifteen-page report when you were asked to write five pages. For oral presentations, time yourself when you rehearse and make sure you can deliver your message within the allotted number of minutes.



Figure 1.4.1: Good business communication does not waste words or time. Angelina Earley – [Times! Of! The World!](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

There is one possible exception to this principle. Many non-Western cultures prefer a less direct approach, where business communication often begins with social or general comments that a U.S. audience might consider unnecessary. Some cultures also have a less strict interpretation of time schedules and punctuality. While it is important to recognize that different cultures have different expectations, the general rule holds true that good business communication does not waste words or time.

Communicator is Ethical

The business communicator’s second fundamental responsibility is to be ethical. Ethics refers to a set of principles or rules for correct conduct. It echoes what Aristotle called *ethos*, the communicator’s good character and reputation for doing what is right. Communicating ethically involves being egalitarian, respectful, and trustworthy—overall, practicing the “golden rule” of treating your audience the way you would want to be treated.

Communication can move communities, influence cultures, and change history. It can motivate people to take stand, consider an argument, or purchase a product. The degree to which you consider both the common good and fundamental principles you hold to be true when crafting your message directly relates to how your message will affect others.

The Ethical Communicator is Egalitarian

The word “egalitarian” comes from the root “equal.” To be egalitarian is to believe in basic equality: that all people should share equally in the benefits and burdens of a society. It means that everyone is entitled to the same respect, expectations, access to information, and rewards of participation in a group.

To communicate in an egalitarian manner, speak and write in a way that is comprehensible and relevant to all your listeners or readers, not just those who are “like you” in terms of age, gender, race or ethnicity, or other characteristics.

In business, you will often communicate to people with certain professional qualifications. For example, you may draft a memo addressed to all the nurses in a certain hospital, or give a speech to all the adjusters in a certain branch of an insurance company. Being egalitarian does not mean you have to avoid professional terminology that is understood by nurses or insurance adjusters. But it does mean that your hospital letter should be worded for all the hospital’s nurses—not just female nurses, not just nurses working directly with patients, not just nurses under age fifty-five. An egalitarian communicator seeks to unify the audience by using ideas and language that are appropriate for all the message’s readers or listeners.

The Ethical Communicator is Respectful

People are influenced by emotions as well as logic. Aristotle named *pathos*, or passion, enthusiasm and energy, as the third of his three important parts of communicating after *logos* and *ethos*.

Most of us have probably seen an audience manipulated by a “cult of personality,” believing whatever the speaker said simply because of how dramatically he or she delivered a speech; by being manipulative, the speaker fails to respect the audience. We may have also seen people hurt by sarcasm, insults, and other disrespectful forms of communication.

This does not mean that passion and enthusiasm are out of place in business communication. Indeed, they are very important. You can hardly expect your audience to care about your message if you don’t show that you care about it yourself. If your topic is worth writing or speaking about, make an effort to show your audience why it is worthwhile by speaking enthusiastically or using a dynamic writing style. Doing so, in fact, shows respect for their time and their intelligence.

However, the ethical communicator will be passionate and enthusiastic without being disrespectful. Losing one’s temper and being abusive are generally regarded as showing a lack of professionalism (and could even involve legal consequences for you or your employer). When you disagree strongly with a coworker, feel deeply annoyed with a difficult customer, or find serious fault with a competitor’s product, it is important to express such sentiments respectfully. For example, instead of telling a customer, “I’ve had it with your complaints!” a respectful business communicator might say, “I’m having trouble seeing how I can fix this situation. Would you explain to me what you want to see happen?”

The Ethical Communicator is Trustworthy

Trust is a key component in communication, and this is especially true in business. As a consumer, would you choose to buy merchandise from a company you did not trust? If you were an employer, would you hire someone you did not trust?

Your goal as a communicator is to build a healthy relationship with your audience, and to do that you must show them why they can trust you and why the information you are about to give them is believable. One way to do this is to begin your message by providing some information about your qualifications and background, your interest in the topic, or your reasons for communicating at this particular time.

Your audience will expect that what you say is the truth as you understand it. This means that you have not intentionally omitted, deleted, or taken information out of context simply to prove your points. They will listen to what you say and how you say it, but also to what you don’t say or do. You may consider more than one perspective on your topic, and then select the perspective you perceive to be correct, giving concrete reasons why you came to this conclusion. People in the audience may have considered or believe in some of the perspectives you consider, and your attention to them will indicate you have done your homework.

Being worthy of trust is something you earn with an audience. Many wise people have observed that trust is hard to build but easy to lose. A communicator may not know something and still be trustworthy, but it’s a violation of trust to pretend you know something when you don’t. Communicate what you know, and if you don’t know something, research it before you speak or write. If you are asked a question to which you don’t know the answer, say “I don’t know the answer but I will research it and get back

to you” (and then make sure you follow through later). This will go over much better with the audience than trying to cover by stumbling through an answer or portraying yourself as knowledgeable on an issue that you are not.

The “Golden Rule”

When in doubt, remember the “golden rule,” which says to treat others the way you would like to be treated. In all its many forms, the golden rule incorporates human kindness, cooperation, and reciprocity across cultures, languages, backgrounds and interests. Regardless of where you travel, who you communicate with, or what your audience is like, remember how you would feel if you were on the receiving end of your communication, and act accordingly.

Key Takeaway

As a communicator, you are responsible for being prepared and being ethical. Being prepared includes being organized, clear, concise, and punctual. Being ethical includes being egalitarian, respectful, and trustworthy and overall, practicing the “golden rule.”

Exercises

1. Recall one time you felt offended or insulted in a conversation. What contributed to your perception? Please share your comments with classmates.
2. When someone lost your trust, were they able earn it back? Please share your comments with classmates?
3. Does the communicator have a responsibility to the audience? Does the audience have a responsibility to the speaker? Why or why not? Please share your comments with classmates.

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2: CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE

2.1: Intercultural communication

2.2: Cultural Diversity

2.3: Demographic Diversity

2.4: Gender Diversity

2.5: How Biases Are Formed

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2.1: Intercultural communication

We may be tempted to think of intercultural communication as interaction between two people from different countries. While two distinct national passports communicate a key part of our identity non-verbally, what happens when two people from two different parts of the same country communicate? Indeed, intercultural communication happens between subgroups of the same country. Whether it be the distinctions between dialects in the same language, the differences in perspective between an Eastern Canadian and a Western Canadian, or the rural- versus-urban dynamic, our geographic, linguistic, educational, sociological, and psychological traits influence our communication.

Culture is part of the very fabric of our thought, and we cannot separate ourselves from it, even as we leave home and begin to define ourselves in new ways through work and achievements. Every business or organization has a culture, and within what may be considered a global culture, there are many subcultures or co-cultures. For example, consider the difference between the sales and accounting departments in a corporation. We can quickly see two distinct groups with their own symbols, vocabulary, and values. Within each group there may also be smaller groups, and each member of each department comes from a distinct background that in itself influences behaviour and interaction.

Suppose we have a group of students who are all similar in age and educational level. Do gender and the societal expectations of roles influence interaction? Of course! There will be differences on multiple levels.

More than just the clothes we wear, the movies we watch, or the video games we play, all representations of our environment are part of our culture. Culture also involves the psychological aspects and behaviours that are expected of members of our group. From the choice of words (message), to how we communicate (in person or by e-mail), to how we acknowledge understanding with a nod or a glance (non-verbal feedback), to the internal and external interference, all aspects of communication are influenced by culture.

Defining culture

Culture consists of the shared beliefs, values, and assumptions of a group of people who learn from one another and teach to others that their behaviours, attitudes, and perspectives are the correct ways to think, act, and feel.

It is helpful to think about culture in the following five ways:

- Culture is learned.
- Culture is shared.
- Culture is dynamic.
- Culture is systemic.
- Culture is symbolic.

The iceberg (shown in Figure 2.1.1), is a commonly used metaphor to describe culture and is great for illustrating the tangible and the intangible. When talking about culture, most people focus on the “tip of the iceberg,” which is visible but makes up just 10 percent of the object. The rest of the iceberg, 90 percent of it, is below the waterline.



Figure 7.51 The cultural iceberg (by Laura Underwood), adapted from Lindner (2013)

Many business leaders, when addressing intercultural situations, pick up on the things they can see—things on the “tip of the iceberg.” Things like food, clothing, and language difference are easily and immediately obvious, but focusing only on these can mean missing or overlooking deeper cultural aspects such as thought patterns, values, and beliefs that are under the surface. Solutions to any interpersonal miscommunication that results become temporary bandages covering deeply rooted conflicts.

Multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural communication

Although they are often used interchangeably, it is important to note the distinctions between the terms multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural communication.

Multiculturalism is a rather surface approach to the coexistence and tolerance of different cultures. It takes the perspective of “us and the others” and typically focuses on those tip-of-the-iceberg features of culture, thus highlighting and accepting some differences but maintaining a “safe” distance. If you have a multicultural day at work, for example, it usually will feature some food, dance, dress, or maybe learning about how to say a few words or greetings in a sampling of cultures.

Cross-cultural approaches typically go a bit deeper, the goal being to be more diplomatic or sensitive. They account for some interaction and recognition of difference through trade and cooperation, which builds some limited understanding—such as, for instance, bowing instead of shaking hands, or giving small but meaningful gifts. A common drawback of cross-cultural comparisons is that we can wade into stereotyping and ethnocentric attitudes—judging other cultures by our own cultural standards—if we aren’t mindful.

Lastly, when we look at **intercultural** approaches, we are well beneath the surface of the iceberg, intentionally making efforts to better understand other cultures as well as ourselves. An intercultural approach is not easy and is often messy, but when you get it right, it is usually far more rewarding than the other two approaches. The intercultural approach is difficult and effective for the same reasons; it acknowledges complexity and aims to work through it to a positive, inclusive, and equitable outcome.

Whenever we encounter someone, we notice similarities and differences. While both are important, it is often the differences that contribute to communication troubles. We don’t see similarities and differences only on an individual level. In fact, we also place people into in-groups and out-groups based on the similarities and differences we perceive. We tend to react to someone we perceive as a member of an out-group based on the characteristics we attach to the group rather than the individual (Allen, 2010). In these situations, it is more likely that stereotypes and prejudice will influence our communication. This division of people into opposing groups has been the source of great conflict around the world, and learning about difference and why it matters will help us be more competent communicators and help to prevent conflict.

Theories of cross-cultural communication

Hofstede

Social psychologist Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 1982, 2001, 2005) is one of the most well-known researchers in cross-cultural communication and management. Hofstede's theory places cultural dimensions on a continuum that range from high to low and really only make sense when the elements are compared to another culture. Hofstede's dimensions include the following:

- **Power distance:** High power distance means a culture accepts and expects a great deal of hierarchy; low power distance means the president and janitor could be on the same level.
- **Individualism:** High individualism means that a culture tends to put individual needs ahead of group or collective needs.
- **Uncertainty avoidance:** High uncertainty avoidance means a culture tends to go to some lengths to be able to predict and control the future. Low uncertainty avoidance means the culture is more relaxed about the future, which sometimes shows in being willing to take risks.
- **Masculinity:** High masculinity relates to a society valuing traits that were traditionally considered masculine, such as competition, aggressiveness, and achievement. A low masculinity score demonstrates traits that were traditionally considered feminine, such as cooperation, caring, and quality of life.
- **Long-term orientation:** High long-term orientation means a culture tends to take a long-term, sometimes multi-generational view when making decisions about the present and the future. Low long-term orientation is often demonstrated in cultures that want quick results and that tend to spend instead of save.
- **Indulgence:** High indulgence means cultures that are okay with people indulging their desires and impulses. Low indulgence or restraint-based cultures value people who control or suppress desires and impulses.

These tools can provide wonderful general insight into making sense of understanding differences and similarities across key below-the-surface cross-cultural elements, but remember that people are still individuals and may or may not conform to what's listed in the tools.

Trompenaars

Fons Trompenaars is another researcher who came up with a different set of cross-cultural measures. These are his seven dimensions of culture (The seven dimensions of culture, n.d.):

- **Universalism vs. particularism:** the extent that a culture is more prone to apply rules and laws as a way of ensuring fairness, in contrast to a culture that looks at the specifics of context and looks at who is involved, to ensure fairness. The former puts the task first; the latter puts the relationship first.
- **Individualism vs. communitarianism:** the extent that people prioritize individual interests versus the community's interest.
- **Specific vs. diffuse:** the extent that a culture prioritizes a head-down, task-focused approach to doing work, versus an inclusive, overlapping relationship between life and work.
- **Neutral vs. emotional:** the extent that a culture works to avoid showing emotion versus a culture that values a display or expression of emotions.
- **Achievement vs. ascription:** the degree to which a culture values earned achievement in what you do versus ascribed qualities related to who you are based on elements like title, lineage, or position.
- **Sequential time vs. synchronous time:** the degree to which a culture prefers doing things one at a time in an orderly fashion versus preferring a more flexible approach to time with the ability to do many things at once.
- **Internal direction vs. outer direction:** the degree to which members of a culture believe they have control over themselves and their environment versus being more conscious of how they need to conform to the external environment.

Like Hofstede's work, Trompenaars' dimensions help us understand some of those beneath-the-surface-of-the-iceberg elements of culture. It's equally important to understand our own cultures as it is to look at others, always being mindful that our cultures, as well as others, are made up of individuals.

High context and low context cultures

High context cultures are replete with implied meanings beyond the words on the surface and even body language that may not be obvious to people unfamiliar with the context. Low context cultures are typically more direct and tend to use words to attempt to convey precise meaning.

For example, an agreement in a high context culture might be verbal because the parties know each other's families, histories, and social position. This knowledge is sufficient for the agreement to be enforced. No one actually has to say, "I know where you live. If you don't hold up your end of the bargain, ..." because the shared understanding is implied and highly contextual. A low context culture usually requires highly detailed, written agreements that are signed by both parties, sometimes mediated through specialists like lawyers, as a way to enforce the agreement. This is low context because the written agreement spells out all the details so that not much is left to the imagination or "context."

Working with others

How can you prepare to work with people from cultures different than your own? Start by doing your homework. Let's assume that you have a group of Japanese colleagues visiting your office next week. How could you prepare for their visit? If you're not already familiar with the history and culture of Japan, this is a good time to do some reading or a little bit of research online. If you can find a few English-language publications from Japan (such as newspapers and magazines), you may wish to read through them to become familiar with current events and gain some insight into the written communication style used.

Preparing this way will help you to avoid mentioning sensitive topics and to show correct etiquette to your guests. For example, Japanese culture values modesty, politeness, and punctuality, so with this information, you can make sure you are early for appointments and do not monopolize conversations by talking about yourself and your achievements. You should also find out what faux pas to avoid. For example, in company of Japanese people, it is customary to pour others' drinks (another person at the table will pour yours). Also, make sure you do not put your chopsticks vertically in a bowl of rice, as this is considered rude. If you have not used chopsticks before and you expect to eat Japanese food with your colleagues, it would be a nice gesture to make an effort to learn. Similarly, learning a few words of the language (e.g., hello, nice to meet you, thank you, and goodbye) will show your guests that you are interested in their culture and are willing to make the effort to communicate.

If you have a colleague who has traveled to Japan or has spent time in the company of Japanese colleagues before, ask them about their experience so that you can prepare. What mistakes should you avoid? How should you address and greet your colleagues? Knowing the answers to these questions will make you feel more confident when the time comes. But most of all, remember that a little goes a long way. Your guests will appreciate your efforts to make them feel welcome and comfortable. People are, for the most part, kind and understanding, so if you make some mistakes along the way, be kind to yourself. Reflect on what happened, learn from it, and move on. Most people are keen to share their culture with others, so your guests will be happy to explain various practices to you.

Improving your intercultural competence

One helpful way to develop your intercultural communication competence is to develop sensitivity to intercultural communication issues and best practices. From everything we have learned so far, it may feel complex and overwhelming. The Intercultural Development Continuum is a theory created by Mitchell Hammer (2012) that helps demystify the process of moving from monocultural approaches to intercultural approaches. There are five steps in this transition:

1. Denial: Denial is the problem-denying stage. For example, a well-meaning person might say that they pay no attention to race issues because they themselves are "colour blind" and treat everyone the same, irrespective of race. While on the surface this attitude seems fair-minded, it can mean willfully blinding oneself to very real cultural differences. Essentially, not much sensitivity or empathy can be present if one denies that cultural differences actually exist. This is a monocultural mindset. When there's denial in organizations, diversity feels *ignored*.

2. Polarization: Polarization is the stage where one accepts and acknowledges that there is such a thing as cultural difference, but the difference is framed as a negative "us versus them" proposition. This usually means "we" are the good guys, and "they" are the bad guys. Sometimes a person will reverse this approach and say their own culture is bad or otherwise deficient and see a different culture as superior or very good. Either way, polarization reinforces already-existing biases and stereotypes and misses out on nuanced understanding and empathy. It is thus considered more of a monocultural mindset. When polarization exists in organizations, diversity usually feels *uncomfortable*.

3. Minimization: Minimization is a hybrid category that is really neither monocultural nor intercultural. Minimization recognizes that there are cultural differences, even significant ones, but tends to focus on universal commonalities that can mask or paper over other important cultural distinctions. This is typically characterized by limited cultural self-awareness in the case of a person belonging to a dominant culture, or as a strategy by members of non-dominant groups to "go along to get along" in an organization. When dominant culture minimization exists in organizations, diversity feels *not heard*.

4. Acceptance: Acceptance demonstrates a recognition and deeper appreciation of both their own and others' cultural differences and commonalities and is the first dimension that exhibits a more intercultural mindset. At this level, people are better able to detect cultural patterns and able to see how those patterns make sense in their own and other cultural contexts. There is the capacity to accept others as being different and at the same time being fully human. When there is acceptance in organizations, diversity feels *understood*.

5. Adaptation: Adaptation is characterized by an ability not only to recognize different cultural patterns in oneself and other cultures but also to effectively adapt one's mindset or behaviour to suit the cultural context in an authentic way. When there is adaptation in organizations, diversity feels *valued and involved*.

The first two steps out of five reflect monocultural mindsets. According to Hammer (2009), people who belong to dominant cultural groups in a given society or people who have had very little exposure to other cultures may be more likely to have a worldview that's more monocultural. But how does this cause problems in interpersonal communication? For one, being blind to the cultural differences of the person you want to communicate with (denial) increases the likelihood that you will encode a message that they won't decode the way you anticipate, or vice versa.

For example, let's say culture A considers the head a special and sacred part of the body that others should never touch, certainly not strangers or mere acquaintances. But let's say in your culture, people sometimes pat each other on the head as a sign of respect and caring. So you pat your culture A colleague on the head, and this act sets off a huge conflict.

It would take a great deal of careful communication to sort out such a misunderstanding, but if each party keeps judging the other by their own cultural standards, it's likely that additional misunderstanding, conflict, and poor communication will transpire.

Using this example, polarization can come into play because now there's a basis of experience for selective perception of the other culture. Culture A might say that your culture is disrespectful, lacks proper morals, and values, and it might support these claims with anecdotal evidence of people from your culture patting one another on the sacred head!

Meanwhile, your culture will say that culture A is bad-tempered, unintelligent, and angry by nature and that there would be no point in even trying to respect or explain things them.

It's a simple example, but over time and history, situations like this have mounted and thus led to violence, war, and genocide.

According to Hammer (2009), the majority of people who have taken the IDI inventory, a 50- question questionnaire to determine where they are on the monocultural–intercultural continuum, fall in the category of minimization, which is neither monocultural nor intercultural. It's the middle-of-the-road category that on one hand recognizes cultural difference but on the other hand simultaneously downplays it. While not as extreme as the first two situations, interpersonal communication with someone of a different culture can also be difficult here because of the same encoding/decoding issues that can lead to inaccurate perceptions. On the positive side, the recognition of cultural differences provides a foundation on which to build and a point from which to move toward acceptance, which is an intercultural mindset.

There are fewer people in the acceptance category than there are in the minimization category, and only a small percentage of people fall into the adaptation category. This means most of us have our work cut out for us if we recognize the value—considering our increasingly global societies and economies—of developing an intercultural mindset as a way to improve our interpersonal communication skill.

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2.2: Cultural Diversity

Learning Objectives

1. Explain what culture is.
2. Define the four dimensions of culture that are part of Hofstede's framework.
3. Describe some ways in which national culture affects organizational behavior.



Figure 2.2.1: Due to increased globalization of businesses, understanding the role of culture for organizational behavior may provide you with a competitive advantage in your career. Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 4.0.

Culture refers to values, beliefs, and customs that exist in a society. In the United States, the workforce is becoming increasingly multicultural, with close to 16% of all employees being born outside the country. In addition, the world of work is becoming increasingly international. The world is going through a transformation in which China, India, and Brazil are emerging as major players in world economics. Companies are realizing that doing international business provides access to raw materials, resources, and a wider customer base. For many companies, international business is where most of the profits lie, such as for Intel Corporation, where 70% of all revenues come from outside the United States. International companies are also becoming major players within the United States. For example, China's Lenovo acquired IBM's personal computer business and became the world's third largest computer manufacturer. As a result of these trends, understanding the role of national culture for organizational behavior may provide you with a competitive advantage in your career. In fact, sometime in your career, you may find yourself working as an expatriate. An expatriate is someone who is temporarily assigned to a position in a foreign country. Such an experience may be invaluable for your career and challenge you to increase your understanding and appreciation of differences across cultures.

How do cultures differ from each other? If you have ever visited a country different from your own, you probably have stories to tell about what aspects of the culture were different and which were similar. Maybe you have noticed that in many parts of the United States people routinely greet strangers with a smile when they step into an elevator or see them on the street, but the same behavior of saying hello and smiling at strangers would be considered odd in many parts of Europe. In India and other parts of Asia, traffic flows with rules of its own, with people disobeying red lights, stopping and loading passengers in highways, or honking continuously for no apparent reason. In fact, when it comes to culture, we are like fish in the sea: We may not realize how culture is shaping our behavior until we leave our own and go someplace else. Cultural differences may shape how people dress, how they act, how they form relationships, how they address each other, what they eat, and many other aspects of daily life. Of course, talking about national cultures does not mean that national cultures are uniform. In many countries, it is possible to talk about the existence of cultures based on region or geography. For example, in the United States, the southern, eastern, western, and midwestern regions of the country are associated with slightly different values.

Thinking about hundreds of different ways in which cultures may differ is not very practical when you are trying to understand

how culture affects work behaviors. For this reason, the work of Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social scientist, is an important contribution to the literature. Hofstede studied IBM employees in 66 countries and showed that four dimensions of national culture explain an important source of variation among cultures. Research also shows that cultural variation with respect to these four dimensions influence employee job behaviors, attitudes, well-being, motivation, leadership, negotiations, and many other aspects of organizational behavior (Hofstede, 1980; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007).

Table 2.2.1: Hofstede's culture framework, a useful tool to understand the systematic differences across cultures.

Individualism Cultures in which people define themselves as individuals and form looser ties with their groups.	Collectivism Cultures where people have stronger bonds to their group membership forms a person's self identity.
• USA • Australia • UK • Canada • Hungary	• Guatemala • Ecuador • Indonesia • Pakistan • China
Low Power Distance A society that views an unequal distribution of power as relatively unacceptable.	High Power Distance A society that views an unequal distribution of power as relatively acceptable.
• Austria • Denmark • Israel • Ireland • New Zealand	• Malaysia • Slovakia • Philippines • Russia • Mexico
Low Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures in which people are comfortable in unpredictable situations and have high tolerance for ambiguity.	High Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures in which people prefer predictable situations and have low tolerance for ambiguity.
• Denmark • Jamaica • Singapore • China • Sweden	• Belgium • El Salvador • Greece • Guatemala • Portugal
Masculinity Cultures in which people value achievement and competitiveness, as well as acquisition of money and other material objects.	Femininity Cultures in which people value maintaining good relationships, caring for the weak, and quality of life.
• Slovakia • Japan • Hungary • Austria • Venezuela	• Norway • Netherlands • Sweden • Costa Rica • Chile

Source: Adapted from information in Geert Hofstede cultural dimensions. Retrieved November 12, 2008, from www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php.

Individualism-Collectivism

Individualistic cultures are cultures in which people define themselves as an individual and form looser ties with their groups. These cultures value autonomy and independence of the person, self-reliance, and creativity. Countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia are examples of individualistic cultures. In contrast, collectivistic cultures are cultures where people have stronger bonds to their groups and group membership forms a person's self identity. Asian countries such as China and Japan, as well as countries in Latin America are higher in collectivism.

In collectivistic cultures, people define themselves as part of a group. In fact, this may be one way to detect people's individualism-collectivism level. When individualists are asked a question such as "Who are you? Tell me about yourself," they are more likely to talk about their likes and dislikes, personal goals, or accomplishments. When collectivists are asked the same question, they are more likely to define themselves in relation to others, such as "I am Chinese" or "I am the daughter of a doctor and a homemaker. I have two brothers." In other words, in collectivistic cultures, self identity is shaped to a stronger extent by group memberships (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990).

In collectivistic societies, family bonds are more influential in people's daily lives. While individualists often refer to their nuclear family when thinking about their families, collectivists are more likely to define family in a broader sense, including cousins, uncles, aunts, and second cousins. Family members are more involved in each others' lives. For example, in societies such as Iran, Greece, and Turkey, extended family members may see each other several times a week. In many collectivistic societies, the language reflects the level of interaction among extended family members such that there may be different words used to refer to maternal versus paternal grandparents, aunts, or uncles. In addition to interacting with each other more often, family members have a strong sense of obligation toward each other. For example, children often expect to live with their parents until they get married. In collectivistic countries such as Thailand, Japan, and India, choosing a career or finding a spouse are all family affairs. In these cultures, family members feel accountable for each others' behavior such that one person's misbehavior may be a cause of shame for the rest of the family (Hui & Triandis, 1986). Understanding the importance of family in collectivistic cultures is critical to understanding their work behaviors. For example, one multinational oil company in Mexico was suffering from low productivity. When the situation was investigated, it became clear that the new manager of the subsidiary had gotten rid of a monthly fiesta for company employees and their families under the assumption that it was a waste of time and money. Employees had interpreted this to mean that the company no longer cared about their families (Raphael, 2001). In India, companies such as Intel organize "take your parents to work day" and involve parents in recruitment efforts, understanding the role of parents in the career and job choices of prospective employees (Frauenheim, 2005).

Collectivists are more attached to their groups and have more permanent attachments to these groups. Conversely, individualists attempt to change groups more often and have weaker bonds to them. It is important to recognize that to collectivists the entire human universe is not considered to be their in-group. In other words, collectivists draw sharper distinctions between the groups they belong to and those they do not belong to. They may be nice and friendly to their in-group members while acting much more competitively and aggressively toward out-group members. This tendency has important work implications. While individualists may evaluate the performance of their colleagues more accurately, collectivists are more likely to be generous when evaluating their in-group members. Freeborders, a software company based in San Francisco, California, found that even though it was against company policy, Chinese employees were routinely sharing salary information with their coworkers. This situation led them to change their pay system by standardizing pay at job levels and then giving raises after more frequent appraisals (Frauenheim, 2005; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003; Gomez, Shapiro, & Kirkman, 2000).

Collectivistic societies emphasize conformity to the group. The Japanese saying "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down" illustrates that being different from the group is undesirable. In these cultures, disobeying or disagreeing with one's group is difficult and people may find it hard to say no to their colleagues or friends. Instead of saying no, which would be interpreted as rebellion or at least be considered rude, they may use indirect ways of disagreeing, such as saying "I have to think about this" or "this would be difficult." Such indirect communication prevents the other party from losing face but may cause misunderstandings in international communications with cultures that have a more direct style. Collectivist cultures may have a greater preference for team-based rewards as opposed to individual-based rewards. For example, in one study, more than 75% of the subjects in Philippines viewed team-based pay as fair, while less than 50% of the U.S.-based subjects viewed team-based rewards as fair (Kirkman, Gibson, & Shapiro, 2001).

Power Distance

Power distance refers to the degree to which the society views an unequal distribution of power as acceptable. Simply put, some cultures are more egalitarian than others. In low power distance cultures, egalitarianism is the norm. In high power distance

cultures, people occupying more powerful positions such as managers, teachers, or those who are older are viewed as more powerful and deserving of a higher level of respect. High power distance cultures are hierarchical cultures where everyone has their place. Powerful people are supposed to act powerful, while those in inferior positions are expected to show respect. For example, Thailand is a high power distance culture and, starting from childhood, people learn to recognize who is superior, equal, or inferior to them. When passing people who are more powerful, individuals are expected to bow, and the more powerful the person, the deeper the bow would be (Pornpitakpan, 2000). Managers in high power distance cultures are treated with a higher degree of respect, which may surprise those in lower power distance cultures. A Citibank manager in Saudi Arabia was surprised when employees stood up every time he passed by (Denison, Haaland, & Goelzer, 2004). Similarly, in Turkey, students in elementary and high schools greet their teacher by standing up every time the teacher walks into the classroom. In these cultures, referring to a manager or a teacher with their first name would be extremely rude. High power distance within a culture may easily cause misunderstandings with those from low power distance societies. For example, the limp handshake someone from India may give or a job candidate from Chad who is looking at the floor throughout the interview are in fact showing their respect, but these behaviors may be interpreted as indicating a lack of confidence or even disrespect in low power distance cultures.

One of the most important ways in which power distance is manifested in the workplace is that in high power distance cultures, employees are unlikely to question the power and authority of their manager, and conformity to the manager will be expected. Managers in these cultures may be more used to an authoritarian style with lower levels of participative leadership demonstrated. People will be more submissive to their superiors and may take orders without questioning the manager (Kirkman, Gibson, & Shapiro, 2001). In these cultures, people may feel uncomfortable when they are asked to participate in decision making. For example, peers are much less likely to be involved in hiring decisions in high power distance cultures. Instead, these cultures seem to prefer paternalistic leaders—leaders who are authoritarian but make decisions while showing a high level of concern toward employees as if they were family members (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003; Ryan et al., 1999).

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which people feel threatened by ambiguous, risky, or unstructured situations. Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance prefer predictable situations and have low tolerance for ambiguity. Employees in these cultures expect a clear set of instructions and clarity in expectations. Therefore, there will be a greater level of creating procedures to deal with problems and writing out expected behaviors in manuals.

Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance prefer to avoid risky situations and attempt to reduce uncertainty. For example, one study showed that when hiring new employees, companies in high uncertainty avoidance cultures are likely to use a larger number of tests, conduct a larger number of interviews, and use a fixed list of interview questions (Ryan et al., 1999). Employment contracts tend to be more popular in cultures higher in uncertainty avoidance compared to cultures low in uncertainty avoidance (Raghuram, London, & Larsen, 2001). The level of change-oriented leadership seems to be lower in cultures higher in uncertainty avoidance (Ergeneli, Gohar, & Temirbekova, 2007). Companies operating in high uncertainty avoidance cultures also tend to avoid risky endeavors such as entering foreign target markets unless the target market is very large (Rothaermel, Kotha, & Steensma, 2006).

Germany is an example of a high uncertainty avoidance culture where people prefer structure in their lives and rely on rules and procedures to manage situations. Similarly, Greece is a culture relatively high in uncertainty avoidance, and Greek employees working in hierarchical and rule-oriented companies report lower levels of stress (Joiner, 2001). In contrast, cultures such as Iran and Russia are lower in uncertainty avoidance, and companies in these regions do not have rule-oriented cultures. When they create rules, they also selectively enforce rules and make a number of exceptions to them. In fact, rules may be viewed as constraining. Uncertainty avoidance may influence the type of organizations employees are attracted to. Japan's uncertainty avoidance is associated with valuing job security, while in uncertainty-avoidant Latin American cultures, many job candidates prefer the stability of bigger and well-known companies with established career paths.

Masculinity–Femininity

Masculine cultures are cultures that value achievement, competitiveness, and acquisition of money and other material objects. Japan and Hungary are examples of masculine cultures. Masculine cultures are also characterized by a separation of gender roles. In these cultures, men are more likely to be assertive and competitive compared to women. In contrast, feminine cultures are cultures that value maintaining good relationships, caring for the weak, and emphasizing quality of life. In these cultures, values are not separated by gender, and both women and men share the values of maintaining good relationships. Sweden and the Netherlands are examples of feminine cultures. The level of masculinity inherent in the culture has implications for the behavior of individuals as well as organizations. For example, in masculine cultures, the ratio of CEO pay to other management-level employees tends to be higher, indicating that these cultures are more likely to reward CEOs with higher levels of pay as opposed

to other types of rewards (Tosi & Greckhamer, 2004). The femininity of a culture affects many work practices, such as the level of work/life balance. In cultures high in femininity such as Norway and Sweden, work arrangements such as telecommuting seem to be more popular compared to cultures higher in masculinity like Italy and the United Kingdom.

OB Toolbox: Prepare Yourself for a Global Career

With the globalizing economy, boundaries with respect to careers are also blurring. How can you prepare yourself for a career that crosses national boundaries?

- *Learn a language.* If you already know that you want to live in China after you finish school, now may be the time to start learning the language. It is true that business is often conducted in English, but it is becoming increasingly ethnocentric to speak only one language while many in the rest of the world can speak two or more. For example, only 9% of those living in the United States can speak their native language plus another language fluently, as opposed to 53% of Europeans (National Virtual Translation Center, 2009). Plus, even if business is conducted in English, your adaptation to a different society, making friends, and leading a satisfying life will be much easier if you can speak the language.
- *Immerse yourself in different cultures.* Visit different cultures. This does not mean visiting five countries in 5 days. Plan on spending more time in one locale, and get to know, observe, and understand the culture.
- *Develop an openness to different experiences.* Be open to different cuisines, different languages, and different norms of working and living. If you feel very strongly that your way of living and working is the right way, you will have a hard time adjusting to a different culture.
- *Develop a strong social support network.* Once you arrive in the culture you will live in, be proactive in making friends. Being connected to people in a different culture will have an influence on your ability to adjust to living there. If you are planning on taking family members with you, their level of readiness will also influence your ability to function in a different culture.
- *Develop a sense of humor.* Adjusting to a different culture is often easier if you can laugh at yourself and the mistakes you make. If you take every mistake too personally, your stay will be less enjoyable and more frustrating.
- *Plan your return.* If you have plans to come back and work in your home country, you will need to plan your return in advance. When people leave home for a long time, they often adapt to the foreign culture they live in and may miss many elements of it when they go back home. Your old friends may have moved on, local employers may not immediately appreciate your overseas experience, and you may even find that cultural aspects of your home country may have changed in your absence. Be ready for a reverse culture shock!

Suggestions for Managing Cultural Diversity

With the increasing importance of international business as well as the culturally diverse domestic workforce, what can organizations do to manage cultural diversity?

Help Employees Build Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence is a person's capability to understand how a person's cultural background influences one's behavior. Developing cultural intelligence seems important, because the days when organizations could prepare their employees for international work simply by sending them to long seminars on a particular culture are gone. Presently, international business is not necessarily conducted between pairs of countries. A successful domestic manager is not necessarily assigned to work on a long-term assignment in China. Of course such assignments still happen, but it is more likely that the employees will continually work with others from diverse cultural backgrounds. This means employees will not necessarily have to become experts in one culture. Instead, they should have the ability to work with people from many diverse backgrounds all at the same time. For these types of assignments, employees will need to develop an awareness of overall cultural differences and learn how to recognize cultural principles that are operating in different situations. In other words, employees will need to be selected based on cultural sensitivity and understanding and trained to enhance such qualities (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). For example, GlobeSmart by Aperian Global is an online tool that helps employees learn how to deal with people from around the world. The process starts by completing a survey about your cultural values, and then these values are compared to those of different cultures. The tool provides specific advice about interpersonal interactions with these cultures (Hamm, 2008).

Avoid Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture is superior to other cultures one comes across. Ethnocentrism leads organizations to adopt universal principles when doing business around the globe and may backfire. In this chapter, we highlighted research findings showing how culture affects employee expectations of work life such as work-life balance, job security, or the level of empowerment. Ignoring cultural differences, norms, and local habits may be costly for businesses and may lead to unmotivated and dissatisfied employees. Successful global companies modify their management styles, marketing, and communication campaigns to fit with the culture in which they are operating. For example, Apple Inc.'s famous PC versus Mac advertising campaign was reshot in Japan and the United Kingdom using local actors. The American ads were found to be too aggressive for the Japanese culture, where direct product comparisons are rare and tend to make people uncomfortable. The new ads feature more friendly banter and are subtler than the U.S. ads. For the British market, the advertisers localized the humor (Fowler, Steinberg, & Patrick, 2007).

Listen to Locals

When doing cross-cultural business, locals are a key source of information. To get timely and accurate feedback, companies will need to open lines of communication and actively seek feedback. For example, Convergys, a Cincinnati-based call-center company, built a cafeteria for the employees in India. During the planning phase, the Indian vice president pointed out that because Indian food is served hot and employees would expect to receive hot meals for lunch, building a cafeteria that served only sandwiches would create dissatisfied employees. By opening the lines of communication in the planning phase of the project, Convergys was alerted to this important cultural difference in time to change the plans (Fisher, 2005).

Recognize That Culture Changes

Cultures are not static—they evolve over the years. A piece of advice that was true 5 years ago may no longer hold true. For example, showing sensitivity to the Indian caste system may be outdated advice for those internationals doing business in India today.

Do Not Always Assume That Culture Is the Problem

When doing business internationally, failure may occur due to culture as well as other problems. Attributing all misunderstandings or failures to culture may enlarge the cultural gap and shift the blame to others. In fact, managing people who have diverse personalities or functional backgrounds may create misunderstandings that are not necessarily due to cultural differences. When marketing people from the United States interact with engineers in India, misunderstandings may be caused by the differences in perceptions between marketing and engineering employees. While familiarizing employees about culture, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal skills regardless of cultural background will be important.

Key Takeaways

With the increasing prevalence of international business as well as diversification of the domestic workforce in many countries, understanding how culture affects organizational behavior is becoming important. Individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity are four key dimensions in which cultures vary. The position of a culture on these dimensions affects the suitable type of management style, reward systems, employee selection, and ways of motivating employees.

Exercises

1. What is culture? Do countries have uniform national cultures?
2. How would you describe your own home country's values on the four dimensions of culture?
3. Reflect on a time when you experienced a different culture or interacted with someone from a different culture. How did the cultural differences influence your interaction?
4. How does culture influence the proper leadership style and reward system that would be suitable for organizations?
5. Imagine that you will be sent to live in a foreign country different from your own in a month. What are the types of preparations you would benefit from doing?

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2.3: Demographic Diversity

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the benefits of managing diversity effectively.
2. Explain the challenges of diversity management.
3. Describe the unique environment facing employees with specific traits such as gender, race, religion, physical disabilities, age, and sexual orientation.

Diversity refers to the ways in which people are similar or different from each other. It may be defined by any characteristic that varies within a particular work unit such as gender, race, age, education, tenure, or functional background (such as being an engineer versus being an accountant). Even though diversity may occur with respect to any characteristic, our focus will be on diversity with respect to demographic, relatively stable, and visible characteristics: specifically gender, race, age, religion, physical abilities, and sexual orientation. Understanding how these characteristics shape organizational behavior is important. While many organizations publicly rave about the benefits of diversity, many find it challenging to manage diversity effectively. This is evidenced by the number of complaints filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regarding discrimination. In the United States, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlaw discrimination based on age, gender, race, national origin, or religion. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination of otherwise capable employees based on physical or mental disabilities. In 2008, over 95,000 individuals filed a complaint claiming that they were discriminated based on these protected characteristics. Of course, this number represents only the most extreme instances in which victims must have received visibly discriminatory treatment to justify filing a complaint. It is reasonable to assume that many instances of discrimination go unreported because they are more subtle and employees may not even be aware of inconsistencies such as pay discrimination. Before the passing of antidiscrimination laws in the United States, many forms of discrimination were socially acceptable. This acceptance of certain discrimination practices is more likely to be seen in countries without similar employment laws. It seems that there is room for improvement when it comes to benefiting from diversity, understanding its pitfalls, and creating a work environment where people feel appreciated for their contributions regardless of who they are.

Benefits of Diversity

What is the business case for diversity? Having a diverse workforce and managing it effectively have the potential to bring about a number of benefits to organizations.

Higher Creativity in Decision Making



Figure 2.3.1: Research shows that diverse teams tend to make higher quality decisions. [Teamwork and team spirit](#) – CC BY-ND 2.0.

An important potential benefit of having a diverse workforce is the ability to make higher quality decisions. In a diverse work team, people will have different opinions and perspectives. In these teams, individuals are more likely to consider more alternatives and think outside the box when making decisions. When thinking about a problem, team members may identify novel solutions. Research shows that diverse teams tend to make higher quality decisions (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996). Therefore, having a diverse workforce may have a direct impact on a company's bottom line by increasing creativity in decision making.

Better Understanding and Service of Customers

A company with a diverse workforce may create products or services that appeal to a broader customer base. For example, PepsiCo Inc. planned and executed a successful diversification effort in the recent past. The company was able to increase the percentage of women and ethnic minorities in many levels of the company, including management. The company points out that in 2004, about 1% of the company's 8% revenue growth came from products that were inspired by the diversity efforts, such as guacamole-flavored Doritos chips and wasabi-flavored snacks. Similarly, Harley-Davidson Motor Company is pursuing diversification of employees at all levels because the company realizes that they need to reach beyond their traditional customer group to stay competitive (Hymowitz, 2005). Wal-Mart Stores Inc. heavily advertises in Hispanic neighborhoods between Christmas and The Epiphany because the company understands that Hispanics tend to exchange gifts on that day as well (Slater, Weigand, & Zwirlein, 2008). A company with a diverse workforce may understand the needs of particular groups of customers better, and customers may feel more at ease when they are dealing with a company that understands their needs.

More Satisfied Workforce

When employees feel that they are fairly treated, they tend to be more satisfied. On the other hand, when employees perceive that they are being discriminated against, they tend to be less attached to the company, less satisfied with their jobs, and experience more stress at work (Sanchez & Brock, 1996). Organizations where employees are satisfied often have lower turnover.

Higher Stock Prices

Companies that do a better job of managing a diverse workforce are often rewarded in the stock market, indicating that investors use this information to judge how well a company is being managed. For example, companies that receive an award from the U.S. Department of Labor for their diversity management programs show increases in the stock price in the days following the announcement. Conversely, companies that announce settlements for discrimination lawsuits often show a decline in stock prices afterward (Wright et al., 1995).

Lower Litigation Expenses

Companies doing a particularly bad job in diversity management face costly litigations. When an employee or a group of employees feel that the company is violating EEOC laws, they may file a complaint. The EEOC acts as a mediator between the company and the person, and the company may choose to settle the case outside the court. If no settlement is reached, the EEOC may sue the company on behalf of the complainant or may provide the injured party with a right-to-sue letter. Regardless of the outcome, these lawsuits are expensive and include attorney fees as well as the cost of the settlement or judgment, which may reach millions of dollars. The resulting poor publicity also has a cost to the company. For example, in 1999, the Coca-Cola Company faced a race discrimination lawsuit claiming that the company discriminated against African Americans in promotions. The company settled for a record \$192.5 million (Lovel, 2003). In 2004, the clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch faced a race discrimination lawsuit that led to a \$40 million settlement and over \$7 million in legal fees. The company had constructed a primarily Caucasian image and was accused of discriminating against Hispanic and African American job candidates, steering these applicants to jobs in the back of the store. As part of the settlement, the company agreed to diversify its workforce and catalog, change its image to promote diversity, and stop recruiting employees primarily from college fraternities and sororities (Greenhouse, 2004). In 2007, the new African American district attorney of New Orleans, Eddie Jordan, was accused of firing 35 Caucasian employees and replacing them with African American employees. In the resulting reverse-discrimination lawsuit, the office was found liable for \$3.7 million, leading Jordan to step down from his office in the hopes of preventing the assets of the office from being seized.^[1] As you can see, effective management of diversity can lead to big cost savings by decreasing the probability of facing costly and embarrassing lawsuits.

Higher Company Performance

As a result of all these potential benefits, companies that manage diversity more effectively tend to outperform others. Research shows that in companies pursuing a growth strategy, there was a positive relationship between racial diversity of the company and firm performance (Richard, 2000). Companies ranked in the Diversity 50 list created by *DiversityInc* magazine performed better than their counterparts (Slater, Weigand, & Zwirlein, 2008). And, in a survey of 500 large companies, those with the largest percentage of female executives performed better than those with the smallest percentage of female executives (Weisul, 2004).

Challenges of Diversity

If managing diversity effectively has the potential to increase company performance, increase creativity, and create a more satisfied workforce, why aren't all companies doing a better job of encouraging diversity? Despite all the potential advantages, there are also a number of challenges associated with increased levels of diversity in the workforce.

Similarity-Attraction Phenomenon

One of the commonly observed phenomena in human interactions is the tendency for individuals to be attracted to similar individuals (Riordan & Shore, 1997). Research shows that individuals communicate less frequently with those who are perceived as different from themselves (Chatman et al., 1998). They are also more likely to experience emotional conflict with people who differ with respect to race, age, and gender (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999). Individuals who are different from their team members are more likely to report perceptions of unfairness and feel that their contributions are ignored (Price, Harrison, & Gavin, 2006).

The similarity-attraction phenomenon may explain some of the potentially unfair treatment based on demographic traits. If a hiring manager chooses someone who is racially similar over a more qualified candidate from a different race, the decision will be ineffective and unfair. In other words, similarity-attraction may prevent some highly qualified women, minorities, or persons with disabilities from being hired. Of course, the same tendency may prevent highly qualified Caucasian and male candidates from being hired as well, but given that Caucasian males are more likely to hold powerful management positions in today's U.S.-based organizations, similarity-attraction may affect women and minorities to a greater extent. Even when candidates from minority or underrepresented groups are hired, they may receive different treatment within the organization. For example, research shows that one way in which employees may get ahead within organizations is through being mentored by a knowledgeable and powerful mentor. Yet, when the company does not have a formal mentoring program in which people are assigned a specific mentor, people are more likely to develop a mentoring relationship with someone who is similar to them in demographic traits (Dreher & Cox, 1996). This means that those who are not selected as protégés will not be able to benefit from the support and advice that would further their careers. Similarity-attraction may even affect the treatment people receive daily. If the company CEO constantly

invites a male employee to play golf with him while a female employee never receives the invitation, the male employee may have a serious advantage when important decisions are made.

Why are we more attracted to those who share our demographic attributes? Demographic traits are part of what makes up surface-level diversity. Surface-level diversity includes traits that are highly visible to us and those around us, such as race, gender, and age. Researchers believe that people pay attention to surface diversity because they are assumed to be related to deep-level diversity, which includes values, beliefs, and attitudes. We want to interact with those who share our values and attitudes, but when we meet people for the first time, we have no way of knowing whether they share similar values. As a result, we tend to use surface-level diversity to make judgments about deep-level diversity. Research shows that surface-level traits affect our interactions with other people early in our acquaintance with them, but as we get to know people, the influence of surface-level traits is replaced by deep-level traits such as similarity in values and attitudes (Harrison et al., 2002). Age, race, and gender dissimilarity are also stronger predictors of employee turnover during the first few weeks or months within a company. It seems that people who are different from others may feel isolated during their early tenure when they are dissimilar to the rest of the team, but these effects tend to disappear as people stay longer and get to know other employees.

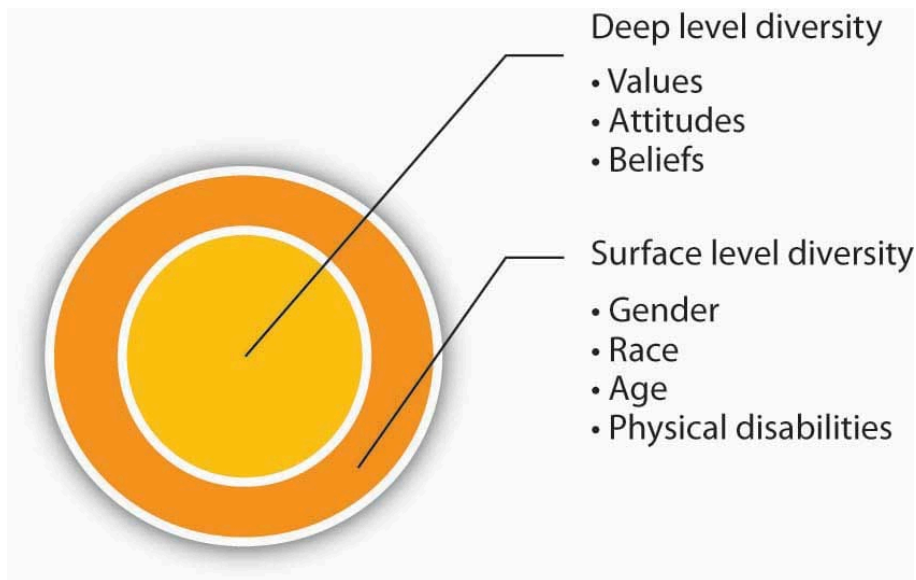


Figure 2.3.2: Individuals often initially judge

others based on surface-level diversity. Over time, this effect tends to fade and is replaced by deep-level traits such as similarity in values and attitudes.

As you may see, while similarity-attraction may put some employees at a disadvantage, it is a tendency that can be managed by organizations. By paying attention to employees early in their tenure, having formal mentoring programs in which people are assigned mentors, and training managers to be aware of the similarity-attraction tendency, organizations can go a long way in dealing with potential diversity challenges.

Faultlines

A faultline is an attribute along which a group is split into subgroups. For example, in a group with three female and three male members, gender may act as a faultline because the female members may see themselves as separate from the male members. Now imagine that the female members of the same team are all over 50 years old and the male members are all younger than 25. In this case, age and gender combine to further divide the group into two subgroups. Teams that are divided by faultlines experience a number of difficulties. For example, members of the different subgroups may avoid communicating with each other, reducing the overall cohesiveness of the team. Research shows that these types of teams make less effective decisions and are less creative (Pearsall, Ellis, & Evans, 2008; Sawyer, Houlette, & Yeagley, 2006). Faultlines are more likely to emerge in diverse teams, but not all diverse teams have faultlines. Going back to our example, if the team has three male and three female members, but if two of the female members are older and one of the male members is also older, then the composition of the team will have much different effects on the team's processes. In this case, age could be a bridging characteristic that brings together people divided across gender.

Research shows that even groups that have strong faultlines can perform well if they establish certain norms. When members of subgroups debate the decision topic among themselves before having a general group discussion, there seems to be less

communication during the meeting on pros and cons of different alternatives. Having a norm stating that members should not discuss the issue under consideration before the actual meeting may be useful in increasing decision effectiveness (Sawyer, Houlette, & Yeagley, 2006).

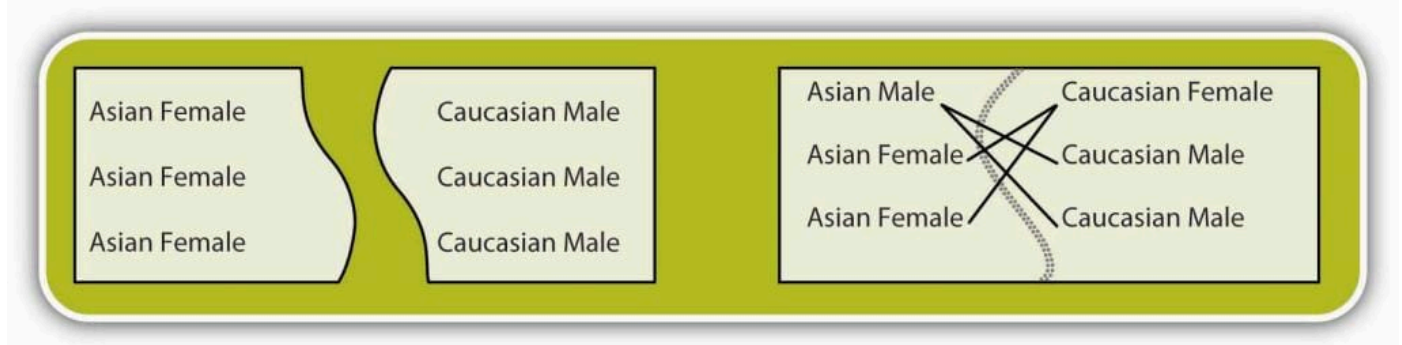


Figure 2.3.3: The group on the left will likely suffer a strong faultline due to the lack of common ground. The group to the right will likely only suffer a weak faultline because the men and women of the different groups will likely identify with each other.

Stereotypes

An important challenge of managing a diverse workforce is the possibility that stereotypes about different groups could lead to unfair decision making. Stereotypes are generalizations about a particular group of people. The assumption that women are more relationship oriented, while men are more assertive, is an example of a stereotype. The problem with stereotypes is that people often use them to make decisions about a particular individual without actually verifying whether the assumption holds for the person in question. As a result, stereotypes often lead to unfair and inaccurate decision making. For example, a hiring manager holding the stereotype mentioned above may prefer a male candidate for a management position over a well-qualified female candidate. The assumption would be that management positions require assertiveness and the male candidate would be more assertive than the female candidate. Being aware of these stereotypes is the first step to preventing them from affecting decision making.

Specific Diversity Issues

Different demographic groups face unique work environments and varying challenges in the workplace. In this section, we will review the particular challenges associated with managing gender, race, religion, physical ability, and sexual orientation diversity in the workplace.

Gender Diversity in the Workplace

In the United States, two important pieces of legislation prohibit gender discrimination at work. The Equal Pay Act (1963) prohibits discrimination in pay based on gender. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) prohibits discrimination in all employment-related decisions based on gender. Despite the existence of strong legislation, women and men often face different treatment at work. The earnings gap and the glass ceiling are two of the key problems women may experience in the workplace.

Earnings Gap

An often publicized issue women face at work is the earnings gap. The median earnings of women who worked full time in 2008 was 79% of men working full time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). There are many potential explanations for the earnings gap that is often reported in the popular media. One explanation is that women are more likely to have gaps in their résumés because they are more likely to take time off to have children. Women are still the primary caregiver for young children in many families and career gaps tend to affect earnings potential because it prevents employees from accumulating job tenure. Another potential explanation is that women are less likely to pursue high-paying occupations such as engineering and business.

In fact, research shows that men and women have somewhat different preferences in job attributes, with women valuing characteristics such as good hours, an easy commute, interpersonal relationships, helping others, and opportunities to make

friends more than men do. In turn, men seem to value promotion opportunities, freedom, challenge, leadership, and power more than women do (Konrad et al., 2000). These differences are relatively small, but they could explain some of the earnings gap. Finally, negotiation differences among women are often cited as a potential reason for the earnings gap. In general, women are less likely to initiate negotiations (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Moreover, when they actually negotiate, they achieve less favorable outcomes compared to men (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). Laboratory studies show that female candidates who negotiated were more likely to be penalized for their attempts to negotiate and male evaluators expressed an unwillingness to work with a female who negotiated (Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007). The differences in the tendency to negotiate and success in negotiating are important factors contributing to the earnings gap. According to one estimate, as much as 34% of the differences between women's and men's pay can be explained by their starting salaries (Gerhart, 1990). When differences in negotiation skills or tendencies affect starting salaries, they tend to have a large impact over the course of years.

If the earnings gap could be traced only to résumé gaps, choice of different occupations, or differences in negotiation behavior, the salary difference might be viewed as legitimate. Yet, these factors fail to completely account for gender differences in pay, and lawsuits about gender discrimination in pay abound. In these lawsuits, stereotypes or prejudices about women seem to be the main culprit. In fact, according to a Gallup poll, women are over 12 times more likely than men to perceive gender-based discrimination in the workplace (Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2008). For example, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. was recently sued for alleged gender-discrimination in pay. One of the people who initiated the lawsuit was a female assistant manager who found out that a male assistant manager with similar qualifications was making \$10,000 more per year. When she approached the store manager, she was told that the male manager had a "wife and kids to support." She was then asked to submit a household budget to justify a raise (Daniels, 2003). Such explicit discrimination, while less frequent, contributes to creating an unfair work environment.

Glass Ceiling

Another issue that provides a challenge for women in the workforce is the so-called glass ceiling. While women may be represented in lower level positions, they are less likely to be seen in higher management and executive suites of companies. In fact, while women constitute close to one-half of the workforce, men are four times more likely to reach the highest levels of organizations (Umphress et al., 2008). In 2008, only 12 of the *Fortune* 500 companies had female CEOs, including Xerox Corporation, PepsiCo, Kraft Foods Inc., and Avon Products Inc. The absence of women in leadership is unfortunate, particularly in light of studies that show the leadership performance of female leaders is comparable to, and in some dimensions such as transformational or change-oriented leadership, superior to, the performance of male leaders (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003).



Figure 2.3.4: Ursula Burns became president of Xerox Corporation in 2007. She is responsible for the company's global R&D, engineering, manufacturing, and marketing. Fortune Live Media – [Fortune The Most Powerful Women 2013](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

One explanation for the glass ceiling is the gender-based stereotypes favoring men in managerial positions. Traditionally, men have been viewed as more assertive and confident than women, while women have been viewed as more passive and submissive. Studies show that these particular stereotypes are still prevalent among male college students, which may mean that these stereotypes may be perpetuated among the next generation of managers (Duehr & Bono, 2006). Assumptions such as these are

problematic for women's advancement because stereotypes associated with men are characteristics often associated with being a manager. Stereotypes are also found to influence how managers view male versus female employees' work accomplishments. For example, when men and women work together in a team on a "masculine" task such as working on an investment portfolio and it is not clear to management which member has done what, managers are more likely to attribute the team's success to the male employees and give less credit to the female employees (Heilman & Haynes, 2005). It seems that in addition to working hard and contributing to the team, female employees should pay extra attention to ensure that their contributions are known to decision makers.

There are many organizations making the effort to make work environments more welcoming to men and women. For example, IBM is reaching out to female middle school students to get them interested in science, hoping to increase female presence in the field of engineering (Thomas, 2004). Companies such as IBM, Booz Allen Hamilton Inc., Ernst & Young Global Ltd., and General Mills Inc. top the 100 Best Companies list created by *Working Mother* magazine by providing flexible work arrangements to balance work and family demands. In addition, these companies provide employees of both sexes with learning, development, and networking opportunities (2007 100 Best companies, 2007).

Race Diversity in the Workplace

Race is another demographic characteristic that is under legal protection in the United States. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) prohibits race discrimination in all employment-related decisions. Yet race discrimination still exists in organizations. In a Korn-Ferry/Columbia University study of 280 minority managers earning more than \$100,000, 60% of the respondents reported that they had seen discrimination in their work assignments and 45% have been the target of racial or cultural jokes. The fact that such discrimination exists even at higher levels in organizations is noteworthy (Allers, 2005; Mehta et al., 2000). In a different study of over 5,500 workers, only 32% reported that their company did a good job hiring and promoting minorities (Fisher, 2004). One estimate suggests that when compared to Caucasian employees, African Americans are four times more likely and Hispanics are three times more likely to experience discrimination (Avery et al., 2007).

Ethnic minorities experience both an earnings gap and a glass ceiling. In 2008, for every dollar a Caucasian male employee made, African American males made around 79 cents while Hispanic employees made 64 cents (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Among *Fortune* 500 companies, only three (American Express Company, Aetna Inc., and Darden Restaurants Inc.) have African American CEOs. It is interesting that while ethnic minorities face these challenges, the demographic trends are such that by 2042, Caucasians are estimated to constitute less than one-half of the population in the United States. This demographic shift has already taken place in some parts of the United States such as the Los Angeles area where only 30% of the population is Caucasian (Dougherty, 2008).

Unfortunately, discrimination against ethnic minorities still occurs. One study conducted by Harvard University researchers found that when Chicago-area companies were sent fictitious résumés containing identical background information, résumés with "Caucasian" sounding names (such as Emily and Greg) were more likely to get callbacks compared to résumés with African American sounding names (such as Jamal and Lakisha) (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).

Studies indicate that ethnic minorities are less likely to experience a satisfying work environment. One study found that African Americans were more likely to be absent from work compared to Caucasians, but this trend existed only in organizations viewed as not valuing diversity (Avery et al., 2007). Similarly, among African Americans, the perception that the organization did not value diversity was related to higher levels of turnover (McKay et al., 2007). Another study found differences in the sales performance of Hispanic and Caucasian employees, but again this difference disappeared when the organization was viewed as valuing diversity (McKay, Avery, & Morris, 2008). It seems that the *perception* that the organization does not value diversity is a fundamental explanation for why ethnic minorities may feel alienated from coworkers. Creating a fair work environment where diversity is valued and appreciated seems to be the key.

Organizations often make news headlines for alleged or actual race discrimination, but there are many stories involving complete turnarounds, suggesting that conscious planning and motivation to improve may make organizations friendlier to all races. One such success story is Denny's Corporation. In 1991, Denny's restaurants settled a \$54 million race discrimination lawsuit. In 10 years, the company was able to change the situation completely. Now, women and minorities make up half of their board and almost half of their management team. The company started by hiring a chief diversity officer who reported directly to the CEO. The company implemented a diversity-training program, extended recruitment efforts to diverse colleges, and increased the number of minority-owned franchises. At the same time, customer satisfaction among African Americans increased from 30% to 80% (Speizer, 2004).

Age Diversity in the Workplace

The workforce is rapidly aging. By 2015, those who are 55 and older are estimated to constitute 20% of the workforce in the United States. The same trend seems to be occurring elsewhere in the world. In the European Union, employees over 50 years of age are projected to increase by 25% in the next 25 years (Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2007). According to International Labor Organization (ILO), out of the world's working population, the largest group is those between 40 and 44 years old. In contrast, the largest segment in 1980 was the 20- to 24-year-old group (International Labor Organization, 2005). In other words, age diversity at work will grow in the future.



Figure 2.3.5: Older employees tend to be reliable and committed employees who often perform at comparable or higher levels than younger workers. [Wikimedia Commons](#) – CC BY-SA 2.5.

What happens to work performance as employees get older? Research shows that age is correlated with a number of positive workplace behaviors, including higher levels of citizenship behaviors such as volunteering, higher compliance with safety rules, lower work injuries, lower counterproductive behaviors, and lower rates of tardiness or absenteeism (Ng & Feldman, 2008). As people get older, they are also less likely to want to quit their job when they are dissatisfied at work (Hellman, 1997).

Despite their positive workplace behaviors, employees who are older often have to deal with age-related stereotypes at work. For example, a review of a large number of studies showed that those between 17 and 29 years of age tend to rate older employees more negatively, while younger employees were viewed as more qualified and having higher potential (Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995). However, these stereotypes have been largely refuted by research. Another review showed that stereotypes about older employees—they perform on a lower level, they are less able to handle stress, or their performance declines with age—are simply inaccurate (Posthuma & Campion). The problem with these stereotypes is that they may discourage older workers from remaining in the workforce or may act as a barrier to their being hired in the first place.

In the United States, age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, which made it illegal for organizations to discriminate against employees over 40 years of age. Still, age discrimination is prevalent in workplaces. For example, while not admitting wrongdoing, Honeywell International Inc. recently settled an age discrimination lawsuit for \$2.15 million. A group of older sales representatives were laid off during company reorganization while younger employees with less experience were kept in their positions (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2004). Older employees may also face discrimination because some jobs have a perceived “correct age.” This was probably the reason behind the lawsuit International Creative Management Inc. faced against 150 TV writers. The lawsuit claimed that the talent agency systematically prevented older workers from getting jobs at major networks (TV writers settle age discrimination lawsuit, 2008).



Figure

Extra close brace or missing open brace : In many family-owned businesses, different generations work together. Nancy Pelosi – [Touring a Family-Owned Business](#) – CC BY 2.0.

What are the challenges of managing age diversity beyond the management of stereotypes? Age diversity within a team can actually lead to higher team performance. In a simulation, teams with higher age diversity were able to think of different possibilities and diverse actions, leading to higher performance for the teams (Kilduff, Angelmar, & Mehra, 2000). At the same time, managing a team with age diversity may be challenging because different age groups seem to have different opinions about what is fair treatment, leading to different perceptions of organizational justice (Colquitt, Noe, & Jackson, 2002). Age diversity also means that the workforce will consist of employees from different generations. Some organizations are noticing a generation gap and noting implications for the management of employees. For example, the pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk Inc. noticed that baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) were competitive and preferred individual feedback on performance, while Generation Y workers (born between 1979 and 1994) were more team oriented. This difference led one regional manager to start each performance feedback e-mail with recognition of team performance, which was later followed by feedback on individual performance. Similarly, Lockheed Martin Corporation noticed that employees from different generations had different learning styles, with older employees preferring PowerPoint presentations and younger employees preferring more interactive learning (White, 2008). Paying attention to such differences and tailoring various aspects of management to the particular employees in question may lead to more effective management of an age-diverse workforce.

Religious Diversity in the Workplace

In the United States, employers are prohibited from using religion in employment decisions based on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Moreover, employees are required to make reasonable accommodations to ensure that employees can practice their beliefs unless doing so provides an unreasonable hardship on the employer (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2007). After September 11, cases involving religion and particularly those involving Muslim employees have been on the rise (Bazar, 2008). Religious discrimination often occurs because the religion necessitates modifying the employee's schedule. For example, devout Muslim employees may want to pray five times a day with each prayer lasting 5 to 10 minutes. Some Jewish employees may want to take off Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, although these days are not recognized as holidays in the United States. These situations pit employers' concerns for productivity against employees' desires to fulfill religious obligations.

Accommodating someone's religious preferences may also require companies to relax their dress code to take into account religious practices such as wearing a turban for Sikhs or covering one's hair with a scarf for Muslim women. In these cases, what matters most is that the company makes a good faith attempt to accommodate the employee. For example, in a recent lawsuit that was decided in favor of Costco Wholesale Corporation, the retailer was accused of religious discrimination. A cashier who belonged to the Church of Body Modification, which is a church with about 1,000 members worldwide, wanted to be able to display her tattoos and facial piercings, which was against the dress code of Costco. Costco wanted to accommodate the employee by asking the individual to cover the piercings with skin-colored Band-Aids, which the employee refused. This is likely the primary reason why the case was decided in favor of Costco (Wellner, 2005).

Employees with Disabilities in the Workplace

Employees with a wide range of physical and mental disabilities are part of the workforce. In 2008 alone, over 19,000 cases of discrimination based on disabilities have been filed with the EEOC. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) prohibits discrimination in employment against individuals with physical as well as mental disabilities if these individuals are otherwise qualified to do their jobs with or without reasonable accommodation. For example, an organization may receive a job application from a hearing impaired candidate whose job responsibilities will include talking over the phone. With the help of a telephone amplifier, which costs around \$50, the employee will be able to perform the job; therefore, the company cannot use the hearing impairment as a reason not to hire the person, again, as long as the employee is otherwise qualified. In 2008, the largest groups of complaints were cases based on discrimination related to disabilities or illnesses such as cancer, depression, diabetes, hearing impairment, manic-depressive disorder, and orthopedic impairments, among others (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2008). Particularly employees suffering from illnesses that last for a long time and require ongoing care seem to be at a disadvantage, because they are more likely to be stereotyped, locked into dead-end jobs, and employed in jobs that require substantially lower skills and qualifications than they possess. They also are more likely to quit their jobs (Beatty & Joffe, 2006).

What can organizations do to create a better work environment for employees with disabilities? One legal requirement is that, when an employee brings up a disability, the organization should consider reasonable accommodations. This may include modifying the employee's schedule and reassigning some nonessential job functions. Organizations that offer flexible work hours may also make it easier for employees with disabilities to be more effective. Finally, supportive relationships with others seem to be the key for making these employees feel at home. Particularly, having an understanding boss and an effective relationship with supervisors are particularly important for employees with disabilities. Because the visible differences between individuals may act as an initial barrier against developing rapport, employees with disabilities and their managers may benefit from being proactive in relationship development (Colella & Varma, 2001).

Sexual Orientation Diversity in the Workplace

Lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender (LBGT) employees in the workplace face a number of challenges and barriers to employment. There is currently no federal law in the United States prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, but as of 2008, 20 states as well as the District of Columbia had laws prohibiting discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation (Human Rights Campaign, 2008).

Research shows that one of the most important issues relating to sexual orientation is the disclosure of sexual identity in the workplace. According to one estimate, up to one-third of lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees do not disclose their sexual orientation at work. Employees may fear the reactions of their managers and coworkers, leading to keeping their sexual identity a secret. In reality though, it seems that disclosing sexual orientation is not the key to explaining work attitudes of these employees—it is whether or not they are *afraid* to disclose their sexual identity. In other words, those employees who fear that full disclosure would lead to negative reactions experience lower job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, and higher intentions to leave their jobs (Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). Creating an environment where all employees feel welcome and respected regardless of their sexual orientation is the key to maintaining a positive work environment.

How can organizations show their respect for diversity in sexual orientation? Some companies start by creating a written statement that the organization will not tolerate discrimination based on sexual orientation. They may have workshops addressing issues relating to sexual orientation and facilitate and create networking opportunities for lesbian and gay employees. Perhaps the most powerful way in which companies show respect for sexual orientation diversity is by extending benefits to the partners of same-sex couples. In fact, more than half of *Fortune* 500 companies currently offer health benefits to domestic partners of same-sex couples. Research shows that in companies that have these types of programs, discrimination based on sexual orientation is less frequent, and the job satisfaction and commitment levels are higher (Button, 2001).

OB Toolbox: I think I am being asked illegal interview questions. What can I do?

In the United States, demographic characteristics such as race, gender, national origin, age, and disability status are protected by law. Yet according to a survey of 4,000 job seekers, about one-third of job applicants have been asked illegal interview questions. How can you answer such questions?

Here are some options.

- *Refuse to answer.* You may point out that the question is illegal and refuse to answer. Of course, this may cost you the job offer, because you are likely to seem confrontational and aggressive.
- *Answer shortly.* Instead of giving a full answer to a question such as “are you married,” you could answer the question briefly and change the subject. In many cases, the interviewer may be trying to initiate small talk and may be unaware that the question is potentially illegal.
- *Answer the intent.* Sometimes, the illegal question hides a legitimate concern. When you are being asked where you are from, the potential employer might be concerned that you do not have a work permit. Addressing the issue in your answer may be better than answering the question you are being asked.
- *Walk away from the interview.* If you feel that the intent of the question is discriminatory, and if you feel that you would rather not work at a company that would ask such questions, you can always walk away from the interview. If you feel that you are being discriminated against, you may also want to talk to a lawyer later on.

Sources: Cottle, M. (1999, April 25). Too personal at the interview. *New York Times*, p. 10; Thomas, J. (1999, July–August). Beware of illegal interview questions. *Women in Business*, 51(4), 14.

Suggestions for Managing Demographic Diversity

What can organizations do to manage diversity more effectively? In this section, we review research findings and the best practices from different companies to create a list of suggestions for organizations.

Build a Culture of Respecting Diversity

In the most successful companies, diversity management is not the responsibility of the human resource department. Starting from top management and including the lowest levels in the hierarchy, each person understands the importance of respecting others. If this respect is not part of an organization's culture, no amount of diversity training or other programs are likely to be effective. In fact, in the most successful companies, diversity is viewed as everyone's responsibility. The United Parcel Service of America Inc. (UPS), the international shipping company, refuses to hire a diversity officer, underlining that it is not one person's job. Companies with a strong culture—where people have a sense of shared values, loyalty to the organization is rewarded, and team performance is celebrated—enable employees with vastly different demographics and backgrounds to feel a sense of belonging (Chatman et al., 1998; Fisher, 2004).



Figure 2.3.7: UPS operates in 200 countries, including Italy where a boat is carrying packages on the Canal Grande in Venice. At UPS, 58% of all senior officers are women or minorities. [Wikimedia Commons](#) – CC BY-SA 2.5.

Make Managers Accountable for Diversity

People are more likely to pay attention to aspects of performance that are measured. In successful companies, diversity metrics are carefully tracked. For example, in PepsiCo, during the tenure of former CEO Steve Reinemund, half of all new hires had to be either women or minorities. Bonuses of managers partly depended on whether they had met their diversity-related goals (Yang, 2006). When managers are evaluated and rewarded based on how effective they are in diversity management, they are more likely to show commitment to diversity that in turn affects the diversity climate in the rest of the organization.

Diversity Training Programs

Many companies provide employees and managers with training programs relating to diversity. However, not all diversity programs are equally successful. You may expect that more successful programs are those that occur in companies where a culture of diversity exists. A study of over 700 companies found that programs with a higher perceived success rate were those that occurred in companies where top management believed in the importance of diversity, where there were explicit rewards for increasing diversity of the company, and where managers were required to attend the diversity training programs (Rynes & Rosen, 1995).

Review Recruitment Practices

Companies may want to increase diversity by targeting a pool that is more diverse. There are many minority professional groups such as the National Black MBA Association or the Chinese Software Professionals Association. By building relations with these occupational groups, organizations may attract a more diverse group of candidates to choose from. The auditing company Ernst & Young Global Ltd. increases diversity of job candidates by mentoring undergraduate students (Nussenbaum, 2003). Companies may also benefit from reviewing their employment advertising to ensure that diversity is important at all levels of the company (Avery, 2003).

Affirmative Action Programs

Policies designed to recruit, promote, train, and retain employees belonging to a protected class are referred to as affirmative action. Based on Executive order 11246 (1965), federal contractors are required to use affirmative action programs. In addition, the federal government, many state and local governments, and the U.S. military are required to have affirmative action plans. An organization may also be using affirmative action as a result of a court order or due to a past history of discrimination. Affirmative action programs are among the most controversial methods in diversity management because some people believe that they lead to an unfair advantage for minority members.

In many cases, the negative perceptions about affirmative action can be explained by misunderstandings relating to what such antidiscrimination policies entail. Moreover, affirmative action means different things to different people and therefore it is inaccurate to discuss affirmative action as a uniform package.

Four groups of programs can be viewed as part of affirmative action programs (Cropanzano, Slaughter, & Bachiochi, 2005; Kravitz, 2008; Voluntary diversity plans can lead to risk, 2007):

1. **Simple elimination of discrimination.** These programs are the least controversial and are received favorably by employees.
2. **Targeted recruitment.** These affirmative action plans involve ensuring that the candidate pool is diverse. These programs are also viewed as fair by most employees.
3. **Tie-breaker.** In these programs, if all other characteristics are equal, then preference may be given to a minority candidate. In fact, these programs are not widely used and their use needs to be justified by organizations. In other words, organizations need to have very specific reasons for why they are using this type of affirmative action, such as past illegal discrimination. Otherwise, their use may be illegal and lead to reverse discrimination. These programs are viewed as less fair by employees.
4. **Preferential treatment.** These programs involve hiring a less-qualified minority candidate. Strong preferential treatment programs are illegal in most cases.

It is plausible that people who are against affirmative action programs may have unverified assumptions about the type of affirmative action program the company is using. Informing employees about the specifics of how affirmative action is being used may be a good way of dealing with any negative attitudes. In fact, a review of the past literature revealed that when specifics of affirmative action are not clearly defined, observers seem to draw their own conclusions about the particulars of the programs

(Harrison et al., 2006).

In addition to employee reactions to affirmative action, there is some research indicating that affirmative action programs may lead to stigmatization of the perceived beneficiaries. For example, in companies using affirmative action, coworkers of new hires may make the assumption that the new hire was chosen due to gender or race as opposed to having the necessary qualifications. These effects may even occur in the new hires themselves, who may have doubts about the fact that they were chosen because they were the best candidate for the position. Research also shows that giving coworkers information about the qualifications and performance of the new hire eliminates these potentially negative effects of affirmative action programs (Heilman et al., 1993; Heilman, Rivero, & Brett, 1991; Heilman, Simon, & Repper, 1987; Kravitz, 2008).

OB Toolbox: Dealing with Being Different

At any time in your career, you may find yourself in a situation in which you are different from those around you. Maybe you are the only male in an organization where most of your colleagues and managers are females. Maybe you are older than all your colleagues. How do you deal with the challenges of being different?

- *Invest in building effective relationships.* Early in a relationship, people are more attracted to those who are demographically similar to them. This means that your colleagues or manager may never get to find out how smart, fun, or hardworking you are if you have limited interactions with them. Create opportunities to talk to them. Be sure to point out areas of commonality.
- *Choose your mentor carefully.* Mentors may help you make sense of the organization's culture, give you career-related advice, and help you feel like you belong. That said, how powerful and knowledgeable your mentor is also matters. You may be more attracted to someone at your same level and who is similar to you, but you may have more to learn from someone who is more experienced, knowledgeable, and powerful than you are.
- *Investigate company resources.* Many companies offer networking opportunities and interest groups for women, ethnic minorities, and employees with disabilities among others. Check out what resources are available through your company.
- *Know your rights.* You should know that harassment based on protected characteristics such as gender, race, age, or disabilities, as well as discrimination based on these traits are illegal in the United States. If you face harassment or discrimination, you may want to notify your manager or your company's HR department.

Key Takeaways

Organizations managing diversity effectively benefit from diversity because they achieve higher creativity, better customer service, higher job satisfaction, higher stock prices, and lower litigation expenses. At the same time, managing a diverse workforce is challenging for several key reasons. Employees are more likely to associate with those who are similar to them early in a relationship, the distribution of demographic traits could create faultlines within a group, and stereotypes may act as barriers to advancement and fair treatment of employees. Demographic traits such as gender, race, age, religion, disabilities, and sexual orientation each face unique challenges. Organizations can manage demographic diversity more effectively by building a culture of respect, making managers accountable for diversity, creating diversity-training programs, reviewing recruitment practices, and under some conditions, utilizing affirmative action programs.

Exercises

1. What does it mean for a company to manage diversity effectively? How would you know if a company is doing a good job of managing diversity?
2. What are the benefits of effective diversity management?
3. How can organizations deal with the "similarity-attraction" phenomenon? Left unchecked, what are the problems this tendency can cause?
4. What is the earnings gap? Who does it affect? What are the reasons behind the earnings gap?
5. Do you think that laws and regulations are successful in eliminating discrimination in the workplace? Why or why not?

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2.4: Gender Diversity

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the benefits and challenges of gender diversity in the workplace

What's in a chromosome (or two)? The difference in the pair of sex chromosomes determines whether a child is female (XX) or male (XY) at birth has a significant impact on the individual's personal and professional development. It is not biology that affects our experience and expectations in the workplace (as some who would justify gender inequality would propose), but socialization, an accumulation of cultural, historical, and legal precedent that has created the gender divide in our society.



According to the Brookings Institution, women's labor force participation has reversed since 2000 and "large gaps remain between men and women in employment rates, the jobs they hold, the wages they earn, and their overall economic security." This is not just a women's issue. In a publication from the Hamilton Project at Brookings, the authors conclude that "barriers to workforce participation for women are stifling the growth of the U.S. economy, and that future economic success hinges on improving career prospects and working environments for all women."^[1]

Over the years, gendered terms (for example, "men") have come to be interpreted more broadly; that is, as referring to both men and women, but the language is hardly inclusive. Indeed, the concept of gender as binary—that is, either female or male—may itself be an anachronism. As the traditional ideas of gender and gender identity are evolving and in order to adapt to a changing reality, the language and operating framework must change accordingly.

Are There Differences in Gender Communication?

Starting in childhood, girls and boys are generally socialized to belong to distinct cultures based on their gender and thus speak in ways particular to their own gender's rules and norms (Fivush; Hohnson; Tannen). This pattern of gendered socialization continues throughout our lives. As a result, men and women often interpret the same conversation differently. Culturally diverse ways of speaking based on gender can cause miscommunication between members of each culture or speech community. These cultural differences are seen in the simple purpose of communication.

Although gender roles are changing, and gender itself is becoming a more fluid concept, traditional roles still influence our communication behaviors. For those socialized to traditional female gender norms, an important purpose of communication is to create and foster relational connections with other people (Johnson; Stamou). In contrast, the goal of men's communication is

primarily to establish identity. This is accomplished by demonstrating independence and control and entertaining or performing for others.

Deborah Tannen, professor of linguistics and the author of multiple books on gender and language, provides the following examples of differences in men's and women's communication.^[2]

- "Men engage in report talk, women in rapport talk."
 - Report talk is used to demonstrate one's knowledge and expertise.
 - Rapport talk is used to share and cultivate relationships.
- Women request; men direct.
 - For example, in communicating a request, a female manager might say: "Could you do this by 5 PM?" A male manager would typically phrase it: "This needs to be done by 5 PM."
- Women are information focused; men are image focused.
 - For example, women are willing to ask questions to clarify understanding. Men tend to avoid asking clarifying questions in order to preserve their reputation.
- Empathy is not apology.
 - Women often use the phrase "I'm sorry" to express concern or empathy. Men tend to interpret this phrase as an acceptance of responsibility for the situation, which it is not.
- Women are judged by their appearance; men are judged by what they say and do.

As in all things, it's important to remember that while these differences exist between groups, all individuals will fall somewhere along a spectrum of these tendencies. Additionally, you may run into men who demonstrate more "feminine" tendencies in their speech or vice versa.

JAMES DAMORE

We see this struggle playing out at Google, where efforts to include more women in technical roles are meeting with some resistance. The conflict surfaced when James Damore, a white male engineer, posted a ten page critique of Google's diversity efforts titled "[Google's Ideological Echo Chamber](#)" on an internal discussion board. One of the most inflammatory points made was that "biological differences between men and women might explain why we don't see equal representation of women in tech and leadership." In his memo, Damore states his belief that women are better attuned to aesthetics and people rather than ideas and that this, as well as their "higher agreeableness" (versus aggressiveness) and "neuroticism," rather than sexism accounts for gender gaps. The "manifesto," as some call it, resulted in Damore being fired for violating Google's code of conduct by "advancing harmful gender stereotypes in our workplace."

Google CEO Sundar Pichai responded to the memo in a [note to employees](#), which includes this excerpt: "To suggest a group of our colleagues have traits that make them less biologically suited to that work is offensive and not OK. It is contrary to our basic values and our Code of Conduct, which expects 'each Googler to do their utmost to create a workplace culture that is free of harassment, intimidation, bias and unlawful discrimination.'"

In a development that reflects the nation's sociopolitical polarization, it appears Damore's firing, rather than ending the issue, has turned him into what a *USA Today* writer terms a "hero of a resurgent conservative movement." Damore has since [filed a lawsuit against Google](#), claiming the search giant discriminates against white, conservative men. In a development worth watching, Damore and David Gudeman, another former Google engineer, are being represented by Harmeet Dhillon, the Republican National Committee's committeewoman for California. Her law firm is seeking class action status for the plaintiffs.

1. Burke, Alison. "[10 facts about American women in the workforce](#)." *Brookings*, 05 Dec 2017. Web. 26 June 2018. ↵
2. Bucher, Richard D. *Diversity Consciousness Opening Our Minds to People, Cultures, and Opportunities*. Pearson, 2015, p 130. ↵

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2.5: How Biases Are Formed



Think About It...

Preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures. –Cesar Chavez

What does this quote mean to you? How many times have you felt that you are on the defense with your culture, traditions, etc.? Why is it that you have experienced this? This chapter addresses how one's own experiences create personal bias.

It is important to note that everyone has personal biases. Being biased is often unconscious and occurs because of the messages we have been exposed to from a very young age. Working towards an awareness of those biases, affords us opportunities to reflect and not react when we are faced with our biases. It is often helpful to do this with someone we can be honest with and who can be honest with us.

How Biases Are Formed

Let's take a look at how we form our biases. It is natural to have biases. We react to the messages we receive in our environment. Those messages often lie beneath the surface in our unconscious which makes it difficult to address as often we are unaware of them. This is often referred to as "implicit bias". They have an effect on how we make decisions in regards to our biases/ stereotypes about race, class, sexual orientation, family structure, religion, etc.



Figure 2.5.1: Playing with multicultural hand puppets is an experience that can affect how children categorize ethnicity. ^[202]

Racialization

Race is often a source of discrimination and oppression in societies; as such, it can have a tremendous impact on childhood development. The United States is a very racialized society (divided by race), and children—especially children of color—often become aware of the dynamics of racism at a very young age. Children are taught the stereotypes that go along with their particular race(s), as well as the races of others, and these stereotypes can have a strong influence on their development. ^[203]

Stereotype Threat

Stereotypes and racialized expectations often contribute to [stereotype threat](#), in which a child experiences [anxiety](#) or concern in a situation that has the potential to confirm a negative stereotype about his or her social group. For example, if a Black child is given the message that Black people are not as “smart” as white people, she may worry if she is not doing well in school because it will, she fears, confirm the negative stereotype. Importantly, stereotype threat has been shown to be something of a [self-fulfilling](#) prophecy—not because the negative stereotype is accurate, but because fear of fulfilling that stereotype can lead to additional anxiety, which in turn can reduce performance. For example, stereotype threat can lower the intellectual performance of Black students taking the SAT, due to the stereotype that they are less intelligent than other groups, which may cause them to feel additional pressure and anxiety.

Intersecting Identities

Our social categories, such as gender, race, or social class affect each other. The concept of intersectionality means that we cannot look these categories in isolation. ^[204] For example, the experience of growing up as a Black girl in the United States cannot be understood only in terms of being Black or of being female; instead, the ways in which these identities interact and frequently reinforce each other must be examined.

Race is also closely linked to class, and people of color are still statistically much more likely to lack access to basic resources and experience economic hardship. These resources include everything from proper nutrition and healthcare to good education systems and neighborhood parks. All of these societal factors intersect and interact to influence a child’s development, so much so that a child from a middle-class white family has many more opportunities than a child from a lower-income family of color. ^[205]

Bias

	Think About It... How do you define bias? Take a moment to critically think about what biases you can surface at this moment. Write them down and after you have read the entire chapter, take a moment to reflect and add to what you wrote.
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Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Key characteristics of implicit bias include:

- Implicit biases are pervasive. Everyone possesses them, even people with commitments to impartiality such as judges.
- Implicit and explicit biases are related but distinct mental constructs. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce each other.
- The implicit associations we hold do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.
- We generally tend to hold implicit biases that favor our own in-group, though research has shown that we can still hold implicit biases against our in-group.
- Implicit biases are malleable. Our brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned through a variety of debiasing techniques. ^[206]

Now that we know these key terms, how, in terms of brain development and natural humanistic functioning, does implicit bias start?

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3: VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

3.1: Principles of Verbal Communication

3.2: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication

3.3: Improving Verbal Communication

3.4: Principles of Nonverbal Communication

3.5: Types of Nonverbal Communication

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3.1: Principles of Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe five key principles of verbal communication.
- Explain how the rules of syntax, semantics, and context govern language.
- Describe how language serves to shape our experience of reality.

Verbal communication is based on several basic principles. In this section, we'll examine each principle and explore how it influences everyday communication. Whether it's a simple conversation with a coworker or a formal sales presentation to a board of directors, these principles apply to all contexts of communication.

Language Has Rules

Language is a code, a collection of symbols, letters, or words with arbitrary meanings that are arranged according to the rules of syntax and are used to communicate (Pearson & Nelson, 2000).

In the first of the Note 2.1 "Introductory Exercises" for this chapter, were you able to successfully match the terms to their meanings? Did you find that some of the definitions did not match your understanding of the terms? The words themselves have meaning within their specific context or language community. But without a grasp of that context, "my bad" may have just sounded odd. Your familiarity with the words and phrases may have made the exercise easy for you, but it isn't an easy exercise for everyone. The words themselves only carry meaning if you know the understood meaning and have a grasp of their context to interpret them correctly.

There are three types of rules that govern or control our use of words. You may not be aware that they exist or that they influence you, but from the moment you put a word into text or speak it, these rules govern your communications. Think of a word that is all right to use in certain situations and not in others. Why? And how do you know?

Syntactic rules govern the order of words in a sentence. In some languages, such as German, syntax or word order is strictly prescribed. English syntax, in contrast, is relatively flexible and open to style. Still, there are definite combinations of words that are correct and incorrect in English. It is equally correct to say, "Please come to the meeting in the auditorium at twelve noon on Wednesday" or, "Please come to the meeting on Wednesday at twelve noon in the auditorium." But it would be incorrect to say, "Please to the auditorium on Wednesday in the meeting at twelve noon come."

Semantic rules govern the meaning of words and how to interpret them (Martinich, 1996). Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It considers what words mean, or are intended to mean, as opposed to their sound, spelling, grammatical function, and so on. Does a given statement refer to other statements already communicated? Is the statement true or false? Does it carry a certain intent? What does the sender or receiver need to know in order to understand its meaning? These are questions addressed by semantic rules.

Contextual rules govern meaning and word choice according to context and social custom. For example, suppose Greg is talking about his coworker, Carol, and says, "She always meets her deadlines." This may seem like a straightforward statement that would not vary according to context or social custom. But suppose another coworker asked Greg, "How do you like working with Carol?" and, after a long pause, Greg answered, "She always meets her deadlines." Are there factors in the context of the question or social customs that would influence the meaning of Greg's statement?

Even when we follow these linguistic rules, miscommunication is possible, for our cultural context or community may hold different meanings for the words used than the source intended. Words attempt to represent the ideas we want to communicate, but they are sometimes limited by factors beyond our control. They often require us to negotiate their meaning, or to explain what we mean in more than one way, in order to create a common vocabulary. You may need to state a word, define it, and provide an example in order to come to an understanding with your audience about the meaning of your message.

Our Reality Is Shaped by Our Language

What would your life be like if you had been raised in a country other than the one where you grew up? Malaysia, for example? Italy? Afghanistan? Or Bolivia? Or suppose you had been born male instead of female, or vice versa. Or had been raised in the northeastern United States instead of the Southwest, or the Midwest instead of the Southeast. In any of these cases, you would not have the same identity you have today. You would have learned another set of customs, values, traditions, other language patterns, and ways of communicating. You would be a different person who communicated in different ways.

You didn't choose your birth, customs, values, traditions, or your language. You didn't even choose to learn to read this sentence or to speak with those of your community, but somehow you accomplished this challenging task. As an adult, you can choose to see things from a new or diverse perspective, but what language do you think with? It's not just the words themselves, or even how they are organized, that makes communication such a challenge. Your language itself, ever changing and growing, in many ways determines your reality (Whorf, 1956). You can't escape your language or culture completely, and always see the world through a shade or tint of what you've been taught, learned, or experienced.

Suppose you were raised in a culture that values formality. At work, you pride yourself on being well dressed. It's part of your expectation for yourself and, whether you admit it or not, for others. Many people in your organization, however, come from less formal cultures, and they prefer business casual attire. You may be able to recognize the difference, and because humans are highly adaptable, you may get used to a less formal dress expectation, but it won't change your fundamental values.

Thomas Kuhn makes the point that "paradigms, or a clear point of view involving theories, laws, and/or generalizations that provide a framework for understanding, tend to form and become set around key validity claims, or statements of the way things work." (McLean, 2003) The paradigm, or worldview, may be individual or collective. And paradigm shifts are often painful. New ideas are always suspect, and usually opposed, without any other reason than because they are not already common (Ackerman, 1980).

As an example, consider the earth-heavens paradigm. Medieval Europeans believed that the Earth was flat and that the edge was to be avoided, otherwise you might fall off. For centuries after the acceptance of a "round earth" belief, the earth was still believed to be the center of the universe, with the sun and all planets revolving around it. Eventually, someone challenged the accepted view. Over time, despite considerable resistance to protect the status quo, people came to better understand the earth and its relationship to the heavens.

In the same way, the makers of the Intel microprocessor once thought that a slight calculation error, unlikely to negatively impact 99.9 percent of users, was better left as is and hidden (Emery, 1996). Like many things in the information age, the error was discovered by a user of the product, became publicly known, and damaged Intel's credibility and sales for years. Recalls and prompt, public communication in response to similar issues are now the industry-wide protocol.

Paradigms involve premises that are taken as fact. Of course the Earth is the center of the universe, of course no one will ever be impacted by a mathematical error so far removed from most people's everyday use of computers, and of course you never danced the macarena at a company party. We now can see how those facts, attitudes, beliefs, and ideas of "cool" are overturned.

How does this insight lend itself to your understanding of verbal communication? Do all people share the same paradigms, words, or ideas? Will you be presenting ideas outside your audience's frame of reference? Outside their worldview? Just as you look back at your macarena performance, get outside your frame of reference and consider how to best communicate your thoughts, ideas, and points to an audience that may not have your same experiences or understanding of the topic.

By taking into account your audience's background and experience, you can become more "other-oriented," a successful strategy to narrow the gap between you and your audience. Our experiences are like sunglasses, tinting the way we see the world. Our challenge, perhaps, is to avoid letting them function as blinders, like those worn by working horses, which create tunnel vision and limit our perspective.

Language Is Arbitrary and Symbolic

As we have discussed previously, words, by themselves, do not have any inherent meaning. Humans give meaning to them, and their meanings change across time. The arbitrary symbols, including letters, numbers, and punctuation marks, stand for concepts in our experience. We have to negotiate the meaning of the word "home," and define it, through visual images or dialogue, in order to communicate with our audience.

Words have two types of meanings: denotative and connotative. Attention to both is necessary to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation. The denotative meaning is the common meaning, often found in the dictionary. The connotative meaning is often not found in the dictionary but in the community of users itself. It can involve an emotional association with a word, positive or negative, and can be individual or collective, but is not universal.

With a common vocabulary in both denotative and connotative terms, effective communication becomes a more distinct possibility. But what if we have to transfer meaning from one vocabulary to another? That is essentially what we are doing when we translate a message. In such cases, language and culture can sometimes make for interesting twists. The *New York Times* (Sterngold, 1998) noted that the title of the 1998 film *There's Something About Mary* proved difficult to translate when it was released in foreign markets. The movie was renamed to capture the idea and to adapt to local audiences' frame of reference: In Poland, where blonde jokes are popular and common, the film title (translated back to English for our use) was *For the Love of a Blonde*. In France, *Mary at All Costs* communicated the idea, while in Thailand *My True Love Will Stand All Outrageous Events* dropped the reference to Mary altogether.

Capturing our ideas with words is a challenge when both conversational partners speak the same language, but across languages, cultures, and generations the complexity multiplies exponentially.

Language Is Abstract

Words represent aspects of our environment, and can play an important role in that environment. They may describe an important idea or concept, but the very act of labeling and invoking a word simplifies and distorts our concept of the thing itself. This ability to simplify concepts makes it easier to communicate, but it sometimes makes us lose track of the specific meaning we are trying to convey through abstraction. Let's look at one important part of life in America: transportation.

Take the word "car" and consider what it represents. Freedom, status, or style? Does what you drive say something about you? To describe a car as a form of transportation is to consider one of its most basic and universal aspects. This level of abstraction means we lose individual distinctions between cars until we impose another level of labeling. We could divide cars into sedans (or saloon) and coupe (or coupé) simply by counting the number of doors (i.e., four versus two). We could also examine cost, size, engine displacement, fuel economy, and style. We might arrive at an American classic, the Mustang, and consider it for all these factors and its legacy as an accessible American sports car. To describe it in terms of transportation only is to lose the distinctiveness of what makes a Mustang a desirable American sports car.

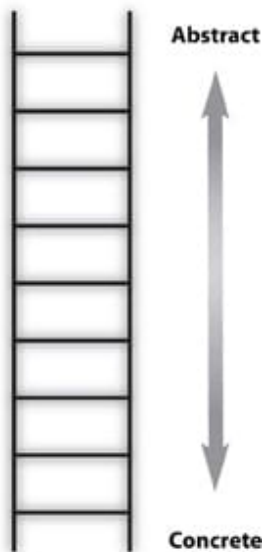


Figure 3.1.1: Abstraction Ladder. Source: Adapted from J. DeVito's Abstraction Ladder (DeVito, 1999).

We can see how, at the extreme level of abstraction, a car is like any other automobile. We can also see how, at the base level, the concept is most concrete. "Mustang," the name given to one of the best-selling American sports cars, is a specific make and model with specific markings; a specific size, shape, and range of available colors; and a relationship with a classic design. By focusing on concrete terms and examples, you help your audience grasp your content.

Language Organizes and Classifies Reality

We use language to create and express some sense of order in our world. We often group words that represent concepts by their physical proximity or their similarity to one another. For example, in biology, animals with similar traits are classified together. An ostrich may be said to be related to an emu and a nandu, but you wouldn't group an ostrich with an elephant or a salamander. Our ability to organize is useful, but artificial. The systems of organization we use are not part of the natural world but an expression of our views about the natural world.

What is a doctor? A nurse? A teacher? If a male came to mind in the case of the word "doctor" and a female came to mind in reference to "nurse" or "teacher," then your habits of mind include a gender bias. There was once a time in the United States where that gender stereotype was more than just a stereotype, it was the general rule, the social custom, the norm. Now it no longer holds true. More and more men are training to serve as nurses. *Business Week* noted in 2008 that one-third of the U.S. physician workforce was female (Arnst, 2005).

We all use systems of classification to navigate through the world. Imagine how confusing life would be if we had no categories such as male/female, young/old, tall/short, doctor/nurse/teacher. These categories only become problematic when we use them to uphold biases and ingrained assumptions that are no longer valid. We may assume, through our biases, that elements are related when they have no relationship at all. As a result, our thinking is limited and our grasp of reality impaired. It is often easier to spot these biases in others, but it behooves us as communicators to become aware of them in ourselves. Holding them unconsciously will limit our thinking, our grasp of reality, and our ability to communicate successfully.

Key Takeaway

Language is a system governed by rules of syntax, semantics, and context; we use paradigms to understand the world and frame our communications.

Exercises

1. Write at least five examples of English sentences with correct syntax. Then rewrite each sentence, using the same words in an order that displays incorrect syntax. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
2. Think of at least five words whose denotative meaning differs from their connotative meaning. Use each word in two sentences, one employing the denotative meaning and the other employing the connotative. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
3. Do you associate meaning with the car someone drives? Does it say something about them? List five cars you observe people you know driving and discuss each one, noting whether you perceive that the car says something about them or not. Share and compare with classmates.

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3.2: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate six ways in which language can be an obstacle or barrier to communication.
2. Explain the differences between clichés, jargon, and slang.
3. Explain the difference between sexist or racist language and legitimate references to gender or race in business communication.

As you use language to make sense of your experiences, as part of our discussion, you no doubt came to see that language and verbal communication can work both for you and against you. Language allows you to communicate, but it also allows you to miscommunicate and misunderstand. The same system we use to express our most intimate thoughts can be frustrating when it fails to capture our thoughts, to represent what we want to express, and to reach our audience. For all its faults, though, it is the best system we have, and part of improving the communication process is the clear identification of where it breaks down. Anticipate where a word or expression may need more clarification and you will be on your way to reducing errors and improving verbal communication.

In an article titled “The Miscommunication Gap,” Susan Washburn lists several undesirable results of poor communication in business:

- Damaged relationships
- Loss of productivity
- Inefficiency and rework
- Conflict
- Missed opportunities
- Schedule slippage (delays, missed deadlines)
- Scope creep...or leap (gradual or sudden changes in an assignment that make it more complex and difficult than it was originally understood to be)
- Wasted resources
- Unclear or unmet requirements

In this section we discuss how words can serve either as a bridge, or a barrier, to understanding and communication of meaning. Our goals of effective and efficient business communication mean an inherent value of words and terms that keeps the bridge clear and free of obstacles.

Cliché

A cliché is a once-clever word or phrase that has lost its impact through overuse. If you spoke or wrote in clichés, how would your audience react? Let's try it. How do you react when you read this sentence: “A cliché is something to avoid like the plague, for it is nothing but a tired old war horse, and if the shoe were on the other foot you too would have an axe to grind”? As you can see, the problem with clichés is that they often sound silly or boring.

Clichés are sometimes a symptom of lazy communication—the person using the cliché hasn't bothered to search for original words to convey the intended meaning. Clichés lose their impact because readers and listeners tend to gloss over them, assuming their common meaning while ignoring your specific use of them. As a result, they can be obstacles to successful communication.

Jargon

Let's pretend you've been assigned to the task of preparing a short presentation on your company's latest product for a group of potential customers. It's a big responsibility. You only have one opportunity to get it right. You will need to do extensive planning and preparation, and your effort, if done well, will produce a presentation that is smooth and confident, looking simple to the casual audience member.

What words do you use to communicate information about your product? Is your audience familiar with your field and its specialized terms? As potential customers, they are probably somewhat knowledgeable in the field, but not to the extent that you and your coworkers are; even less so compared to the “techies” who developed the product. For your presentation to succeed, your challenge is to walk a fine line between using too much profession-specific language on the one hand, and “talking down” to your audience on the other hand.

While your potential customers may not understand all the engineering and schematic detail terms involved in the product, they do know what they and their organizations are looking for in considering a purchase. Your solution may be to focus on common ground—what you know of their past history in terms of contracting services or buying products from your company. What can you tell from their historical purchases? If your research shows that they place a high value on saving time, you can focus your presentation on the time-saving aspects of your new product and leave the technical terms to the user’s manual.

Jargon is an occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession. Jargon does not necessarily imply formal education, but instead focuses on the language people in a profession use to communicate with each other. Members of the information technology department have a distinct group of terms that refer to common aspects in their field. Members of the marketing department, or advertising, or engineering, research, and development also have sets of terms they use within their professional community. Jargon exists in just about every occupation, independent of how much formal education is involved—from medicine and law; to financial services, banking, and insurance; to animal husbandry, auto repair, and the construction trades.

Whether or not to use jargon is often a judgment call, and one that is easier to make in speaking than in writing. In an oral context, we may be able to use a technical term and instantly know from feedback whether or not the receiver of the message “got it.” If they didn’t, we can define it on the spot. In written language, we lack that immediate response and must attend more to the context of receiver. The more we learn about our audience, the better we can tailor our chosen words. If we lack information or want our document to be understood by a variety of readers, it pays to use common words and avoid jargon.

Slang

Think for a moment about the words and expressions you use when you communicate with your best friends. If a coworker was to hang out with you and your friends, would they understand all the words you use, the music you listen to, the stories you tell and the way you tell them? Probably not, because you and your friends probably use certain words and expressions in ways that have special meaning to you.

This special form of language, which in some ways resembles jargon, is slang. Slang is the use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, nonstandard, humorous, or rebellious effect. It differs from jargon in that it is used in informal contexts, among friends or members of a certain age group, rather than by professionals in a certain industry.

If you say something is “phat,” you may mean “cool,” which is now a commonly understood slang word, but your coworker may not know this. As word “phat” moves into the mainstream, it will be replaced and adapted by the communities that use it.

Since our emphasis in business communication is on clarity, and a slang word runs the risk of creating misinterpretation, it is generally best to avoid slang. You may see the marketing department use a slang word to target a specific, well-researched audience, but for our purposes of your general presentation introducing a product or service, we will stick to clear, common words that are easily understood.

Sexist and Racist Language

Some forms of slang involve put-downs of people belonging to various groups. This type of slang often crosses the line and becomes offensive, not only to the groups that are being put down, but also to others who may hear it. In today’s workplace there is no place where sexist or racist language is appropriate. In fact, using such language can be a violation of company policies and in some cases antidiscrimination laws.

Sexist language uses gender as a discriminating factor. Referring to adult women as “girls” or using the word “man” to refer to humankind are examples of sexist language. In a more blatant example, several decades ago a woman was the first female sales representative in her company’s sales force. The men resented her and were certain they could outsell her, so they held a “Beat the Broad” sales contest. (By the way, she won.) Today, a contest with a name like that would be out of the question.

Racist language discriminates against members of a given race or ethnic group. While it may be obvious that racial and ethnic slurs have no place in business communication, there can also be issues with more subtle references to “*those people*” or “you know how *they* are.” If race or ethnicity genuinely enters into the subject of your communication—in a drugstore, for example, there is often an aisle for black hair care products—then naturally it makes sense to mention customers belonging to that group. The key is that mentioning racial and ethnic groups should be done with the same respect you would desire if someone else were referring to groups you belong to.

Euphemisms

In seeking to avoid offensive slang, it is important not to assume that a euphemism is the solution. A euphemism involves substituting an acceptable word for an offensive, controversial, or unacceptable one that conveys the same or similar meaning. The problem is that the audience still knows what the expression means, and understands that the writer or speaker is choosing a euphemism for the purpose of sounding more educated or genteel.

Euphemisms can also be used sarcastically or humorously—“H-E-double-hockey-sticks,” for example, is a euphemism for “hell” that may be amusing in some contexts. If your friend has just gotten a new job as a janitor, you may jokingly ask, “How’s my favorite sanitation engineer this morning?” But such humor is not always appreciated, and can convey disrespect even when none is intended.

Euphemistic words are not always disrespectful, however. For example, when referring to a death, it is considered polite in many parts of the United States to say that the person “passed” or “passed away,” rather than the relatively insensitive word, “died.” Similarly, people say, “I need to find a bathroom” when it is well understood they are not planning to take a bath.

Still, these polite euphemisms are exceptions to the rule. Euphemisms are generally more of a hindrance than a help to understanding. In business communication the goal is clarity, and the very purpose of euphemism is to be vague. To be clear, choose words that mean what you intend to convey.

Doublespeak

Doublespeak is the deliberate use of words to disguise, obscure, or change meaning. Doublespeak is often present in bureaucratic communication, where it can serve to cast a person or an organization in a less unfavorable light than plain language would do.

When you ask a friend, “How does it feel to be downsized?” you are using a euphemism to convey humor, possibly even dark humor. Your friend’s employer was likely not joking, though, when the action was announced as a “downsizing” rather than as a “layoff” or “dismissal.” In military communications, “collateral damage” is often used to refer to civilian deaths, but no mention of the dead is present. You may recall the “bailout” of the U.S. economy in 2008, which quickly came to be called the “rescue” and finally the “buy in” as the United States bought interests in nine regional and national banks. The meaning changed from saving an economic system or its institutions to investing in them. This change of terms, and the attempt to change the meaning of the actions, became common in comedy routines across the nation.

Doublespeak can be quite dangerous when it is used deliberately to obscure meaning and the listener cannot anticipate or predict consequences based on the (in)effective communication. When a medical insurance company says, “We insure companies with up to twenty thousand lives,” is it possible to forget that those “lives” are people? Ethical issues quickly arise when humans are dehumanized and referred to as “objects” or “subjects.” When genocide is referred to as “ethnic cleansing,” is it any less deadly than when called by its true name?

If the meaning was successfully hidden from the audience, one might argue that the doublespeak was in fact effective. But our goal continues to be clear and concise communication with a minimum of misinterpretation. Learn to recognize doublespeak by what it does not communicate as well as what it communicates.

Each of these six barriers to communication contributes to misunderstanding and miscommunication, intentionally or unintentionally. If you recognize one of them, you can address it right away. You can redirect a question and get to essential meaning, rather than leaving with a misunderstanding that impacts the relationship. In business communication, our goal of clear and concise communication remains constant, but we can never forget that trust is the foundation for effective communication. Part of our effort must include reinforcing the relationship inherent between source and receiver, and one effective step toward that goal is to reduce obstacles to effective communication.

Key Takeaway

To avoid obstacles to communication, avoid clichés, jargon, slang, sexist and racist language, euphemisms, and doublespeak.

Exercises

1. Identify at least five common clichés and look up their origins. Try to understand how and when each phrase became a cliché. Share your findings with your classmates.
2. Using your library's microfilm files or an online database, look through newspaper articles from the 1950s or earlier. Find at least one article that uses sexist or racist language. What makes it racist or sexist? How would a journalist convey the same information today? Share your findings with your class.
3. Identify one slang term and one euphemism you know is used in your community, among your friends, or where you work. Share and compare with classmates.
4. How does language change over time? Interview someone older than you and someone younger than you and identify words that have changed. Pay special attention to jargon and slang words.
5. Is there ever a justifiable use for doublespeak? Why or why not? Explain your response and give some examples.
6. Can people readily identify the barriers to communication? Survey ten individuals and see if they accurately identify at least one barrier, even if they use a different term or word.

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3.3: Improving Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- List and explain the use of six strategies for improving verbal communication.
- Demonstrate the appropriate use of definitions in an oral or written presentation.
- Understand how to assess the audience, choose an appropriate tone, and check for understanding and results in an oral or written presentation.

Throughout the chapter we have visited examples and stories that highlight the importance of verbal communication. To end the chapter, we need to consider how language can be used to enlighten or deceive, encourage or discourage, empower or destroy. By defining the terms we use and choosing precise words, we will maximize our audience's understanding of our message. In addition, it is important to consider the audience, control your tone, check for understanding, and focus on results. Recognizing the power of verbal communication is the first step to understanding its role and impact on the communication process.

Define Your Terms

Even when you are careful to craft your message clearly and concisely, not everyone will understand every word you say or write. As an effective business communicator, you know it is your responsibility to give your audience every advantage in understanding your meaning. Yet your presentation would fall flat if you tried to define each and every term—you would end up sounding like a dictionary.

The solution is to be aware of any words you are using that may be unfamiliar to your audience. When you identify an unfamiliar word, your first decision is whether to use it or to substitute a more common, easily understood word. If you choose to use the unfamiliar word, then you need to decide how to convey its meaning to those in your audience who are not familiar with it. You may do this in a variety of ways. The most obvious, of course, is to state the meaning directly or to rephrase the term in different words. But you may also convey the meaning in the process of making and supporting your points. Another way is to give examples to illustrate each concept, or use parallels from everyday life.

Overall, keep your audience in mind and imagine yourself in their place. This will help you to adjust your writing level and style to their needs, maximizing the likelihood that your message will be understood.

Choose Precise Words

To increase understanding, choose precise words that paint as vivid and accurate a mental picture as possible for your audience. If you use language that is vague or abstract, your meaning may be lost or misinterpreted. Your document or presentation will also be less dynamic and interesting than it could be.

Table 3.3.2 lists some examples of phrases that are imprecise and precise. Which one evokes a more dynamic image in your imagination?

Table 3.3.1: *Precisely What Are You Saying?*

The famous writer William Safire died in 2009; he was over seventy.	The former Nixon speech writer, language authority, and <i>New York Times</i> columnist William Safire died of pancreatic cancer in 2009; he was seventy-nine.
Clumber spaniels are large dogs.	The Clumber Spaniel Club of America describes the breed as a “long, low, substantial dog,” standing 17 to 20 inches high and weighing 55 to 80 pounds.
It is important to eat a healthy diet during pregnancy.	Eating a diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low-fat dairy products can improve your health during pregnancy and boost your chances of having a healthy baby.

We are making good progress on the project.	In the two weeks since inception, our four-member team has achieved three of the six objectives we identified for project completion; we are on track to complete the project in another three to four weeks.
For the same amount spent, we expected more value added.	We have examined several proposals in the \$10,000 range, and they all offer more features than what we see in the \$12,500 system ABC Corp. is offering.
Officers were called to the scene.	Responding to a 911 call, State Police Officers Arellano and Chavez sped to the intersection of County Route 53 and State Highway 21.
The victim went down the street.	The victim ran screaming to the home of a neighbor, Mary Lee of 31 Orchard Street.
Several different colorways are available.	The silk jacquard fabric is available in ivory, moss, cinnamon, and topaz colorways.
This smartphone has more applications than customers can imagine.	At last count, the BlackBerry Tempest has more than 500 applications, many costing 99 cents or less; users can get real-time sports scores, upload videos to TwitVid, browse commuter train schedules, edit e-mails before forwarding, and find recipes—but so far, it doesn't do the cooking for you.
A woman was heckled when she spoke at a health care event.	On August 25, 2009, Rep. Frank Pallone (Democrat of New Jersey's 6th congressional district) hosted a "town hall" meeting on health care reform where many audience members heckled and booed a woman in a wheelchair as she spoke about the need for affordable health insurance and her fears that she might lose her home.

Consider Your Audience

In addition to precise words and clear definitions, contextual clues are important to guide your audience as they read. If you are speaking to a general audience and choose to use a word in professional jargon that may be understood by many—but not all—of the people in your audience, follow it by a common reference that clearly relates its essential meaning. With this positive strategy you will be able to forge relationships with audience members from diverse backgrounds. Internal summaries tell us what we've heard and forecast what is to come. It's not just the words, but also how people hear them that counts.

If you say the magic words "in conclusion," you set in motion a set of expectations that you are about to wrap it up. If, however, you introduce a new point and continue to speak, the audience will perceive an expectancy violation and hold you accountable. You said the magic words but didn't honor them. One of the best ways to display respect for your audience is to not exceed the expected time in a presentation or length in a document. Your careful attention to contextual clues will demonstrate that you are clearly considering your audience.

Take Control of Your Tone

Does your writing or speech sound pleasant and agreeable? Simple or sophisticated? Or does it come across as stuffy, formal, bloated, ironic, sarcastic, flowery, rude, or inconsiderate? Recognizing our own tone is not always easy, as we tend to read or listen from our own viewpoint and make allowances accordingly.

Once we have characterized our tone, we need to decide whether and how it can be improved. Getting a handle on how to influence tone and to make your voice match your intentions takes time and skill.

One useful tip is to read your document out loud before you deliver it, just as you would practice a speech before you present it to an audience. Sometimes hearing your own words can reveal their tone, helping you decide whether it is correct or appropriate for the situation.

Another way is to listen or watch others' presentations that have been described with terms associated with tone. Martin Luther King Jr. had one style while President Barack Obama has another. The writing in *The Atlantic* is far more sophisticated than the simpler writing in *USA Today*, yet both are very successful with their respective audiences. What kind of tone is best for your intended audience?

Finally, seek out and be receptive to feedback from teachers, classmates, and coworkers. Don't just take the word of one critic, but if several critics point to a speech as an example of pompous eloquence, and you don't want to come across in your presentation as pompous, you may learn from that example speech what to avoid.

Check for Understanding

When we talk to each other face-to-face, seeing if someone understood you isn't all that difficult. Even if they really didn't get it, you can see, ask questions, and clarify right away. That gives oral communication, particularly live interaction, a distinct advantage. Use this immediacy for feedback to your advantage. Make time for feedback and plan for it. Ask clarifying questions. Share your presentation with more than one person, and choose people that have similar characteristics to your anticipated audience.

If you were going to present to a group that you knew in advance was of a certain age, sex, or professional background, it would only make sense to connect with someone from that group prior to your actual performance to check and see if what you have created and what they expect are similar. In oral communication, feedback is core component of the communication model and we can often see it, hear it, and it takes less effort to assess it.

Be Results Oriented

At the end of the day, the assignment has to be complete. It can be a challenge to balance the need for attention to detail with the need to arrive at the end product—and its due date. Stephen Covey suggests beginning with the end in mind as one strategy for success. If you have done your preparation, know your assignment goals, desired results, have learned about your audience and tailored the message to their expectations, then you are well on your way to completing the task. No document or presentation is perfect, but the goal itself is worthy of your continued effort for improvement.

Here the key is to know when further revision will not benefit the presentation and to shift the focus to test marketing, asking for feedback, or simply sharing it with a mentor or coworker for a quick review. Finding balance while engaging in an activity that requires a high level of attention to detail can be challenge for any business communicator, but it is helpful to keep the end in mind.

Key Takeaway

To improve communication, define your terms, choose precise words, consider your audience, control your tone, check for understanding, and aim for results.

Exercises

1. Choose a piece of writing from a profession you are unfamiliar with. For example, if you are studying biology, choose an excerpt from a book on fashion design. Identify several terms you are unfamiliar with, terms that may be considered jargon. How does the writer help you understand the meaning of these terms? Could the writer make them easier to understand? Share your findings with your class.
2. In your chosen career field or your college major, identify ten jargon words, define them, and share them with the class.
3. Describe a simple process, from brushing your teeth to opening the top of a bottle, in as precise terms as possible. Present to the class.

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3.4: Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate nonverbal communication and describe its role in the communication process.
- Understand and explain the principles of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication is Fluid

Where does a wink start and a nod end? Nonverbal communication involves the entire body, the space it occupies and dominates, the time it interacts, and not only what is not said, but how it is not said. Confused? Try to focus on just one element of nonverbal communication and it will soon get lost among all the other stimuli. Let's consider eye contact. What does it mean by itself without context, chin position, or eyebrows to flag interest or signal a threat? Nonverbal action flows almost seamlessly from one to the next, making it a challenge to interpret one element, or even a series of elements.

We perceive time as linear, flowing along in a straight line. We did one task, we're doing another task now, and we are planning on doing something else all the time. Sometimes we place more emphasis on the future, or the past, forgetting that we are actually living in the present moment whether we focus on "the now" or not. Nonverbal communication is always in motion, as long as we are, and is never the same twice.

Nonverbal communication is irreversible. In written communication, you can write a clarification, correction, or retraction. While it never makes the original statement go completely away, it does allow for correction. Unlike written communication, oral communication may allow "do-overs" on the spot: you can explain and restate, hoping to clarify your point. You can also dig the hole you are in just a little bit deeper. The old sayings "when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging" and "open mouth, insert foot" can sometimes apply to oral communications. We've all said something we would give anything to take back, but we all know we can't. Oral communication, like written communication, allows for some correction, but it still doesn't erase the original message or its impact. Nonverbal communication takes it one step further. You can't separate one nonverbal action from the context of all the other verbal and nonverbal communication acts, and you can't take it back.

In a speech, nonverbal communication is continuous in the sense that it is always occurring, and because it is so fluid, it can be hard to determine where one nonverbal message starts and another stops. Words can be easily identified and isolated, but if we try to single out a speaker's gestures, smile, or stance without looking at how they all come together in context, we may miss the point and draw the wrong conclusion. You need to be conscious of this aspect of public speaking because, to quote another old saying, "Actions speak louder than words." This is true in the sense that people often pay more attention to your nonverbal expressions more than your words. As a result, nonverbal communication is a powerful way to contribute to (or detract from) your success in communicating your message to the audience.

Nonverbal Communication is Fast

Let's pretend you are at your computer at work. You see that an e-mail has arrived, but you are right in the middle of tallying a spreadsheet whose numbers just don't add up. You see that the e-mail is from a coworker and you click on it. The subject line reads "pink slips." You could interpret this to mean a suggestion for a Halloween costume, or a challenge to race for each other's car ownership, but in the context of the workplace you may assume it means layoffs.

Your emotional response is immediate. If the author of the e-mail could see your face, they would know that your response was one of disbelief and frustration, even anger, all via your nonverbal communication. Yes, when a tree falls in the forest it makes a sound, even if no one is there to hear it. In the same way, you express yourself via nonverbal communication all the time without much conscious thought at all. You may think about how to share the news with your partner, and try to display a smile and a sense of calm when you feel like anything but smiling.

Nonverbal communication gives our thoughts and feelings away before we are even aware of what we are thinking or how we feel. People may see and hear more than you ever anticipated. Your nonverbal communication includes both intentional and unintentional messages, but since it all happens so fast, the unintentional ones can contradict what you know you are supposed

to say or how you are supposed to react.

Nonverbal Communication Can Add to or Replace Verbal Communication

People tend to pay more attention to how you say it than what you actually say. In presenting a speech this is particularly true. We communicate nonverbally more than we engage in verbal communication, and often use nonverbal expressions to add to, or even replace, words we might otherwise say. We use a nonverbal gesture called an *illustrator* to communicate our message effectively and reinforce our point. Your coworker Andrew may ask you, “Barney’s Bar after work?” as he walks by, and you simply nod and say “yeah.” Andrew may respond with a nonverbal gesture, called an *emblem*, by signaling with the “OK” sign as he walks away.

In addition to illustrators or emblematic nonverbal communication, we also use *regulators*. “Regulators are nonverbal messages which control, maintain or discourage interaction” (McLean, S., 2003). For example, if someone is telling you a message that is confusing or upsetting, you may hold up your hand, a commonly recognized regulator that asks the speaker to stop talking.

Let’s say you are in a meeting presenting a speech that introduces your company’s latest product. If your audience members nod their heads in agreement on important points and maintain good eye contact, it is a good sign. Nonverbally, they are using regulators encouraging you to continue with your presentation. In contrast, if they look away, tap their feet, and begin drawing in the margins of their notebook, these are regulators suggesting that you better think of a way to regain their interest or else wrap up your presentation quickly.

“Affect displays are nonverbal communication that express emotions or feelings” (McLean, S., 2003). An affect display that might accompany holding up your hand for silence would be to frown and shake your head from side to side. When you and Andrew are at Barney’s Bar, smiling and waving at coworkers who arrive lets them know where you are seated and welcomes them.



Figure 3.4.1: Combing your hair would be an example of a purposeful action, unlike a self-adaptive behavior. Matthew – [I Hate Bad Hair Days](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

“Adaptors are displays of nonverbal communication that help you adapt to your environment and each context, helping you feel comfortable and secure” (McLean, S., 2003). A self-adaptor involves you meeting your need for security, by playing with your hair for example, by adapting something about yourself in way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose. Combing your hair would be an example of a purposeful action, unlike a self-adaptive behavior. An object-adaptor involves the use of an object in a way for which it was not designed. You may see audience members tapping their pencils, chewing on them, or playing with them, while ignoring you and your presentation. Or perhaps someone pulls out a comb and repeatedly rubs a thumbnail against the comb’s teeth. They are using the comb or the pencil in a way other than its intended design, an object-adaptor that communicates a lack of engagement or enthusiasm in your speech.

Intentional nonverbal communication can complement, repeat, replace, mask, or contradict what we say. When Andrew invited you to Barney’s, you said, “Yeah” and nodded, complementing and repeating the message. You could have simply nodded, effectively replacing the “yes” with a nonverbal response. You could also have decided to say no, but did not want to hurt Andrew’s feelings. Shaking your head “no” while pointing to your watch, communicating work and time issues, may mask your real thoughts or

feelings. Masking involves the substitution of appropriate nonverbal communication for nonverbal communication you may want to display (McLean, S., 2003). Finally, nonverbal messages that conflict with verbal communication can confuse the listener. Table 3.4.1 summarizes these concepts.

Table 3.4.1: Some Nonverbal Expressions

Term	Definition
Adaptors	Help us feel comfortable or indicate emotions or moods
Affect Displays	Express emotions or feelings
Complementing	Reinforcing verbal communication
Contradicting	Contradicting verbal communication
Emblems	Nonverbal gestures that carry a specific meaning, and can replace or reinforce words
Illustrators	Reinforce a verbal message
Masking	Substituting more appropriate displays for less appropriate displays
Object-Adaptors	Using an object for a purpose other than its intended design
Regulators	Control, encourage or discourage interaction
Repeating	Repeating verbal communication
Replacing	Replacing verbal communication
Self-Adaptors	Adapting something about yourself in a way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose

Nonverbal Communication Is Universal

Consider the many contexts in which interaction occurs during your day. In the morning, at work, after work, at home, with friends, with family, and our list could go on for quite awhile. Now consider the differences in nonverbal communication across these many contexts. When you are at work, do you jump up and down and say whatever you want? Why or why not? You may not engage in that behavior because of expectations at work, but the fact remains that from the moment you wake until you sleep, you are surrounded by nonverbal communication.

If you had been born in a different country, to different parents, and perhaps as a member of the opposite sex, your whole world would be quite different. Yet nonverbal communication would remain a universal constant. It may not look the same, or get used in the same way, but it will still be nonverbal communication in its many functions and displays.

Nonverbal Communication Is Confusing and Contextual

Nonverbal communication can be confusing. We need contextual clues to help us understand, or begin to understand, what a movement, gesture, or lack of display means. Then we have to figure it all out based on our prior knowledge (or lack thereof) of the person and hope to get it right. Talk about a challenge. Nonverbal communication is everywhere, and we all use it, but that doesn't make it simple or independent of when, where, why, or how we communicate.

Nonverbal Communication Can Be Intentional or Unintentional

Suppose you are working as a salesclerk in a retail store, and a customer communicated frustration to you. Would the nonverbal aspects of your response be intentional or unintentional? Your job is to be pleasant and courteous at all times, yet your wrinkled eyebrows or wide eyes may have been unintentional. They clearly communicate your negative feelings at that moment. Restating your wish to be helpful and displaying nonverbal gestures may communicate "no big deal," but the stress of the moment is still "written" on your face.

Can we tell when people are intentionally or unintentionally communicating nonverbally? Ask ten people this question and compare their responses. You may be surprised. It is clearly a challenge to understand nonverbal communication in action. We often assign intentional motives to nonverbal communication when in fact their display is unintentional, and often hard to

interpret.

Nonverbal Messages Communicate Feelings and Attitudes

Steven Beebe, Susan Beebe, and Mark Redmond offer us three additional principals of interpersonal nonverbal communication that serve our discussion. One is that you often react faster than you think. Your nonverbal responses communicate your initial reaction before you can process it through language or formulate an appropriate response. If your appropriate, spoken response doesn't match your nonverbal reaction, you may give away your true feelings and attitudes (Beebe, S., Beebe, S., and Redmond, M., 2002).

Albert Mehrabian asserts that we rarely communicate emotional messages through the spoken word. According to Mehrabian, 93 percent of the time we communicate our emotions nonverbally, with at least 55 percent associated with facial gestures. Vocal cues, body position and movement, and normative space between speaker and receiver can also be clues to feelings and attitudes (Mehrabian, A., 1972).

Is your first emotional response always an accurate and true representation of your feelings and attitudes, or does your emotional response change across time? We are all changing all the time, and sometimes a moment of frustration or a flash of anger can signal to the receiver a feeling or emotion that existed for a moment, but has since passed. Their response to your communication will be based on that perception, even though you might already be over the issue. This is where the spoken word serves us well. You may need to articulate clearly that you were frustrated, but not anymore. The words spoken out loud can serve to clarify and invite additional discussion.

We Believe Nonverbal Communication More than Verbal

Building on the example of responding to a situation with facial gestures associated with frustration before you even have time to think of an appropriate verbal response, let's ask the question: what would you believe, someone's actions or their words? According to William Seiler and Melissa Beall, most people tend to believe the nonverbal message over the verbal message. People will often answer that "actions speak louder than words" and place a disproportionate emphasis on the nonverbal response (Seiler W., and Beall, M., 2000). Humans aren't logical all the time, and they do experience feelings and attitudes that change. Still, we place more confidence in nonverbal communication, particularly when it comes to lying behaviors. According to Miron Zuckerman, Bella DePaulo, and Robert Rosenthal, there are several behaviors people often display when they are being deceptive (Zuckerman, M., DePaulo, B., and Rosenthal, R., 1981):

- Reduction in eye contact while engaged in a conversation
- Awkward pauses in conversation
- Higher pitch in voice
- Deliberate pronunciation and articulation of words
- Increased delay in response time to a question
- Increased body movements like changes in posture
- Decreased smiling
- Decreased rate of speech

If you notice one of more of the behaviors, you may want to take a closer look. Over time we learn people's patterns of speech and behavior, and form a set of expectations. Variation from their established patterns, combined with the clues above, can serve to alert you to the possibility that something deserves closer attention.

Our nonverbal responses have a connection to our physiological responses to stress, such as heart rate, blood pressure, and skin conductivity. Polygraph machines (popularly referred to as "lie detectors") focus on these physiological responses and demonstrate anomalies, or variations. While movies and TV crime shows may make polygraphs look foolproof, there is significant debate about whether they measure dishonesty with any degree of accuracy.

Can you train yourself to detect lies? It is unlikely. Our purpose in studying nonverbal communication is not to uncover dishonesty in others, but rather to help you understand how to use the nonverbal aspects of communication to increase understanding.

Nonverbal Communication Is Key in the Speaker/Audience Relationship

When we first see each other, before anyone says a word, we are already sizing each other up. Within the first few seconds we have made judgments about each other based on what we wear, our physical characteristics, even our posture. Are these judgments accurate? That is hard to know without context, but we can say that nonverbal communication certainly affects first impressions, for better or worse. When a speaker and the audience first meet, nonverbal communication in terms of space, dress, and even personal characteristics can contribute to assumed expectations. The expectations might not be accurate or even fair, but it is important to recognize that they will be present. There is truth in the saying, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." Since beginnings are fragile times, your attention to aspects you can control, both verbal and nonverbal, will help contribute to the first step of forming a relationship with your audience. Your eye contact with audience members, use of space, and degree of formality will continue to contribute to that relationship.

As a speaker, your nonverbal communication is part of the message and can contribute to, or detract from, your overall goals. By being aware of them, and practicing with a live audience, you can learn to be more aware and in control.

Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal communication is the process of conveying a message without the use of words; it relates to the dynamic process of communication, the perception process and listening, and verbal communication.
- Nonverbal communication is fluid and fast, universal, confusing, and contextual. It can add to or replace verbal communication and can be intentional or unintentional.
- Nonverbal communication communicates feelings and attitudes, and people tend to believe nonverbal messages more than verbal ones.

Exercises

1. Does it limit or enhance our understanding of communication to view nonverbal communication as that which is not verbal communication? Explain your answer and discuss with the class.
2. Choose a television personality you admire. What do you like about this person? Watch several minutes of this person with the sound turned off, and make notes of the nonverbal expressions you observe. Turn the sound back on and make notes of their tone of voice, timing, and other audible expressions. Discuss your results with a classmate.
3. Find a program that focuses on microexpressions and write a brief summary of how they play a role in the program. Share and compare with classmates.
4. Create a survey that addresses the issue of which people trust more, nonverbal or verbal messages. Ask an equal number of men and women and compare your results with those of your classmates.
5. Search for information on the reliability and admissibility of results from polygraph (lie detector) tests. Share your findings with classmates.
6. See how long and how much you can get done during the day without the use of verbal messages.

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3.5: Types of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Describe the similarities and differences among eight general types of nonverbal communication.

Now that we have discussed the general principles that apply to nonverbal communication, let's examine eight types of nonverbal communication to further understand this challenging aspect of communication:

1. Space
2. Time
3. Physical characteristics
4. Body movements
5. Touch
6. Paralanguage
7. Artifacts
8. Environment

Space

When we discuss space in a nonverbal context, we mean the space between objects and people. Space is often associated with social rank and is an important part of business communication. Who gets the corner office? Why is the head of the table important and who gets to sit there?

People from diverse cultures may have different normative space expectations. If you are from a large urban area, having people stand close to you may be normal. If you are from a rural area or a culture where people expect more space, someone may be standing "too close" for comfort and not know it.

Edward T. Hall, serving in the European and South Pacific Regions in the Corps of Engineers during World War II, traveled around the globe. As he moved from one place to another, he noticed that people in different countries kept different distances from each other. In France, they stood closer to each other than they did in England. Hall wondered why that was and began to study what he called proxemics, or the study of the human use of space and distance in communication (Hall, E. T., 1963).

In *The Hidden Dimension*, he indicated there are two main aspects of space: territory and personal space. Hall drew on anthropology to address the concepts of dominance and submission, and noted that the more powerful person often claims more space. This plays an important role in modern society, from who gets the corner office to how we negotiate space between vehicles. Road rage is increasingly common where overcrowding occurs, and as more vehicles occupy the same roads, tensions over space are predictable.

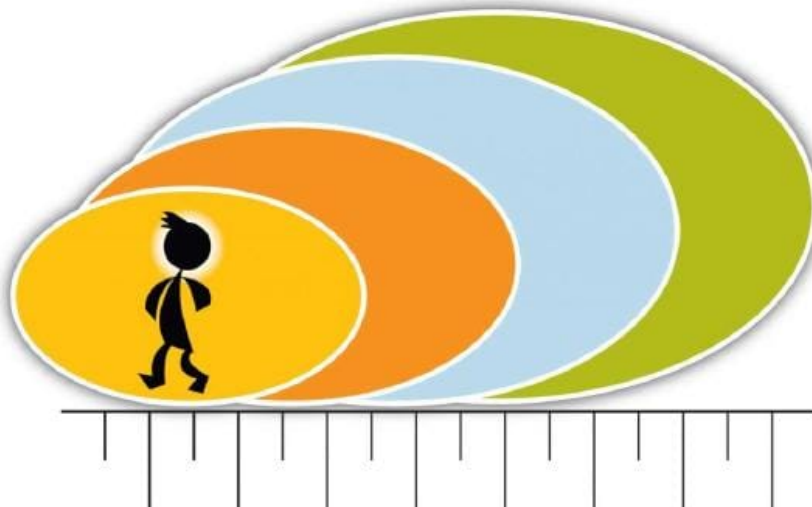
Territory is related to control. As a way of establishing control over your own room, maybe you painted it your favorite color, or put up posters that represent your interests or things you consider unique about yourself. Families or households often mark their space by putting up fences or walls around their houses. This sense of a right to control your space is implicit in territory. Territory means the space you claim as your own, are responsible for, or are willing to defend.

The second aspect Hall highlights is personal space, or the "bubble" of space surrounding each individual. As you walk down a flight of stairs, which side do you choose? We may choose the right side because we've learned that is what is expected, and people coming up the same stair choose their right. The right choice insures that personal space is not compromised. But what happens when some comes up the wrong side? They violate the understood rules of movement and often correct themselves. But what happens if they don't change lanes as people move up and down the stairs? They may get dirty looks or even get bumped as people in the crowd handle the invasion of "their" space. There are no lane markers, and bubbles of space around each person move with them, allowing for the possibility of collision.

We recognize the basic need for personal space, but the normative expectations for space vary greatly by culture. You may perceive that in your home people sleep one to each bed, but in many cultures people sleep two or more to a bed and it is

considered normal. If you were to share that bed, you might feel uncomfortable, while someone raised with group sleeping norms might feel uncomfortable sleeping alone. From where you stand in an aerobics class in relation to others, to where you place your book bag in class, your personal expectations of space are often at variance with others.

As the context of a staircase has norms for nonverbal behavior, so does the public speaking context. In North America, eye contact with the audience is expected. Big movements and gestures are not generally expected and can be distracting. The speaker occupies a space on the “stage,” even if it’s in front of the class. When you occupy that space, the audience will expect to behave in certain ways. If you talk to the screen behind you while displaying a PowerPoint presentation, the audience may perceive that you are not paying attention to them. Speakers are expected to pay attention to, and interact with, the audience, even if in the feedback is primarily nonverbal. Your movements should coordinate with the tone, rhythm, and content of your speech. Pacing back and forth, keeping your hands in your pockets, or crossing your arms may communicate nervousness, or even defensiveness, and detract from your speech.



Intimate, Personal, Social, and Public Space

Figure 3.5.1: Space: Four Main Categories of

Distance: As a general rule, try to act naturally, as if you were telling a friend a story, so that your body will relax and your nonverbal gestures will come more naturally. Practice is key to your level of comfort; the more practice you get, the more comfortable and less intimidating it will seem to you.

Hall articulated four main categories of distance used in communication as shown in Figure 3.5.1 (Hall, E., 1966).

Time

Do you know what time it is? How aware you are of time varies by culture and normative expectations of adherence (or ignorance) of time. Some people, and the communities and cultures they represent, are very time-oriented. The Euro Railways trains in Germany are famous for departing and arriving according to the schedule. In contrast, if you take the train in Argentina, you’ll find that the schedule is more of an approximation of when the train will leave or arrive.

“Time is money” is a common saying across many cultures, and reveals a high value for time. In social contexts, it often reveals social status and power. Who are you willing to wait for? A doctor for an office visit when you are sick? A potential employer for a job interview? Your significant other or children? Sometimes we get impatient, and our impatience underscores our value for time.

When you give a presentation, does your audience have to wait for you? Time is a relevant factor of the communication process in your speech. The best way to show your audience respect is to honor the time expectation associated with your speech. Always try to stop speaking before the audience stops listening; if the audience perceives that you have “gone over time,” they will be less willing to listen. This in turn will have a negative impact on your ability to communicate your message.

Suppose you are presenting a speech that has three main points. Your audience expects you to regulate the time and attention to each point, but if you spend all your time on the first two points and rush through the third, your speech won’t be balanced and will lose rhythm. The speaker occupies a position of some power, but it is the audience that gives them that position. By displaying

respect and maintaining balance, you will move through your points more effectively.

Chronemics is the study of how we refer to and perceive time. Tom Bruneau at Radford University has spent a lifetime investigating how time interacts in communication and culture (Bruneau, T., 1974; Bruneau, T., 1990; Bruneau, T., and Ishii S., 1988). As he notes, across Western society, time is often considered the equivalent of money. The value of speed is highly prized in some societies (Schwartz, T., 1989). In others, there is a great respect for slowing down and taking a long-term view of time.

When you order a meal at a fast food restaurant, what are your expectations for how long you will have to wait? When you order a pizza online for delivery, when do you expect it will arrive? If you order cable service for your home, when do you expect it might be delivered? In the first case, you might measure the delivery of a hamburger in a matter of seconds or minutes, and perhaps thirty minutes for pizza delivery, but you may measure the time from your order to working cable in days or even weeks. You may even have to be at your home from 8 a.m. to noon, waiting for its installation. The expectations vary by context, and we often grow frustrated in a time-sensitive culture when the delivery does not match our expectations.

In the same way, how long should it take to respond to a customer's request for assistance or information? If they call on the phone, how long should they be on hold? How soon should they expect a response to an e-mail? As a skilled business communicator, you will know to anticipate normative expectations and do your best to meet those expectations more quickly than anticipated. Your prompt reply or offer of help in response to a request, even if you cannot solve the issue on the spot, is often regarded positively, contributing to the formation of positive communication interactions.

Across cultures the value of time may vary. Some Mexican American friends may invite you to a barbecue at 8 p.m., but when you arrive you are the first guest, because it is understood that the gathering actually doesn't start until after 9 p.m. Similarly in France, an 8 p.m. party invitation would be understood to indicate you should arrive around 8:30, but in Sweden 8 p.m. means 8 p.m., and latecomers may not be welcome. Some Native Americans, particularly elders, speak in well-measured phrases and take long pauses between phrases. They do not hurry their speech or compete for their turn, knowing no one will interrupt them (McLean, S., 1998). Some Orthodox Jews observe religious days when they do not work, cook, drive, or use electricity. People around the world have different ways of expressing value for time.

Physical Characteristics

You didn't choose your birth, your eye color, the natural color of your hair, or your height, but people spend millions every year trying to change their physical characteristics. You can get colored contacts; dye your hair; and if you are shorter than you'd like to be, buy shoes to raise your stature a couple of inches. You won't be able to change your birth, and no matter how much you stoop to appear shorter, you won't change your height until time and age gradually makes itself apparent. If you are tall, you might find the correct shoe size, pant length, or even the length of mattress a challenge, but there are rewards. Have you ever heard that taller people get paid more (Burnham, T., and Phelan, J., 2000)? There is some truth to that idea. There is also some truth to the notion that people prefer symmetrical faces (where both sides are equal) over asymmetrical faces (with unequal sides; like a crooked nose or having one eye or ear slightly higher than the other) (Burnham, T., and Phelan, J., 2000).

We often make judgments about a person's personality or behavior based on physical characteristics, and researchers are quick to note that those judgments are often inaccurate (Wells, W., and Siegel, B., 1961; Cash, T., and Kilcullen, R., 1985). Regardless of your eye or hair color, or even how tall you are, being comfortable with yourself is an important part of your presentation. Act naturally and consider aspects of your presentation you can control in order to maximize a positive image for the audience.

Body Movements

The study of body movements, called kinesics, is key to understanding nonverbal communication. Since your actions will significantly contribute to the effectiveness of your business interactions, let's examine four distinct ways body movements that complement, repeat, regulate, or replace your verbal messages.

Body movements can complement the verbal message by reinforcing the main idea. For example, you may be providing an orientation presentation to a customer about a software program. As you say, "Click on this tab," you may also initiate that action. Your verbal and nonverbal messages reinforce each other. You can also reinforce the message by repeating it. If you first say, "Click on the tab," and then motion with your hand to the right, indicating that the customer should move the cursor arrow with the mouse to the tab, your repetition can help the listener understand the message.

In addition to repeating your message, body movements can also regulate conversations. Nodding your head to indicate that you

are listening may encourage the customer to continue asking questions. Holding your hand up, palm out, may signal them to stop and provide a pause where you can start to answer.

Body movements also substitute or replace verbal messages. Ekman and Friesen found that facial features communicate to others our feelings, but our body movements often reveal how intensely we experience those feelings (Ekman, P., and Friesen, W., 1967). For example, if the customer makes a face of frustration while trying to use the software program, they may need assistance. If they push away from the computer and separate themselves physically from interacting with it, they may be extremely frustrated. Learning to gauge feelings and their intensity as expressed by customers takes time and patience, and your attention to them will improve your ability to facilitate positive interactions.

Touch

Touch in communication interaction is called haptics, and William Seiler and Meliss Beall identify five distinct types of touch, from impersonal to intimate, as listed in Table 3.5.1.

Table 3.5.1: Types of Touch

Term	Definition
1. Functional-Professional Touch	Medical examination, physical therapy, sports coach, music teacher
2. Social-Polite Touch	Handshake
3. Friendship-Warmth Touch	Hug
4. Love-Intimacy Touch	Kiss between family members or romantic partners
5. Sexual-Arousal Touch	Sexual caressing and intercourse

Before giving your presentation, you may interact with people by shaking hands and making casual conversation. This interaction can help establish trust before you take the stage. While speaking in public we do not often touch people in the audience, but we do interact with visual aids, our note cards, and other objects. How we handle them can communicate our comfort level. It's always a good idea to practice using the technology, visual aids, or note cards you will use in a speech during a practice session. Using the technology correctly by clicking the right button on the mouse or pressing the right switch on the overhead projector can contribute to your credibility.

Paralanguage

Paralanguage is the exception to the definition of nonverbal communication. You may recall that we defined nonverbal communication as not involving words, but paralanguage exists when we are speaking, using words. Paralanguage involves verbal and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including tone, intensity, pausing, and even silence.

Perhaps you've also heard of a pregnant pause, a silence between verbal messages that is full of meaning. The meaning itself may be hard to understand or decipher, but it is there nonetheless. For example, your coworker Jan comes back from a sales meeting speechless and with a ghost-white complexion. You may ask if the meeting went all right. "Well, ahh..." may be the only response you get. The pause speaks volumes. Something happened, though you may not know what. It could be personal if Jan's report was not well received, or it could be more systemic, like the news that sales figures are off by 40 percent and pink slips may not be far behind.

Silence or vocal pauses can communicate hesitation, indicate the need to gather thought, or serve as a sign of respect. Keith Basso quotes an anonymous source as stating, "It is not the case that a man who is silent says nothing" (Basso, K. A., 1970). Sometimes we learn just as much, or even more, from what a person does not say as what they do say. In addition, both Basso and Susan Philips found that traditional speech among Native Americans places a special emphasis on silence (Philips, S., 1983).

Artifacts

Do you cover your tattoos when you are at work? Do you know someone who does? Or perhaps you know someone who has a tattoo and does not need to cover it up on their job? Expectations vary a great deal, but body art or tattoos are still controversial in the workplace. According to the *San Diego Union-Tribune* (Kinsman, M., 2001),

- 20 percent of workers indicated their body art had been held against them on the job.
- 42 percent of employers said the presence of visible body art lowered their opinion of workers.
- 44 percent of managers surveyed have body art.
- 52 percent of workers surveyed have body art.
- 67 percent of workers who have body art or piercings cover or remove them during work hours.

In your line of work, a tattoo might be an important visual aid, or it might detract from your effectiveness as a business communicator. Body piercings may express individuality, but you need to consider how they will be interpreted by employers and customers.

Artifacts are forms of decorative ornamentation that are chosen to represent self-concept. They can include rings and tattoos, but may also include brand names and logos. From clothes to cars, watches, briefcases, purses, and even eyeglasses, what we choose to surround ourselves with communicates something about our sense of self. They may project gender, role or position, class or status, personality, and group membership or affiliation. Paying attention to a customer's artifacts can give you a sense of the self they want to communicate, and may allow you to more accurately adapt your message to meet their needs.

Environment

Environment involves the physical and psychological aspects of the communication context. More than the tables and chairs in an office, environment is an important part of the dynamic communication process. The perception of one's environment influences one's reaction to it. For example, Google is famous for its work environment, with spaces created for physical activity and even in-house food service around the clock. The expense is no doubt considerable, but Google's actions speak volumes. The results produced in the environment, designed to facilitate creativity, interaction, and collaboration, are worth the effort.

Key Takeaway

Nonverbal communication can be categorized into eight types: space, time, physical characteristics, body movements, touch, paralanguage, artifacts, and environment.

Exercise

1. Do a Google search on space and culture. Share your findings with your classmates.
2. Note where people sit on the first day of class, and each class session thereafter. Do students return to the same seat? If they do not attend class, do the classmates leave their seat vacant? Compare your results.
3. What kind of value do you have for time, and what is truly important to you? Make a list of what you spend your time on, and what you value most. Do the lists match? Are you spending time on what is truly important to you? Relationships take time, and if you want them to succeed in a personal or business context, you have to make them a priority.
4. To what degree is time a relevant factor in communication in the information age? Give some examples. Discuss your ideas with a classmate.
5. How many people do you know who have chosen tattoos or piercings as a representation of self and statement of individuality? Survey your friends and share your findings with your classmates.

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4: PERCEPTION AND THE SELF

4.1: Perception Process

4.2: Perceiving Others

4.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self

4.4: Improving Perception

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4.1: Perception Process

Learning Objectives

1. Define perception.
2. Discuss how salience influences the selection of perceptual information.
3. Explain the ways in which we organize perceptual information.
4. Discuss the role of schemata in the interpretation of perceptual information.

Perception Process

Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. This process, which is shown in Figure 2.1 “The Perception Process”, includes the perception of select stimuli that pass through our perceptual filters, are organized into our existing structures and patterns, and are then interpreted based on previous experiences. Although perception is a largely cognitive and psychological process, how we perceive the people and objects around us affects our communication. We respond differently to an object or person that we perceive favorably than we do to something we find unfavorable. But how do we filter through the mass amounts of incoming information, organize it, and make meaning from what makes it through our perceptual filters and into our social realities?

Selecting Information

We take in information through all five of our senses, but our perceptual field (the world around us) includes so many stimuli that it is impossible for our brains to process and make sense of it all. So, as information comes in through our senses, various factors influence what actually continues on through the perception process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Selecting is the first part of the perception process, in which we focus our attention on certain incoming sensory information. Think about how, out of many other possible stimuli to pay attention to, you may hear a familiar voice in the hallway, see a pair of shoes you want to buy from across the mall, or smell something cooking for dinner when you get home from work. We quickly cut through and push to the background all kinds of sights, smells, sounds, and other stimuli, but how do we decide what to select and what to leave out?

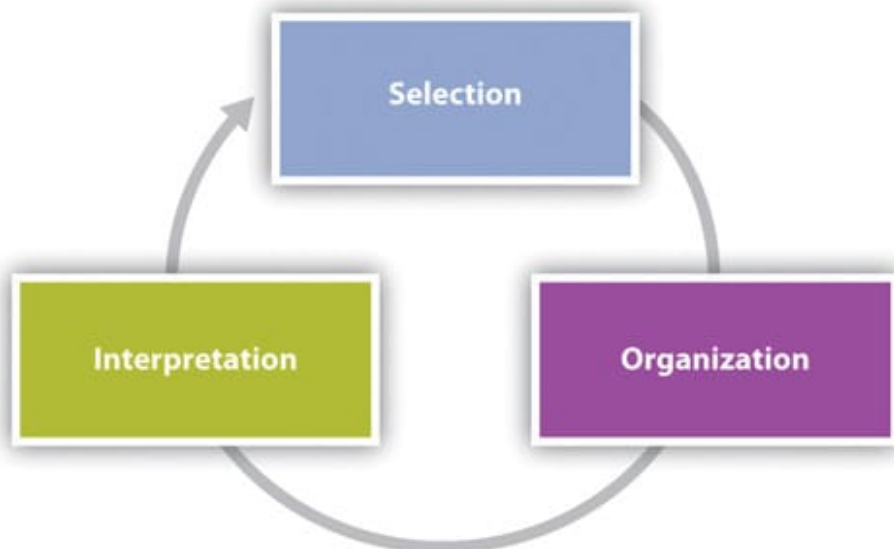


Figure 4.1.1 The Perception Process

We tend to pay attention to information that is salient. Salience is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context. The thing attracting our attention can be abstract, like a concept, or concrete, like an object. For example, a person’s identity as a Native American may become salient when they are protesting at the Columbus Day parade in Denver,

Colorado. Or a bright flashlight shining in your face while camping at night is sure to be salient. The degree of salience depends on three features (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). We tend to find salient things that are visually or aurally stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Lastly, expectations affect what we find salient.

Visual and Aural Stimulation

It is probably not surprising to learn that visually and/or aurally stimulating things become salient in our perceptual field and get our attention. Creatures ranging from fish to hummingbirds are attracted to things like silver spinners on fishing poles or red and yellow bird feeders. Having our senses stimulated isn't always a positive thing though. Think about the couple that won't stop talking during the movie or the upstairs neighbor whose subwoofer shakes your ceiling at night. In short, stimuli can be attention-getting in a productive or distracting way. As communicators, we can use this knowledge to our benefit by minimizing distractions when we have something important to say. It's probably better to have a serious conversation with a significant other in a quiet place rather than a crowded food court. As we will learn later in Chapter 12 "Public Speaking in Various Contexts", altering the rate, volume, and pitch of your voice, known as vocal variety, can help keep your audience engaged, as can gestures and movement. Conversely, nonverbal adaptors, or nervous movements we do to relieve anxiety like pacing or twirling our hair, can be distracting. Aside from minimizing distractions and delivering our messages enthusiastically, the content of our communication also affects salience.

Needs and Interests

We tend to pay attention to information that we perceive to meet our needs or interests in some way. This type of selective attention can help us meet instrumental needs and get things done. When you need to speak with a financial aid officer about your scholarships and loans, you sit in the waiting room and listen for your name to be called. Paying close attention to whose name is called means you can be ready to start your meeting and hopefully get your business handled. When we don't think certain messages meet our needs, stimuli that would normally get our attention may be completely lost. Imagine you are in the grocery store and you hear someone say your name. You turn around, only to hear that person say, "Finally! I said your name three times. I thought you forgot who I was!" A few seconds before, when you were focused on figuring out which kind of orange juice to get, you were attending to the various pulp options to the point that you tuned other stimuli out, even something as familiar as the sound of someone calling your name. Again, as communicators, especially in persuasive contexts, we can use this to our advantage by making it clear how our message or proposition meets the needs of our audience members. Whether a sign helps us find the nearest gas station, the sound of a ringtone helps us find our missing cell phone, or a speaker tells us how avoiding processed foods will improve our health, we select and attend to information that meets our needs.



R Pollard – [tex playing video games](#) – CC BY 2.0.

We also find salient information that interests us. Of course, many times, stimuli that meet our needs are also interesting, but it's worth discussing these two items separately because sometimes we find things interesting that don't necessarily meet our needs. I'm sure we've all gotten sucked into a television show, video game, or random project and paid attention to that at the expense

of something that actually meets our needs like cleaning or spending time with a significant other. Paying attention to things that interest us but don't meet specific needs seems like the basic formula for procrastination that we are all familiar with.

In many cases we know what interests us and we automatically gravitate toward stimuli that match up with that. For example, as you filter through radio stations, you likely already have an idea of what kind of music interests you and will stop on a station playing something in that genre while skipping right past stations playing something you aren't interested in. Because of this tendency, we often have to end up being forced into or accidentally experiencing something new in order to create or discover new interests. For example, you may not realize you are interested in Asian history until you are required to take such a course and have an engaging professor who sparks that interest in you. Or you may accidentally stumble on a new area of interest when you take a class you wouldn't otherwise because it fits into your schedule. As communicators, you can take advantage of this perceptual tendency by adapting your topic and content to the interests of your audience.

Expectations

The relationship between salience and expectations is a little more complex. Basically, we can find expected things salient and find things that are unexpected salient. While this may sound confusing, a couple examples should illustrate this point. If you are expecting a package to be delivered, you might pick up on the slightest noise of a truck engine or someone's footsteps approaching your front door. Since we expect something to happen, we may be extra tuned in to clues that it is coming. In terms of the unexpected, if you have a shy and soft-spoken friend who you overhear raising the volume and pitch of his voice while talking to another friend, you may pick up on that and assume that something out of the ordinary is going on. For something unexpected to become salient, it has to reach a certain threshold of difference. If you walked into your regular class and there were one or two more students there than normal, you may not even notice. If you walked into your class and there was someone dressed up as a wizard, you would probably notice. So, if we expect to experience something out of the routine, like a package delivery, we will find stimuli related to that expectation salient. If we experience something that we weren't expecting and that is significantly different from our routine experiences, then we will likely find it salient. We can also apply this concept to our communication. I always encourage my students to include supporting material in their speeches that defies our expectations. You can help keep your audience engaged by employing good research skills to find such information.

There is a middle area where slight deviations from routine experiences may go unnoticed because we aren't expecting them. To go back to the earlier example, if you aren't expecting a package, and you regularly hear vehicle engines and sidewalk foot traffic outside your house, those pretty routine sounds wouldn't be as likely to catch your attention, even if it were slightly more or less traffic than expected. This is because our expectations are often based on previous experience and patterns we have observed and internalized, which allows our brains to go on "autopilot" sometimes and fill in things that are missing or overlook extra things. Look at the following sentence and read it aloud: Percpetoin is bsaed on pateetrns, maening we often raech a cocnlsuion wituht cosnidreing ecah indiidaul elmenet. This example illustrates a test of our expectation and an annoyance to every college student. We have all had the experience of getting a paper back with typos and spelling errors circled. This can be frustrating, especially if we actually took the time to proofread. When we first learned to read and write, we learned letter by letter. A teacher or parent would show us a card with *A-P-P-L-E* written on it, and we would sound it out. Over time, we learned the patterns of letters and sounds and could see combinations of letters and pronounce the word quickly. Since we know what to expect when we see a certain pattern of letters, and know what comes next in a sentence since we wrote the paper, we don't take the time to look at each letter as we proofread. This can lead us to overlook common typos and spelling errors, even if we proofread something multiple times. As a side note, I'll share two tips to help you avoid proofreading errors: First, have a friend proofread your paper. Since they didn't write it, they have fewer expectations regarding the content. Second, read your papers backward. Since patterns of speech aren't the same in reverse you have to stop and focus on each word. Now that we know how we select stimuli, let's turn our attention to how we organize the information we receive.

Organizing Information

Organizing is the second part of the perception process, in which we sort and categorize information that we perceive based on innate and learned cognitive patterns. Three ways we sort things into patterns are by using proximity, similarity, and difference (Coren, 1980). In terms of proximity, we tend to think that things that are close together go together. For example, have you ever been waiting to be helped in a business and the clerk assumes that you and the person standing beside you are together? The slightly awkward moment usually ends when you and the other person in line look at each other, then back at the clerk, and one of you explains that you are not together. Even though you may have never met that other person in your life, the clerk used a basic perceptual organizing cue to group you together because you were standing in proximity to one another.



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We also group things together based on similarity. We tend to think similar-looking or similar-acting things belong together. I have two friends that I occasionally go out with, and we are all three males, around the same age, of the same race, with short hair and glasses. Aside from that, we don't really look alike, but on more than one occasion a server at a restaurant has assumed that we're brothers. Despite the fact that many of our other features are different, the salient features are organized based on similarity and the three of us are suddenly related.

We also organize information that we take in based on difference. In this case, we assume that the item that looks or acts different from the rest doesn't belong with the group. Perceptual errors involving people and assumptions of difference can be especially awkward, if not offensive. My friend's mother, who is Vietnamese American, was attending a conference at which another attendee assumed she was a hotel worker and asked her to throw something away for her. In this case, my friend's mother was a person of color at a convention with mostly white attendees, so an impression was formed based on the other person's perception of this difference.

These strategies for organizing information are so common that they are built into how we teach our children basic skills and how we function in our daily lives. I'm sure we all had to look at pictures in grade school and determine which things went together and which thing didn't belong. If you think of the literal act of organizing something, like your desk at home or work, we follow these same strategies. If you have a bunch of papers and mail on the top of your desk, you will likely sort papers into separate piles for separate classes or put bills in a separate place than personal mail. You may have one drawer for pens, pencils, and other supplies and another drawer for files. In this case you are grouping items based on similarities and differences. You may also group things based on proximity, for example, by putting financial items like your checkbook, a calculator, and your pay stubs in one area so you can update your budget efficiently. In summary, we simplify information and look for patterns to help us more efficiently communicate and get through life.

Simplification and categorizing based on patterns isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, without this capability we would likely not have the ability to speak, read, or engage in other complex cognitive/behavioral functions. Our brain innately categorizes and files information and experiences away for later retrieval, and different parts of the brain are responsible for different sensory experiences. In short, it is natural for things to group together in some ways. There are differences among people, and looking for patterns helps us in many practical ways. However, the judgments we place on various patterns and categories are not natural; they are learned and culturally and contextually relative. Our perceptual patterns do become unproductive and even unethical when the judgments we associate with certain patterns are based on stereotypical or prejudicial thinking.

We also organize interactions and interpersonal experiences based on our firsthand experiences. When two people experience the same encounter differently, misunderstandings and conflict may result. Punctuation refers to the structuring of information into a timeline to determine the cause (stimulus) and effect (response) of our communication interactions (Sillars, 1980). Applying this concept to interpersonal conflict can help us see how the perception process extends beyond the individual to the interpersonal level. This concept also helps illustrate how organization and interpretation can happen together and how interpretation can influence how we organize information and vice versa.

Where does a conflict begin and end? The answer to this question depends on how the people involved in the conflict punctuate, or structure, their conflict experience. Punctuation differences can often escalate conflict, which can lead to a variety of relationship problems (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967). For example, Linda and Joe are on a project team at work and have a deadline approaching. Linda has been working on the project over the weekend in anticipation of her meeting with Joe first thing Monday morning. She has had some questions along the way and has e-mailed Joe for clarification and input, but he hasn't responded. On Monday morning, Linda walks into the meeting room, sees Joe, and says, "I've been working on this project all weekend and needed your help. I e-mailed you three times! What were you doing?" Joe responds, "I had no idea you e-mailed me. I was gone all weekend on a camping trip." In this instance, the conflict started for Linda two days ago and has just started for Joe. So, for the two of them to most effectively manage this conflict, they need to communicate so that their punctuation, or where the conflict started for each one, is clear and matches up. In this example, Linda made an impression about Joe's level of commitment to the project based on an interpretation she made after selecting and organizing incoming information. Being aware of punctuation is an important part of perception checking, which we will discuss later. Let's now take a closer look at how interpretation plays into the perception process.

Interpreting Information

Although selecting and organizing incoming stimuli happens very quickly, and sometimes without much conscious thought, interpretation can be a much more deliberate and conscious step in the perception process. Interpretation is the third part of the perception process, in which we assign meaning to our experiences using mental structures known as schemata. Schemata are like databases of stored, related information that we use to interpret new experiences. We all have fairly complicated schemata that have developed over time as small units of information combine to make more meaningful complexes of information.



Malingering – trying the rose colored glasses approach again – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

We have an overall schema about education and how to interpret experiences with teachers and classmates. This schema started developing before we even went to preschool based on things that parents, peers, and the media told us about school. For example, you learned that certain symbols and objects like an apple, a ruler, a calculator, and a notebook are associated with being a student or teacher. You learned new concepts like grades and recess, and you engaged in new practices like doing homework, studying, and taking tests. You also formed new relationships with teachers, administrators, and classmates. As you progressed through your education, your schema adapted to the changing environment. How smooth or troubling schema reevaluation and revision is varies from situation to situation and person to person. For example, some students adapt their schema relatively easily as they move from elementary, to middle, to high school, and on to college and are faced with new expectations for behavior and academic engagement. Other students don't adapt as easily, and holding onto their old schema creates problems as they try to interpret new information through old, incompatible schema. We've all been in a similar situation at some point in our lives, so we know that revising our schemata can be stressful and that such revision takes effort and usually involves some mistakes, disappointments, and frustrations. But being able to adapt our schemata is a sign of cognitive complexity, which is an important part of communication competence. So, even though the process may be challenging, it can also be a time for learning and growth.

It's important to be aware of schemata because our interpretations affect our behavior. For example, if you are doing a group project for class and you perceive a group member to be shy based on your schema of how shy people communicate, you may avoid giving him presentation responsibilities in your group project because you do not think shy people make good public speakers. Schemata also guide our interactions, providing a script for our behaviors. We know, in general, how to act and communicate in a waiting room, in a classroom, on a first date, and on a game show. Even a person who has never been on a game show can develop a schema for how to act in that environment by watching *The Price Is Right*, for example. People go to great lengths to make shirts with clever sayings or act enthusiastically in hopes of being picked to be a part of the studio audience and hopefully become a contestant on the show.

As we have seen, schemata are used to interpret others' behavior and form impressions about who they are as a person. To help this process along, we often solicit information from people to help us place them into a preexisting schema. In the United States and many other Western cultures, people's identities are often closely tied to what they do for a living. When we introduce others, or ourselves, occupation is usually one of the first things we mention. Think about how your communication with someone might differ if he or she were introduced to you as an artist versus a doctor. We make similar interpretations based on where people are from, their age, their race, and other social and cultural factors. We will learn more about how culture, gender, and other factors influence our perceptions as we continue through the chapter. In summary, we have schemata about individuals, groups, places, and things, and these schemata filter our perceptions before, during, and after interactions. As schemata are retrieved from memory, they are executed, like computer programs or apps on your smartphone, to help us interpret the world around us. Just like computer programs and apps must be regularly updated to improve their functioning, competent communicators update and adapt their schemata as they have new experiences.

"Getting Real": Police Officers, Schemata, and Perception/Interpretation

Prime-time cable and network television shows like the *Law and Order* franchise and *Southland* have long offered viewers a glimpse into the lives of law enforcement officers. *COPS*, the first and longest-running prime-time reality television show, and newer reality-themed and educational shows like *The First 48* and *Lockdown*, offer a more realistic look into techniques used by law enforcement. Perception is a crucial part of an officer's skill set. Specifically, during police-citizen encounters, where tensions may be high and time for decision making limited, officers rely on schemata developed through personal experience off the job and training and experience on the job (Rozelle & Baxter, 1975). Moreover, police officers often have to make perceptions based on incomplete and sometimes unreliable information. So, how do police officers use perception to help them do their jobs?

Research has examined how police officers use perception to make judgments about personality traits, credibility, deception, and the presence or absence of a weapon, among others things, and just like you and me, officers use the same process of selection, organization, and interpretation. This research has found that officers, like us, rely on schema to help them make decisions under time and situational constraints. In terms of selection, expectations influence officer perception. At preshift meetings, officers are briefed on ongoing issues and "things to be on the lookout for," which provides them with a set of expectations—for example, the make and model of a stolen car—that can guide their selection process. They must also be prepared for things that defy their expectations, which is not a job skill that many other professionals have to consider every day. They never know when a traffic stop could turn into a pursuit or a seemingly gentle person could turn violent. These expectations can then connect to organization strategies. For example, if an officer knows to be alert for a criminal suspect, they will actively organize incoming perceptual information into categories based on whether or not people look similar to or different from the suspect description. Proximity also plays into police work. If a person is in a car with a driver who has an unregistered handgun, the officer is likely to assume that the other person also has criminal intent. While these practices are not inherently bad, there are obvious problems that can develop when these patterns become rigid schema. Some research has shown that certain prejudices based on racial schema can lead to perceptual errors—in this case, police officers mistakenly perceiving a weapon in the possession of black suspects more often than white suspects (Payne, 2001). Additionally, racial profiling (think of how profiles are similar to schemata) has become an issue that's gotten much attention since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the passage of immigration laws in states like Arizona and Alabama that have been critiqued as targeting migrant workers and other undocumented immigrants. As you can see, law enforcement officers and civilians use the same perception process, but such a career brings with it responsibilities and challenges that highlight the imperfect nature of the perception process.

1. What communication skills do you think are key for a law enforcement officer to have in order to do their job effectively and why?

2. Describe an encounter that you have had with a law enforcement officer (if you haven't had a direct experience you can use a hypothetical or fictional example). What were your perceptions of the officer? What do you think his or her perceptions were of you? What schemata do you think contributed to each of your interpretations?
3. What perceptual errors create potential ethical challenges in law enforcement? For example, how should the organizing principles of proximity, similarity, and difference be employed?

Key Takeaways

- Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. This process affects our communication because we respond to stimuli differently, whether they are objects or persons, based on how we perceive them.
- Given the massive amounts of stimuli taken in by our senses, we only select a portion of the incoming information to organize and interpret. We select information based on salience. We tend to find salient things that are visually or aurally stimulating and things that meet our needs and interests. Expectations also influence what information we select.
- We organize information that we select into patterns based on proximity, similarity, and difference.
- We interpret information using schemata, which allow us to assign meaning to information based on accumulated knowledge and previous experience.

Exercises

1. Take a moment to look around wherever you are right now. Take in the perceptual field around you. What is salient for you in this moment and why? Explain the degree of salience using the three reasons for salience discussed in this section.
2. As we organize information (sensory information, objects, and people) we simplify and categorize information into patterns. Identify some cases in which this aspect of the perception process is beneficial. Identify some cases in which it could be harmful or negative.
3. Getting integrated: Think about some of the schemata you have that help you make sense of the world around you. For each of the following contexts—academic, professional, personal, and civic—identify a schema that you commonly rely on or think you will rely on. For each schema you identified note a few ways that it has already been challenged or may be challenged in the future.

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4.2: Perceiving Others

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between internal and external attributions.
2. Explain two common perceptual errors: the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias.
3. Discuss how the primacy and recency effects relate to first and last impressions.
4. Discuss how physical and environmental factors influence perception.
5. Explain the horn and halo effects.
6. Recognize the roles that culture and personality play in the perception of others.

Perceiving Others

Are you a good judge of character? How quickly can you “size someone up?” Interestingly, research shows that many people are surprisingly accurate at predicting how an interaction with someone will unfold based on initial impressions. Fascinating research has also been done on the ability of people to make a judgment about a person’s competence after as little as 100 milliseconds of exposure to politicians’ faces. Even more surprising is that people’s judgments of competence, after exposure to two candidates for senate elections, accurately predicted election outcomes (Ballew II & Todoroy, 2007). In short, after only minimal exposure to a candidate’s facial expressions, people made judgments about the person’s competence, and those candidates judged more competent were people who actually won elections! As you read this section, keep in mind that these principles apply to how you perceive others and to how others perceive you. Just as others make impressions on us, we make impressions on others. We have already learned how the perception process works in terms of selecting, organizing, and interpreting. In this section, we will focus on how we perceive others, with specific attention to how we interpret our perceptions of others.

Attribution and Interpretation

I’m sure you have a family member, friend, or coworker with whom you have ideological or political differences. When conversations and inevitable disagreements occur, you may view this person as “pushing your buttons” if you are invested in the issue being debated, or you may view the person as “on their soapbox” if you aren’t invested. In either case, your existing perceptions of the other person are probably reinforced after your conversation and you may leave the conversation thinking, “She is never going to wake up and see how ignorant she is! I don’t know why I even bother trying to talk to her!” Similar situations occur regularly, and there are some key psychological processes that play into how we perceive others’ behaviors. By examining these processes, attribution in particular, we can see how our communication with others is affected by the explanations we create for others’ behavior. In addition, we will learn some common errors that we make in the attribution process that regularly lead to conflict and misunderstanding.

Attribution

In most interactions, we are constantly running an attribution script in our minds, which essentially tries to come up with explanations for what is happening. Why did my neighbor slam the door when she saw me walking down the hall? Why is my partner being extra nice to me today? Why did my officemate miss our project team meeting this morning? In general, we seek to attribute the cause of others’ behaviors to internal or external factors. Internal attributions connect the cause of behaviors to personal aspects such as personality traits. External attributions connect the cause of behaviors to situational factors. Attributions are important to consider because our reactions to others’ behaviors are strongly influenced by the explanations we reach. Imagine that Gloria and Jerry are dating. One day, Jerry gets frustrated and raises his voice to Gloria. She may find that behavior more offensive and even consider breaking up with him if she attributes the cause of the blow up to his personality, since personality traits are usually fairly stable and difficult to control or change.



Beelgin – ROAD RAGE FIST – CC BY 2.0.

Conversely, Gloria may be more forgiving if she attributes the cause of his behavior to situational factors beyond Jerry's control, since external factors are usually temporary. If she makes an internal attribution, Gloria may think, "Wow, this person is really a loose cannon. Who knows when he will lose it again?" If she makes an external attribution, she may think, "Jerry has been under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines at work and hasn't been getting much sleep. Once this project is over, I'm sure he'll be more relaxed." This process of attribution is ongoing, and, as with many aspects of perception, we are sometimes aware of the attributions we make, and sometimes they are automatic and/or unconscious. Attribution has received much scholarly attention because it is in this part of the perception process that some of the most common perceptual errors or biases occur.

One of the most common perceptual errors is the fundamental attribution error, which refers to our tendency to explain others' behaviors using internal rather than external attributions (Sillars, 1980). For example, when I worked at an urban college in Denver, Colorado, I often had students come into class irritated, saying, "I got a parking ticket! I can't believe those people. Why don't they get a real job and stop ruining my life!" If you Google some clips from the reality television show *Parking Wars*, you will see the ire that people often direct at parking enforcement officers. In this case, illegally parked students attribute the cause of their situation to the malevolence of the parking officer, essentially saying they got a ticket because the officer was a mean/bad person, which is an internal attribution. Students were much less likely to acknowledge that the officer was just doing his or her job (an external attribution) and the ticket was a result of the student's decision to park illegally.

Perceptual errors can also be biased, and in the case of the self-serving bias, the error works out in our favor. Just as we tend to attribute others' behaviors to internal rather than external causes, we do the same for ourselves, especially when our behaviors have led to something successful or positive. When our behaviors lead to failure or something negative, we tend to attribute the cause to external factors. Thus the self-serving bias is a perceptual error through which we attribute the cause of our successes to internal personal factors while attributing our failures to external factors beyond our control. When we look at the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias together, we can see that we are likely to judge ourselves more favorably than another person, or at least less personally.

The professor-student relationship offers a good case example of how these concepts can play out. I have often heard students who earned an unsatisfactory grade on an assignment attribute that grade to the strictness, unfairness, or incompetence of their professor. I have also heard professors attribute a poor grade to the student's laziness, attitude, or intelligence. In both cases, the behavior is explained using an internal attribution and is an example of the fundamental attribution error. Students may further attribute their poor grade to their busy schedule or other external, situational factors rather than their lack of motivation, interest, or preparation (internal attributions). On the other hand, when students get a good grade on a paper, they will likely attribute that cause to their intelligence or hard work rather than an easy assignment or an "easy grading" professor. Both of these examples illustrate the self-serving bias. These psychological processes have implications for our communication because when we attribute causality to another person's personality, we tend to have a stronger emotional reaction and tend to assume that this personality characteristic is stable, which may lead us to avoid communication with the person or to react negatively. Now that you are aware of these common errors, you can monitor them more and engage in perception checking, which we will learn more about later, to verify your attributions.

Impressions and Interpretation

As we perceive others, we make impressions about their personality, likeability, attractiveness, and other characteristics. Although much of our impressions are personal, what forms them is sometimes based more on circumstances than personal characteristics. All the information we take in isn't treated equally. How important are first impressions? Does the last thing you notice about a person stick with you longer because it's more recent? Do we tend to remember the positive or negative things we notice about a person? This section will help answer these questions, as we explore how the timing of information and the content of the messages we receive can influence our perception.

First and Last Impressions



Amtec Photos – [Man on a Job Interview](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

The old saying “You never get a second chance to make a good impression” points to the fact that first impressions matter. The brain is a predictive organ in that it wants to know, based on previous experiences and patterns, what to expect next, and first impressions function to fill this need, allowing us to determine how we will proceed with an interaction after only a quick assessment of the person with whom we are interacting (Hargie, 2011). Research shows that people are surprisingly good at making accurate first impressions about how an interaction will unfold and at identifying personality characteristics of people they do not know. Studies show that people are generally able to predict how another person will behave toward them based on an initial interaction. People's accuracy and ability to predict interaction based on first impressions vary, but people with high accuracy are typically socially skilled and popular and have less loneliness, anxiety, and depression; more satisfying relationships; and more senior positions and higher salaries (Hargie, 2011). So not only do first impressions matter, but having the ability to form accurate first impressions seems to correlate to many other positive characteristics.

First impressions are enduring because of the primacy effect, which leads us to place more value on the first information we receive about a person. So if we interpret the first information we receive from or about a person as positive, then a positive first impression will form and influence how we respond to that person as the interaction continues. Likewise, negative interpretations of information can lead us to form negative first impressions. If you sit down at a restaurant and servers walk by for several minutes and no one greets you, then you will likely interpret that negatively and not have a good impression of your server when he finally shows up. This may lead you to be short with the server, which may lead him to not be as attentive as he normally would. At this point, a series of negative interactions has set into motion a cycle that will be very difficult to reverse and make positive.

The recency effect leads us to put more weight on the most recent impression we have of a person's communication over earlier impressions. Even a positive first impression can be tarnished by a negative final impression. Imagine that a professor has maintained a relatively high level of credibility with you over the course of the semester. She made a good first impression by being organized, approachable, and interesting during the first days of class. The rest of the semester went fairly well with no major conflicts. However, during the last week of the term, she didn't have final papers graded and ready to turn back by the time she said she would, which left you with some uncertainty about how well you needed to do on the final exam to earn an A in the class. When you did get your paper back, on the last day of class, you saw that your grade was much lower than you expected. If this happened to you, what would you write on the instructor evaluation? Because of the recency effect, many students would

likely give a disproportionate amount of value to the professor's actions in the final week of the semester, negatively skewing the evaluation, which is supposed to be reflective of the entire semester. Even though the professor only returned one assignment late, that fact is very recent in students' minds and can overshadow the positive impression that formed many weeks earlier.

The Halo and Horn Effects

We have a tendency to adapt information that conflicts with our earlier impressions in order to make it fit within the frame we have established. This is known as selective distortion, and it manifests in the halo and horn effects. The angelic halo and devilish horn are useful metaphors for the lasting effects of positive and negative impressions.

The halo effect occurs when initial positive perceptions lead us to view later interactions as positive. The horn effect occurs when initial negative perceptions lead us to view later interactions as negative (Hargie, 2011). Since impressions are especially important when a person is navigating the job market, let's imagine how the horn and halo effects could play out for a recent college graduate looking to land her first real job. Nell has recently graduated with her degree in communication studies and is looking to start her career as a corporate trainer. If one of Nell's professors has a relationship with an executive at an area business, his positive verbal recommendation will likely result in a halo effect for Nell. Since the executive thinks highly of his friend the professor, and the professor thinks highly of Nell, then the executive will start his interaction with Nell with a positive impression and interpret her behaviors more positively than he would otherwise. The halo effect initiated by the professor's recommendation may even lead the executive to dismiss or overlook some negative behaviors. Let's say Nell doesn't have a third party to help make a connection and arrives late for her interview. That negative impression may create a horn effect that carries through the interview. Even if Nell presents as competent and friendly, the negative first impression could lead the executive to minimize or ignore those positive characteristics, and the company may not hire her.

Physical and Environmental Influences on Perception

We make first impressions based on a variety of factors, including physical and environmental characteristics. In terms of physical characteristics, style of dress and grooming are important, especially in professional contexts. We have general schema regarding how to dress and groom for various situations ranging from formal, to business casual, to casual, to lounging around the house.

You would likely be able to offer some descriptors of how a person would look and act from the following categories: a goth person, a prep, a jock, a fashionista, a hipster. The schema associated with these various cliques or styles are formed through personal experience and through exposure to media representations of these groups. Different professions also have schema for appearance and dress. Imagine a doctor, mechanic, congressperson, exotic dancer, or mail carrier. Each group has clothing and personal styles that create and fit into general patterns. Of course, the mental picture we have of any of the examples above is not going to be representative of the whole group, meaning that stereotypical thinking often exists within our schema. We will learn more about the negative effects of stereotypical thinking later in the chapter, but it's important to understand how persuasive various physical perceptual influences can be.

Think about the harm that has been done when people pose as police or doctors to commit crimes or other acts of malice. Seeing someone in a white lab coat automatically leads us to see that person as an authority figure, and we fall into a scripted pattern of deferring to the "doctor" and not asking too many questions. The Milgram experiments offer a startling example of how powerful these influences are. In the experiments, participants followed instructions from a man in a white lab coat (who was actually an actor), who prompted them to deliver electric shocks to a person in another room every time the other person answered a memory question incorrectly. The experiment was actually about how people defer to authority figures instead of acting independently. Although no one was actually being shocked in the other room, many participants continued to "shock," at very high levels of voltage, the other person even after that person supposedly being shocked complained of chest pains and became unresponsive (Encina, 2003).



chico945 – new york times. morgan schweitzer illustration for 12-14-13 article titled 'solving the shortage in primary care doctors' – CC BY 2.0.

Just as clothing and personal style help us form impressions of others, so do physical body features. The degree to which we perceive people to be attractive influences our attitudes about and communication with them. Facial attractiveness and body weight tend to be common features used in the perception of physical attractiveness. In general people find symmetrical faces and nonoverweight bodies attractive. People perceived as attractive are generally evaluated more positively and seen as more kind and competent than people evaluated as less attractive. Additionally, people rated as attractive receive more eye contact, more smiles, and closer proximity to others (people stand closer to them). Unlike clothing and personal style, these physical features are more difficult, if not impossible, to change.

Finally, the material objects and people that surround a person influence our perception. In the MTV show *Room Raiders*, contestants go into the bedrooms of three potential dates and choose the one they want to go on the date with based on the impressions made while examining each potential date's cleanliness, decorations, clothes, trophies and awards, books, music, and so on. Research supports the reliability of such impressions, as people have been shown to make reasonably accurate judgments about a person's personality after viewing his or her office or bedroom (Hargie, 2011). Although the artificial scenario set up in *Room Raiders* doesn't exactly match up with typical encounters, the link between environmental cues and perception is important enough for many companies to create policies about what can and can't be displayed in personal office spaces. It would seem odd for a bank manager to have an *Animal House* poster hanging in his office, and that would definitely influence customers' perceptions of the manager's personality and credibility. The arrangement of furniture also creates impressions. Walking into a meeting and sitting on one end of a long boardroom table is typically less inviting than sitting at a round table or on a sofa.

Culture, Personality, and Perception

Our cultural identities and our personalities affect our perceptions. Sometimes we are conscious of the effects and sometimes we are not. In either case, we have a tendency to favor others who exhibit cultural or personality traits that match up with our own. This tendency is so strong that it often leads us to assume that people we like are more similar to us than they actually are. Knowing more about how these forces influence our perceptions can help us become more aware of and competent in regards to the impressions we form of others.

Culture

Race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all affect the perceptions that we make. The schemata through which we interpret what we perceive are influenced by our cultural identities. As we are socialized into various cultural identities, we internalize beliefs, attitudes, and values shared by others in our cultural group. Schemata held by members of a cultural identity group have similarities, but schemata held by different cultural groups may vary greatly. Unless we are exposed to various cultural groups and learn how others perceive us and the world around them, we will likely have a narrow or naïve view of the world and assume that others see things the way we do. Exposing yourself to and experiencing cultural differences in perspective doesn't mean that you have to change your schema to match another cultural group's. Instead, it may offer you a chance to better

understand why and how your schemata were constructed the way they were.

As we have learned, perception starts with information that comes in through our senses. How we perceive even basic sensory information is influenced by our culture, as is illustrated in the following list:

- **Sight.** People in different cultures “read” art in different ways, differing in terms of where they start to look at an image and the types of information they perceive and process.
- **Sound.** “Atonal” music in some Asian cultures is unpleasing; it is uncomfortable to people who aren’t taught that these combinations of sounds are pleasing.
- **Touch.** In some cultures it would be very offensive for a man to touch—even tap on the shoulder—a woman who isn’t a relative.
- **Taste.** Tastes for foods vary greatly around the world. “Stinky tofu,” which is a favorite snack of people in Taipei, Taiwan’s famous night market, would likely be very off-putting in terms of taste and smell to many foreign tourists.
- **Smell.** While US Americans spend considerable effort to mask natural body odor, which we typically find unpleasant, with soaps, sprays, and lotions, some other cultures would not find unpleasant or even notice what we consider “b.o.” Those same cultures may find a US American’s “clean” (soapy, perfumed, deodorized) smell unpleasant.

Aside from differences in reactions to basic information we take in through our senses, there is also cultural variation in how we perceive more complicated constructs, like marriage, politics, and privacy. In May of 2012, French citizens elected a new president. François Hollande moved into the presidential palace with his partner of five years, Valerie Trierweiler. They are the first unmarried couple in the country’s history to occupy the presidential palace (de la Baume, 2012). Even though new census statistics show that more unmarried couples are living together than ever before in the United States, many still disapprove of the practice, and it is hard to imagine a US president in a similar circumstance as France’s Hollande. Other places like Saudi Arabia and the Vatican have strong cultural aversions to such a practice, which could present problems when France’s first couple travels abroad.

As we’ve already learned, our brain processes information by putting it into categories and looking for predictability and patterns. The previous examples have covered how we do this with sensory information and with more abstract concepts like marriage and politics, but we also do this with people. When we categorize people, we generally view them as “like us” or “not like us.” This simple us/them split affects subsequent interaction, including impressions and attributions. For example, we tend to view people we perceive to be like us as more trustworthy, friendly, and honest than people we perceive to be not like us (Brewer, 1999). We are also more likely to use internal attribution to explain negative behavior of people we perceive to be different from us. If a person of a different race cuts another driver off in traffic, the driver is even more likely to attribute that action to the other driver’s internal qualities (thinking, for example, “He or she is inconsiderate and reckless!”) than they would someone of their own race. Having such inflexible categories can have negative consequences, and later we will discuss how forcing people into rigid categories leads to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Of course, race isn’t the only marker of difference that influences our perceptions, and the problem with our rough categorization of people into “like us” and “not like us” categories is that these differences aren’t really as easy to perceive as we think. We cannot always tell whether or not someone is culturally like us through visual cues. For some cultural identities, like sexual orientation and ability, our awareness of any differences may only come when the other person discloses their identity to us.



Aislinn Ritchie – gender stereotyping – CC BY-SA 2.0.

You no doubt frequently hear people talking and writing about the “vast differences” between men and women. Whether it’s communication, athletic ability, expressing emotions, or perception, people will line up to say that women are one way and men are the other way. While it is true that gender affects our perception, the reason for this difference stems more from social norms than genetic, physical, or psychological differences between men and women. We are socialized to perceive differences between men and women, which leads us to exaggerate and amplify what differences there actually are (McCornack, 2007). We basically see the stereotypes and differences we are told to see, which helps to create a reality in which gender differences are “obvious.” However, numerous research studies have found that, especially in relation to multiple aspects of communication, men and women communicate much more similarly than differently. In summary, various cultural identities shape how we perceive others because beliefs, attitudes, and values of the cultural groups to which we belong are incorporated into our schema. Our personalities also present interesting perceptual advantages and challenges that we will now discuss.

Personality

I occasionally have potential employers of students I have taught or supervised call me to do “employment verifications” during which they ask general questions about the applicant. While they may ask a few questions about intellectual ability or academic performance, they typically ask questions that try to create a personality profile of the applicant. They basically want to know what kind of leader, coworker, and person he or she is. This is a smart move on their part, because our personalities greatly influence how we see ourselves in the world and how we perceive and interact with others.

Personality refers to a person’s general way of thinking, feeling, and behaving based on underlying motivations and impulses (McCornack, 2007). These underlying motivations and impulses form our personality traits. Personality traits are “underlying,” but they are fairly enduring once a person reaches adulthood. That is not to say that people’s personalities do not change, but major changes in personality are not common unless they result from some form of trauma. Although personality scholars believe there are thousands of personalities, they all comprise some combination of the same few traits. Much research has been done on personality traits, and the “Big Five” that are most commonly discussed are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness (McCrea, 2001). These five traits appear to be representative of personalities across cultures, and you can read more about what each of these traits entails below. If you are interested in how you rank in terms of personality traits, there are many online tests you can take, including one from [Truity](http://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test) (www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test).

The Big Five Personality Traits

- **Openness.** Refers to a person’s willingness to consider new ideas and perspectives. People high in openness are creative and are perceived as open minded. People low in openness are more rigid and set in their thinking and are perceived as “set in their ways.”
- **Conscientiousness.** Refers to a person’s level of self-organization and motivation. People with high conscientiousness are methodical, motivated, and dependable. People with low conscientiousness are less focused, less careful, and less dependable.

- **Extraversion.** Refers to a person's interest in interacting with others. People with high extraversion are sociable and often called "extroverts." People with low extraversion are less sociable and are often called "introverts."
- **Agreeableness.** Refers to a person's level of trustworthiness and friendliness. People with high agreeableness are cooperative and likable. People with low agreeableness are suspicious of others and sometimes aggressive, which makes it more difficult for people to find them pleasant to be around.
- **Neuroticism.** Refers to a person's level of negative thoughts regarding himself or herself. People high in neuroticism are insecure and experience emotional distress and may be perceived as unstable. People low in neuroticism are more relaxed, have less emotional swings, and are perceived as more stable.

Scholarship related to personality serves many purposes, and some of them tie directly to perception. Corporations and television studios spend millions of dollars on developing personality profiles and personality testing. Corporations can make hiring and promotion decisions based on personality test results, which can save them money and time if they can weed out those who don't "fit" the position before they get in the door and drain resources. Television studios make casting decisions based on personality profiles because they know that certain personalities evoke strong and specific reactions from viewers. The reality television show *Survivor* has done more than one season where they bring back "Heroes and Villains," which already indicates that the returning cast members made strong impressions on the show's producers and audience members. Think about the reality television stars that you love to root for, want to see lose, and can't stand to look at or look away from. Shows like *Celebrity Rehab* intentionally cast fading stars who already have strong personalities and emotional and addiction issues in order to create the kind of human train wrecks that attract millions of viewers. So why does this work?

It is likely that you have more in common with that reality TV star than you care to admit. We tend to focus on personality traits in others that we feel are important to our own personality. What we like in ourselves, we like in others, and what we dislike in ourselves, we dislike in others (McCornack, 2007). If you admire a person's loyalty, then loyalty is probably a trait that you think you possess as well. If you work hard to be positive and motivated and suppress negative and unproductive urges within yourself, you will likely think harshly about those negative traits in someone else. After all, if you can suppress your negativity, why can't they do the same? This way of thinking isn't always accurate or logical, but it is common.

The concept of assumed similarity refers to our tendency to perceive others as similar to us. When we don't have enough information about a person to know their key personality traits, we fill in the gaps—usually assuming they possess traits similar to those we see in ourselves. We also tend to assume that people have similar attitudes, or likes and dislikes, as us. If you set your friend up with a man you think she'll really like only to find out there was no chemistry when they met, you may be surprised to realize your friend doesn't have the same taste in men as you. Even though we may assume more trait and taste similarity between our significant others and ourselves than there actually is, research generally finds that while people do interpersonally group based on many characteristics including race, class, and intelligence, the findings don't show that people with similar personalities group together (Beer & Watson, 2008).

In summary, personality affects our perception, and we all tend to be amateur personality scholars given the amount of effort we put into assuming and evaluating others' personality traits. This bank of knowledge we accumulate based on previous interactions with people is used to help us predict how interactions will unfold and help us manage our interpersonal relationships. When we size up a person based on their personality, we are auditioning or interviewing them in a way to see if we think there is compatibility. We use these implicit personality theories to generalize a person's overall personality from the traits we can perceive. The theories are "implicit" because they are not of academic but of experience-based origin, and the information we use to theorize about people's personalities isn't explicitly known or observed but implied. In other words, we use previous experience to guess other people's personality traits. We then assume more about a person based on the personality traits we assign to them.

This process of assuming has its advantages and drawbacks. In terms of advantages, the use of implicit personality theories offers us a perceptual shortcut that can be useful when we first meet someone. Our assessment of their traits and subsequent assumptions about who they are as a person makes us feel like we "know the person," which reduces uncertainty and facilitates further interaction. In terms of drawbacks, our experience-based assumptions aren't always correct, but they are still persuasive and enduring. As we have already learned, first impressions carry a lot of weight in terms of how they influence further interaction. Positive and negative impressions formed early can also lead to a halo effect or a horn effect, which we discussed earlier. Personality-based impressions can also connect to impressions based on physical and environmental cues to make them even stronger. For example, perceiving another person as attractive can create a halo effect that then leads you to look for behavioral cues that you can then tie to positive personality traits. You may notice that the attractive person also says "please" and "thank you," which increases his or her likeability. You may notice that the person has clean and fashionable shoes, which leads you to believe he or she is professional and competent but also trendy and hip. Now you have an overall positive impression of this person that will affect your subsequent behaviors (Beer & Watson, 2008). But how accurate were your impressions? If on your way home you realize you just bought a car from this person, who happened to be a car salesperson, that was \$7,000 over your price range, you might have second thoughts about how good a person he or she actually is.

Key Takeaways

- We use attributions to interpret perceptual information, specifically, people's behavior. Internal attributions connect behavior to internal characteristics such as personality traits. External attributions connect behavior to external characteristics such as situational factors.
- Two common perceptual errors that occur in the process of attribution are the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias.
 - The fundamental attribution error refers to our tendency to overattribute other people's behaviors to internal rather than external causes.
 - The self-serving bias refers to our tendency to overattribute our successes to internal factors and overattribute our failures to external factors.
- First and last impressions are powerful forces in the perception process. The primacy effect is a perceptual tendency to place more importance on initial impressions than later impressions. The recency effect is the perceptual tendency to place more importance on the most recent impressions over earlier impressions.
- Physical and environmental cues such as clothing, grooming, attractiveness, and material objects influence the impressions that we form of people.
- The halo effect describes a perceptual effect that occurs when initial positive impressions lead us to view later interactions as positive. The horn effect describes a perceptual effect that occurs when initial negative impressions lead us to view later interactions as negative.
- Cultural identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all affect the perceptions that we make about basic sensory information such as sounds and smells as well as larger concepts such as marriage and privacy. Despite the fact that much popular knowledge claims that women and men communicate very differently, communication processes for each gender are more similar than different.
- Personality affects perception in many ways. Our personality traits, which are our underlying and enduring motivations for thinking and behaving the way we do, affect how we see others and ourselves. We use observed and implied personality traits to form impressions of others, which then influence how we act toward them.

Exercises

1. Think of a recent conflict and how you explained the behavior that caused the conflict and subsequently formed impressions about the other person based on your perceptions. Briefly describe the conflict situation and then identify internal and external attributions for your behavior and the behavior of the other person. Is there any evidence of the fundamental attribution error or self-serving bias in this conflict encounter? If so, what?
2. Describe a situation in which you believe the primacy and/or recency effect influenced your perceptions of a person or event.
3. Has your perception of something ever changed because of exposure to cultural difference? For example, have you grown to like a kind of food, music, clothing, or other custom that you earlier perceived unfavorably?

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4.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self

Learning Objectives

1. Define self-concept and discuss how we develop our self-concept.
2. Define self-esteem and discuss how we develop self-esteem.
3. Explain how social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory influence self-perception.
4. Discuss how social norms, family, culture, and media influence self-perception.
5. Define self-presentation and discuss common self-presentation strategies.

Perceiving and Presenting Self

Just as our perception of others affects how we communicate, so does our perception of ourselves. But what influences our self-perception? How much of our self is a product of our own making and how much of it is constructed based on how others react to us? How do we present ourselves to others in ways that maintain our sense of self or challenge how others see us? We will begin to answer these questions in this section as we explore self-concept, self-esteem, and self-presentation.

Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the overall idea of who a person thinks he or she is. If I said, “Tell me who you are,” your answers would be clues as to how you see yourself, your self-concept. Each person has an overall self-concept that might be encapsulated in a short list of overarching characteristics that he or she finds important. But each person’s self-concept is also influenced by context, meaning we think differently about ourselves depending on the situation we are in. In some situations, personal characteristics, such as our abilities, personality, and other distinguishing features, will best describe who we are. You might consider yourself laid back, traditional, funny, open minded, or driven, or you might label yourself a leader or a thrill seeker. In other situations, our self-concept may be tied to group or cultural membership. For example, you might consider yourself a member of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity, a Southerner, or a member of the track team.



Stefano Ravalli – In control – CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Our self-concept is also formed through our interactions with others and their reactions to us. The concept of the looking glass self explains that we see ourselves reflected in other people’s reactions to us and then form our self-concept based on how we believe other people see us (Cooley, 1902). This reflective process of building our self-concept is based on what other people have actually said, such as “You’re a good listener,” and other people’s actions, such as coming to you for advice. These thoughts

evoke emotional responses that feed into our self-concept. For example, you may think, “I’m glad that people can count on me to listen to their problems.”

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people. Social comparison theory states that we describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people. Social comparisons are based on two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and similarity/difference (Hargie, 2011). In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself to be more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of comparison and evaluation isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but it can have negative consequences if our reference group isn’t appropriate. Reference groups are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups with which to engage in social comparison. If a man wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, he may be discouraged by his difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge himself as inferior, which could negatively affect his self-concept. Using as a reference group people who have only recently started a fitness program but have shown progress could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

We also engage in social comparison based on similarity and difference. Since self-concept is context specific, similarity may be desirable in some situations and difference more desirable in others. Factors like age and personality may influence whether or not we want to fit in or stand out. Although we compare ourselves to others throughout our lives, adolescent and teen years usually bring new pressure to be similar to or different from particular reference groups. Think of all the cliques in high school and how people voluntarily and involuntarily broke off into groups based on popularity, interest, culture, or grade level. Some kids in your high school probably wanted to fit in with and be similar to other people in the marching band but be different from the football players. Conversely, athletes were probably more apt to compare themselves, in terms of similar athletic ability, to other athletes rather than kids in show choir. But social comparison can be complicated by perceptual influences. As we learned earlier, we organize information based on similarity and difference, but these patterns don’t always hold true. Even though students involved in athletics and students involved in arts may seem very different, a dancer or singer may also be very athletic, perhaps even more so than a member of the football team. As with other aspects of perception, there are positive and negative consequences of social comparison.

We generally want to know where we fall in terms of ability and performance as compared to others, but what people do with this information and how it affects self-concept varies. Not all people feel they need to be at the top of the list, but some won’t stop until they get the high score on the video game or set a new school record in a track-and-field event. Some people strive to be first chair in the clarinet section of the orchestra, while another person may be content to be second chair. The education system promotes social comparison through grades and rewards such as honor rolls and dean’s lists. Although education and privacy laws prevent me from displaying each student’s grade on a test or paper for the whole class to see, I do typically report the aggregate grades, meaning the total number of As, Bs, Cs, and so on. This doesn’t violate anyone’s privacy rights, but it allows students to see where they fell in the distribution. This type of social comparison can be used as motivation. The student who was one of only three out of twenty-three to get a D on the exam knows that most of her classmates are performing better than she is, which may lead her to think, “If they can do it, I can do it.” But social comparison that isn’t reasoned can have negative effects and result in negative thoughts like “Look at how bad I did. Man, I’m stupid!” These negative thoughts can lead to negative behaviors, because we try to maintain internal consistency, meaning we act in ways that match up with our self-concept. So if the student begins to question her academic abilities and then incorporates an assessment of herself as a “bad student” into her self-concept, she may then behave in ways consistent with that, which is only going to worsen her academic performance. Additionally, a student might be comforted to learn that he isn’t the only person who got a D and then not feel the need to try to improve, since he has company. You can see in this example that evaluations we place on our self-concept can lead to cycles of thinking and acting. These cycles relate to self-esteem and self-efficacy, which are components of our self-concept.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the judgments and evaluations we make about our self-concept. While self-concept is a broad description of the self, self-esteem is a more specifically an evaluation of the self (Byrne, 1996). If I again prompted you to “Tell me who you are,” and then asked you to evaluate (label as good/bad, positive/negative, desirable/undesirable) each of the things you listed about yourself, I would get clues about your self-esteem. Like self-concept, self-esteem has general and specific elements. Generally, some people are more likely to evaluate themselves positively while others are more likely to evaluate themselves negatively (Brockner, 1988). More specifically, our self-esteem varies across our life span and across contexts.



Kiran Foster – self-esteem – CC BY 2.0.

How we judge ourselves affects our communication and our behaviors, but not every negative or positive judgment carries the same weight. The negative evaluation of a trait that isn't very important for our self-concept will likely not result in a loss of self-esteem. For example, I am not very good at drawing. While I appreciate drawing as an art form, I don't consider drawing ability to be a very big part of my self-concept. If someone critiqued my drawing ability, my self-esteem wouldn't take a big hit. I do consider myself a good teacher, however, and I have spent and continue to spend considerable time and effort on improving my knowledge of teaching and my teaching skills. If someone critiqued my teaching knowledge and/or abilities, my self-esteem would definitely be hurt. This doesn't mean that we can't be evaluated on something we find important. Even though teaching is very important to my self-concept, I am regularly evaluated on it. Every semester, I am evaluated by my students, and every year, I am evaluated by my dean, department chair, and colleagues. Most of that feedback is in the form of constructive criticism, which can still be difficult to receive, but when taken in the spirit of self-improvement, it is valuable and may even enhance our self-concept and self-esteem. In fact, in professional contexts, people with higher self-esteem are more likely to work harder based on negative feedback, are less negatively affected by work stress, are able to handle workplace conflict better, and are better able to work independently and solve problems (Brockner, 1988). Self-esteem isn't the only factor that contributes to our self-concept; perceptions about our competence also play a role in developing our sense of self.

Self-Efficacy refers to the judgments people make about their ability to perform a task within a specific context (Bandura, 1997). As you can see in Figure 2.2 "Relationship between Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concept", judgments about our self-efficacy influence our self-esteem, which influences our self-concept. The following example also illustrates these interconnections.



Figure 4.3.1 Relationship between Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concept

Pedro did a good job on his first college speech. During a meeting with his professor, Pedro indicates that he is confident going into the next speech and thinks he will do well. This skill-based assessment is an indication that Pedro has a high level of self-efficacy related to public speaking. If he does well on the speech, the praise from his classmates and professor will reinforce his self-efficacy and lead him to positively evaluate his speaking skills, which will contribute to his self-esteem. By the end of the class, Pedro likely thinks of himself as a good public speaker, which may then become an important part of his self-concept. Throughout these points of connection, it's important to remember that self-perception affects how we communicate, behave, and perceive other things. Pedro's increased feeling of self-efficacy may give him more confidence in his delivery, which will likely result in positive feedback that reinforces his self-perception. He may start to perceive his professor more positively since they share an interest in public speaking, and he may begin to notice other people's speaking skills more during class presentations and public lectures. Over time, he may even start to think about changing his major to communication or pursuing career options that incorporate public speaking, which would further integrate being "a good public speaker" into his self-concept. You can hopefully see that these interconnections can create powerful positive or negative cycles. While some of this process is under our control, much of it is also shaped by the people in our lives.

The verbal and nonverbal feedback we get from people affect our feelings of self-efficacy and our self-esteem. As we saw in Pedro's example, being given positive feedback can increase our self-efficacy, which may make us more likely to engage in a similar task in the future (Hargie, 2011). Obviously, negative feedback can lead to decreased self-efficacy and a declining interest in engaging with the activity again. In general, people adjust their expectations about their abilities based on feedback they get from others. Positive feedback tends to make people raise their expectations for themselves and negative feedback does the opposite, which ultimately affects behaviors and creates the cycle. When feedback from others is different from how we view ourselves, additional cycles may develop that impact self-esteem and self-concept.

Self-discrepancy theory states that people have beliefs about and expectations for their actual and potential selves that do not always match up with what they actually experience (Higgins, 1987). To understand this theory, we have to understand the different "selves" that make up our self-concept, which are the actual, ideal, and ought selves. The actual self consists of the attributes that you or someone else believes you *actually* possess. The ideal self consists of the attributes that you or someone else *would like you* to possess. The ought self consists of the attributes you or someone else believes you *should* possess.

These different selves can conflict with each other in various combinations. Discrepancies between the actual and ideal/ought selves can be motivating in some ways and prompt people to act for self-improvement. For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so. Discrepancies between the ideal and ought selves can be especially stressful. For example, many professional women who are also mothers have an ideal view of self that includes professional success and advancement. They may also have an ought self that includes a sense of duty and obligation to be a full-time mother. The actual self may be someone who does OK at both but doesn't quite live up to the expectations of either. These discrepancies do not just create cognitive unease—they also lead to emotional, behavioral, and communicative changes.

When we compare the actual self to the expectations of ourselves and others, we can see particular patterns of emotional and

behavioral effects. When our actual self doesn't match up with our own ideals of self, we are not obtaining our own desires and hopes, which can lead to feelings of dejection including disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration. For example, if your ideal self has no credit card debt and your actual self does, you may be frustrated with your lack of financial discipline and be motivated to stick to your budget and pay off your credit card bills.

When our actual self doesn't match up with other people's ideals for us, we may not be obtaining significant others' desires and hopes, which can lead to feelings of dejection including shame, embarrassment, and concern for losing the affection or approval of others. For example, if a significant other sees you as an "A" student and you get a 2.8 GPA your first year of college, then you may be embarrassed to share your grades with that person.

When our actual self doesn't match up with what we think other people think we should obtain, we are not living up to the ought self that we think others have constructed for us, which can lead to feelings of agitation, feeling threatened, and fearing potential punishment. For example, if your parents think you should follow in their footsteps and take over the family business, but your actual self wants to go into the military, then you may be unsure of what to do and fear being isolated from the family.

Finally, when our actual self doesn't match up with what we think we should obtain, we are not meeting what we see as our duties or obligations, which can lead to feelings of agitation including guilt, weakness, and a feeling that we have fallen short of our moral standard (Higgins, 1987). For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so due to the guilt of reading about the increasing number of animals being housed at the facility. The following is a review of the four potential discrepancies between selves:

- **Actual vs. own ideals.** We have an overall feeling that we are not obtaining our desires and hopes, which leads to feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration.
- **Actual vs. others' ideals.** We have an overall feeling that we are not obtaining significant others' desires and hopes for us, which leads to feelings of shame and embarrassment.
- **Actual vs. others' ought.** We have an overall feeling that we are not meeting what others see as our duties and obligations, which leads to feelings of agitation including fear of potential punishment.
- **Actual vs. own ought.** We have an overall feeling that we are not meeting our duties and obligations, which can lead to a feeling that we have fallen short of our own moral standards.

Influences on Self-Perception

We have already learned that other people influence our self-concept and self-esteem. While interactions we have with individuals and groups are definitely important to consider, we must also note the influence that larger, more systemic forces have on our self-perception. Social and family influences, culture, and the media all play a role in shaping who we think we are and how we feel about ourselves. Although these are powerful socializing forces, there are ways to maintain some control over our self-perception.

Social and Family Influences

Various forces help socialize us into our respective social and cultural groups and play a powerful role in presenting us with options about who we can be. While we may like to think that our self-perception starts with a blank canvas, our perceptions are limited by our experiences and various social and cultural contexts.

Parents and peers shape our self-perceptions in positive and negative ways. Feedback that we get from significant others, which includes close family, can lead to positive views of self (Hargie, 2011). In the past few years, however, there has been a public discussion and debate about how much positive reinforcement people should give to others, especially children. The following questions have been raised: Do we have current and upcoming generations that have been overpraised? Is the praise given warranted? What are the positive and negative effects of praise? What is the end goal of the praise? Let's briefly look at this discussion and its connection to self-perception.



CLF – Dismantle trophy – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Whether praise is warranted or not is very subjective and specific to each person and context, but in general there have been questions raised about the potential negative effects of too much praise. Motivation is the underlying force that drives us to do things. Sometimes we are intrinsically motivated, meaning we want to do something for the love of doing it or the resulting internal satisfaction. Other times we are extrinsically motivated, meaning we do something to receive a reward or avoid punishment. If you put effort into completing a short documentary for a class because you love filmmaking and editing, you have been largely motivated by intrinsic forces. If you complete the documentary because you want an “A” and know that if you fail your parents will not give you money for your spring break trip, then you are motivated by extrinsic factors. Both can, of course, effectively motivate us. Praise is a form of extrinsic reward, and if there is an actual reward associated with the praise, like money or special recognition, some people speculate that intrinsic motivation will suffer. But what’s so good about intrinsic motivation? Intrinsic motivation is more substantial and long-lasting than extrinsic motivation and can lead to the development of a work ethic and sense of pride in one’s abilities. Intrinsic motivation can move people to accomplish great things over long periods of time and be happy despite the effort and sacrifices made. Extrinsic motivation dies when the reward stops. Additionally, too much praise can lead people to have a misguided sense of their abilities. College professors who are reluctant to fail students who produce failing work may be setting those students up to be shocked when their supervisor critiques their abilities or output once they get into a professional context (Hargie, 2011).

There are cultural differences in the amount of praise and positive feedback that teachers and parents give their children. For example, teachers give less positive reinforcement in Japanese and Taiwanese classrooms than do teachers in US classrooms. Chinese and Kenyan parents do not regularly praise their children because they fear it may make them too individualistic, rude, or arrogant (Wierzbicka, 2004). So the phenomenon of overpraising isn’t universal, and the debate over its potential effects is not resolved.

Research has also found that communication patterns develop between parents and children that are common to many verbally and physically abusive relationships. Such patterns have negative effects on a child’s self-efficacy and self-esteem (Morgan & Wilson, 2007). As you’ll recall from our earlier discussion, attributions are links we make to identify the cause of a behavior. In the case of aggressive or abusive parents, they are not as able to distinguish between mistakes and intentional behaviors, often seeing honest mistakes as intended and reacting negatively to the child. Such parents also communicate generally negative evaluations to their child by saying, for example, “You can’t do anything right!” or “You’re a bad girl.” When children do exhibit positive behaviors, abusive parents are more likely to use external attributions that diminish the achievement of the child by saying, for example, “You only won because the other team was off their game.” In general, abusive parents have unpredictable reactions to their children’s positive and negative behavior, which creates an uncertain and often scary climate for a child that can lead to lower self-esteem and erratic or aggressive behavior. The cycles of praise and blame are just two examples of how the family as a socializing force can influence our self-perceptions. Culture also influences how we see ourselves.

Culture

How people perceive themselves varies across cultures. For example, many cultures exhibit a phenomenon known as the self-

enhancement bias, meaning that we tend to emphasize our desirable qualities relative to other people (Loughnan et al., 2011). But the degree to which people engage in self-enhancement varies. A review of many studies in this area found that people in Western countries such as the United States were significantly more likely to self-enhance than people in countries such as Japan. Many scholars explain this variation using a common measure of cultural variation that claims people in individualistic cultures are more likely to engage in competition and openly praise accomplishments than people in collectivistic cultures. The difference in self-enhancement has also been tied to economics, with scholars arguing that people in countries with greater income inequality are more likely to view themselves as superior to others or want to be perceived as superior to others (even if they don't have economic wealth) in order to conform to the country's values and norms. This holds true because countries with high levels of economic inequality, like the United States, typically value competition and the right to boast about winning or succeeding, while countries with more economic equality, like Japan, have a cultural norm of modesty (Loughnan, 2011).

Race also plays a role in self-perception. For example, positive self-esteem and self-efficacy tend to be higher in African American adolescent girls than Caucasian girls (Stockton et al., 2009). In fact, more recent studies have discounted much of the early research on race and self-esteem that purported that African Americans of all ages have lower self-esteem than whites. Self-perception becomes more complex when we consider biracial individuals—more specifically those born to couples comprising an African American and a white parent (Bowles, 1993). In such cases, it is challenging for biracial individuals to embrace both of their heritages, and social comparison becomes more difficult due to diverse and sometimes conflicting reference groups. Since many biracial individuals identify as and are considered African American by society, living and working within a black community can help foster more positive self-perceptions in these biracial individuals. Such a community offers a more nurturing environment and a buffer zone from racist attitudes but simultaneously distances biracial individuals from their white identity. Conversely, immersion into a predominantly white community and separation from a black community can lead biracial individuals to internalize negative views of people of color and perhaps develop a sense of inferiority. Gender intersects with culture and biracial identity to create different experiences and challenges for biracial men and women. Biracial men have more difficulty accepting their potential occupational limits, especially if they have white fathers, and biracial women have difficulty accepting their black features, such as hair and facial features. All these challenges lead to a sense of being marginalized from both ethnic groups and interfere in the development of positive self-esteem and a stable self-concept.



taylormackenzie – Love Abundance – CC BY-SA 2.0.

There are some general differences in terms of gender and self-perception that relate to self-concept, self-efficacy, and envisioning ideal selves. As with any cultural differences, these are generalizations that have been supported by research, but they do not represent all individuals within a group. Regarding self-concept, men are more likely to describe themselves in terms of their group membership, and women are more likely to include references to relationships in their self-descriptions. For example, a man may note that he is a Tarheel fan, a boat enthusiast, or a member of the Rotary Club, and a woman may note that she is a mother of two or a loyal friend.

Regarding self-efficacy, men tend to have higher perceptions of self-efficacy than women (Hargie, 2011). In terms of actual and ideal selves, men and women in a variety of countries both described their ideal self as more masculine (Best & Thomas, 2004). As was noted earlier, gender differences are interesting to study but are very often exaggerated beyond the actual variations. Socialization and internalization of societal norms for gender differences accounts for much more of our perceived differences

than do innate or natural differences between genders. These gender norms may be explicitly stated—for example, a mother may say to her son, “Boys don’t play with dolls”—or they may be more implicit, with girls being encouraged to pursue historically feminine professions like teaching or nursing without others actually stating the expectation.

Media

The representations we see in the media affect our self-perception. The vast majority of media images include idealized representations of attractiveness. Despite the fact that the images of people we see in glossy magazines and on movie screens are not typically what we see when we look at the people around us in a classroom, at work, or at the grocery store, many of us continue to hold ourselves to an unrealistic standard of beauty and attractiveness. Movies, magazines, and television shows are filled with beautiful people, and less attractive actors, when they are present in the media, are typically portrayed as the butt of jokes, villains, or only as background extras (Patzner, 2008). Aside from overall attractiveness, the media also offers narrow representations of acceptable body weight.

Researchers have found that only 12 percent of prime-time characters are overweight, which is dramatically less than the national statistics for obesity among the actual US population (Patzner, 2008). Further, an analysis of how weight is discussed on prime-time sitcoms found that heavier female characters were often the targets of negative comments and jokes that audience members responded to with laughter. Conversely, positive comments about women’s bodies were related to their thinness. In short, the heavier the character, the more negative the comments, and the thinner the character, the more positive the comments. The same researchers analyzed sitcoms for content regarding male characters’ weight and found that although comments regarding their weight were made, they were fewer in number and not as negative, ultimately supporting the notion that overweight male characters are more accepted in media than overweight female characters. Much more attention has been paid in recent years to the potential negative effects of such narrow media representations. The following “Getting Critical” box explores the role of media in the construction of body image.

In terms of self-concept, media representations offer us guidance on what is acceptable or unacceptable and valued or not valued in our society. Mediated messages, in general, reinforce cultural stereotypes related to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and class. People from historically marginalized groups must look much harder than those in the dominant groups to find positive representations of their identities in media. As a critical thinker, it is important to question media messages and to examine who is included and who is excluded.

Advertising in particular encourages people to engage in social comparison, regularly communicating to us that we are inferior because we lack a certain product or that we need to change some aspect of our life to keep up with and be similar to others. For example, for many years advertising targeted to women instilled in them a fear of having a dirty house, selling them products that promised to keep their house clean, make their family happy, and impress their friends and neighbors. Now messages tell us to fear becoming old or unattractive, selling products to keep our skin tight and clear, which will in turn make us happy and popular.

“Getting Critical”: Body Image and Self-Perception

Take a look at any magazine, television show, or movie and you will most likely see very beautiful people. When you look around you in your daily life, there are likely not as many glamorous and gorgeous people. Scholars and media critics have critiqued this discrepancy for decades because it has contributed to many social issues and public health issues ranging from body dysmorphic disorder, to eating disorders, to lowered self-esteem.

Much of the media is driven by advertising, and the business of media has been to perpetuate a “culture of lack” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). This means that we are constantly told, via mediated images, that we lack something. In short, advertisements often tell us we don’t have enough money, enough beauty, or enough material possessions. Over the past few decades, women’s bodies in the media have gotten smaller and thinner, while men’s bodies have gotten bigger and more muscular. At the same time, the US population has become dramatically more obese. As research shows that men and women are becoming more and more dissatisfied with their bodies, which ultimately affects their self-concept and self-esteem, health and beauty product lines proliferate and cosmetic surgeries and other types of enhancements become more and more popular. From young children to older adults, people are becoming more aware of and oftentimes unhappy with their bodies, which results in a variety of self-perception problems.

1. How do you think the media influences your self-perception and body image?

2. Describe the typical man that is portrayed in the media. Describe the typical woman that is portrayed in the media. What impressions do these typical bodies make on others? What are the potential positive and negative effects of the way the media portrays the human body?
3. Find an example of an “atypical” body represented in the media (a magazine, TV show, or movie). Is this person presented in a positive, negative, or neutral way? Why do you think this person was chosen?

Self-Presentation

How we perceive ourselves manifests in how we present ourselves to others. Self-presentation is the process of strategically concealing or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions (Human et al., 2012). We engage in this process daily and for different reasons. Although people occasionally intentionally deceive others in the process of self-presentation, in general we try to make a good impression while still remaining authentic. Since self-presentation helps meet our instrumental, relational, and identity needs, we stand to lose quite a bit if we are caught intentionally misrepresenting ourselves. In May of 2012, Yahoo!'s CEO resigned after it became known that he stated on official documents that he had two college degrees when he actually only had one. In a similar incident, a woman who had long served as the dean of admissions for the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology was dismissed from her position after it was learned that she had only attended one year of college and had falsely indicated she had a bachelor's and master's degree (Webber & Korn, 2012). Such incidents clearly show that although people can get away with such false self-presentation for a while, the eventual consequences of being found out are dire. As communicators, we sometimes engage in more subtle forms of inauthentic self-presentation. For example, a person may state or imply that they know more about a subject or situation than they actually do in order to seem smart or “in the loop.” During a speech, a speaker works on a polished and competent delivery to distract from a lack of substantive content. These cases of strategic self-presentation may not ever be found out, but communicators should still avoid them as they do not live up to the standards of ethical communication.

Consciously and competently engaging in self-presentation can have benefits because we can provide others with a more positive and accurate picture of who we are. People who are skilled at impression management are typically more engaging and confident, which allows others to pick up on more cues from which to form impressions (Human et al., 2012). Being a skilled self-presenter draws on many of the practices used by competent communicators, including becoming a higher self-monitor. When self-presentation skills and self-monitoring skills combine, communicators can simultaneously monitor their own expressions, the reaction of others, and the situational and social context (Sosik, Avolio, & Jung, 2002). Sometimes people get help with their self-presentation. Although most people can't afford or wouldn't think of hiring an image consultant, some people have started generously donating their self-presentation expertise to help others. Many people who have been riding the tough job market for a year or more get discouraged and may consider giving up on their job search. Now a project called “Style Me Hired” has started offering free makeovers to jobless people in order to offer them new motivation and help them make favorable impressions and hopefully get a job offer.^[1]



Steve Petrucelli – [Interview Time!](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

There are two main types of self-presentation: prosocial and self-serving (Sosik, Avolio, & Jung, 2002). Prosocial self-presentation entails behaviors that present a person as a role model and make a person more likable and attractive. For example, a supervisor may call on her employees to uphold high standards for business ethics, model that behavior in her own actions, and compliment others when they exemplify those standards. Self-serving self-presentation entails behaviors that present a person as highly skilled, willing to challenge others, and someone not to be messed with. For example, a supervisor may publicly take credit for the accomplishments of others or publicly critique an employee who failed to meet a particular standard. In summary, prosocial strategies are aimed at benefiting others, while self-serving strategies benefit the self at the expense of others.

In general, we strive to present a public image that matches up with our self-concept, but we can also use self-presentation strategies to enhance our self-concept (Hargie, 2011). When we present ourselves in order to evoke a positive evaluative response, we are engaging in self-enhancement. In the pursuit of self-enhancement, a person might try to be as appealing as possible in a particular area or with a particular person to gain feedback that will enhance one's self-esteem. For example, a singer might train and practice for weeks before singing in front of a well-respected vocal coach but not invest as much effort in preparing to sing in front of friends. Although positive feedback from friends is beneficial, positive feedback from an experienced singer could enhance a person's self-concept. Self-enhancement can be productive and achieved competently, or it can be used inappropriately. Using self-enhancement behaviors just to gain the approval of others or out of self-centeredness may lead people to communicate in ways that are perceived as phony or overbearing and end up making an unfavorable impression (Sosik, Avolio, & Jung, 2002).

"Getting Plugged In": Self-Presentation Online: Social Media, Digital Trails, and Your Reputation

Although social networking has long been a way to keep in touch with friends and colleagues, the advent of social media has made the process of making connections and those all-important first impressions much more complex. Just looking at Facebook as an example, we can clearly see that the very acts of constructing a profile, posting status updates, "liking" certain things, and sharing various information via Facebook features and apps is self-presentation (Kim & Lee, 2011). People also form impressions based on the number of friends we have and the photos and posts that other people tag us in. All this information floating around can be difficult to manage. So how do we manage the impressions we make digitally given that there is a permanent record?

Research shows that people overall engage in positive and honest self-presentation on Facebook (Kim & Lee, 2011). Since people know how visible the information they post is, they may choose to only reveal things they think will form favorable impressions. But the mediated nature of Facebook also leads some people to disclose more personal information than they might otherwise in such a public or semipublic forum. These hyperpersonal disclosures run the risk of forming negative impressions based on who sees them. In general, the ease of digital communication, not just on Facebook, has presented new challenges for our self-control and information management. Sending someone a sexually provocative image used to take some effort before the age of digital cameras, but now "sexting" an explicit photo only takes a few seconds. So people who would have likely not engaged in such behavior before are more tempted to now, and it is the desire to present oneself as desirable or cool that leads people to send photos they may later regret (DiBlasio, 2012). In fact, new technology in the form of apps is trying to give people a little more control over the exchange of digital information. An iPhone app called "Snapchat" allows users to send photos that will only be visible for a few seconds. Although this isn't a guaranteed safety net, the demand for such apps is increasing, which illustrates the point that we all now leave digital trails of information that can be useful in terms of our self-presentation but can also create new challenges in terms of managing the information floating around from which others may form impressions of us.

1. What impressions do you want people to form of you based on the information they can see on your Facebook page?
2. Have you ever used social media or the Internet to do "research" on a person? What things would you find favorable and unfavorable?
3. Do you have any guidelines you follow regarding what information about yourself you will put online or not? If so, what are they? If not, why?

Key Takeaways

- Our self-concept is the overall idea of who we think we are. It is developed through our interactions with others and through social comparison that allows us to compare our beliefs and behaviors to others.
- Our self-esteem is based on the evaluations and judgments we make about various characteristics of our self-concept. It is developed through an assessment and evaluation of our various skills and abilities, known as self-efficacy, and through a

comparison and evaluation of who we are, who we would like to be, and who we should be (self-discrepancy theory).

- Social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory affect our self-concept and self-esteem because through comparison with others and comparison of our actual, ideal, and ought selves we make judgments about who we are and our self-worth. These judgments then affect how we communicate and behave.
- Socializing forces like family, culture, and media affect our self-perception because they give us feedback on who we are. This feedback can be evaluated positively or negatively and can lead to positive or negative patterns that influence our self-perception and then our communication.
- Self-presentation refers to the process of strategically concealing and/or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions. Prosocial self-presentation is intended to benefit others and self-serving self-presentation is intended to benefit the self at the expense of others. People also engage in self-enhancement, which is a self-presentation strategy by which people intentionally seek out positive evaluations.

Exercises

1. Make a list of characteristics that describe who you are (your self-concept). After looking at the list, see if you can come up with a few words that summarize the list to narrow in on the key features of your self-concept. Go back over the first list and evaluate each characteristic, for example noting whether it is something you do well/poorly, something that is good/bad, positive/negative, desirable/undesirable. Is the overall list more positive or more negative? After doing these exercises, what have you learned about your self-concept and self-esteem?
2. Discuss at least one time in which you had a discrepancy or tension between two of the three selves described by self-discrepancy theory (the actual, ideal, and ought selves). What effect did this discrepancy have on your self-concept and/or self-esteem?
3. Take one of the socializing forces discussed (family, culture, or media) and identify at least one positive and one negative influence that it/they have had on your self-concept and/or self-esteem.
4. Getting integrated: Discuss some ways that you might strategically engage in self-presentation to influence the impressions of others in an academic, a professional, a personal, and a civic context.

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4.4: Improving Perception

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss strategies for improving self-perception.
2. Discuss strategies for improving perception of others.
3. Employ perception checking to improve perception of self and others.

Improving Perception

So far, we have learned about the perception process and how we perceive others and ourselves. Now we will turn to a discussion of how to improve our perception. Our self-perception can be improved by becoming aware of how schema, socializing forces, self-fulfilling prophecies, and negative patterns of thinking can distort our ability to describe and evaluate ourselves. How we perceive others can be improved by developing better listening and empathetic skills, becoming aware of stereotypes and prejudice, developing self-awareness through self-reflection, and engaging in perception checking.

Improving Self-Perception

Our self-perceptions can and do change. Recall that we have an overall self-concept and self-esteem that are relatively stable, and we also have context-specific self-perceptions. Context-specific self-perceptions vary depending on the person with whom we are interacting, our emotional state, and the subject matter being discussed. Becoming aware of the process of self-perception and the various components of our self-concept (which you have already started to do by studying this chapter) will help you understand and improve your self-perceptions.

Since self-concept and self-esteem are so subjective and personal, it would be inaccurate to say that someone's self-concept is "right" or "wrong." Instead, we can identify negative and positive aspects of self-perceptions as well as discuss common barriers to forming accurate and positive self-perceptions. We can also identify common patterns that people experience that interfere with their ability to monitor, understand, and change their self-perceptions. Changing your overall self-concept or self-esteem is not an easy task given that these are overall reflections on who we are and how we judge ourselves that are constructed over many interactions. A variety of life-changing events can relatively quickly alter our self-perceptions. Think of how your view of self changed when you moved from high school to college. Similarly, other people's self-perceptions likely change when they enter into a committed relationship, have a child, make a geographic move, or start a new job.



Michelle Ramos – Father & Daughter – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Aside from experiencing life-changing events, we can make slower changes to our self-perceptions with concerted efforts aimed at becoming more competent communicators through self-monitoring and reflection. As you actively try to change your self-perceptions, do not be surprised if you encounter some resistance from significant others. When you change or improve your self-concept, your communication will also change, which may prompt other people to respond to you differently. Although you may have good reasons for changing certain aspects of your self-perception, others may become unsettled or confused by your changing behaviors and communication. Remember, people try to increase predictability and decrease uncertainty within personal relationships. For example, many students begin to take their college education more seriously during their junior and senior years. As these students begin to change their self-concept to include the role of “serious student preparing to graduate and enter the professional world,” they likely have friends that want to maintain the “semiserious student who doesn’t exert much consistent effort and prefers partying to studying” role that used to be a shared characteristic of both students’ self-concepts. As the first student’s behavior changes to accommodate this new aspect of his or her self-concept, it may upset the friend who was used to weeknights spent hanging out rather than studying. Let’s now discuss some suggestions to help avoid common barriers to accurate and positive self-perceptions and patterns of behavior that perpetuate negative self-perception cycles.

Avoid Reliance on Rigid Schema

As we learned earlier, schemata are sets of information based on cognitive and experiential knowledge that guide our interaction. We rely on schemata almost constantly to help us make sense of the world around us. Sometimes schemata become so familiar that we use them as scripts, which prompts mindless communication and can lead us to overlook new information that may need to be incorporated into the schema. So it’s important to remain mindful of new or contradictory information that may warrant revision of a schema. Being mindful is difficult, however, especially since we often unconsciously rely on schemata. Think about how when you’re driving a familiar route you sometimes fall under “highway hypnosis.” Despite all the advanced psychomotor skills needed to drive, such as braking, turning, and adjusting to other drivers, we can pull into a familiar driveway or parking lot having driven the whole way on autopilot. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. But have you slipped into autopilot on a familiar route only to remember that you are actually going somewhere else after you’ve already missed your turn? This example illustrates the importance of keeping our schemata flexible and avoiding mindless communication.

Be Critical of Socializing Forces

We learned earlier that family, friends, sociocultural norms, and the media are just some of the socializing forces that influence our thinking and therefore influence our self-perception. These powerful forces serve positive functions but can also set into motion negative patterns of self-perception. Two examples can illustrate the possibility for people to critique and resist socializing forces in order to improve their self-perception. The first deals with physical appearance and notions of health, and the second deals with cultural identities and discrimination.

We have already discussed how the media presents us with narrow and often unrealistic standards for attractiveness. Even though most of us know that these standards don’t represent what is normal or natural for the human body, we internalize these ideals, which results in various problems ranging from eating disorders, to depression, to poor self-esteem. A relatively overlooked but controversial and interesting movement that has emerged partially in response to these narrow representations of the body is the fat acceptance movement. The fat acceptance movement has been around for more than thirty years, but it has more recently gotten public attention due to celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Kirstie Alley, who after years of publicly struggling with weight issues have embraced a view that weight does not necessarily correspond to health. Many people have found inspiration in that message and have decided that being healthy and strong is more important than being thin (Katz, 2009). The “Healthy at Every Size” movement and the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance have challenged the narrative put out by the thirty-billion-dollar-a-year weight-loss industry that fat equals lazy, ugly, and unhealthy.^[1] Conflicting scientific studies make it difficult to say conclusively how strong the correlation is between weight and health, but it seems clear that a view that promotes healthy living and positive self-esteem over unconditional dieting and a cult of thinness is worth exploring more given the potential public health implications of distorted body image and obesity.



Tim Vrtiska – [Good Advice](#) – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Cultural influences related to identities and difference can also lead to distorted self-perceptions, especially for people who occupy marginalized or oppressed identities. While perception research has often been used to support the notion that individuals who are subjected to discrimination, like racial and ethnic minorities, are likely to have low self-esteem because they internalize negative societal views, this is not always the case (Armenta & Hunt, 2009). In fact, even some early perception research showed that minorities do not just passively accept the negative views society places on them. Instead, they actively try to maintain favorable self-perceptions in the face of discriminatory attitudes. Numerous studies have shown that people in groups that are the targets of discrimination may identify with their in-group more because of this threat, which may actually help them maintain psychological well-being. In short, they reject the negative evaluations of the out-group and find refuge and support in their identification with others who share their marginalized status.

Beware of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Self-fulfilling prophecies are thought and action patterns in which a person's false belief triggers a behavior that makes the initial false belief actually or seemingly come true (Guyl et al., 2010). For example, let's say a student's biology lab instructor is a Chinese person who speaks English as a second language. The student falsely believes that the instructor will not be a good teacher because he speaks English with an accent. Because of this belief, the student doesn't attend class regularly and doesn't listen actively when she does attend. Because of these behaviors, the student fails the biology lab, which then reinforces her original belief that the instructor wasn't a good teacher.

Although the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies was originally developed to be applied to social inequality and discrimination, it has since been applied in many other contexts, including interpersonal communication. This research has found that some people are chronically insecure, meaning they are very concerned about being accepted by others but constantly feel that other people will dislike them. This can manifest in relational insecurity, which is again based on feelings of inferiority resulting from social comparison with others perceived to be more secure and superior. Such people often end up reinforcing their belief that others will dislike them because of the behaviors triggered by their irrational belief. Take the following scenario as an example: An insecure person assumes that his date will not like him. During the date he doesn't engage in much conversation, discloses negative information about himself, and exhibits anxious behaviors. Because of these behaviors, his date forms a negative impression and suggests they not see each other again, reinforcing his original belief that the date wouldn't like him. The example shows how a pattern of thinking can lead to a pattern of behavior that reinforces the thinking, and so on. Luckily, experimental research shows that self-affirmation techniques can be successfully used to intervene in such self-fulfilling prophecies. Thinking positive thoughts and focusing on personality strengths can stop this negative cycle of thinking and has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance, weight loss, and interpersonal relationships (Stinston et al., 2011).

Create and Maintain Supporting Interpersonal Relationships

Aside from giving yourself affirming messages to help with self-perception, it is important to find interpersonal support. Although

most people have at least some supportive relationships, many people also have people in their lives who range from negative to toxic. When people find themselves in negative relational cycles, whether it is with friends, family, or romantic partners, it is difficult to break out of those cycles. But we can all make choices to be around people that will help us be who we want to be and not be around people who hinder our self-progress. This notion can also be taken to the extreme, however. It would not be wise to surround yourself with people who only validate you and do not constructively challenge you, because this too could lead to distorted self-perceptions.

Beware of Distorted Patterns of Thinking and Acting

You already know from our discussion of attribution errors that we all have perceptual biases that distort our thinking. Many of these are common, and we often engage in distorted thinking without being conscious of it. Learning about some of the typical negative patterns of thinking and acting may help us acknowledge and intervene in them. One such pattern involves self-esteem and overcompensation.



Kevin Dooley – Midlife crisis car – CC BY 2.0.

People with low self-esteem may act in ways that overcompensate for their feelings of low self-worth and other insecurities. Whether it's the businessman buying his midlife crisis Corvette, the "country boy" adding monster tires to his truck, or the community leader who wears several carats of diamonds everywhere she goes, people often turn to material possessions to try to boost self-esteem. While these purchases may make people feel better in the short term, they may have negative financial effects that can exacerbate negative self-perceptions and lead to interpersonal conflict. People also compensate for self-esteem with their relational choices. A person who is anxious about his career success may surround himself with people who he deems less successful than himself. In this case, being a big fish in a small pond helps some people feel better about themselves when they engage in social comparison.

People can also get into a negative thought and action cycle by setting unrealistic goals and consistently not meeting them. Similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy, people who set unrealistic goals can end up with negative feelings of self-efficacy, which as we learned earlier, can negatively affect self-esteem and self-concept. The goals we set should be challenging but progressive, meaning we work to meet a realistic goal, then increase our expectations and set another goal, and so on.

Some people develop low self-esteem because they lack accurate information about themselves, which may be intentional or unintentional. A person can intentionally try to maintain high self-esteem by ignoring or downplaying negative comments and beliefs and focusing on positive evaluations. While this can be a good thing, it can also lead to a distorted self-concept. There is a middle ground between beating yourself up or dwelling on the negative and ignoring potentially constructive feedback about weaknesses and missing opportunities to grow as a person. Conversely, people who have low self-esteem or negative self-concepts may discount or ignore positive feedback. To wrap up this section, I'd like to turn to one of my favorite shows and a great source for examples relevant to the perception process: *American Idol*.

I've always enjoyed showing clips from *American Idol* auditions in my class when I teach about self-perception. As you probably know, the season always starts with audition footage shot in various cities. The range of singing abilities, not to mention personalities, of those who show up for a chance to sing in front of the judges leads millions of viewers to keep tuning in. While it's

obvious that the producers let some people through who they know don't have a chance at making it on the show, they also know that certain personalities make for good reality television viewing. I've often found myself wondering, "Do these people really think they can sing?" The answer is sometimes a very clear "Yes!" Sure, some are there just to make a spectacle and hopefully make it on TV, but there are many who actually believe they have singing abilities—even to the point that they challenge and discount the judges' comments.



Beth – American Idol Experience 9258 – CC BY 2.0.

During the contestant's tearful and/or angry postrejection interview, they are often shown standing with their family and friends, who are also surprised at the judges' decision. These contestants could potentially avoid this emotional ending by following some of the previous tips. It's good that they have supportive interpersonal relationships, but people's parents and friends are a little biased in their feedback, which can lead to a skewed self-concept. These contestants could also set incremental goals. Singing at a local event or even at a karaoke bar might have helped them gain more accurate information about their abilities and led them to realize they didn't have what it takes to be an "American idol."

Overcoming Barriers to Perceiving Others

There are many barriers that prevent us from competently perceiving others. While some are more difficult to overcome than others, they can all be addressed by raising our awareness of the influences around us and committing to monitoring, reflecting on, and changing some of our communication habits. Whether it is our lazy listening skills, lack of empathy, or stereotypes and prejudice, various filters and blinders influence how we perceive and respond to others.

Develop Empathetic Listening Skills

As we will learn in Chapter 5 "Listening", effective listening is not easy, and most of us do not make a concerted effort to overcome common barriers to listening. Our fast-paced lives and cultural values that emphasize speaking over listening sometimes make listening feel like a chore. But 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 also help us expand our self- and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and taking on different perspectives. Empathetic listening is challenging because it requires cognitive and emotional investment that goes beyond the learning of a skill set.

I didn't know what a lazy listener I was until I started teaching and realized how much time and effort teachers have to put into their jobs. Honestly, at first it was challenging to attentively listen to student issues, thoughts, and questions, but I immediately saw the value in it. To be a good teacher, I had to become a better listener. As a result, I also gained more empathy skills and became a lot more patient. A valuable lesson I learned during this time is best stated as follows: "Everyone's biggest problem is his or her biggest problem." If one person's biggest problem is getting enough money together to buy a new cell phone and another person's biggest problem is getting enough money together to get much needed medication, each of these people is likely experiencing a similar amount of stress. As an outsider, we might look at this example and think about how a cell phone

isn't necessary to live but the medication is. But everyone's reality is his or her reality, and when you can concede that someone's reality isn't like yours and you are OK with that, then you have overcome a significant barrier to becoming more aware of the perception process.

I recently had a good student inform me that he was leaving school to pursue other things. He had given speeches about wildfire firefighting and beer brewing and was passionate about both of those things, but not school. As an academic and lover of and advocate for higher education, I wouldn't have made that choice for myself or for him. But I am not him, and I can't assume his perceptions are consistent with mine. I think he was surprised when I said, "I think you are a smart and capable adult, and this is your decision to make, and I respect that. School is not going anywhere, so it'll be here when you're ready to come back. In the meantime, I'd be happy to be a reference for any jobs you're applying for. Just let me know." I wanted to make it clear that I didn't perceive him as irresponsible, immature, misguided, or uncommitted. He later told me that he appreciated my reaction that day.

Beware of Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes are sets of beliefs that we develop about groups, which we then apply to individuals from that group. Stereotypes are schemata that are taken too far, as they reduce and ignore a person's individuality and the diversity present within a larger group of people. Stereotypes can be based on cultural identities, physical appearance, behavior, speech, beliefs, and values, among other things, and are often caused by a lack of information about the target person or group (Guyll et al., 2010). Stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral, but all run the risk of lowering the quality of our communication.

While the negative effects of stereotypes are pretty straightforward in that they devalue people and prevent us from adapting and revising our schemata, positive stereotypes also have negative consequences. For example, the "model minority" stereotype has been applied to some Asian cultures in the United States. Seemingly positive stereotypes of Asian Americans as hardworking, intelligent, and willing to adapt to "mainstream" culture are not always received as positive and can lead some people within these communities to feel objectified, ignored, or overlooked.

Stereotypes can also lead to double standards that point to larger cultural and social inequalities. There are many more words to describe a sexually active female than a male, and the words used for females are disproportionately negative, while those used for males are more positive. Since stereotypes are generally based on a lack of information, we must take it upon ourselves to gain exposure to new kinds of information and people, which will likely require us to get out of our comfort zones. When we do meet people, we should base the impressions we make on describable behavior rather than inferred or secondhand information. When stereotypes negatively influence our overall feelings and attitudes about a person or group, prejudiced thinking results.



Sassy mom – AIDS Awareness – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Prejudice is negative feelings or attitudes toward people based on their identity or identities. Prejudice can have individual or widespread negative effects. At the individual level, a hiring manager may not hire a young man with a physical disability (even though that would be illegal if it were the only reason), which negatively affects that one man. However, if pervasive cultural

thinking that people with physical disabilities are mentally deficient leads hiring managers all over the country to make similar decisions, then the prejudice has become a social injustice. In another example, when the disease we know today as AIDS started killing large numbers of people in the early 1980s, response by some health and government officials was influenced by prejudice. Since the disease was primarily affecting gay men, Haitian immigrants, and drug users, the disease was prejudged to be a disease that affected only “deviants” and therefore didn’t get the same level of attention it would have otherwise. It took many years, investment of much money, and education campaigns to help people realize that HIV and AIDS do not prejudge based on race or sexual orientation and can affect any human.

Engage in Self-Reflection

A good way to improve your perceptions and increase your communication competence in general is to engage in self-reflection. If a communication encounter doesn’t go well and you want to know why, your self-reflection will be much more useful if you are aware of and can recount your thoughts and actions.

Self-reflection can also help us increase our cultural awareness. Our thought process regarding culture is often “other focused,” meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the old adage “know thyself” is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because our taken-for-granted or deeply held beliefs and values may become less certain when we see the multiple perspectives that exist.

We can also become more aware of how our self-concepts influence how we perceive others. We often hold other people to the standards we hold for ourselves or assume that their self-concept should be consistent with our own. For example, if you consider yourself a neat person and think that sloppiness in your personal appearance would show that you are unmotivated, rude, and lazy, then you are likely to think the same of a person you judge to have a sloppy appearance. So asking questions like “Is my impression based on how this person wants to be, or how I think this person should want to be?” can lead to enlightening moments of self-reflection. Asking questions in general about the perceptions you are making is an integral part of perception checking, which we will discuss next.

Checking Perception

Perception checking is a strategy to help us monitor our reactions to and perceptions about people and communication. There are some internal and external strategies we can use to engage in perception checking. In terms of internal strategies, review the various influences on perception that we have learned about in this chapter and always be willing to ask yourself, “What is influencing the perceptions I am making right now?” Even being aware of what influences are acting on our perceptions makes us more aware of what is happening in the perception process. In terms of external strategies, we can use other people to help verify our perceptions.

The cautionary adage “Things aren’t always as they appear” is useful when evaluating your own perceptions. Sometimes it’s a good idea to bounce your thoughts off someone, especially if the perceptions relate to some high-stakes situation. But not all situations allow us the chance to verify our perceptions. Preventable crimes have been committed because people who saw something suspicious didn’t report it even though they had a bad feeling about it. Of course, we have to walk a line between being reactionary and being too cautious, which is difficult to manage. We all know that we are ethically and sometimes legally required to report someone to the police who is harming himself or herself or others, but sometimes the circumstances are much more uncertain.

The Tony Award-winning play *Doubt: A Parable* and the Academy Award-winning movie based on it deal with the interplay of perception, doubt, and certainty. In the story, which is set in a Bronx, New York, Catholic school in 1964, a young priest with new ideas comes into the school, which is run by a traditional nun who, like many, is not fond of change. The older nun begins a campaign to get the young priest out of her school after becoming convinced that he has had an inappropriate relationship with one of the male students. No conclusive evidence is offered during the course of the story, and the audience is left, as are the characters in the story, to determine for themselves whether or not the priest is “guilty.” The younger priest doesn’t fit into the nun’s schema of how a priest should look and act. He has longer fingernails than other priests, he listens to secular music, and he takes three sugars in his tea. A series of perceptions like this lead the nun to certainty of the priest’s guilt, despite a lack of concrete evidence. Although this is a fictional example, it mirrors many high-profile cases of abuse that have been in the news in recent years. Hopefully we will not find ourselves in such an uncertain and dire position, but in these extreme cases and more mundane daily interactions, perception checking can be useful.

“Getting Competent”: Perception Checking

Perception checking helps us slow down perception and communication processes and allows us to have more control over both. Perception checking involves being able to describe what is happening in a given situation, provide multiple interpretations of events or behaviors, and ask yourself and others questions for clarification. Some of this process happens inside our heads, and some happens through interaction. Let’s take an interpersonal conflict as an example.

Stefano and Patrick are roommates. Stefano is in the living room playing a video game when he sees Patrick walk through the room with his suitcase and walk out the front door. Since Patrick didn’t say or wave good-bye, Stefano has to make sense of this encounter, and perception checking can help him do that. First, he needs to try to describe (not evaluate yet) what just happened. This can be done by asking yourself, “What is going on?” In this case, Patrick left without speaking or waving good-bye. Next, Stefano needs to think of some possible interpretations of what just happened. One interpretation could be that Patrick is mad about something (at him or someone else). Another could be that he was in a hurry and simply forgot, or that he didn’t want to interrupt the video game. In this step of perception checking, it is good to be aware of the attributions you are making. You might try to determine if you are overattributing internal or external causes. Lastly, you will want to verify and clarify. So Stefano might ask a mutual friend if she knows what might be bothering Patrick or going on in his life that made him leave so suddenly. Or he may also just want to call, text, or speak to Patrick. During this step, it’s important to be aware of punctuation. Even though Stefano has already been thinking about this incident, and is experiencing some conflict, Patrick may have no idea that his actions caused Stefano to worry. If Stefano texts and asks why he’s mad (which wouldn’t be a good idea because it’s an assumption) Patrick may become defensive, which could escalate the conflict. Stefano could just describe the behavior (without judging Patrick) and ask for clarification by saying, “When you left today you didn’t say bye or let me know where you were going. I just wanted to check to see if things are OK.”

The steps of perception checking as described in the previous scenario are as follows:

- Step 1: Describe the behavior or situation without evaluating or judging it.
 - Step 2: Think of some possible interpretations of the behavior, being aware of attributions and other influences on the perception process.
 - Step 3: Verify what happened and ask for clarification from the other person’s perspective. Be aware of punctuation, since the other person likely experienced the event differently than you.
1. Getting integrated: Give an example of how perception checking might be useful to you in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
 2. Which step of perception checking do you think is the most challenging and why?

Key Takeaways

- We can improve self-perception by avoiding reliance on rigid schemata, thinking critically about socializing institutions, intervening in self-fulfilling prophecies, finding supportive interpersonal networks, and becoming aware of cycles of thinking that distort our self-perception.
- We can improve our perceptions of others by developing empathetic listening skills, becoming aware of stereotypes and prejudice, and engaging in self-reflection.
- Perception checking is a strategy that allows us to monitor our perceptions of and reactions to others and communication.

Exercises

1. Which barrier(s) to self-perception do you think present the most challenge to you and why? What can you do to start to overcome these barriers?
2. Which barrier(s) to perceiving others do you think present the most challenge to you and why? What can you do to start to overcome these barriers?
3. Recount a recent communication encounter in which perception checking may have led to a more positive result. What could you have done differently?

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5: LISTENING

5.1: Hearing versus Listening

5.2: The Value of Listening

5.3: The Three A's of Active Listening

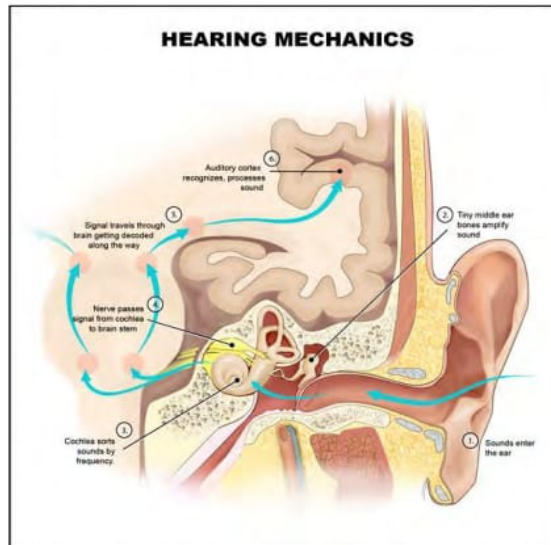
5.4: Strategies to Enhance Listening

5.1: Hearing versus Listening

A mother takes her four-year-old to the pediatrician reporting she's worried about the girl's hearing. The doctor runs through a battery of tests, checks in the girl's ears to be sure everything looks good, and makes notes in the child's folder. Then, she takes the mother by the arm. They move together to the far end of the room, behind the girl. The doctor whispers in a low voice to the concerned parent: "Everything looks fine. But, she's been through a lot of tests today. You might want to take her for ice cream after this as a reward." The daughter jerks her head around, a huge grin on her face, "Oh, please, Mommy! I love ice cream!" The doctor, speaking now at a regular volume, reports, "As I said, I don't think there's any problem with her hearing, but she may not always be choosing to listen."



Hearing is something most everyone does without even trying. It is a physiological response to sound waves moving through the air at up to 760 miles per hour. First, we receive the sound in our ears. The wave of sound causes our eardrums to vibrate, which engages our brain to begin processing. The sound is then transformed into nerve impulses so that we can perceive the sound in our brains. Our auditory cortex recognizes a sound has been heard and begins to process the sound by matching it to previously encountered sounds in a process known as **auditory association** (Brownell, 1996). Hearing has kept our species alive for centuries. When you are asleep but wake in a panic having heard a noise downstairs, an age-old selfpreservation response is kicking in. You were asleep. You weren't listening for the noise – unless perhaps you are a parent of a teenager out past curfew – but you hear it. Hearing is unintentional, whereas listening (by contrast) requires you to pay conscious attention. Our bodies hear, but we need to employ intentional effort to actually listen.



We regularly engage in several different types of listening. When we are tuning our attention to a song we like, or a poetry reading, or actors in a play, or sitcom antics on television, we are listening for pleasure, also known as **appreciative listening**. When we are listening to a friend or family member, building our relationship with another through offering support and showing empathy for her feelings in the situation she is discussing, we are engaged in **relational listening**. Therapists, counselors, and conflict mediators are trained in another level known as **empathetic or therapeutic listening**. When we are at a political event, attending a debate, or enduring a salesperson touting the benefits of various brands of a product, we engage in critical listening. This requires us to be attentive to key points that influence or confirm our judgments. When we are focused on gaining information whether from a teacher in a classroom setting, or a pastor at church, we are engaging in **informational listening** (Ireland, 2011).

Yet, despite all these variations, Nichols (1995) called listening a “lost art.” The ease of sitting passively without really listening is well known to anyone who has sat in a boring class with a professor droning on about the Napoleonic wars or proper pain medication regimens for patients allergic to painkillers. You hear the words the professor is saying, while you check Facebook on your phone under the desk. Yet, when the exam question features an analysis of Napoleon’s downfall or a screaming patient fatally allergic to codeine you realize you didn’t actually listen. Trying to recall what you heard is a challenge, because without your attention and intention to remember, the information is lost in the caverns of your cranium.

Listening is one of the first skills infants gain, using it to acquire language and learn to communicate with their parents. Bommelje (2011) suggests listening is the activity we do most in life, second only to breathing. Nevertheless, the skill is seldom taught.

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5.2: The Value of Listening

Listening is a critical skill. The strategies endorsed in this chapter can help you to be a more attentive listener in any situation.

Academic Benefit

Bommelje, Houston, and Smither (2003) studied effective listening among 125 college students and found a strong link between effective listening and school success, supporting previous research in the field linking listening skills to grade point average. This finding is unsurprising as the better you listen while in class, the better prepared you will be for your assignments and exams. It is quite simple really. When students listen, they catch the instructions, pointers, feedback, and hints they can use to make the assignment better or get a better score on the test.

Learning is a result of listening, which in turn leads to even better listening and attentiveness to the other person. ~
Alice Miller

Professional Benefits

Connecting listening skills to better leadership, Hoppe (2006) lists many professional advantages of active listening, indicating that it helps us: better understand and make connections between ideas and information; change perspectives and challenge assumptions; empathize and show respect or appreciation, which can enhance our relationships; and build self-esteem. When people aren't listening, it becomes much more difficult to get things done effectively and trust is broken while fostering resentments. Bell and Mejer (2011), identifying poor listening as a "silent killer of productivity and profit," state change becomes extremely difficult to implement in a work environment when people are not listening.

Effective listening can also help you to make a better impression on employers. This can begin at the interview. You really want the job, but you are really nervous. As a result, you are having trouble paying attention to what the CEO of the company is saying in your final interview. She asks you if you have any questions, and you ask something you were wondering about in the elevator on the way up to this penthouse office. You're unlikely to get the job if you ask something she's just talked about. Even if you, somehow, convince her to hire you, you will make little progress at the firm if your supervisors often have to tell you things again, or you make decisions that cost the company in lost profits because you weren't listening effectively in a team meeting.



Ferrari (2012) identifies listening as the "most critical business skill of all." He notes, "listening can well be the difference between profit and loss, between success and failure, between a long career and a short one" (p. 2).

Personal Benefits

If listening is done well, the **communication loop** is effectively completed between speaker and receiver. The speaker shares a message with the receiver, having selected a particular method to communicate that message. The receiver aims to interpret the message and share understanding of the message with the speaker. Communication effectiveness is determined by the level of shared interpretation of the message reached through listener response and feedback. When done successfully, the loop is complete, and both sender and receiver feel connected. The active listener who employs the positive attributes detailed in this chapter is more likely to be better liked, in turn increasing her self-esteem. She is also likely to be better able to reduce tension in situations and resolve conflict (Wobser, 2004). After all, the symbols for ears, eyes, undivided attention, and heart comprise the Chinese character for “to listen” (McFerran, 2009, p. G1). Truly listening to the words of a speaker is sure to make a positive difference in your interactions whether they are academic, professional, or personal.



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5.3: The Three A's of Active Listening

Effective listening is about selfawareness. You must pay attention to whether or not you are only hearing, passively listening, or actively engaging. Effective listening requires concentration and a focused effort that is known as active listening. Active listening can be broken down into three main elements.

Know how to listen, and you will profit even from those who talk badly. ~ Plutarch



Attention

We know now that attention is the fundamental difference between hearing and listening. Paying attention to what a speaker is saying requires intentional effort on your part. Nichols (1957), credited with first researching the field of listening, observed, “listening is hard work. It is characterized by faster heart action, quicker circulation of the blood, a small rise in bodily temperature” (p. 9). Consider that we can process information four times faster than a person speaks. Yet, tests of listening comprehension show the average person listening at only 25% efficiency. A typical person can speak 125 words-per-minute, yet we can process up to three times faster, reaching as much as 500 words-per-minute. The poor listener grows impatient, while the effective listener uses the extra processing time to process the speaker’s words, distinguish key points, and mentally summarize them (Nichols, 1957).

Hoppe (2006) advises active listening is really a state of mind requiring us to choose to focus on the moment, being present and attentive while disregarding any of our anxieties of the day. He suggests listeners prepare themselves for active attention by creating a **listening reminder**. This might be to write “Listen” at the top of a page in front of you in a meeting.

While reading a book, or having a discussion with an individual, you can go back and re-read or ask a question to clarify a point. This is not always true when listening. Listening is of the moment, and we often only get to hear the speaker’s words once. The key then is for the listener to quickly ascertain the speaker’s central premise or controlling idea. Once this is done, it becomes easier for the listener to discern what is most important. Of course, distinguishing the speaker’s primary goal, his main points, and the structure of the speech are all easier when the listener is able to listen with an open mind.



Attitude

Even if you are paying attention, you could be doing so with the wrong attitude, the second A. Telling yourself this is all a waste of time is not going to help you to listen effectively. You'll be better off determining an internal motivation to be attentive to the person speaking. Approaching the task of listening with a positive attitude and an open-mind will make the act of listening much easier. Bad listeners make snap judgments that justify the decision to be inattentive. Yet, since you're already there, why not listen to see what you can learn? Kaponya (1991) warns against psychological **deaf spots** which impair our ability to perceive and understand things counter to our convictions. It can be as little as a word or phrase that might cause "an emotional eruption" causing communication efficiency to drop rapidly (p. 194). For instance, someone who resolutely supports military action as the best response to a terrorist action may be unable to listen objectively to a speaker endorsing negotiation as a better tool. Even if the speaker is effectively employing logic, drawing on credible sources, and appealing to emotion with a heartrending tale of the civilian casualties caused by bombings, this listener would be unable to keep an open mind. Failing to acknowledge your deaf spots will leave you at a deficit when listening.

You will always need to make up your own mind about where you stand – whether you agree or disagree with the speaker – but it is critical to do so *after* listening. Adler (1983) proposes having four questions in mind while listening: "What is the whole speech about?" "What are the main or pivotal ideas, conclusions, and arguments?" "Are the speaker's conclusions sound or mistaken?" and "What of it?" Once you have an overall idea of the speech, determine the key points, and gauge your agreement, you can decide why it matters, how it affects you, or what you might do as a result of what you have heard. Yet, he notes it is "impossible" to answer all these questions at the same time as you are listening (p. 96). Instead, you have to be ready and willing to pay attention to the speaker's point of view and changes in direction, patiently waiting to see where she is leading you.

There are things I can't force. I must adjust. There are times when the greatest change needed is a change of my viewpoint. ~ Denis Diderot

Adjustment

To do this well, you need the final of the three A's: adjustment. Often when we hear someone speak, we don't know in advance what he is going to be saying. So, we need to be flexible, willing to follow a speaker along what seems like a verbal detour down a rabbit hole, until we are rewarded by the speaker reaching his final destination while his audience marvels at the creative means by which he reached his important point. If the audience members are more intent on reacting to or anticipating what is said, they will be poor listeners indeed.

Take time now to think about your own listening habits by completing the listening profile, adapted from Brownell (1996) (see Appendix A). The next section will consider ways to address the challenges of listening effectively.

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5.4: Strategies to Enhance Listening

Keep An Open Mind

Thinking about listening might make you feel tense in the moment. The effective listener is instead calm with a focused and alert mind. You are not waiting to hear what you want to hear, but listening to “what is said as it is said” (Ramsland, 1992, p. 171). Effective listeners keep an open mind. Remember that listening to a point of view is not the same as accepting that point of view. Recognizing this can help you to cultivate a more open perspective, helping you to better adjust as you listen actively to a speaker. Also, it might help you to curtail your emotions. If you do encounter a point that incenses you, write it down to return to later. For now, you should keep on listening.

Identify Distractions

In any setting where you are expected to listen, you encounter numerous distractions. For instance, the father sitting in the living room watching television, might want to turn off the television to better enable him to listen to his son when he comes into the room saying, “Dad, I have a problem.” In the classroom setting, you might be distracted sitting beside friends who make sarcastic comments throughout the class. In a new product meeting with the sales team, you could be unnerved by the constant beep of your phone identifying another text, email, or phone message has arrived. Identifying the things that will interrupt your attention, and making a conscious choice to move to a different seat or turn off your phone, can help position you to listen more effectively.



Come Prepared

Another useful strategy is to come prepared when you can. Any time you enter a listening situation with some advance working knowledge of the speaker and what might be expected of you as a listener, you will be better able to adjust and engage more deeply in what is being said. For instance, you might: read the assigned readings for class, do the lab work before the lecture writing up the results, read a biography of a guest speaker before you go to an event, review the agenda from the previous staff meeting, or consult with a colleague about a client before going on-site to make a sale.

Take Notes

Taking notes can also advance your ability to be actively engaged in the speaker’s words. You need not write down everything the speaker is saying. First, this is quite likely to be impossible. Second, once you are caught up in recording a speaker’s every

word, you are no longer listening. Use a tape recorder instead – having asked the speaker's permission first – if you feel you really must capture every word the speaker utters. You want to focus your efforts on really listening with an active mind. Learning to focus your attention on main points, key concepts, and gaining the overall gist of the speaker's talk is another skill to develop. You might endeavor to do this by jotting down a few notes or even drawing visuals that help you to recall the main ideas. The manner in which you take the notes is up to you; what is important is the fact that you are listening and working to process what is being said. Writing down questions that come to mind and asking questions of the speaker when it is possible, are two more ways to guarantee effective listening as you have found an internal motivation to listen attentively.

Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence. ~ Robert Frost

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6: CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

6.1: Understanding Conflict

6.2: Sources of Conflict in an Organization

6.3: Conflict in the Work Environment

6.4: Dealing with Conflict- Different Approaches

6.5: Managing Intercultural Conflict

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6.1: Understanding Conflict

Learning Outcomes

- Differentiate between the terms conflict, disagreement, and argument.
- Explain two perspectives about the existence of conflict.
- Define and explain the term “interpersonal conflict.”

For our purposes, it is necessary to differentiate a conflict from a disagreement.¹ A **disagreement** is a difference of opinion and often occurs during an **argument**, or a verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects. It's important to realize that arguments are not conflicts, but if they become verbally aggressive, they can quickly turn into conflicts. One factor that ultimately can help determine if an argument will escalate into a conflict is an individual's tolerance for disagreement. James McCroskey, along with his colleagues, initially defined **tolerance for disagreement** as whether an individual can openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted.^{2,3} People that have a high tolerance for disagreement can easily discuss opinions with pretty much anyone and realize that arguing is perfectly normal and, for some, even entertaining. People that have a low tolerance for disagreement feel personally attacked any time someone is perceived as devaluing their opinion. From an interpersonal perspective, understanding someone's tolerance for disagreement can help in deciding if arguments will be perceived as the other as attacks that could lead to verbally aggressive conflicts. However, not all conflict is necessarily verbally aggressive nor destructive.

The term “conflict” is actually very difficult to pin down. We could have an entire chapter where we just examined various definitions of the term. Simplistically, **conflict** is an interactive process occurring when conscious beings (individuals or groups) have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations resources and/or values. First, conflict is interactive and inherently communicative. Second, two or more people or even groups of people who can think must be involved. Lastly, there are a whole range of different areas where people can have opposing or incompatible opinions. For this generic definition, we provided a laundry list of different types of incompatibility that can exist between two or more individuals or groups. Is this list completely exhaustive? No. But we provided this list as a way of thinking about the more common types of issues that are raised when people engage in conflict. From this perspective, everything from a minor disagreement to a knock-down, drag-out fight would classify as a conflict

The rest of this section is going to explore the nature of conflict and its importance in communication. To do this, we'll discuss two different perspectives on conflict (disruption vs. normalcy). Then we'll explore interpersonal conflict more closely. Lastly, we'll discuss the positive and negative functions of conflict.

Two Perspectives on Conflict

As with most areas of interpersonal communication, no single perspective exists in the field related to interpersonal conflict. There are generally two very different perspectives that one can take. Herbert W. Simmons was one of the first to realize that there were two very different perspectives on conflict.⁴ On the one hand, you had scholars who see conflict as a disruption in a normal working system, which should be avoided. On the other hand, some scholars view conflict as a normal part of human relationships. Let's look at each of these in this section.

Disruptions in Normal Workings of a System

The first major perspective of conflict was proposed by James C. McCroskey and Lawrence R. Wheeless.⁵ McCroskey and Wheeless described conflict as a negative phenomenon in interpersonal relationships:

Conflict between people can be viewed as the opposite or antithesis of affinity. In this sense, interpersonal conflict is the breaking down of attraction and the development of repulsion, the dissolution of perceived homophily (similarity) and the increased perception of incompatible differences, the loss of perceptions of credibility and the development of disrespect.

6

From this perspective, conflict is something inherently destructive. McCroskey and Virginia P. Richmond went further and argued that conflict is characterized by antagonism, distrust, hostility, and suspicion.⁷

This more negative view of conflict differentiates itself from a separate term, **disagreement**, which is simply a difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people. Richmond and McCroskey note that there are two types of disagreements: substantive and procedural.⁸ A **substantive** disagreement is a disagreement that people have about a specific topic or issue. Basically, if you and your best friend want to go eat at two different restaurants for dinner, then you're engaging in a substantive disagreement. On the other hand, **procedural disagreements** are "concerned with procedure, how a decision should be reached or how a policy should be implemented."⁹ So, if your disagreement about restaurant choice switches to a disagreement on how to make a choice (flipping a coin vs. rock-paper-scissors), then you've switched into a procedural disagreement.

A conflict then is a disagreement plus negative affect, or when you disagree with someone else and you don't like the other person. It's the combination of a disagreement and dislike that causes a mere disagreement to turn into a conflict. Ultimately, conflict is a product of how one communicates this dislike of another person during the disagreement. People in some relationships end up saying very nasty things to one another during a disagreement because their affinity for the other person has diminished. When conflict is allowed to continue and escalate, it "can be likened to an ugly, putrid, decaying, pus-filled sore."¹⁰

From this perspective, conflicts are ultimately only manageable; whereas, disagreements can be solved. Although a disagreement is the cornerstone of all conflicts, most disagreements don't turn into conflicts because there is an affinity between the two people engaged in the disagreement.

Normal Part of Human Communication

The second perspective of the concept of conflict is very different from the first one. As described by Dudley D. Cahn and Ruth Anna Abigail, conflict is a normal, inevitable part of life.¹¹ Cahn and Abigail argue that conflict is one of the foundational building blocks of interpersonal relationships. One can even ask if it's possible to grow in a relationship without conflict. Managing and overcoming conflict makes a relationship stronger and healthier. Ideally, when interpersonal couples engage in conflict management (or conflict resolution), they will reach a solution that is mutually beneficial for both parties. In this manner, conflict can help people seek better, healthier outcomes within their interactions.

Ultimately, conflict is neither good nor bad, but it's a tool that can be used for constructive or destructive purposes. Conflict can be very beneficial and healthy for a relationship. Let's look at how conflict is beneficial for individuals and relationships:

- Conflict helps people find common ground.
- Conflict helps people learn how to manage conflict more effectively for the future.
- Conflict provides the opportunity to learn about the other person(s).
- Conflict can lead to creative solutions to problems.
- Confronting conflict allows people to engage in an open and honest discussion, which can build relationship trust.
- Conflict encourages people to grow both as humans and in their communication skills.
- Conflict can help people become more assertive and less aggressive.
- Conflict can strengthen individuals' ability to manage their emotions.
- Conflict lets individuals set limits in relationships.
- Conflict lets us practice our communication skills.

When one approaches conflict from this vantage point, conflict can be seen as an amazing resource in interpersonal relationships. However, both parties must agree to engage in prosocial conflict management strategies for this to work effectively (more on that later in this chapter).

Now that we've examined the basic idea of conflict, let's switch gears and examine conflict in a more interpersonal manner.

Interpersonal Conflict

According to Cahn and Abigail, interpersonal conflict requires four factors to be present:

1. the conflict parties are interdependent,

2. they have the perception that they seek incompatible goals or outcomes or they favor incompatible means to the same ends,
3. the perceived incompatibility has the potential to adversely affect the relationship leaving emotional residues if not addressed, and
4. there is a sense of urgency about the need to resolve the difference.¹²

Let's look at each of these parts of interpersonal conflict separately.

People are Interdependent

According to Cahn and Abigail, "**interdependence** occurs when those involved in a relationship characterize it as continuous and important, making it worth the effort to maintain."¹³ From this perspective, interpersonal conflict occurs when we are in some kind of relationship with another person. For example, it could be a relationship with a parent/guardian, a child, a coworker, a boss, a spouse, etc. In each of these interpersonal relationships, we generally see ourselves as having long-term relationships with these people that we want to succeed. Notice, though, that if you're arguing with a random person on a subway, that will not fall into this definition because of the interdependence factor. We may have disagreements and arguments with all kinds of strangers, but those don't rise to the level of interpersonal conflicts.

People Perceive Differing Goals/Outcomes of Means to the Same Ends

An incompatible goal occurs when two people want different things. For example, imagine you and your best friend are thinking about going to the movies. They want to see a big-budget superhero film, and you're more in the mood for an independent artsy film. In this case, you have pretty incompatible goals (movie choices). You can also have incompatible means to reach the same end. Incompatible means, in this case, "occur when we want to achieve the same goal but differ in how we should do so."¹⁴ For example, you and your best friend agree on going to the same movie, but not about at which theatre you should see the film.

Conflict Can Negatively Affect the Relationship if Not Addressed

Next, interpersonal conflicts can lead to very negative outcomes if the conflicts are not managed effectively. Here are some examples of conflicts that are not managed effectively:

- One partner dominates the conflict, and the other partner caves-in.
- One partner yells or belittles the other partner.
- One partner uses half-truths or lies to get her/his/their way during the conflict.
- Both partners only want to get their way at all costs.
- One partner refuses to engage in conflict.
- Etc.

Again, this is a sample laundry list of some of the ways where conflict can be mismanaged. When conflict is mismanaged, one or both partners can start to have less affinity for the other partner, which can lead to a decreasing in liking, decreased caring about the relational partner, increased desire to exit the relationship, increased relational apathy, increased revenge-seeking behavior, etc. All of these negative outcomes could ultimately lead to conflicts becoming increasingly more aggressive (both active and passive) or just outright conflict avoidance. We'll look at both of these later in the chapter.

Some Sense of Urgency to Resolve Conflict

Lastly, there must be some sense of urgency to resolve the conflict within the relationship. The conflict gets to the point where it must receive attention, and a decision must be made or an outcome decided upon, or else. If a conflict reaches the point where it's not solved, then the conflict could become more problematic and negative if it's not dealt with urgently.

Now, some people let conflicts stir and rise over many years that can eventually boil over, but these types of conflicts when they arise generally have some other kind of underlying conflict that is causing the sudden explosion. For example, imagine your spouse has a particularly quirky habit. For the most part, you ignore this habit and may even make a joke about the habit. Finally, one day you just explode and demand the habit must change. Now, it's possible that you let this conflict build for so long that it finally explodes. It's kind of like a geyser. According to Yellowstone National Park, here's how a geyser works:

The looping chambers trap steam from the hot water. Escaped bubbles from trapped steam heat the water column to the

boiling point. When the pressure from the trapped steam builds enough, it blasts, releasing the pressure. As the entire water column boils out of the ground, more than half the volume is this steam. The eruption stops when the water cools below the boiling point.¹⁵

In the same way, sometimes people let irritations or underlying conflict percolate inside of them until they reach a boiling point, which leads to the eventual release of pressure in the form of a sudden, out of nowhere conflict. In this case, even though the conflict has been building for some time, the eventual desire to make this conflict known to the other person does cause an immediate sense of urgency for the conflict to be solved.

Key Takeaways

- The terms disagreement and argument are often confused with one another. For our purposes, the terms refer to unique concepts. A disagreement is a difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people; whereas, an argument is a verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects.
- There are two general perspectives regarding the nature of conflict. The first perspective sees conflict as a disruption to normal working systems, so conflict is inherently something that is dangerous to relationships and should be avoided. The second perspective sees conflict as a normal, inevitable part of any relationship. From this perspective, conflict is a tool that can either be used constructively or destructively in relationships.
- According to Cahn and Abigail, interpersonal conflict consists of four unique parts: 1) interdependence between or among the conflict parties, (2) incompatible goals/ means, (3) conflict can adversely affect a relationship if not handled effectively, and (4) there is a sense of urgency to resolve the conflict.

Exercises

1. On a sheet of paper, write out what you believe are the pros and cons of both major perspectives about conflict. Which one do you think describes your own understanding of conflict? Do you think they are both applicable to interpersonal conflict?
2. Think of a time when you've engaged in conflict with a relational partner of some kind (parent/guardian, child, sibling, spouse, friend, romantic partner, etc.). Using Cahn and Abigail's four parts of interpersonal conflict, dissect the conflict and explain why it would qualify as an interpersonal conflict.
3. We know that different people have different levels of tolerance for disagreement in life. How do you think an individual's tolerance for disagreement impacts her/ his/their ability to interact with others interpersonally?

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6.2: Sources of Conflict in an Organization

Learning Objectives

- Identify organizational sources of conflict

Personality conflicts make work rough. When you're not in the office, you get to choose who you hang out with, but during the work day, the cast of characters is chosen for you. If an organization is looking to hire people that fit with the company culture, then chances are good you'll get along with most of them! However, it's likely that there will be at least one coworker that you don't get along with 100 percent.

Organizational sources of conflict are those events or factors that cause goals to differ. Personality conflicts, irritating as they may be, don't actually qualify as an organizational source of conflict. They may be the most aggravating part of your day and, certainly, they're something organizations need to watch for if it interferes with daily work, but these organizational sources produce much bigger problems. Those sources are

- Goal incompatibility and differentiation
- Interdependence
- Uncertainty and resource scarcity
- Reward systems

Goal Incompatibility and Differentiation



Organizational sources of conflict occur when departments are differentiated in their goals. For instance, the research and development team at an electronics company might be instructed to come up with the best new, pie-in-the-sky idea for individual-use electronics—that thing consumers didn't know they needed. The R&D team might come up with something fantastic, featuring loads of bells and whistles that the consumer will put to excellent use.

Then, the manufacturing team gets together to look at this new design. They've been told that management likes it, and that they need to build it by the most economical means possible. They start make adjustments to the design, saving money by using less expensive materials than what were recommended by the R&D team. Conflict arises.

Goal incompatibility and differentiation is a fairly common occurrence. The manufacturing team disagrees with research and development. The sales department feels like the legal department is there to keep them from getting deals signed. Departments within the organization feel like they are working at cross-purposes, even though they're both operating under the assumption

that their choices are best for the company.

Interdependence

Interdependence describes the extent to which employees rely on other employees to get their work done. If people all had independent goals that didn't affect one another, everything would be fine. That's not the case in many organizations.

For instance, a communication department is charged with putting together speaking points that help their front-line employees deal with customer questions. Because the communications department is equipped to provide clear instructions but are not necessarily the subject matter experts, they must wait for engineering to provide product details that are important to the final message. If those details are not provided, the communication department cannot reach their goal of getting these speaking points out on time for their front-line staff to deal with questions.

The same holds true for a first-, second-, and third-shift assembly line. One shift picks up where another leaves off. The same standards of work, production numbers, and clean-up should be upheld by all three teams. If one team deviates from those standards, then it creates conflict with the other two groups.

Uncertainty and Resource Scarcity

Change. We talked about it as a source of stress, and we're going to talk about it here as an organizational source of conflict. Uncertainty makes it difficult for managers to set clear directions, and lack of clear direction leads to conflict.

Resource scarcity also leads to conflict. If there aren't enough material and supplies for every worker, then those who do get resources and those who don't are likely to experience conflict. As resources dwindle and an organization has to make do with less, departments will compete to get those resources. For instance, if budgets are slim, the marketing department may feel like they can make the most of those dollars by earning new customers. The development team may feel like they can benefit from the dollars by making more products to sell. Conflict results over resource scarcity.

Reward System

An organization's reward system can be a source of conflict, particularly if the organization sets up a win-lose environment for employee rewards.



For instance, an organization might set a standard where only a certain percent of the employees can achieve the top ranking for raises and bonuses. This standard, not an uncommon practice, creates heavy competition within its employee ranks. Competition of this nature often creates conflict.

Other forms of rewards that might incite conflict include employee of the month or other major awards that are given on a competitive basis.

Conflict can occur between two employees, between a team of employees, or between departments of an organization, brought about by the employees, teams, or organizations themselves. Now that we understand conflict, we're ready to take on negotiation. It's different from conflict, but it's easy to see how some of the skills one uses to be a great negotiator are snatched from conflict resolution.

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6.3: Conflict in the Work Environment

Learning Objectives

1. Understand evaluations and criticism in the workplace, and discuss several strategies for resolving workplace conflict

The word “conflict” produces a sense of anxiety for many people, but it is part of the human experience. Just because conflict is universal does not mean that we cannot improve how we handle disagreements, misunderstandings, and struggles to understand or make ourselves understood. Hocker and Wilmot, Hocker, J., & Wilmot, W. (1991). *Interpersonal conflict*. Dubuque, IA: Willam C. Brown. offer us several principles on conflict that have been adapted here for our discussion:

- Conflict is universal.
- Conflict is associated with incompatible goals
- Conflict is associated with scarce resources
- Conflict is associated with interference
- Conflict is not a sign of a poor relationship
- Conflict cannot be avoided
- Conflict cannot always be resolved
- Conflict is not always bad

Conflict is the physical or psychological struggle associated with the perception of opposing or incompatible goals, desires, demands, wants, or needs McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.. When incompatible goals, scarce resources, or interference are present, conflict is a typical result, but it doesn't mean the relationship is poor or failing. All relationships progress through times of conflict and collaboration. How we navigate and negotiate these challenges influences, reinforces, or destroys the relationship. Conflict is universal, but how and when it occurs is open to influence and interpretation. Rather than viewing conflict from a negative frame of reference, view it as an opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship.

Conflict Management Strategies

As professional communicators, we can acknowledge and anticipate that conflict will be present in every context or environment where communication occurs, particularly in groups. To that end, we can predict, anticipate, and formulate strategies to address conflict successfully. How you choose to approach conflict influences its resolution. Joseph DeVitoDeVito, J. (2003). *Messages: building interpersonal skills*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. offers us several conflict management strategies that we have adapted and expanded for our use.

Avoidance

You may choose to change the subject, leave the room, or not even enter the room in the first place, but the conflict will remain and resurface when you least expect it. Your reluctance to address the conflict directly is a normal response, and one which many cultures prize. In cultures where independence is highly valued, direct confrontation is more common. In cultures where the community is emphasized over the individual, indirect strategies may be more common. Avoidance allows for more time to resolve the problem, but can also increase costs associated with problem in the first place. Your organization or business will have policies and protocols to follow regarding conflict and redress, but it is always wise to consider the position of your conversational partner or opponent and to give them, as well as yourself, time to explore alternatives.

Defensiveness Versus Supportiveness

GibbGibb, J. (1961). Defensive and supportive communication. *Journal of Communication*, 11, 141-148. discussed defensive and supportive communication interactions as part of his analysis of conflict management. Defensive communication is characterized by control, evaluation, and judgments, while supportive communication focuses on the points and not personalities. When we feel judged or criticized, our ability to listen can be diminished, and we may only hear the negative message. By choosing to focus on

the message instead of the messenger, we keep the discussion supportive and professional.

Face-Detracting and Face-Saving

Communication is not competition. Communication is the sharing of understanding and meaning, but does everyone always share equally? People struggle for control, limit access to resources and information as part of territorial displays, and otherwise use the process of communication to engage in competition. People also use communication for collaboration. Both competition and collaboration can be observed in group communication interactions, but there are two concepts central to both: face-detracting and face-saving strategies.

Face-detracting strategies involve messages or statements that take away from the respect, integrity, or credibility of a person. Face-saving strategies protect credibility and separate message from messenger. For example, you might say that “sales were down this quarter,” without specifically noting who was responsible. Sales were simply down. If, however, you ask, “How does the sales manager explain the decline in sales?” you have specifically connected an individual with the negative news. While we may want to specifically connect tasks and job responsibilities to individuals and departments, in terms of language each strategy has distinct results.

Face-detracting strategies often produce a defensive communication climate, inhibit listening, and allow for little room for collaboration. To save face is to raise the issue while preserving a supportive climate, allowing room in the conversation for constructive discussions and problem-solving. By using a face-saving strategy to shift the emphasis from the individual to the issue, we avoid power struggles and personalities, providing each other space to save face. Donohue, W., & Klot, R. (1992). *Managing interpersonal conflict*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage..

In collectivist cultures, where the community well-being is promoted or valued above that of the individual, face-saving strategies are common communicative strategies. Groups are valued, and the role of the individual is de-emphasized. In Japan, for example, to confront someone directly is perceived as humiliation, a great insult. In the United States, greater emphasis is placed on individual performance, and responsibility may be more directly assessed. If our goal is to solve a problem, and preserve the relationship, then consideration of a face-saving strategy should be one option a skilled business communicator considers when addressing negative news or information.

Empathy

Communication involves not only the words we write or speak, but how and when we write or say them. The way we communicate also carries meaning, and empathy for the individual involves attending to this aspect of interaction. Empathetic listening involves listening to both the literal and implied meanings within a message. For example, the implied meaning might involve understanding what has led this person to feel this way. By paying attention to feelings and emotions associated with content and information, we can build relationships and address conflict more constructively. In management, negotiating conflict is a common task and empathy is one strategy to consider when attempting to resolve issues. We can also observe that inherent in the group development process is the presence of conflict. It is not a sign of bad things to come, nor a reason to think something is wrong. Conflict is a normal part of communication in general, and group communication in particular. In fact, conflict can be the antidote to groupthink, and help the group members refrain from going along with the flow, even when reason or the available information indicated otherwise.

Gunnysacking

Bach and Wyden. Bach, G., & Wyden, P. (1968). *The intimacy enemy*. New York, NY: Avon. discuss gunnysacking (or backpacking) as the imaginary bag we all carry, into which we place unresolved conflicts or grievances over time. If your organization has gone through a merger, and your business has transformed, there may have been conflicts that occurred during the transition. Holding onto the way things used to be can be like a stone in your gunnysack, and influence how you interpret your current context.

People may be aware of similar issues but might not know your history, and cannot see your backpack or its contents. For example, if your previous manager handled issues in one way, and your new manager handles them in a different way, this may cause you some degree of stress and frustration. Your new manager cannot see how the relationship existed in the past, but will still observe the tension. Bottling up your frustrations only hurts you and can cause your current relationships to suffer. By addressing, or unpacking, the stones you carry, you can better assess the current situation with the current patterns and variables.

We learn from experience, but can distinguish between old wounds and current challenges, and try to focus our energies where they will make the most positive impact.

Managing Your Emotions

Have you ever seen red, or perceived a situation through rage, anger, or frustration? Then you know that you cannot see or think clearly when you are experiencing strong emotions. There will be times in the work environment when emotions run high, and your awareness of them can help you clear your mind and choose to wait until the moment has passed to tackle the challenge.

“Never speak or make decision in anger” is one common saying that holds true, but not all emotions involve fear, anger, or frustration. A job loss can be a sort of professional death for many, and the sense of loss can be profound. The loss of a colleague to a layoff while retaining your position can bring pain as well as relief, and a sense of survivor’s guilt. Emotions can be contagious in the workplace, and fear of the unknown can influence people to act in irrational ways. The wise business communicator can recognize when emotions are on edge in themselves or others, and choose to wait to communicate, problem-solve, or negotiate until after the moment has passed.

Evaluations and Criticism in the Workplace

Guffey, Guffey, M. (2008). *Essentials of business communication* (7th ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson-Wadsworth. pp.320 wisely notes that Xenophon, a Greek philosopher, once said “The sweetest of all sounds is praise.” We have seen previously that appreciation, respect, inclusion, and belonging are all basic human needs across all contexts, and are particularly relevant in the workplace. Efficiency and morale are positively related, and recognition of good work is important. There may come a time, however, when evaluations involve criticism. Knowing how to approach this criticism can give you peace of mind to listen clearly, separating subjective, personal attacks from objective, constructive requests for improvement. Guffey offers us seven strategies for giving and receiving evaluations and criticism in the workplace that we have adapted here.

Listen Without Interrupting

If you are on the receiving end of an evaluation, start by listening without interruption. Interruptions can be internal and external, and warrant further discussion. If your supervisor starts to discuss a point and you immediately start debating the point in your mind, you are paying attention to yourself and what you think they said or are going to say, and not that which is actually communicated. This gives rise to misunderstandings and will cause you to lose valuable information you need to understand and address the issue at hand.

External interruptions may involve your attempt to get a word in edgewise, and may change the course of the conversation. Let them speak while you listen, and if you need to take notes to focus your thoughts, take clear notes of what is said, also noting points to revisit later. External interruptions can also take the form of a telephone ringing, a “text message has arrived” chime, or a co-worker dropping by in the middle of the conversation.

As an effective business communicator, you know all too well to consider the context and climate of the communication interaction when approaching the delicate subject of evaluations or criticism. Choose a time and place free from interruption. Choose one outside of the common space where there may be many observers. Turn off your cell phone. Choose face to face communication instead of an impersonal email. By providing a space free of interruption, you are displaying respect for the individual and the information.

Determine the Speaker’s Intent

We have discussed previews as a normal part of conversation, and in this context they play an important role. People want to know what is coming and generally dislike surprises, particularly when the context of an evaluation is present. If you are on the receiving end, you may need to ask a clarifying question if it doesn’t count as an interruption. You may also need to take notes, and write down questions that come to mind to address when it is your turn to speak. As a manager, be clear and positive in your opening and lead with praise. You can find one point, even if it is only that the employee consistently shows up to work on time, to highlight before transitioning to a performance issue.

Indicate You Are Listening

In mainstream U.S. culture, eye contact is a signal that you are listening and paying attention to the person speaking. Take notes, nod your head, or lean forward to display interest and listening. Regardless of whether you are the employee receiving the criticism or the supervisor delivering it, displaying of listening behavior engenders a positive climate that helps mitigate the challenge of negative news or constructive criticism.

Paraphrase

Restate the main points to paraphrase what has been discussed. This verbal display allows for clarification and acknowledges receipt of the message.

If you are the employee, summarize the main points and consider steps you will take to correct the situation. If none come to mind, or you are nervous and are having a hard time thinking clearly, state out loud the main point and ask if you can provide solution steps and strategies at a later date. You can request a follow-up meeting if appropriate, or indicate you will respond in writing via email to provide the additional information.

If you are the employer, restate the main points to ensure that the message was received, as not everyone hears everything that is said or discussed the first time it is presented. Stress can impair listening, and paraphrasing the main points can help address this common response.

If You Agree...

If an apology is well deserved, offer it. Communicate clearly what will change or indicate when you will respond with specific strategies to address the concern. As a manager you will want to formulate a plan that addresses the issue and outlines responsibilities as well as time frames for corrective action. As an employee, you will want specific steps you can both agree on that will serve to solve the problem. Clear communication and acceptance of responsibility demonstrates maturity and respect.

If You Disagree...

If you disagree, focus on the points or issue and not personalities. Do not bring up past issues and keep the conversation focused on the task at hand. You may want to suggest, now that you better understand their position, a follow-up meeting to give you time to reflect on the issues. You may want to consider involving a third party, investigating to learn more about the issue, or taking time to cool off.

Do not respond in anger or frustration; instead, always display professionalism. If the criticism is unwarranted, consider that the information they have may be flawed or biased, and consider ways to learn more about the case to share with them, searching for a mutually beneficial solution.

If other strategies to resolve the conflict fail, consider contacting your Human Resources department to learn more about due process procedures at your workplace. Display respect and never say anything that would reflect poorly on yourself or your organization. Words spoken in anger can have a lasting impact, and are impossible to retrieve or take back.

Learn from the Experience

Every communication interaction provides an opportunity for learning if you choose to see it. Sometimes the lessons are situational, and may not apply in future contexts. Other times the lessons learned may well serve you across your professional career. Taking notes for yourself to clarify your thoughts, much like a journal, serve to document and help you see the situation more clearly.

Recognize that some aspects of communication are intentional, and may communicate meaning, even if it is hard to understand. Also know that some aspects of communication are unintentional, and may not imply meaning or design. People make mistakes. They say things they should not have said. Emotions are revealed that are not always rational, and not always associated with the current context. A challenging morning at home can spill over into the workday and someone's bad mood may have nothing to do with you. Team members aren't always the same day to day, and the struggles outside of the work environment can impact the

group.

Try to distinguish between what you can control and what you cannot, and always choose professionalism.

Key Takeaway

- Conflict is unavoidable and can be opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship.

Exercise 6.3.1

1. Write a description of a situation you recall where you came into conflict with someone else. It may be something that happened years ago, or a current issue that just arose. Using the principles and strategies in this section, describe how the conflict was resolved, or could have been resolved. Discuss your ideas with your classmates.
2. Of the strategies for managing conflict described in this section, which do you think are the most effective? Why? Discuss your opinions with a classmate.
3. Can you think of a time when a conflict led to a new opportunity, better understanding, or other positive result? If not, think of a past conflict and imagine a positive outcome. Write a 2–3 paragraph description of what happened, or what you imagine could happen. Share your results with a classmate.

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6.4: Dealing with Conflict- Different Approaches

Every individual or group manages conflict differently. In the 1970s, consultants Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann developed a tool for analyzing the approaches to conflict resolution. This tool is called the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) (Kilman Diagnostics, 2017).

Essential Learning Activity T6.4.1:

For information on the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument, see the [Kilman Diagnostics](#) website.

Thomas and Kilman suggest that in a conflict situation, a person's behaviour can be assessed on two factors:

1. **Commitment to goals or assertiveness**—the extent to which an individual (or a group) attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns or goals.
2. **Commitment to relationships or cooperation**—the extent to which an individual (or a group) attempts to satisfy the concerns of the other party, and the importance of the relationship with the other party.

Thomas and Kilman use these factors to explain the five different approaches to dealing with conflict:

avoiding	competing	accommodating	compromising	collaborating
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There is an appropriate time to use each approach in dealing with conflict. While most people will use different methods in various circumstances, we all tend to have a more dominant approach that feels most comfortable. One approach is not necessarily better than another and all approaches can be learned and utilized. To most effectively deal with conflict, it is important to analyze the situation and determine which approach is most appropriate.

Let's take a closer look at each approach and when to use it.

Avoiding

An avoidance approach demonstrates a low commitment to both goals and relationships. This is the most common method of dealing with conflict, especially by people who view conflict negatively.

Table 6.4.1: Avoiding

Types of Avoidance	Results	Appropriate When
- Physical flight - Mental withdrawal - Changing the subject - Blaming or minimizing - Denial that the problem exists - Postponement to a more appropriate time (which may never occur) - Use of emotions (tears, anger, etc.)	- The dispute is not resolved. - Disputes often build up and eventually explode. - Low satisfaction results in complaining, discontentment, and talking back. - Stress spreads to other parties (e.g., co-workers, family).	- The issue is trivial or unimportant, or another issue is more pressing - Potential damage outweighs potential benefits - Timing for dealing with the conflict is inappropriate (because of overwhelming emotions or lack of information)

Application to Nursing—Avoidance

When might avoidance be an appropriate approach to conflict in a hospital or clinic setting?

In a hospital or clinical setting, there may be times when it is appropriate to avoid conflict. For example, on a particularly busy day in the emergency room, when a patient in life-threatening condition has just been received, the attending doctor may bark directions at the assisting nurses to get equipment. The nurses may feel offended by the doctor's actions; however, it may be appropriate for the nurses to avoid the conflict at that moment given the emergency situation. The nurse, if he or she felt it was inappropriate behavior by the doctor, could then deal with the conflict after the patient has been stabilized.

When might avoidance be an inappropriate approach to conflict in a hospital or clinic setting?

Avoiding the conflict may be inappropriate if that same doctor continues to bark directions at the nursing staff in non-emergency situations, such as during debrief of a surgery, or when communicating non-emergency instructions. When the nurses and doctor have to continue a working relationship, avoiding the continuing conflict will no longer be appropriate.

Competing

A competing approach to conflict demonstrates a high commitment to goals and a low commitment to relationships. Individuals who use the competing approach pursue their own goals at the other party's expense. People taking this approach will use whatever power is necessary to win. It may display as defending a position, interest, or value that you believe to be correct. Competing approaches are often supported by structures (courts, legislatures, sales quotas, etc.) and can be initiated by the actions of one party. Competition may be appropriate or inappropriate (as defined by the expectations of the relationship).

Table 6.4.2: Competing

Types of Competing	Results	Appropriate When
- Power of authority, position, or majority - Power of persuasion - Pressure techniques (e.g., threats, force, intimidation) - Disguising the issue - Tying relationship issues to substantive issues	- The conflict may escalate or the other party may withdraw. - Reduces the quality and durability of agreement. - Assumes no reciprocating power will come from the other side; people tend to reach for whatever power they have when threatened. - Increases the likelihood of future problems between parties. - Restricts communication and decreases trust.	- There are short time frames and quick action is vital. - Dealing with trivial issues. - Tough decisions require leadership (e.g., enforcing unpopular rules, cost cutting, discipline).

Application to Nursing—Competing

When might a competing approach to conflict be appropriate in a hospital or clinic setting?

A competing approach to conflict may be appropriate in a hospital or clinic setting if you recognize that another nurse has made an error in how much medication to administer to a patient. You recognize this mistake prior to the nurse entering the patient's room so you approach the nurse, take the medication out of his or her hands, and place the correct dosage. The goal of patient safety outweighs the commitment to the relationship with that nurse in this case.

When might a competing approach to conflict be inappropriate in a hospital or clinic setting?

It would be inappropriate to continue to be competitive when you debrief with the nurse about the dangers of medication errors and the system of double checking dosage amounts. The goal at this point is to enhance the learning of that nurse as well as to build trust in your relationship as colleagues. A different approach is needed.

Accommodating

Accommodating demonstrates a low commitment to goals and high commitment to relationship. This approach is the opposite of competing. It occurs when a person ignores or overrides their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other party. An accommodating approach is used to establish reciprocal adaptations or adjustments. This could be a hopeful outcome for those who take an accommodating approach, but when the other party does not reciprocate, conflict can result. Others may view those who use the accommodating approach heavily as “that is the way they are” and don’t need anything in return. Accommodators typically will not ask for anything in return. Accommodators tend to get resentful when a reciprocal relationship isn’t established. Once resentment grows, people who rely on the accommodating approach often shift to a competing approach because they are tired of being “used.” This leads to confusion and conflict.

Table 6.4.3: Accommodating

Types of Accommodating	Results	Appropriate When
• Playing down the conflict to maintain surface harmony • Self-sacrifice • Yielding to the other point of view	• Builds relationships that will allow you to be more effective in future problem solving • Increases the chances that the other party may be more accommodating to your needs in the future • Does not improve communication	• You are flexible on the outcome, or when the issue is more important to the other party. • Preserving harmony is more important than the outcome. • It’s necessary to build up good faith for future problem solving. • You are wrong or in a situation where competition could damage your position.

Application to Nursing—Accommodation

When might accommodation be an appropriate approach to conflict in a hospital or clinic setting?

It may be appropriate to use an accommodating approach when, for example, one of the nurses on your shift has a particularly difficult patient who is taking up a lot of time and effort. Seeing that the nurse is having difficulty, you take on some of her or his tasks. This increases your workload for a period of time, but it allows your colleague the time needed to deal with the difficult patient.

When might accommodation be an inappropriate approach to conflict in a hospital or clinic setting?

This approach may no longer be appropriate if that same nurse expects you to continue to cover his or her tasks after the situation with the difficult patient has been resolved.

Compromising

A compromising approach strikes a balance between a commitment to goals and a commitment to relationships. The objective of a compromising approach is a quick solution that will work for both parties. Usually it involves both parties giving up something and meeting in the middle. Compromising is often used in labour negotiations, as typically there are multiple issues to resolve in a short period of time.

Table 6.4.4: *Compromising*

Types of Compromising	Results	Appropriate When
- Splitting the difference - Exchanging concessions - Finding middle ground	- Both parties may feel they lost the battle and feel the need to get even next time. - No relationship is established although it should also not cause relationship to deteriorate. - Danger of stalemate - Does not explore the issue in any depth	- Time pressures require quick solutions. - Collaboration or competition fails. - Short-term solutions are needed until more information can be obtained.

Application to Nursing—Compromise

When might compromise be an appropriate approach to conflict in a hospital or clinic setting?

You are currently on shift with another nurse that does the bare minimum and rarely likes to help his or her colleagues out. It is two hours since lunch and one of your hyperglycemic patients have not received their lunch tray. You approach your colleague and ask him or her to go look for the tray while you draw blood from a patient for them. The other nurse agrees as he or she has been having difficulty with the patient that needs a blood draw.

When might a compromise be an inappropriate approach to conflict in a hospital or clinic setting?

It would be inappropriate to continue to ask the nurse to do tasks for you that are less appealing than the tasks you take on.

Collaborating

Collaborating is an approach that demonstrates a high commitment to goals and also a high commitment to relationships. This approach is used in an attempt to meet concerns of all parties. Trust and willingness for risk is required for this approach to be effective.

Table 6.4.5: *Collaborating*

Type of Collaborating	Results	Appropriate When
- Maximizing use of fixed resources - Working to increase resources - Listening and communicating to promote understanding of interests and values - Learning from each other's insight	- Builds relationships and improves potential for future problem solving - Promotes creative solutions	- Parties are committed to the process and adequate time is available. - The issue is too important to compromise. - New insights can be beneficial in achieving creative solutions. - There is a desire to work through hard feelings that have been a deterrent to problem solving. - There are diverse interests and issues at play. - Participants can be future focused.

Application to Nursing—Collaboration

When might collaboration be an appropriate approach to conflict in a hospital or clinic setting?

It may be appropriate to use collaboration in a hospital or clinic setting when discussing vacation cover off with team members at a team meeting. During a team meeting, time is available to discuss and focus on what is important for each member of the team.

When might collaboration be an inappropriate approach to conflict in a hospital or clinic setting?

Collaboration would be inappropriate in a discussion of a new policy that has been put in place if the team has little influence in making adjustments.

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6.5: Managing Intercultural Conflict

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, readers should:

- Identify and describe the five types of conflict.
- Identify and describe the style of conflict present in a given situation.
- Understand how and why individuals approach conflict in various ways.
- Understand how and why individuals manage conflict in various ways and be able to suggest more productive ways for handling intercultural conflict.
- Explain the four-skill approach to managing intercultural conflict.

Conflict is a part of all human relationships (Canary, 2003). Almost any issue can spark conflict—*money, time, religion, politics, culture*—and almost anyone can get into a conflict. Conflicts are happening all around the world at the personal, societal, political, and international levels. Conflict is not simple and it's not just a matter of disagreement. According to Wilmot & Hocker (2010), “**conflict** is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals. (p. 11)” There are several aspects of conflict that we must consider when pondering this definition and its application to intercultural communication.

Expressed Struggle

Conflict is a communication process that is expressed verbally and nonverbally. Wilmot & Hocker assert that communication creates conflict, communication reflects conflict, and communication is the vehicle for the management of conflict (Wilmot & Hocker, 1998). Often, conflict is easily identified because one party openly and verbally disagrees with the other, but intrapersonal, or internal conflict, may exist for some time before being expressed. An example could be family members avoiding each other because both think, “I don’t want to see them for awhile because of what they did.” The **expression** of the struggle is often activated by a triggering event which brings the conflict to everyone’s attention. In the case of family members, a triggering event could be going on vacation instead of attending a golden wedding anniversary party or other significant life event.

Interdependent

Parties engaged in **expressed struggle** do so because they are **interdependent**. “A person who is not dependent upon another—that is, who has no special interest in what the other does—has no conflict with that other person” (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). In other words, each parties’ choices effect the other because conflict is a mutual activity. Each decision impacts the other.

Consider the teenager who chooses to wear an obnoxious or offensive t-shirt before catching the bus. People with no connections to the teen and notice the t-shirt are unlikely to engage in conflict. They have never seen the teen before, and probably won’t again. The ill-advised decision to wear the t-shirt does not impact them, therefore the reason to engage in conflict does not exist.

The same scenario involving a teen and their parents would probably turn out differently. Because parents and teens are interdependent, the ill-advised decision to wear an offensive t-shirt could quickly escalate into a power struggle over individual autonomy that leads to harsh words and hurt feelings.

Perception

Parties in conflict have perceptions about their own position and the position of others. Each party may also have a different perception of any given situation. We can anticipate having such differences due to a number of factors that create **perceptual filters** or **cultural frames** that influence our responses to the situation. Such influences can be things like culture, race & ethnicity; gender & sexuality; knowledge; impressions of the messenger; and previous experience. These factors and more conspire to form the **perceptual filters** through which we experience conflict.

Clashes in Goals, Resources, and Behaviors

Conflict arises from differences. It occurs whenever parties disagree over their values, motivations, ideas, or desires. The perception might be that goals are mutually exclusive, or there's not enough resources to go around, or one party is sabotaging another. When conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep need is typically at the core of the problem. When the legitimacy of the conflicting needs is recognized, it opens pathways to problem-solving.

Conflict Types

Conflict can be difficult to analyze because it occurs in so many different settings. Knowing the various types of conflict that occur in interpersonal relationships helps us to identify appropriate strategies for managing conflict. Mark Cole (1996) states that there are five types of interpersonal conflict: affective, interest, value, cognitive, and goal.

- **Affective** conflict occurs when people become aware that their feelings and emotions are incompatible. For example, if a romantic couple wants to go out to eat, but one of the partners is a vegetarian while the other is on the Paleo diet, what do they do? The food choices that they have committed to may impact their feelings for each other causing them to question a future together. If the same romantic couple marries and begins to raise children, what will their diet consist of? Do they follow the Paleo diet or the vegetarian one? **Conflict of interest** arises when people disagree about a plan of action or when they have incompatible preferences for a course of action. A difference in ideologies or values between relational partners is called **value conflict**. Our romantic partners eating preferences may be the result of strongly held religious or political views. Remember the old saying, "Never talk about religion and politics." Many people engage in **value conflict** about religion and politics.
- **Cognitive conflict** is when people become aware that their thought processes or perceptions are in conflict. Our romantic partners may disagree about the meaning of a wink from a car salesman as they shopped for a new car. One of the partners believes that the wink was friendly and meant to build a relationship with the couple, but the other partner saw the wink as a sign that the couple would get a better deal if they looked seriously at a specific car.
- **Goal conflict** occurs when people disagree about a preferred outcome or end state. Our car-shopping romantic partners need transportation. For one, the cost of a new car reinforces the choice made to continue using public transportation to save the money not spent for a house. For the other, buying a new car means gaining access to the suburbs where they can afford to buy a new house now.

Rarely do the types of conflict stand alone. Most often, several types of conflict are found intertwined within each other and within the context itself. The actual situation in which the conflict happens can occur on the personal level, the societal level, and even the international level. How we choose to manage the conflict may depend on the types of conflict, the contexts that they occur within, and the particular situation.

Characteristics of Intercultural Conflict

Intercultural conflicts are often characterized by more ambiguity, language issues, and the clash of conflict styles than same culture conflict. Intercultural conflict characteristics rest on the principles discussed in greater depth in the foundation chapters. These principles stressed that culture is dynamic and heterogeneous, but learned. Values are manifest in beliefs and behaviors, which lead to the **worldviews** that guide our perception and navigation through life. Michelle LeBaron (2003) states that "cultures affect the ways we name, frame, blame, and attempt to tame conflicts (p. 3)."

Ambiguity, or the confusion about how to handle or define the conflict, is often present in intercultural conflict because of the multi-layered and heterogeneous nature of culture. What appears on the surface of the conflict may mask what is more deeply hidden below. Verbally indirect, high context cultures, may be reluctant to use words to explore issues of extreme importance that verbally direct, and low context cultures need to access the symbolic levels that are largely outside of their awareness. Yet, knowing the general norms of a group, does not predict the behavior of a specific member of a group. Dimensions of context, and individual differences can be crucial to understanding.

Language issues can also add to the confusion—or clarity—as we try to **name, frame, blame**, and tame the conflict. Not knowing each other's languages very well, could make conflict resolution difficult, and remaining silent could also provide a needed "cooling off" period with time to think. The Western approach to conflict resolution often means labeling and analyzing the smaller components parts of an issue (**name, frame, blame**), before a resolution (**tame**) can be proposed. The Eastern approach to conflict resolution often means reinforcing all aspects of the relationship (**tame**), before ever discussing the issue (**name**,

frame, blame)—if at all. In the Eastern approach, language is more of a means of creating and maintaining identity than solving a problem.

Intercultural Conflict Management

Culture is always a factor in conflict, though it rarely causes it alone. When differences surface between people, organizations, and nations, culture is always present, shaping perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. Attitudes and behaviors shared with dominant or national cultures often seem to be *normal, natural, or the way things are done*. Our cultural background, and how we were raised, largely determines how we deal with conflict.

The term **facework** refers to the communication strategies that people “use to establish, sustain, or restore a preferred social identity to others during interaction” (Samp, 2015, p. ?). Goffman (1959) claims that everyone is concerned about how others perceive them. To lose **face** is to publicly suffer a diminished self-image, and saving **face** is to be liked, appreciated, and approved by others. Brown & Levinson (1987) use the concept of face to explain politeness, and to them politeness is universal, resulting from people’s face needs.

Facework varies from culture to culture and influences conflict styles. For example, people from individualistic cultures tend to be more concerned with saving their own face rather than anyone else’s face. This results in a tendency to use more direct conflict management styles. In contrast, people from collectivistic cultures tend to be more concerned with preserving group harmony and saving the other person’s **face** during conflict. Making use of a less direct conversation style to protect the other or make them look good is considered the best way to manage **facework**.

Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2004) is based a number of assumptions about the extent to which **face** negotiated within a culture and what existing value patterns shape culture members’ preferences for the process of negotiating face in conflict situations. The **Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory** is not only influenced by the individual and culture, but also the relationship and the situation of the people experiencing the conflict.

Two Approaches to Conflict

Ways of **naming** and **framing** vary across cultural boundaries. People generally deal with conflict in the way that they learned while growing up. For those accustomed to a calm and rational discussion, screaming and yelling may seem to be a dangerous conflict. Yet, conflicts are subject to different interpretations, based on cultural preference, context, and **facework** ideals.

- **Direct Approaches** is favored by cultures that think conflict is a good thing, and that conflict should be approached **directly**, because working through conflict results in more solid and stronger relationships. This approach emphasizes using precise language, and articulating issues carefully. The best solution is based on solving for set of criteria that has been agreed upon by both parties beforehand.
- **Indirect Approaches** on the other hand are favored by cultures that view conflict as destructive for relationships and prefer to deal with conflict **indirectly**. These cultures think that when people disagree, they should adapt to the consensus of the group rather than engage in conflict. Confrontations are seen as destructive and ineffective. Silence and avoidance are viewed as effective tools to manage conflict. Intermediaries or mediators are used when conflict negotiation is unavoidable, and people who undermine group harmony may face sanctions or ostracism.
- **Emotionally Expressive** people or cultures are those who value intense displays of emotion during disagreement. Outward displays of emotion are seen as indicating that one really cares and is committed to resolving the conflict. It is thought that it is better to show emotion through expressive nonverbal behavior and words than to keep feelings inside and hidden from the world. Trust is gained through the sharing of emotions, and that sharing is necessary for credibility.
- **Emotionally Restrained** People or cultures are those who think that disagreements are best discussed in an emotionally calm manner. Emotions are controlled through “internalization” and few, if any, verbal or nonverbal expressions will be displayed. A sensitivity to hurting feelings or protecting the **face** or honor of the other is paramount. Trust is earned through what is seen as emotional maturity, and that maturity is necessary to appear credible.

Conflict Styles

Miscommunication and misunderstanding between people within the same culture can feel overwhelming enough, but when this occurs with people of another culture or co-culture, we may feel a serious sense of stress. Frequently, all of the good intentions and patience we are able to use during lower-stress encounters can be forgotten, and sometimes we may find that our behavior

can surprise even ourselves. Because of this, intercultural conflict experts have developed conflict style inventories that help us to understand our own personal tendencies toward dealing with conflict, and the tendencies others may have.

The **Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory** or **ICS** (Hammer, 2005), measures people's approaches to conflict along two different continuums: direct/indirect and expressive/restrained. Different individuals, but also people of different national cultures, approach conflict in different ways.

The **discussion style** combines *direct* and emotionally restrained dimensions. As it is a verbally direct approach, people who use this style are comfortable expressing disagreements. User perceived strengths of this approach are that it confronts problems, explores arguments, and maintains a calm atmosphere during the conflict. The weaknesses perceived by others is that it is difficult to read "read between the lines," it appears logical but unfeeling, and it can be uncomfortable with emotional arguments. **Discussion style** can often be found in Northern Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and various co-cultures in the United States.

The **engagement style** emphasizes a *verbally direct* and *emotionally expressive* approach to dealing with conflict. This style views intense verbal and nonverbal expressions of emotion as demonstrating a willingness to resolve the conflict. User perceived strengths to this approach are that it provides detailed explanations, instructions, and information. This style expresses opinions and shows feelings. The weaknesses perceived by others are the lack of concern with the views and feelings of others along with the potential for dominantly rude behavior. Individual viewpoints are not separated from emotion. **Engagement style** is often used in Mediterranean Europe, Russia, Israel, Latin America, and various co-cultures in the United States.

The **accommodating style** combines the *indirect* and *emotionally restrained* approaches. People who use this approach may send ambiguous message because they believe that by doing so, the conflict will not get out of control. Silence and avoidance are also considered worthy tools. User perceived strengths to this approach are sensitivity to feelings of the other party, control of emotional outburst, and consideration to alternative meaning of ambiguous messages. Weaknesses as perceived by others are difficulty in voicing your own opinion, appearing to be uncommitted or dishonest, and difficulty in providing explanations.

Accommodators tend to avoid direct expression of feelings by using intermediaries, friends or relatives who informally act on their behalf when dealing with the conflict. Mediation tends to be used in more formal situations when one person believes that conflict will encourage growth in the relationship. **Accommodating style** is often used in East Asia, North America and South America.

The **dynamic style** uses indirect communication along with more emotional expressiveness. These people are comfortable with emotions, but tend to speak in metaphors and often use mediators. Their credibility is grounded in their degree of emotional expressiveness. User perceived strengths to this approach are using third parties to gather information and resolve conflicts, being skilled at observing nonverbal behaviors, and being comfortable with emotional displays. Weaknesses as perceived by others are appearing too emotional, unreasonable, and possibly devious, while rarely getting to the point. **Dynamic style** is often used in the Middle East, India, Sub-Saharan Africa, and various co-cultures in the United States.

It is important to recognize that people, and cultures, deal with conflict in a variety of ways for a variety of different reasons. Preferred styles are not static and rigid. People use different conflict styles with different partners. Gender, ethnicity, and religion may all influence how we handle conflict. Conflict may even occur over economic, political, and social issues.

Two Approaches to Managing Conflict

How people choose to deal with conflict in any given situation depends on the type of conflict and their relationship to the other person. Cognitive conflicts with close friends may be more discussion based in the United States, but more accommodating in Japan. Both are focused on preserving the harmony within the relationship. However, if the cognitive conflict takes place between acquaintances or strangers, where maintaining a relationship is not as important, the engagement or dynamic styles may come out.

Considering all the variations in how people choose to deal with conflict, it's important to distinguish between productive and destructive conflict as well as cooperative and competitive conflict.

- **Destructive conflict** leads people to make sweeping generalizations about the problem. Groups or individuals escalate the issues with negative attitudes. The conflict starts to deviate from the original issues, and anything in the relationship is open for examination or re-visiting. Participants try to jockey for power while using threats, coercion, and deception as polarization occurs. Leaders display militant, single-minded traits to rally their followers.
- **Productive conflict** features skills that make it possible to manage conflict situations effectively and appropriately. First

the participants narrow the conflict to the original issue so that the specific problem is easier to understand. Next, the leaders stress mutually satisfactory outcomes and direct all their efforts to cooperative problem-solving. Research from Alan Sillars and colleagues found that during disputes, individuals selectively remember information that supports themselves and contradicts their partners, view their own communication more positively than their partners', and blame partners for failure to resolve the conflict (Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000). Sillars and colleagues also found that participant thoughts are often locked in simple, unqualified and negative views. Only in 2% of cases did respondents attribute cooperativeness to their partners and uncooperativeness to themselves (Sillars et al., 2000).

- **Competitive conflict** promotes escalation. When conflicts escalate and anger peaks, our minds are filled with negative thoughts of all the grievances and resentments we feel towards others (Sillars et al., 2000). Conflicted parties set up self-reinforcing and mutually confirming expectations. Coercion, deception, suspicion, rigidity, and poor communication are all hallmarks of a **competitive** atmosphere.
- **cooperative conflict** promotes perceived similarity, trust, flexibility, and open communication. If both parties are committed to the resolution process, there is a sense of joint ownership in reaching a conclusion.

Because it is very difficult to turn a **competitive conflict** relationship into a **cooperative conflict** relationship, a **cooperative** relationship must be encouraged from the very beginning before the conflict starts to escalate. A **cooperative conflict** atmosphere promotes perceived similarity, trust, flexibility, and open communication. If both parties are committed to the resolution process, there is a sense of joint ownership in reaching a conclusion.

Consequently, the most important thing you can do to enhance *cooperative and productive conflict* is to practice critical self-reflection. Business consultants in the United States offer various versions of the **seven-step conflict resolution model** that is a good place to start. The seven steps are:

- State the Problem. Ask each of the conflicting parties to state their view of the problem as simply and clearly as possible.
- Restate the Problem. Ask each party to restate the problem as they understand the other party to view it.
- Understand the Problem. Each party must agree that the other side understands both ways of looking at the problem.
- Pinpoint the Issue. Zero in on the objective facts.
- Ask for Suggestions. Ask how the problem should be solved.
- Make a Plan.
- Follow up.

A quick review of the previous seven steps betrays its western roots with the unspoken assumption that conflicting individuals will be **verbally direct** and **emotionally restrained** or advocates of the **discussion style** of conflict.

Culture and Managing Conflict

The strongest cultural factor that influences your conflict approach is whether you belong to an individualistic or collectivistic culture (Ting-Toomey, 1997). People raised in collectivistic cultures often view direct communication regarding conflict as personal attacks (Nishiyama, 1971), and consequently are more likely to manage conflict through avoidance or accommodation. People from individualistic cultures feel comfortable agreeing to disagree, and don't particularly see such clashes as personal affronts (Ting-Toomey, 1985). They are more likely to compete, react, or collaborate.

Gudykunst & Kim (2003) suggest that if you are an individualist in a dispute with a collectivist, you should consider the following:

- Recognize that collectivist may prefer to have a third party mediate the conflict so that those in conflict can manage their disagreement without direct confrontation to preserve relational harmony.
- Use more indirect verbal messages.
- Let go of the situation if the other person does not recognize the conflict exists or does not want to deal with it.

If you are a collectivist and are conflicting with someone from an individualist culture, the following guidelines may help:

- Recognize that individualists often separate conflicts from people. It's not personal.
- Use an assertive style, filled with "I" messages, and be direct by candidly stating your opinions and feelings.
- Manage conflicts even if you'd rather avoid them.

Another thing to consider is replacing the **ethno-centric** "seven steps" with a more culturally friendly, or **ethno-relative, four skills approach** from **Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory** (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). These skills are:

- **Mindful Listening:** Pay special attention to the cultural and personal assumptions being expressed in the conflict interaction. Paraphrase verbal and nonverbal content and emotional meaning of the other party's message to check for accurate interpretation.
- **Mindful Reframing:** This is another face-honoring skill that requires the creation of alternative contexts to shape our understanding of the conflict behavior.
- **Collaborative Dialogue:** An exchange of dialogue that is oriented fully in the present moment and builds on Mindful Listening and Mindful Reframing to practice communicating with different linguistic or contextual resources.
- **Culture-based Conflict Resolution Steps** is a seven-step conflict resolution model that guides conflicting groups to identify the background of a problem, analyze the cultural assumptions and underlying values of a person in a conflict situation, and promotes ways to achieve harmony and share a common goal.
 - What is my cultural and personal assessment of the problem?
 - Why did I form this assessment and what is the source of this assessment?
 - What are the underlying assumptions or values that drive my assessment?
 - How do I know they are relative or valid in this conflict context?
 - What reasons might I have for maintaining or changing my underlying conflict premise?
 - How should I change my cultural or personal premises into the direction that promotes deeper intercultural understanding?
 - How should I flex **adaptively** on both verbal and nonverbal conflict style levels in order to display **facework** sensitive behaviors and to facilitate a productive common-interest outcome?

(Ting-Toomey, 2012; Fisher-Yoshida, 2005; Mezirow, 2000)

Conclusion

Just as there is no consensus across cultures about what constitutes a conflict or how the conflicting events should be framed, there are also many different conflict response theories. LeBaron, Hammer, Sillars, Gudykunst, Kim, and Ting-Toomey are only a few of the many researchers who have explored the complexities of intercultural conflict. It is also a topic of interest for sociologists, psychologists, business managers, educators, and communities. Acquiring knowledge about personal and intercultural conflict styles can hopefully help us transform conflicts into meaningful dialogue, and become better communicators in the process.

Key Vocabulary

- affective conflict
- conflict of interest
- value conflict
- cognitive conflict
- goal conflict
- direct vs.indirect approach
- emotional expressiveness vs. restraint
- destructive vs. productive
- competitive vs. cooperative
- Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory
- mindful listening
- mindful reframing
- collaborative dialogue
- culture-based conflict resolution steps
- conflict
- face
- facework

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7: SPEECHES

- 7.1: Benefits of Public Speaking
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- 7.10: How can we reduce our use of filler words?

7.1: Benefits of Public Speaking

American Colleges and Universities, there are a core set of skills that are necessary “both for a globally engaged democracy and for a dynamic innovation fueled economy” (Rhodes, 2010, p. 10). In the category of “Intellectual and practical skills” **public speaking** is listed as one of these core skills. This is not particularly surprising given that communication skills are critical for intellectual development, career trajectory, and civic engagement. Public speaking is universally applicable to all types of majors and occupations and is seen by U.S. employers as a critical employability skill for job seekers (Rockler-Gladen, 2009; U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). No matter what your ambitions and interests are, developing speaking skills will benefit your personal, professional, and public life.



Personal

People don't just give presentations on the job and in classes. At times we are called upon to give speeches in our personal lives. It may be for a special event, such as a toast at a wedding. We may be asked to give a eulogy at a funeral for a friend or loved one. As a part of volunteer work, one may have to introduce a guest speaker at an event or present or accept an award for service. Chapter 17, “Special Occasion Speaking” by Scholl will help you to prepare for these brief but important speeches. Developing the skill to give these types of speeches can help us to fulfill essential roles in our family and community.

Another great personal benefit of public speaking is that it builds self confidence. It's no surprise that speaking in public is scary, but by engaging in the activity you will build self-confidence through the experience. Chapter 11, “Speaking with Confidence” by Grapsy (in this book) will give you advice on how to minimize speech apprehension, and the advice can be used in many other social situations as well.

Action is a great restorer and builder of confidence. Inaction is not only the result, but the cause, of fear. Perhaps the action you take will be successful; perhaps different action or adjustments will have to follow. But any action is better than no action at all. ~ Norman Vincent Peale

Professional

TV announcers, teachers, lawyers, and entertainers must be able to speak well, but most other professions require or at the very least can benefit from the skills found in public speaking.

It is believed 70% of jobs today involve some form of public speaking (Aras, 2012). With the recent economic shift from manufacturing to service careers, the ability to communicate with others has become crucial. Top CEOs advise that great leaders must be able to communicate ideas effectively, they must be able to persuade, build support, negotiate and speak effectively in public (Farrell, 2011). The chapters on “Informative Speaking” and “Persuasive Speaking” can help readers understand how

to write presentations that enhance their leadership skills. But before you even start a career, you have to get a job. Effective speaking skills make you more attractive to employers, enhancing your chances of securing employment and later advancing within your career. Employers, career counselors, and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) all list good communication skills at the top of the list of qualities sought in potential employees. According to NACE's executive director, Marilyn Mackes, the Job Outlook 2013 Report found that employers are looking for people who can communicate effectively (Koncz & Allen, 2012). Monster.com advises, "articulating thoughts clearly and concisely will make a difference in both a job interview and subsequent job performance" (McKay, 2005).

Public

Learning about public speaking will allow you to participate in democracy at its most basic level. Public speaking is important in creating and sustaining a society, which includes informed, active participants. Even if you do not plan to run for office, learning about public speaking helps you to listen more carefully to and critically evaluate other's speeches. In fact the "Listening Effectively" and "Critical Thinking and Reasoning" chapters in this book by Goddu and Russ will help you to develop those skills. Listening and critical thinking allow you to understand public dilemmas, form an opinion about them, and participate in resolving them. The progress of the past century involving segregation, women's rights and environmental protection are the result of people advancing new ideas and speaking out to others to persuade them to adopt changes.



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7.2: Oral presentations

- Who is someone whose presentation style you admire? Describe it. What do they do when they present that you like? Why do you like it?
- How do you feel when you have to present? Do you feel nervous? Excited? Stressed out? What do you do to manage these emotions?
- What do you do to prepare for a presentation?
- What strategies or techniques do you use when you present? How might this differ from one context, culture, or environment to another?

Many people have very limiting beliefs about presentations and their own abilities to give one. Examining your skills, fears, and preferences can be helpful in becoming more comfortable in presenting.

You don't have to be perfect

Letting go of perfection can be the hardest guideline to apply to ourselves. It's also in our nature to compare ourselves to others. You might forgive a classmate for the occasional "umm" during a speech, but then turn right around and spend a lot of mental effort chastising yourself for making the same error in your presentation. We all have distinct strengths and weaknesses. Knowing yourself and where you need to improve is an important first step. Recognizing that Rome wasn't built in a day, and that you won't become a world-class speaker overnight, may be easier said than done.

It may help to recognize that your listeners don't want to see you fail; on the contrary, they want you to do well because when you do, they will be able to relax, enjoy, and understand your presentation. You might be surprised to know that not everyone counts each time you say "umm." However, if you do tend to say "umm," "ahhh," or other filler phrases repeatedly, they can distract your audience from your message.

Organization is important

Have you ever thought of a great comeback to something someone said a while after they said it? Wouldn't it have been nice to be quick and articulate and able to deliver your comeback right then and there? Speaking in public gives you a distinct advantage over "off the cuff" improvisation and stumbling for the right comeback. You get to prepare and be organized. You know you'll be speaking to an audience in order to persuade them to do, think, or consider an idea or action.

What issues might they think of while you are speaking? What comebacks or arguments might they say if it were a debate? You get to anticipate what the audience will want to know, say, or hear. You get to prepare your statements and visual aids to support your speech and create the timing, organization, and presentation of each point. Many times in life we are asked to take a position and feel unprepared to respond. Speaking in public gives you the distinct opportunity to prepare and organize your ideas or points in order to make an impact and respond effectively.

Speaking in public is like participating in a conversation

This may sound odd at first, but consider the idea of an "enlarged conversation" described by Julia Wood (2001). She expresses a clear connection between everyday speech and public dialogue. Sometimes we take a speech turn, while at other times we remain silent while others take their turn. We do this all day long and think nothing of it. We are often the focus of attention from friends and colleagues, and it hardly ever makes us nervous. When we get on a stage, however, some people perceive that the whole game has changed. It hasn't. We still take turns, and the speaker will take a longer turn as part of an enlarged conversation. People in the audience will still communicate feedback and the speaker will still negotiate their turn just the way they would in an everyday conversation. The difference is all about how we, as the speaker, perceive the context.

Some people feel that the level of expectations, the need for perfection, or the idealistic qualities we perceive in eloquent

speakers are required, and then focus on deficiencies, fears, and the possibility of failing to measure up. By letting go of this ideal, we can approach the challenge with a more pragmatic frame of mind. The rules we play comfortably by in conversation every day are the same as we shift to a larger conversation within the context of public speaking. This viewpoint can offer an alternative as you address your apprehensions and can help you let go of unrealistic expectations.

What makes a presentation successful

A successful presentation occurs when the presenter and the audience connect. Authenticity and passion can resonate so much with an audience that it can outweigh elements otherwise considered pitfalls. What you bring to the audience affects what they get from your presentation.

Verbal cues

Pitch

Do you have a deep, low voice, or a high-pitched one? We all have a normal speaking pitch where we are most comfortable, but we can move our pitch up or down. Use pitch inflections to make your delivery more interesting and emphatic. If you don't change pitch at all, your delivery will be monotone, which gets boring for the audience very quickly.

Volume

Do you speak softly or loudly? Adjust the volume of your voice to your environment and audience. If you're in a large auditorium, speak up, or better yet, use a microphone! It's not a badge of honour to avoid using a microphone; use one to help make your presentation accessible to those who may have hearing disabilities. You may need to use more volume to compensate for ambient noise like traffic or an air conditioner, or for presenting in room with a lot of hard surfaces (where the sound can bounce off and echo). You can also use volume strategically to emphasize the most important points in your speech.

Emphasis

Stress certain words in your speech to add emphasis to them, that is, to indicate that they are particularly important. You may also use a visual aid to emphasize key points by using photographs or charts.

Enunciation

Practice enunciating your words, which means practicing saying each word distinctly. If you speak too quickly, the end of one word can start to blend into the start of another. One way to compensate for this is to practice slowing down your rate of speech by taking a micro-break between each word. If you've ever been told you sound like you're mumbling (early in my career, I was told this all the time!), it helps to focus practice moving your lips, jaw, and tongue as you say each word and to speak with more volume. These techniques can seem difficult to remember in the moment of giving a presentation, but it can get easier with practice (which I know from experience!).

Rate

Are you a fast or slow speaker? The pace that you speak at will influence how well the audience can understand you. Pause for breath naturally during your speech. Your speaking rate should be appropriate for your topic. A rapid, lively rate communicates enthusiasm, urgency, or humour. A slower, moderated rate conveys respect and seriousness. By varying your rate within a speech, you can emphasize your main points and keep your audience engaged.

If you tend to speak too quickly or too softly, try practicing some vocal exercises, such as some of those described by Julian Treasure in his [2013 Ted Talk](#). Vocal exercises can help reduce your nervousness and improve your voice control, making it easier for your audience to understand your message.

Filler words

Try to minimize the use of filler words, such as like, er, um, and uh, because they can be distracting if they are overused. One way to find out whether you use filler phrases is to record yourself presenting and then watch it. You might be surprised to find out you're unconsciously saying something over and over—or that you only said twice what you thought you'd repeated a hundred times! Once you are aware of your tendency to use filler phrases, eliminating them can become a goal for improvement. A technique I find helpful is to try substituting a short pause in place of where I catch myself about to say a filler word.

Non-verbal cues

Gestures and body language

A gesture is “a movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, to express an idea or meaning” (OxfordDictionaries.com, 2015). You can use these to channel nervous energy into an enhancement of your speech, reinforcing important points, but they can be distracting if overused. If the audience is busy watching your hands fly around, they will not be able to concentrate on your words.

Watching a recording of yourself presenting can also be informative for other reasons. It can help you pick up on your body language cues that might be distracting for your audience. For example, you might see if you sway or rock; wring or rub your hands repeatedly; or fiddle with papers, pens, or other objects in your hands. Many of these habits are often carried out unconsciously because of nervousness. Once you're aware of doing these things, you can work to eliminate them. But how do you stop, for example, swaying or twirling your cue cards if you don't even realize you're doing it? Preparation and practice are key.

Here are some techniques to try:

- If you are swaying or rocking out of nervousness, trying to stand perfectly still might be incredibly difficult. Instead, consider turning that swaying or rocking into a gentle pacing.
- If you wring or rub your hands, you can instead try gesturing as you speak.
- If you fiddle with any objects that are in your hands, then make sure you present with empty hands! For example, if you don't have papers in your hand, you won't be able to twirl them, and if you don't have a pen in your hands, you won't be able to click it open and closed.

Eye contact

By recording yourself presenting and practicing in front of friends or family, you can also gauge what level of eye contact you are making. If you find you're presenting to just one or two people in the audience, you can try practicing looking in a “Z” gaze at the audience. Look first at the back left corner, then the back right, move to the front left, and then the right front. You can then move in reverse or start back at the beginning.

If you find you're having difficulty maintaining eye contact with the audience, try looking between people in the audience, cycling between 3 or 4 different areas. While you still may not be making eye contact with anybody, you will at least be looking out at the entire audience rather than at your feet, your notes, or at the wall at the back of the room.

Silence

Silence is a powerful technique if used well, but it is often overlooked. They can add emphasis and dramatic effect when you are speaking. They can also allow your audience some time to process the information you are sharing.

Presentation techniques

There are many different presentation techniques that you can use, but there is no single technique that may be “correct” or “the best.” The key is to use the ones you think will help you connect with your audience and help maintain their interest in your presentation.

The following list describes some strategies you can consider using in your presentation. It's important to note that this is not an

exhaustive list or and it's not an exhaustive or comprehensive discussion of these techniques.

Audience references – Highlight something common to the audience that will make them interested in the topic.

Current events – Refer to a current event in the news that demonstrates the relevance of your topic to the audience.

Question – Ask either a question that asks for a response from your audience, or a rhetorical question, which does not need a response but is designed to get them thinking about the topic.

Personal reference – Refer to a story about yourself that is relevant to the topic.

Storytelling – Include an anecdote, a narrative, or a story.

Storytelling can be a very powerful technique to help you connect with your audience. For better or worse, audiences are likely to remember anecdotes and narratives long after the statistics are forgotten. Human beings love stories and often will walk away from a speech moved by or remembering a powerful story or example more than anything else. A story can be a brief component in your presentation, or you can structure your entire presentation as a story.

From a Euro-Western dominant culture point of view, stories will often have linear structures, which is a “classic formula [where] a protagonist with goals meets an unexpected obstacle and a crisis results. The protagonist attempts to overcome the obstacle, leading to a climax, and finally a denouement. (There can also be interruptions and plot twists)” (Anderson, 2016, p. 65). However, this is but one perspective on storytelling. Storytelling structure, Protocols, and formats can differ from culture to culture.

For example, Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald, a member of the Sto:lo Nation and an Indigenous studies scholar at the University of British Columbia, describes how some Indigenous stories may not have a clear beginning, middle, or end (2012b). She also explains how Indigenous stories may have more than one meaning and they need to be told within context, including who the storyteller is, where that person is from, what culture is represented in the story, and the purpose of the story (Archibald, 2012b). Furthermore, Dr. Archibald describes how there may be Protocols around the telling of Indigenous stories, such as who can tell the story, to whom, when, where, and how (Archibald, 2012a).

Watch Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald (Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Sto:lo Nation) talk about Indigenous stories and their framework >>



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Watch Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald (Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Sto:lo Nation) talk about including Indigenous stories >>



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Furthermore, stories can be shared through spoken or written word, dance (such as the Lion Dance during Chinese New Year), music (such as hip hop), or visual means (such as art displays or interactive websites). 'Welila'ogwa Irene Isaac, a member of the 'Namgis First Nation and a contributing author to *Knowing Home: Braiding Indigenous Science with Western Science, Book 1*, describes how other cultural practices can be forms of storytelling as well, saying that "central to the cultural and spiritual practices of the Kwakwaka'wakw people is the Potlatch or Winter Ceremonies when stories are retold, dramatized, and shared" (2016, Chapter 14, para. 2).

What is important to take away from this brief discussion is that members of your audience may have different understandings of and experiences with what form a story takes, how it is structured, who can tell it, when it can be told, and how they (the audience) are to reflect on and interact with it. Before incorporating a story in your presentation, it's critical to consider context; Protocols; your audience; and your own relationship to the story, the story creator (or owner), and the culture from which it originates.

Preparing to Present

Here are some strategies for preparing to present.

As you rehearse and practice your presentation, try to identify the weaknesses in your delivery to improve on them. Try practising in front of a mirror or even recording yourself and playing it back. It's also helpful to get feedback from a supportive audience at this stage. Perhaps a few family members or friends could watch you give your presentation and provide some feedback. These sessions should help you get comfortable and help you remember what you want to say without having to constantly refer to notes.

If at all possible, access the room where you will be presenting. This way you can get a feel for its setup and decide how you will stand or move during your presentation.

If you are using technology to support your presentation (i.e., PowerPoint slides or a projector), test everything before you begin. Do a microphone check and test its volume, view your slides on the computer you will be using, check any weblinks, play videos to test their sound, or make a call to test the phone connection prior to your teleconference. Your audience will get restless quickly if they arrive and are expected to wait while you fix a technical problem. This can also make you seem disorganized and hurt your credibility as an authoritative speaker.

Contingency planning

Well before the day of your presentation, ask yourself, "What could go wrong?" This might sound like a good way to stress yourself out, but it can actually be very helpful. If you anticipate the worst-case scenario and are prepared for it, problems on the day of your presentation are less likely to bother you.

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7.3: Speaking Competencies

1. Useful Topic

The first speaking competency is *to select a topic that is appropriate to the audience and the occasion*. An advanced speaker selects a worthwhile topic that engages the audience. His topic also presents the audience with new information that they did not know before the speech. A beginning speaker selects a topic that lacks originality or is out of date. His topic provides no new information to the audience. An ineffective speaker may give a speech in which a single topic cannot be deduced by the audience.

2. Engaging Introduction

To formulate an introduction that orients the audience to the topic and the speaker is the second speaking competency. An advanced speaker writes an introduction that contains an excellent attention-getter. She firmly establishes her credibility. She provides a sound orientation to the topic, states her thesis clearly, and previews her points in a cogent and memorable way. For the beginning speaker, her attention-getter is mundane and she somewhat develops her credibility. Her thesis is awkwardly composed and she provides little direction for the audience. The ineffective speaker has no opening technique, no credibility statement and provides no background on the topic. In addition she has no thesis statement and no preview of her points.



3. Clear Organization

Competency three is *to use an effective organizational pattern*. An advanced speaker is very well organized and delivers a speech with clear main points. His points are mutually exclusive and directly related to the thesis. Further, he employs effective transitions and signposts to help the speech flow well. The beginning speaker has main points that are somewhat organized, but the content of these points may overlap. Transitions may also be present in his speech, but they are not particularly effective. In the ineffective speaker's speech, there is no clear organizational pattern, there are no transitions, and it sounds as if the information is randomly presented.

Don't leave inferences to be drawn when evidence can be presented. ~ Richard Wright

4. Well-Supported Ideas

Fourth on the list of speaking competencies is *to locate, synthesize, and employ compelling supporting materials*. In the advanced speaker's speech, her key points are well supported with a variety of credible materials, and her sources provide excellent support for her thesis. In addition, all of her sources are clearly cited. A beginning speaker has points that are generally supported with a fair mix of materials. Only some of her evidence supports her thesis, and her source citations need to be clarified. An ineffective speaker gives a speech with no supporting materials or no source citations.

5. Closure in Conclusion

The fifth speaking competency is *to develop a conclusion that reinforces the thesis and provides psychological closure*. The advanced speaker provides a clear and memorable summary of his points, and he refers back to the thesis or big picture. His speech also ends with a strong clincher or call to action. A beginning speaker provides some summary of his points, but there is no clear reference back to his thesis. The closing technique of his speech can also be strengthened. In an ineffective speaker's speech, there is no conclusion. His speech ends abruptly and without closure.



6. Clear and Vivid Language

To demonstrate a careful choice of words is the sixth speaking competency. An advanced speaker's language is exceptionally clear, imaginative and vivid. Her language is also completely free from bias, grammatical errors and inappropriate usage. The beginning speaker selects language that is adequate to make her point. She has some errors in grammar and occasionally uses slang, jargon or awkward sentence structure. The ineffective speaker has many errors in her grammar and syntax. She also mispronounces words and extensively uses slang, jargon, and/or sexist or racist terms.

7. Suitable Vocal Expression

Competency number seven is *to effectively use vocal expression and paralinguistics to engage the audience*. Excellent use of vocal variation, intensity and pacing are characteristics of the advanced speaker. His vocal expression is also natural and enthusiastic, and he avoids fillers. Some vocal variation is evident in the beginning speaker's speech. He also enunciates clearly, speaks audibly, and generally avoids fillers (e.g., "um," "uh," "like," etc.). An ineffective speaker is inaudible, enunciates poorly, and speaks in a monotone voice. His speech also has poor pacing, and he distracts listeners with fillers.

8. Corresponding Nonverbals

Eighth on the list of competencies is to *demonstrate nonverbal behavior that supports the verbal message*. An advanced speaker has posture, gestures, facial expression and eye contact that are natural, well developed, and display high levels of poise and confidence. Some reliance on notes is seen with the beginning speaker, but she has adequate eye contact. She also generally avoids distracting mannerisms. The ineffective speaker usually looks down and avoids eye contact. She has nervous gestures and other nonverbal behaviors that distract from or contradict the message.

Body language is a very powerful tool. We had body language before we had speech, and apparently, 80% of what you understand in a conversation is read through the body, not the words. ~ Deborah Bull



9. Adapted to the Audience

The ninth speaking competency is to *successfully adapt the presentation to the audience*. The advanced speaker shows how information is important to audience members, and his speech is tailored to their beliefs, values and attitudes. He may also make allusions to culturally shared experiences. A beginning speaker assumes but does not articulate the importance of the topic. His presentation is minimally adapted to the audience, and some of the ideas presented in the speech are removed from the audience's frame of reference or experiences. An ineffective speaker's speech is contrary to the audience's beliefs, values and attitudes. His message may be generic or canned and no attempt is made to establish common ground.

10. Adept Use of Visual Aids

To skillfully make use of visual aids is the tenth competency. Exceptional explanation and presentation of visual aids is characteristic of the advanced speaker. Her speech has visuals that provide powerful insight into the speech topic, and her visuals are of high professional quality. The beginning speaker's visual aids are generally well developed and explained, although there may be minor errors present in the visuals. An ineffective speaker uses visual aids that distract from her speech. Her visuals may not be relevant, or her visuals may be of poor professional quality.

11. Convincing persuasion

The eleventh and final speaking competency is to *construct an effectual persuasive message with credible evidence and sound reasoning*. An advanced speaker articulates the problem and solution in a clear, compelling manner. He supports his claims with powerful and credible evidence while completely avoiding reasoning fallacies. His speech also contains a memorable call to action. In the beginning speaker's speech, the problem and solution are evident, and most claims are supported with evidence. He also has generally sound reasoning and a recognizable call to action. For the ineffective speaker, the problem and/or solution

are not defined. His claims are not supported with evidence, his speech contains poor reasoning, and there is no call to action. Readers should note that the competencies listed above are not all inclusive. Ultimately one must adjust, expand, and apply these competencies as best fits the requirements of the speaking situation. But they do provide a starting point for new or less experienced speakers to begin to understand all of the interrelated components of a speech.



Being ignorant is not so much a shame, as being unwilling to learn. ~ Benjamin Franklin

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7.4: Types of Speeches and Speaking Occasions

There are three general purposes for speaking in public. The general purpose of a speech is usually determined by the occasion in which the speech will be presented. The first general purpose is to inform your audience. In an informative speech, the presenter will share information about a particular person, place, object, process, concept, or issue by defining, describing, or explaining. Occasions for which an informative speech would be presented include a report presented to coworkers, a teacher presenting information to his or her class, and a training session for a job. The second purpose for public speaking is to persuade. In a persuasive speech, the presenter will attempt to reinforce or change their audiences' beliefs, attitudes, feelings, or values. Several occasions where persuasion is used include a sales pitch to potential customers, a politician's campaign speech, or a debate during a public forum. The last general purpose is to commemorate or entertain. These types of speeches often strengthen the bonds between audience members from recalling a shared experience or intend to amuse audiences through humor, stories, or illustrations. Examples of this purpose include a toast, such as a best man's speech at a wedding reception; a eulogy to praise the dead; a commencement speech at graduation; or presenting an award. It is important to note that these general purposes may overlap one another. One might wish to use some forms of entertainment while informing or persuading his or her audience.



A desire presupposes the possibility of action to achieve it; action presupposes a goal which is worth achieving. ~ Ayn Rand

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7.5: Organizing Principles for Your Speech

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and understand how to use at least five different organizing principles for a speech.

There are many different ways to organize a speech, and none is “better” or “more correct” than the others. The choice of an organizing principle, or a core assumption around which everything else is arranged, depends on the subject matter, the rhetorical situation, and many other factors, including your preference as speaker.

The left column of Table 7.5.1 presents seventeen different organizing principles to consider. The center column explains how the principle works, and the right column provides an applied example based on our sample speech about the First Transcontinental Railroad. For example, using a biographical organizing principle, you might describe the journey of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804; the signing of the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862, and the completion of the first Transcontinental Express train trip in 1876. As another example, using a spatial organizing principle, you might describe the mechanics of how a steam locomotive engine works to turn the train wheels, which move on a track to travel across distances.

As you read each organizational structure, consider how the main points and subheadings might change or be adapted to meet each pattern.

Table 7.5.1 Sample Organizing Principles for a Speech

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
1. Time (Chronological)	Structuring your speech by time shows a series of events or steps in a process, which typically has a beginning, middle, and end. “Once upon a time stories” follow a chronological pattern.	Before the First Transcontinental Railroad, the events that led to its construction, and its impact on early America...
2. Comparison	Structuring your speech by comparison focuses on the similarities and/or differences between points or concepts.	A comparison of pre- and post-First Transcontinental Railroad North America, showing how health and life expectancy remained the same.
3. Contrast	Structure your speech by using contrasting points highlights the differences between items and concepts.	A contrast of pre- and post-First Transcontinental Railroad North America, by shipping times, time it took to communicate via letter, or how long it took to move out West.
4. Cause and Effect	Structuring your speech by cause and effect establishes a relationship between two events or situations, making the connection clear.	The movement of people and goods out West grew considerably from 1750 to 1850. With the availability of a new and faster way to go West, people generally supported its construction.

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
5. Problem and Solution	Structuring your speech by problem and solution means you state the problem and detail how it was solved. This approach is effective for persuasive speeches.	Manufacturers were producing better goods for less money at the start of the Industrial Revolution, but they lack a fast, effective method of getting their goods to growing markets. The First Transcontinental Railroad gave them speed, economy, and access to new markets.
6. Classification (Categorical)	Structuring your speech by classification establishes categories.	At the time the nation considered the First Transcontinental Railroad, there were three main types of transportation: by water, by horse, and by foot.

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
7. Biographical	Structuring your speech by biography means examining specific people as they relate to the central topic.	• 1804: Lewis and Clark travel 4,000 miles in over two years across America • 1862: President Lincoln signs the Pacific Railroad Act • 1876: The Transcontinental Express from New York arrives in San Francisco with a record-breaking time of 83 hours and 39 minutes • 2009: President Obama can cross America by plane in less than 5 hours
8. Space (Spatial)	Structuring your speech by space involves the parts of something and how they fit to form the whole.	A train uses a heat source to heat water, create steam, and turn a turbine, which moves a lever that causes a wheel to move on a track.
9. Ascending and Descending	Structuring your speech by ascending or descending order involves focusing on quantity and quality. One good story (quality) leads to the larger picture, or the reverse.	A day in the life of a traveler in 1800. Incremental developments in transportation to the present, expressed through statistics, graphs, maps and charts.
10. Psychological	It is also called “Monroe’s Motivated Sequence” (Ayres, J. and Miller, J., 1994). Structuring your speech on the psychological aspects of the audience involves focusing on their inherent needs and wants. See Maslow and Shutz. The speaker calls <i>attention</i> to a <i>need</i> , then focuses on the satisfaction of the need, <i>visualization</i> of the solution, and ends with a proposed or historical <i>action</i> . This is useful for a persuasive speech.	When families in the year 1800 went out West, they rarely returned to see family and friends. The country as a whole was an extension of this distended family, separated by time and distance. The railroad brought families and the country together.
11. Elimination	Structuring your speech using the process of elimination involves outlining all the possibilities.	The First Transcontinental Railroad helped pave the way for the destruction of the Native American way of life in 1870. After examining treaties, relocation and reservations, loss of the buffalo, disease and war, the railroad can be accurately considered the catalyst for the end of an era.
12. Ceremonial: Events, Ceremonies, or Celebrations	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank dignitaries and representatives. 2. Mention the importance of the event. 3. Mention the relationship of the event to the audience. 4. Thank the audience for their participation in the event, ceremony, or celebration.	Thanking the representatives, builders, and everyone involved with the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. The railroad will unite America, and bring us closer in terms of trade, communication and family. Thank you for participating in today’s dedication.

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
13. Awards	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank everyone for coming together. 2. Discuss the history and importance of the award. 3. Give a brief biography of the person who will receive the award (often nonspecific to keep people guessing and to build suspense). 4. Announce the name of the award recipient. 5. Present the award (present award with left hand, shake with right). 6. Award recipient may give a speech. 7. Transition to the next item or thank everyone for participating.	>Thank everyone for coming together. The Golden Spike Award was created in honor of all the great men and women that made today possible. The person receiving this award needs no introduction. His/her tireless efforts to build partnerships, coalitions, and raise support for the railroad have been unwavering. (Name), please come and receive the Golden Spike Award. (Speech/no speech.) Thank you, everyone, for coming.
14. Toast: Weddings or Similar Gatherings	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank everyone for coming together. 2. Discuss the importance of the event (wedding). 3. Mention the relationship of the couple to the audience or the speaker to the person being celebrated. 4. Add one short sentence. 5. Optional: Conclude, thanking the audience for participation in the event, ceremony, or celebration.	Thank everyone for coming together. I've know the groom since he played with toy trains and only now, with (partner's name), can I see how far his involvement in our new cross-country train got him. "All the best of healthy and happiness." Thank you everyone for joining us in this celebration of (name) and (name) (point 5 is optional).
15. Speaker Introductions	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank everyone for coming together. 2. Provide a brief biography of the person who will speak or establish their credibility. 3. Discuss the speaker and his or her topic. 4. Announce the name of the speaker, and possibly once their speech has concluded. 5. Transition to the next item or thank everyone for participating.	Thank everyone for coming together. Today's speaker has a long history in the development of the train, including engineering technical aspects of steam locomotion. Today he/she will address the steps that lead to our very own cross-country railroad. Please help me welcome (name). (Optional after speech: Thank you, everyone. Next we have...)
16. After-Dinner Speech	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank everyone for coming together. 2. Provide a fun or humorous attention statement. 3. Discuss the topic in a light-hearted manner with connected stories, anecdotes, or even a joke or two. 4. Connect the humor to the topic of importance 5. Thank everyone for participating.	Thank you for coming together to celebrate the driving of the Golden Spike. There have been many challenging moments along the way that I would like to share tonight (stories, anecdotes, or even a joke). While it's been a long journey, we've made it. Thank you for coming tonight.
17. Oral Interpretation	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Draw attention to the piece of literature. 2. Explain its significance, context, and background. 3. Interpret the manuscript for the audience. 4. Conclude with key points from the reading. 5. Reiterate the main point of the piece of literature.	Today I would like to share with you the proclamation that led to the railroad you see before you today. (Interpret the proclamation, using your voice to bring the written word alive.) Without the foresight, vision and leadership we can now see, this railroad might still be a dream.

Key Takeaway

A speech may be organized according to any of many different organizing principles.

Exercises

1. Choose at least three different organizing principles from the left column of Table 7.5.1. Take the thesis of a speech you are preparing and write an applied example, similar to the ones provided about the First Transcontinental Railroad that shows how you would apply each of your chosen organizing principles to your speech.
2. Think of one technology or application that you perceive has transformed your world. Choose two organizing principles and create two sample outlines for speeches about your topic. Share and compare with classmates.

References

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7.6: Elevator Speech

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the basic parts of an elevator speech.
2. Create an effective elevator speech.

An elevator speech is to oral communication what a Twitter message (limited to 280 characters) is to written communication. It has to engage and interest the listener, inform and/or persuade, and be memorable (Howell, L., 2006). An elevator speech is a presentation that persuades the listener in less than thirty seconds, or around a hundred words. It takes its name from the idea that in a short elevator ride (of perhaps ten floors), carefully chosen words can make a difference. In addition to actual conversations taking place during elevator rides, other common examples include the following:

- An entrepreneur making a brief presentation to a venture capitalist or investor
- A conversation at the water cooler
- Comments during intermission at a basketball game
- A conversation as you stroll across the parking lot

Creating an Elevator Speech

An elevator speech does not have to be a formal event, though it can be. An elevator speech is not a full sales pitch and should not get bloated with too much information. The idea is not to rattle off as much information as possible in a short time, nor to present a “canned” thirty-second advertising message, but rather to give a relaxed and genuine “nutshell” summary of one main idea. The speech can be generic and nonspecific to the audience or listener, but the more you know about your audience, the better. When you tailor your message to that audience, you zero in on your target and increase your effectiveness (Albertson, E., 2008). The emphasis is on brevity, but a good elevator speech will address several key questions:

1. What is the topic, product or service?
2. Who are you?
3. Who is the target market? (if applicable)
4. What is the revenue model? (if applicable)
5. What or who is the competition and what are your advantages?

Table 7.6.1 adapts the five parts of a speech to the format of the elevator speech.

Table 7.6.1 *Parts of an Elevator Speech*

Speech Component	Adapted to Elevator Speech
Attention Statement	Hook + information about you
Introduction	What you offer
Body	Benefits; what's in it for the listener
Conclusion	Example that sums it up
Residual Message	Call for action

Example:

1. How are you doing?
2. Great! Glad you asked. I'm with (X Company) and we just received this new (product x)—it is amazing. It beats the competition hands down for a third of the price. Smaller, faster, and less expensive make it a winner. It's already a sales leader. Hey, if you know anyone who might be interested, call me! (Hands business card to the listener as visual aid)

Key Takeaway

You often don't know when opportunity to inform or persuade will present itself, but with an elevator speech, you are prepared!

Exercises

1. Pick a product or service and prepare an elevator speech (less than a hundred words, no more than thirty seconds). Rehearse the draft out loud to see how it sounds and post or present it in class.
2. Find an example of an elevator speech online (YouTube, for example) and review it. Post the link and a brief summary of strengths and weaknesses. Share and compare with classmates.
3. Prepare an elevator speech (no more than thirty seconds) and present to the class.

References

Albertson, E. (2008). *How to open doors with a brilliant elevator speech*. New Providence, NJ: R. R. Bowker.

Howell, L. (2006). *Give your elevator speech a lift*. Bothell, WA: Publishers Network.

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7.7: Visual Aids

Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate how to use visual aids effectively in your presentation.

Almost all presentations can be enhanced by the effective use of visual aids. These can include handouts, overhead transparencies, drawings on the whiteboard, PowerPoint slides, and many other types of props. Visual aids are an important nonverbal aspect of your speech that you can control. Once you have chosen a topic, you need to consider how you are going to show your audience what you are talking about.

Have you ever asked for driving directions and not understood someone's response? Did the person say, "Turn right at Sam's Grocery Store, the new one" or "I think you will turn at the second light, but it might be the third one"? Chances are that unless you know the town well or have a map handy, the visual cue of a grocery store or a traffic light might be insufficient to let you know where to turn. Your audience experiences the same frustration, or sense of accomplishment, when they get lost or find their way during your speech. Consider how you can express yourself visually, providing common references, illustrations, and images that lead the audience to understand your point or issue.

Visual aids accomplish several goals:

- Make your speech more interesting
- Enhance your credibility as a speaker
- Serve as guides to transitions, helping the audience stay on track
- Communicate complex or intriguing information in a short period of time
- Reinforce your verbal message
- Help the audience use and retain the information

Purpose, Emphasis, Support, and Clarity

When you look at your own presentation from an audience member's perspective, you might consider how to distinguish the main points from the rest of the information. You might also consider the relationships being presented between ideas or concepts, or how other aspects of the presentation can complement the oral message.

Your audience naturally will want to know why you are presenting the visual aid. The purpose for each visual aid should be clear, and almost speak for itself. If you can't quickly grasp the purpose of a visual aid in a speech, you have to honestly consider whether it should be used in the first place. Visual aids can significantly develop the message of a speech, but they must be used for a specific purpose the audience can easily recognize.

Perhaps you want to highlight a trend between two related issues, such as socioeconomic status and educational attainment. A line graph might show effectively how, as socioeconomic status rises, educational attainment also rises. This use of a visual aid can provide emphasis, effectively highlighting key words, ideas, or relationships for the audience.

Visual aids can also provide necessary support for your position. Audience members may question your assertion of the relationship between socioeconomic status and educational attainment. To support your argument, you might include on the slide, "According to the U.S. Department of Education Study no. 12345," or even use an image of the Department of Education Web page projected on a large screen. You might consider showing similar studies in graphic form, illustrating similarities across a wide range of research.

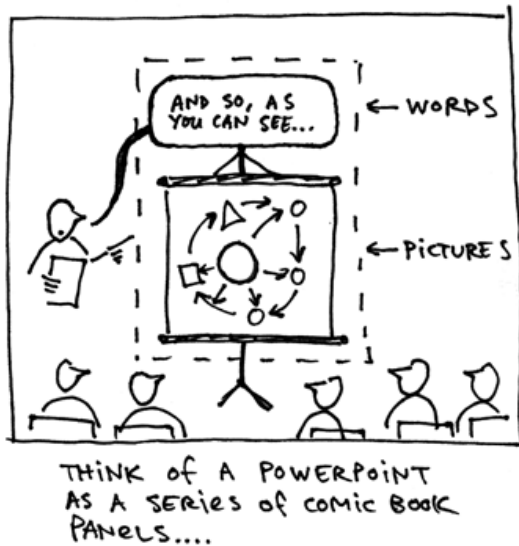


Figure 7.7.1: Visual aids provide necessary support for

your position, illustrate relationships, and demonstrate trends. Austin Kleon – [powerpoint as a comic](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Clarity is key in the use of visual aids. One way to improve clarity is to limit the number of words on a PowerPoint slide. No more than ten words per slide, with a font large enough to be read at the back of the room or auditorium, is a good rule of thumb. Key images that have a clear relationship to the verbal message can also improve clarity. You may also choose to illustrate the same data successively in two distinct formats, perhaps a line graph followed by two pie graphs. Your central goal is to ensure your visual aid is clear.

Methods and Materials

If you have been asked to give a presentation on a new product idea that a team within your organization is considering, how might you approach the challenge? You may consider a chronological organization pattern, starting with background, current market, and a trend analysis of what is to come—fair enough, but how will you make it vivid for your audience? How to represent information visually is a significant challenge, and you have several options.

You may choose to use a chart or diagram to show a timeline of events to date, from the first meeting about the proposed product to the results from the latest focus group. This timeline may work for you, but let's say you would like to get into the actual decision-making process that motivated your team to design the product with specific features in the first place. You may decide to use decision trees (or tree diagrams) showing the variables and products in place at the beginning of your discussions, and how each decision led to the next, bringing you to the decision-making point where you are today.



Figure 7.7.2: Visual aids make it vivid for your audience.

Gareth Saunders – Welcome to Powerpoint – CC BY-SA 2.0.

To complement this comprehensive guide and help make a transition to current content areas of questions, you may use a bar or pie graph to show the percentage of competing products in the market. If you have access to the Internet and a projector, you may use a topographical map showing a three-dimensional rendering of the local areas most likely to find your product attractive. If actual hills and valleys have nothing to do with your project, you can still represent the data you have collected in three dimensions. Then you may show a comparable graph illustrating the distribution of products and their relative degree of market penetration.

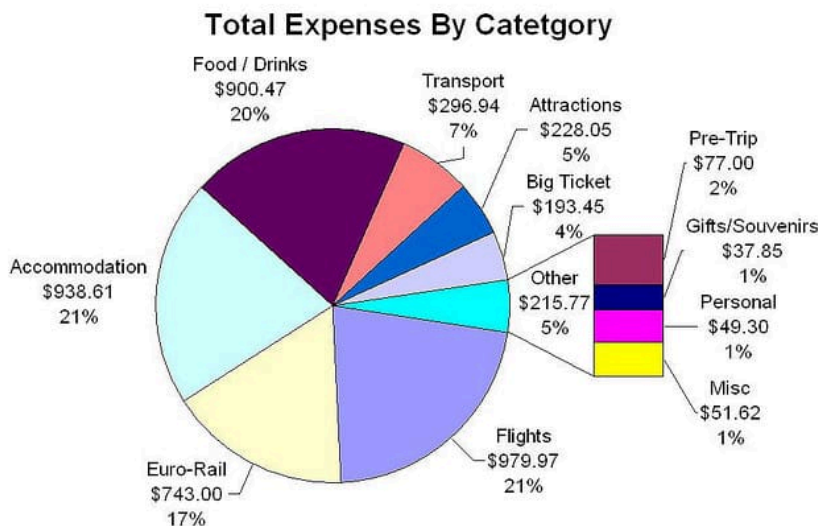


Figure 7.7.3: Bar and pie graphs can clearly demonstrate results. Christopher Porter – EuroTrip2006 – Total Expenses – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Finally, you may move to the issue of results, and present the audience with a model of your product and one from a competitor, asking which they prefer. The object may be just the visual aid you need to make your point and reinforce the residual message. When we can see, feel, touch, or be in close proximity to an object it often has a greater impact. In a world of digital images and special effects, objects presented in real time can still make a positive effect on the audience.

Additional visual aids you may choose include—but are not limited to—sound and music, video, and even yourself. If your speech is about how to use the product, your demonstration may just be the best visual aid.

You will want to give some thought to how to portray your chart, graph, or object when it's time to use your visual aids. The chalk or white board is common way of presenting visual aids, but it can get messy. Your instructor may write key words or diagrams on

the boards while discussing a textbook chapter, but can you read his or her writing? The same lesson holds true for you. If you are going to use a white board and have a series of words on it, write them out clearly before you start your presentation.

Flip charts on a pedestal can also serve to show a series of steps or break a chart down into its basic components. A poster board is another common way of organizing your visual aids before a speech, but given its often one-time use, it is losing out to the computer screen. It is, however, portable and allows you a large “blank page” with which to express your ideas.

Handouts may also serve to communicate complex or detailed information to the audience, but be careful never to break handout rule number one: never give handouts to the audience at the beginning of your speech. Where do you want the audience to look—at you or at the handout? Many novice speakers might be tempted to say the handout, but you will no doubt recognize how that diverts and divides the audience’s attention. People will listen to the words from the handout in their minds and tune you out. They will read at their own pace and have questions. They may even be impolite enough to use them as fans or paper airplanes. Handouts can be your worst enemy. If you need to use one, state at the beginning of the speech that you will be providing one at the conclusion of your presentation. This will alleviate the audience’s worry about capturing all your content by taking notes, and keep their attention focused on you while you speak.

Transparencies and slides have been replaced by computer-generated slide show programs like PowerPoint by Microsoft, which we will discuss in greater detail later in this section. These programs can be very helpful in presenting visual information, but because computers and projectors sometimes break down and fail to work as planned, you need a plan B. You may need a poster board, or to write on the whiteboard or to have a handout in reserve, but a Plan B is always a good idea when it comes to presentations that integrate technology. You may arrive at your destination and find the equipment is no longer available, is incompatible with your media storage device, or is simply not working, but the show must go on.

Video clips, such as those you might find on YouTube, can also be effective visual aids. However, as with handouts, there is one concern: You don’t want the audience to want to watch the video more than they want to tune into your presentation. How do you prevent this? Keep the clip short and make sure it reinforces the central message of your presentation. Always stop speaking before the audience stops listening, and the same holds true for the mesmerizing force of moving images on a screen. People are naturally attracted to them and will get “sucked into” your video example rather quickly. Be a good editor, introduce the clip and state what will happen out loud, point out a key aspect of it to the audience while it plays (overlap), and then make a clear transitional statement as you turn it off. Transitions are often the hardest part of any speech as the audience can get off track, and video clips are one of the most challenging visual aids you can choose because of their power to attract attention. Use that power wisely.

Preparing Visual Aids

Get started early so that you have time to create or research visual aids that will truly support your presentation, not just provide “fluff.” Make sure you use a font or image large enough to be legible for those in the back of the room, and that you actually test your visual aids before the day of your presentation. Ask a friend to stand at the back of the room and read or interpret your visual aid. If you are using computer-generated slides, try them out in a practice setting, not just on your computer screen. The slides will look different when projected. Allow time for revision based on what you learn.

Your visual aids should meet the following criteria:

- *Big*. They should be legible for everyone, and should be “back row certified.”
- *Clear*. Your audience should “get it” the first time they see it.
- *Simple*. They should serve to simplify the concepts they illustrate.
- *Consistent*. They should reinforce continuity by using the same visual style.

Using Visual Aids

Here are three general guidelines to follow when using visual aids (McLean, S., 2003). Here are some *dos* and *don’ts*:

1. Do make a clear connection between your words and the visual aid for the audience.
2. Do not distract the audience with your visual aid, blocking their view of you or adjusting the visual aid repeatedly while trying to speak.
3. Do speak to your audience—not to the whiteboard, the video, or other visual aids.

The timing of your presentation, and of your visual aids, can also have good or bad consequences. According to a popular joke, a good way to get your boss to approve just about anything is to schedule a meeting after lunch, turn the lights down, and present some boring PowerPoint slides. While the idea of a drowsy boss signing off on a harebrained project is amusing, in reality you will want to use visual aids not as a sleeping potion but as a strategy to keep your presentation lively and interesting.

Becoming proficient at using visual aids takes time and practice, and the more you practice before your speech, the more comfortable you will be with your visual aids and the role they serve in illustrating your points. Planning ahead before speaking will help, but when it comes time to actually give your speech, make sure they work for the audience as they should. Speaking to a visual aid (or reading it with your back to the audience) is not an effective strategy. You should know your material well enough that you refer to a visual aid, not rely on it.

Using PowerPoint as a Visual Aid

PowerPoint and similar visual representation programs can be an effective tool to help audiences remember your message, but they can also be an annoying distraction to your speech. How you prepare your slides and use the tool will determine your effectiveness.

PowerPoint is a slideware program that you have no doubt seen used in class, presentation at work, or perhaps used yourself to support a presentation. PowerPoint and similar slideware programs provide templates for creating electronic slides to present visual information to the audience, reinforcing the verbal message. You'll be able to import, or cut and paste, words from text files, images, or video clips to create slides to represent your ideas. You can even incorporate Web links. When using any software program, it's always a good idea to experiment with it long before you intend to use it, explore its many options and functions, and see how it can be an effective tool for you.

Video Clip

Intercultural Communication ([click to see video](#))

PowerPoint slides can connect words with images.

At first, you might be overwhelmed by the possibilities, and you might be tempted to use all the bells, whistles, and sound effects, not to mention the tumbling, flying, and animated graphics. If used wisely, a dissolve or key transition can be like a well-executed scene from a major motion picture film and lead your audience to the next point. But if used indiscriminately, it can annoy the audience to the point where they cringe in anticipation of the sound effect at the start of each slide. This danger is inherent in the tool, but you are in charge of it and can make wise choices that enhance the understanding and retention of your information.

The first point to consider is what is the most important visual aid? The answer is you, the speaker. You will facilitate the discussion, give life to the information, and help the audience correlate the content to your goal or purpose. You don't want to be in a position where the PowerPoint presentation is the main focus and you are on the side of the stage, simply helping the audience follow along. It should support you in your presentation, rather than the other way around. Just as there is a number one rule for handouts, there is also one for PowerPoints: do not use PowerPoints as a read-aloud script for your speech. The PowerPoints should amplify and illustrate your main points, not reproduce everything you are going to say.

Your pictures are the second area of emphasis you'll want to consider. The tool will allow you to show graphs, charts and illustrate relationships that words may only approach in terms of communication, but your verbal support of the visual images will make all the difference. Dense pictures or complicated graphics will confuse more than clarify. Choose clear images that have an immediate connection to both your content and the audience, tailored to their specific needs. After images, consider only key words that can be easily read to accompany your pictures. The fewer words the better; try to keep each slide to a total word count of less than ten words. Do not use full sentences. Using key words provides support for your verbal discussion, guiding you as well as your audience. The key words can serve as signposts or signal words related to key ideas.

A natural question at this point is, "How do I communicate complex information simply?" The answer comes with several options. The visual representation on the screen is for support and illustration. Should you need to communicate more technical, complex, or in-depth information in a visual way, consider preparing a handout to distribute at the conclusion of your speech. You may also consider using a printout of your slide show with a "notes" section, but if you distribute it at the beginning of your speech, you run the risk of turning your presentation into a guided reading exercise and possibly distracting or losing members of the audience.

Everyone reads at a different pace and takes notes in their own way. You don't want to be in the position of going back and forth between slides to help people follow along.

Another point to consider is how you want to use the tool to support your speech and how your audience will interpret its presentation. Most audiences wouldn't want to read a page of text—as you might see in this book—on the big screen. They'll be far more likely to glance at the screen and assess the information you present in relation to your discussion. Therefore, it is key to consider one main idea, relationship, or point per slide. The use of the tool should be guided with the idea that its presentation is for the audience's benefit, not yours. People often understand pictures and images more quickly and easily than text, and you can use this to your advantage, using the knowledge that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Use of Color

People love color, and understandably your audience will appreciate the visual stimulation of a colorful presentation. If you have ever seen a car painted a custom color that just didn't attract you, or seen colors put together in ways that made you wonder what people were thinking when they did that, you will recognize that color can also distract and turn off an audience.

Color is a powerful way to present information, and the power should be used wisely. You will be selecting which color you want to use for headers or key words, and how they relate the colors in the visual images. Together, your images, key words, and the use of color in fonts, backgrounds, table, and graphs can have a significant impact on your audience. You will need to give some thought and consideration to what type of impact you want to make, how it will contribute or possibly distract, and what will work well for you to produce an effective and impressive presentation.

There are inherent relationships between colors, and while you may have covered some of this information in art classes you have taken, it is valuable to review here. According to the standard color wheel, colors are grouped into primary, secondary, and tertiary categories. Primary colors are the colors from which other colors are made through various combinations. Secondary colors represent a combination of two primary colors, while tertiary colors are made from combinations of primary and secondary colors.

- *Primary colors.* Red, blue and yellow
- *Secondary colors.* Green, violet, and orange
- *Tertiary colors.* Red-orange, red-violet, blue-violet, blue-green, yellow-orange, and yellow-green

Colors have relationships depending on their location on the wheel. Colors that are opposite each other are called complementary and they contrast, creating a dynamic effect. Analogous colors are located next to each other and promote harmony, continuity, and sense of unity.

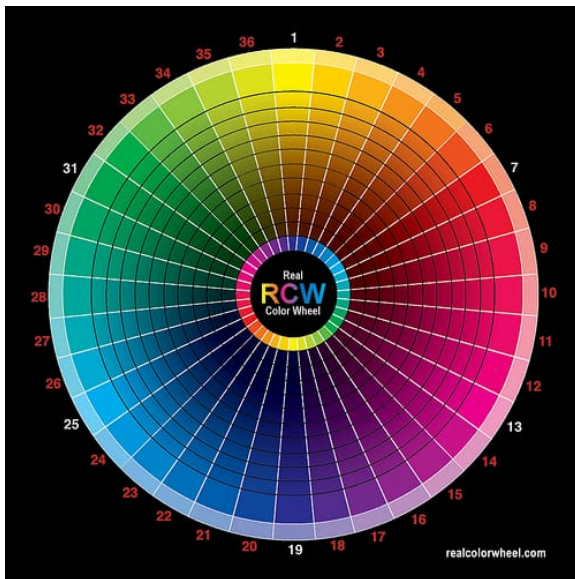


Figure 7.7.1: Color Wheel. Michael Hernandez – [color wheel](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Your audience comes first: when considering your choice of colors to use, legibility must be your priority. Contrast can help the audience read your key terms more easily. Also, focus on the background color and its relation to the images you plan to

incorporate to ensure they complement each other. Consider repetition of color, from your graphics to your text, to help unify each slide. To reduce visual noise, try not to use more than two or three additional colors. Use colors sparingly to make a better impact, and consider the use of texture and reverse color fonts (the same as a background or white) as an option.

Be aware that many people are blue-green colorblind, and that red-green colorblindness is also fairly common. With this in mind, choose colors that most audience members will be able to differentiate. If you are using a pie chart, for example, avoid putting a blue segment next to a green one. Use labeling so that even if someone is totally colorblind they will be able to tell the relative sizes of the pie segments and what they signify.

Color is also a matter of culture. Some colors may be perceived as formal or informal, or masculine or feminine. Recognize that red is usually associated with danger, while green signals “go.” Make sure the color associated with the word is reflected in your choice. If you have a key word about nature, but the color is metallic, the contrast may not contribute to the rhetorical situation and confuse the audience.

Seeking a balance between professionalism and attractiveness may seem to be a challenge, but experiment and test your drafts with friends to see what works for you. Also consider examining other examples, commonly available on the Internet, but retain the viewpoint that not everything online is effective nor should it be imitated. There are predetermined color schemes already incorporated into PowerPoint that you can rely on for your presentation.

We’ve given consideration to color in relation to fonts and the representation of key words, but we also need to consider font size and selection. PowerPoint will have default settings for headlines and text, but you will need to consider what is most appropriate for your rhetorical situation. Always think about the person sitting in the back of the room. The title size should be at least forty points, and the body text (used sparingly) should be at least thirty-two points.



Figure 7.7.2: Visual aids should be clear from the back of the room. Martin Roell – Powerpoint + Sonne = ... – CC BY-SA 2.0.

In *Designing Visual Language: Strategies for Professional Communicators* (Kostelnick, C., and Roberts, D., 1998), Charles Kostelnick and David Roberts provide a valuable discussion of fonts, font styles, and what to choose to make an impact depending on your rhetorical situation. One good principle they highlight is that sans serif fonts such as Arial work better than serif fonts like Times New Roman for images projected onto a screen. The thin lines and extra aspects to serif the font may not portray themselves well on a large screen or contribute to clarity. To you this may mean that you choose Arial or a similar font to enhance clarity and ease of reading. Kostelnick and Roberts also discuss the use of grouping strategies to improve the communication of information (Kostelnick, C., and Roberts, D., 1998). Bullets, the use of space, similarity, and proximity all pertain to the process of perception, which differs from one person to another.

Helpful Hints for Visual Aids

As we’ve discussed, visual aids can be a powerful tool when used effectively, but can also run the risk of dominating your presentation. As a speaker, you will need to consider your audience and how the portrayal of images, text, graphic, animated

sequences, or sound files will contribute or detract from your presentation. Here is a brief list of hints to keep in mind as you prepare your presentation.

- Keep visual aids simple.
- Use one key idea per slide.
- Avoid clutter, noise, and overwhelming slides.
- Use large, bold fonts that the audience can read from at least twenty feet from the screen.
- Use contrasting colors to create a dynamic effect.
- Use analogous colors to unify your presentation.
- Use clip art with permission and sparingly.
- Edit and proofread each slide with care and caution.
- Use copies of your visuals available as handouts after your presentation.
- Check the presentation room beforehand.
- With a PowerPoint presentation, or any presentation involving technology, have a backup plan, such as your visuals printed on transparencies, should unexpected equipment or interface compatibility problems arise

Becoming proficient at using visual aids takes time and practice. The more you practice before your speech, the more comfortable you will be with your visual aids and the role they serve in illustrating your message. Giving thought to where to place visual aids before speaking helps, but when the time comes to actually give your speech, make sure you reassess your plans and ensure that they work for the audience as they should. Speaking to a visual aid (or reading it to the audience) is not an effective strategy. Know your material well enough that you refer to your visual aids, not rely on them.

Key Takeaway

Strategically chosen visual aids will serve to illustrate, complement, and reinforce your verbal message.

Exercises

1. Look at the picture of the blankets above. Write copy for the left part of the slide and decide what colors would best complement the message. Share your results with the class.
2. Create your own presentation of three to five slides with no less than three images and three words per slide. Share the results with the class.
3. Explore PowerPoint or a similar slideware program and find your favorite feature. Write a series of steps on how to access and use it. Share your results with the class.
4. Create a slide presentation that defines and explains your favorite feature in the program and include at least one point on its advantage for the audience. Share the results with the class.

References

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7.8: Myths and Realities of Public Speaking

Learning Objectives

1. Describe common myths and realities of public speaking.

Now that you have identified your purpose, chosen your topic and thesis statement, gathered and organized your material, you are almost ready to put your speech into its final form. At this juncture, let's examine some common public speaking myths and outline the guidelines you'll need to consider as you prepare to face your audience. There are a lot of myths associated with public speaking. In many ways these guidelines dispel common perceptions of public speaking and may lead you to be more open with yourself and your audience as you prepare and present your speech.

Speaking in Public is Not Like Killing Lions

From an evolutionary biology perspective, our bodies have developed to respond to stress in advantageous ways. When we needed to run from a bear, hunt a lion, or avoid a snake, our bodies predictably got us prepared with a surge of adrenaline (Burnham, T., and Phelan, J., 2000). Hunters who didn't respond well to stress or failed at hunting were less likely to live long enough to reach maturity and reproduce. So we have the successful hunter to thank for our genes, but people in developed countries today do not need hunting skills to feed their families.

While food is still an issue in many parts of the world, our need to respond to threats and stress has shifted from our evolutionary roots to concern over our job, our relationships, and how we negotiate a modern economy. Communication is a great resource and tool, and we can apply the principles and lessons to ourselves. We can create the perception that the speech is like defeating the lion and really get ourselves worked up. Or we can choose to see it as a natural extension of communication with others.

Speaking in public itself is not inherently stressful, but our response to the stimulus can contribute to or reduce our level of stress. We all will have a stress response to a new, unknown, or unfamiliar stimulus. Nevertheless, the butterflies in our stomach are a response we can choose to control by becoming more familiar with the expectations, preparation, and performance associated with speaking in public.

You Don't Have to Be Perfect

Letting go of perfection can be the hardest guideline to apply to ourselves. It's also in our nature to compare ourselves to others and ourselves. You might forgive a classmate for the occasional "umm" during a speech, but then turn right around and spend a lot of mental effort chastising yourself for making the same error in your presentation. We all have distinct strengths and weaknesses. Knowing yourself and where you need to improve is an important first step. Recognizing that Rome wasn't built in a day, and that you won't become a world-class speaker overnight, may be easier said than done.

It may help to recognize that your listeners don't want to see you fail; on the contrary, they want you to do well, because when you do, they will be able to relax and enjoy your presentation. You might be surprised to know that not everyone counts each time you say "umm." However, if "umm," "ahhh," or "you know what I mean" are phrases that you tend to repeat, they will distract your audience from your message. Eliminating such distracting habits can become a goal for improvement. Improvement is a process, not an end in itself; in fact, many people believe that learning to speak in public is more about the journey than the destination. Each new setting, context, and audience will present new challenges, and your ability to adapt, learned through your journey of experience, will help you successfully meet each new challenge.

Organization Is Key to Success

Have you ever thought of a great comeback to something someone said a while after they said it? Wouldn't it have been nice to be quick and articulate and able to deliver your comeback right then and there? Speaking in public gives you a distinct advantage over "off the cuff" improvisation and stumbling for the right comeback. You get to prepare and be organized. You know you'll be speaking to an audience in order to persuade them to do, think, or consider an idea or action.

What issues might they think of while you are speaking? What comebacks or arguments might they say if it were a debate? You get to anticipate what the audience will want to know, say, or hear. You get to prepare your statements and visual aids to support your speech and create the timing, organization, and presentation of each point. Many times in life we are asked to take a position and feel unprepared to respond. Speaking in public gives you the distinct opportunity to prepare and organize your ideas or points in order to make an impact and respond effectively.

Speaking in Public Is Like Participating in a Conversation

This may sound odd at first, but consider the idea of an “enlarged conversation” described by Julia T. Wood. She expresses a clear connection between everyday speech and public dialogue. Sometimes we take a speech turn, while at other times we remain silent while others take their turn. We do this all day long and think nothing of it. We are often the focus of attention from friends and colleagues and it hardly ever makes us nervous. When we get on a stage, however, some people perceive that the whole game has changed. It hasn’t. We still take turns, and the speaker will take a longer turn as part of an enlarged conversation. People in the audience will still communicate feedback and the speaker will still negotiate his or her turn just the way they would in an everyday conversation. The difference is all about how we, as the speaker, perceive the context.

Some people feel that the level of expectations, the need for perfection, or the idealistic qualities we perceive in eloquent speakers are required, and then focus on deficiencies, fears, and the possibility of failing to measure up. By letting go of this ideal, we can approach the challenge with a more pragmatic frame of mind. The rules we play comfortably by in conversation every day are the same as we shift to a larger conversation within the context of public speaking. This viewpoint can offer an alternative as you address your apprehensions, and help you let go of unrealistic expectations.

Key Takeaway

Public speaking does not have to be a “fright or flight” experience; it can be like holding a half of a friendly conversation. This will especially be true if you do a good job of preparing and organizing your presentation ahead of time.

Exercises

1. Have you ever done a creative visualization exercise? Try this one and see how it helps you prepare your speech. Choose a quiet place, sit in a comfortable position, and close your eyes. Picture yourself getting up to give your oral presentation. Picture what you want to happen—you will speak confidently, clearly, and engagingly. Your audience will listen attentively and consider the merit of your points. When you are finished, they will applaud and express appreciation for the good job you have done.
2. Write out a series of goal statements, one for each part or point of your presentation. What do you want to accomplish with each section, visual aid, or statement? Share your results with classmates.
3. Consider the elements of a speech to inform and adapt them for a speech to persuade. In what ways would you adjust key points or issues?

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7.9: What are filler words and why do we use them?

Do these look familiar: um, ah, like, you know, and yeah, er, okay, uh? They should. Most of us currently use them or have used them before. Unfortunately, they add no value to your communication. In fact, you can remove these from your communication repertoire and still speak in complete sentences. There are names for these: filler words, filler phrases, and filler sounds.

"A filler is an apparently meaningless word, phrase, or sound that marks a pause or hesitation in speech. Also known as a pause filler or hesitation form. Some of the common **filler words** in English are um, uh, er, ah, like, okay, right, and you know".(12)

"Recently I worked with a client who was a Solutions Architect. He had good experience and was getting interviews, and he answered interview questions well. He sounded like someone any company would want to hire, except for one thing – when he spoke he said “um” constantly. Although his other interview skills were good, the “um’s” made him sound unprofessional.” (13)

Some people use fillers when they are having anxiety, when thinking about what they want to say next, when they don’t know their topic well, or because it’s a habit. Regardless of the reason, you will be a better communicator when you eliminate or decrease your usage of fillers, because fillers may be distracting to the person or audience you’re speaking to. Some may even view you as less intelligent if you use fillers.

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7.10: How can we reduce our use of filler words?

When considering your use of filler words, you might assume: “Eliminating fillers totally is very difficult.” and even think: “I don’t even realize I’m using fillers.” We should all say, “I want to decrease or totally eliminate fillers from my vocabulary.” It can be done with dedication and lots of practice. You must be patient with yourself when realizing you are using fillers in general or

using fillers way too much. Using a filler or two may go undetected. However, using too many can negatively impact your personal and professional relationships.

Record a conversation and count the use of unnecessary pauses and filler words in relation to the other words in the speech. See if you can reduce the ratio over time. Remember that as you become more confident and familiar with speaking it will be easier to reduce the frequency of many of the unnecessary filler words and pauses.(14)

Be patient with yourself and practice.

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8: INTERVIEWING

8.1: Rituals of Conversation and Interviews

8.2: Types of Interviews

8.3: Preparing for Interviews

8.4: Interview Questions

8.5: Wrapping it Up and Looking Ahead

8.6: Virtual Interviews- the New Normal?

8.7: Ten Tips for Virtual Interviewing Success

8.1: Rituals of Conversation and Interviews

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the five steps in any conversation.
2. Discuss employment interviewing.

You no doubt have participated in countless conversations throughout your life, and the process of how to conduct a conversation may seem so obvious that it needs no examination. Yet, all cultures have rituals of various kinds, and conversation is one of these universal rituals. A skilled business communicator knows when to speak, when to remain silent, and to always stop speaking before the audience stops listening. Further, understanding conversation provides a solid foundation for our next discussion on employment interviewing. Employment interviews follow similar ritual patterns and have their own set of expectations. Expectations may differ based on field, level, knowledge, and experience, but they generally follow the five steps of a basic conversation.



Figure 8.1.1: Conversations follow rules.

Search Engine People Blog – [Conversation](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Conversation as a Ritual

Why discuss the ritual of conversation? Because it is one of the main ways we interact in the business environment, and it is ripe for misunderstandings. Our everyday familiarity with conversations often makes us blind to the subtle changes that take place during the course of a conversation. Examining it will allow you to consider its components, predict the next turn, anticipate an opening or closing, and make you a better conversationalist. Steven Beebe, Susan Beebe, and Mark Redmond offer us five stages of conversation that are adapted here for our discussion (Beebe, S., Beebe, S., and Redmond, M., 2002).

Initiation

The first stage of conversation is called initiation, and requires you to be open to interact. How you communicate openness is up to you; it may involve nonverbal signals like eye contact or body positions, such as smiling or even merely facing the other person and making eye contact. A casual reference to the weather, a light conversation about the weekend, or an in-depth conversation about how the financial markets are performing this morning requires a source to start the process: someone has to initiate the exchange. For some, this may produce a degree of anxiety. If status and hierarchical relationships are present, it may be a question of who speaks when according to cultural norms. The famous anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski called small talk “phatic communion,” (Malinowski, B., 1935) reinforcing the idea that there is a degree of ritual across cultures on how we initiate,

engage, and conclude conversations.

Preview

The preview is an indication, verbal or nonverbal, of what the conversation is about, both in terms of content and in terms of the relationship. A word or two in the subject line of an e-mail may signal the topic, and the relationship between individuals, such as an employee-supervisor relationship, may be understood. A general reference to a topic may approach a topic indirectly, allowing the recipient to either pick up on the topic and to engage in the discussion or to redirect the conversation away from a topic they are not ready to talk about. People are naturally curious, and also seek certainty. A preview can serve to reduce uncertainty and signal intent.

Talking Point(s)

Joseph DeVito characterizes this step as getting down to business, reinforcing the goal orientation of the conversation (DeVito, J., 2003). In business communication, we often have a specific goal or series of points to address, but we cannot lose sight of the relationship messages within the discussion of content. You may signal to your conversation partner that there are three points to address, much like outlining an agenda at a meeting. This may sound formal at first, but if you listen to casual conversations you'll often find there is an inherent list or central point where the conversational partners arrive. By clearly articulating, either in written or oral form, the main points, you provide an outline or structure to the conversation.

Feedback

Similar to a preview step, this stage allows the conversational partners to clarify, restate, or discuss the points of the conversation to arrive at a sense of mutual understanding. In some cultures the points and their feedback may recycle several times, which may sound repetitious to Western ears. In Western cultures we often get to the point rather quickly and once we've arrived at an understanding, we move quickly to the conclusion. Communication across cultures often requires additional cycles of statement and restatement to insure transmission of information as well as reinforcement of the relationship. Time may be money in some cultures, but time is also a representation of respect. Feedback is an opportunity to make sure the interaction was successful the first time. Failure to attend to this stage can lead to the need for additional interactions, reducing efficiency across time.

Closing

The acceptance of feedback on both sides of the conversation often signals the transition to the conclusion of the conversation. Closings are similar to the initiation step (Knapp, M. and Vangelisti, A., 2000), and often involve ritual norms (Malinowski, B., 1935). Verbal clues are sometimes present, but you may also notice the half step back as conversational partners create additional space in preparation to disengage.

There are times when a conversational partner introduces new information in the conclusion, which can start the process all over again. You may also note that if words like "in conclusion" or "oh—one more thing" are used, a set of expectations is now in force. A conclusion has been announced and the listener expects it. If the speaker continues to recycle at this point, the listener's listening skills are often not as keen as they were during the heat of the main engagement, and it may even produce frustration. People mentally shift to the next order of business and this transition must be negotiated successfully.

By mentioning a time, date, or place for future communication you can clearly signal that the conversation, although currently concluded, will continue later. In this way, you can often disengage successfully while demonstrating respect.

Employment Interviewing

We all join communities, teams, and groups across our lifetimes (McLean, S., 2005). We go from an unknown outsider to a new member and eventually a full member. Businesses and organizations are communities consisting of teams and groups, and if we decide to switch teams or communities, or if that decision is made for us with a reduction in force layoff, for example, we'll be back on the job market. In order to make the transition from an outsider to an insider, you'll have to pass a series of tests, both informal and formal. One of the most common tests is otherwise known as an employment interview. An employment interview is an exchange between a candidate and a prospective employer (or their representative). It is a formal process with several

consistent elements that you can use to guide your preparation.

Employment interviews come in all shapes and sizes, and may not be limited to only one exchange but one interaction. A potential employee may very well be screened by a computer (as the résumé is scanned) and interviewed online or via the telephone before the applicant ever meets a representative or panel of representatives. The screening process may include formal tests that include personality tests, background investigations, and consultations with previous employers. Depending on the type of job you are seeking, you can anticipate answering questions, often more than once, to a series of people as you progress through a formal interview process. Just as you have the advantage of preparing for a speech with anticipation, you can apply the same research and public speaking skills to the employment interview.

The invitation to interview means you have been identified as a candidate who meets the minimum qualifications and demonstrate potential as a viable candidate. Your cover letter, résumé, or related application materials may demonstrate the connection between your preparation and the job duties, but now comes the moment where you will need to articulate those points out loud.

If we assume that you would like to be successful in your employment interviewing, then it makes sense to use the communication skills gained to date with the knowledge of interpersonal communication to maximize your performance. There is no one right or wrong way to prepare and present at your interview, just as each audience is unique, but we can prepare and anticipate several common elements.

Preparation

The right frame of mind is an essential element for success in communication, oral or written. For many if not most, the employment interview is surrounded with mystery and a degree of fear and trepidation. Just as giving a speech may produce a certain measure of anxiety, you can expect that a job interview will make you nervous. Anticipate this normal response, and use your nervous energy to your benefit. To place your energies where they will be put to best use, the first step is preparation.

Would you prepare yourself before writing for publication or speaking in public? Of course. The same preparation applies to the employment interview. Briefly, the employment interview is a conversational exchange (even if it is in writing at first) where the participants try to learn more about each other. Both conversational partners will have goals in terms of content, and explicitly or implicitly across the conversational exchange will be relational messages. Attending to both points will strengthen your performance.

On the content side, if you have been invited for an interview, you can rest assured that you have met the basic qualifications the employer is looking for. Hopefully, this initiation signal means that the company or organization you have thoroughly researched is one you would consider as a potential employer. Perhaps you have involved colleagues and current employees of the organization in your research process and learned about several of the organization's attractive qualities as well as some of the challenges experienced by the people working there.

Businesses hire people to solve problems, so you will want to focus on how your talents, expertise, and experience can contribute to the organization's need to solve those problems. The more detailed your analysis of their current challenges, the better. You need to be prepared for standard questions about your education and background, but also see the opening in the conversation to discuss the job duties, the challenges inherent in the job, and the ways in which you believe you can meet these challenges. Take the opportunity to demonstrate the fact that you have "done your homework" in researching the company. Table 8.1.1 presents a checklist of what you should try to know before you consider yourself prepared for an interview.

Table 8.1.1: Interview Preparation Checklist

What to Know	Examples
Type of Interview	Will it be a behavioral interview, where the employer watches what you do in a given situation? Will you be asked technical questions or given a work sample? Or will you be interviewed over lunch or coffee, where your table manners and social skills will be assessed?
Type of Dress	Office attire varies by industry, so stop by the workplace and observe what workers are wearing if you can. If this isn't possible, call and ask the human resources office what to wear—they will appreciate your wish to be prepared.

What to Know	Examples
Company or Organization	Do a thorough exploration of the company's Web site. If it doesn't have one, look for business listings in the community online and in the phone directory. Contact the local chamber of commerce. At your library, you may have access to subscription sites such as Hoover's Online (www.hoovers.com).
Job	Carefully read the ad you answered that got you the interview, and memorize what it says about the job and the qualifications the employer is seeking. Use the Internet to find sample job descriptions for your target job title. Make a written list of the job tasks and annotate the list with your skills, knowledge, and other attributes that will enable you to perform the job tasks with excellence.
Employer's Needs	Check for any items in the news in the past couple of years involving the company name. If it is a small company, the local town newspaper will be your best source. In addition, look for any advertisements the company has placed, as these can give a good indication of the company's goals.

Performance

You may want to know how to prepare for an employment interview, and we're going to take it for granted that you have researched the company, market, and even individuals in your effort to learn more about the opportunity. From this solid base of preparation, you need to begin to prepare your responses. Would you like some of the test questions before the test? Luckily for you, employment interviews involve a degree of uniformity across their many representations. Here are eleven common questions you are likely to be asked in an employment interview (McLean, S., 2005):

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Have you ever done this type of work before?
3. Why should we hire you?
4. What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
5. Give me an example of a time when you worked under pressure.
6. Tell me about a time you encountered (X) type of problem at work. How did you solve the problem?
7. Why did you leave your last job?
8. How has your education and/or experience prepared you for this job?
9. Why do you want to work here?
10. What are your long-range goals? Where do you see yourself three years from now?
11. Do you have any questions?

When you are asked a question in the interview, look for its purpose as well as its literal meaning. "Tell me about yourself" may sound like an invitation for you to share your text message win in last year's competition, but it is not. The employer is looking for someone who can address their needs. Telling the interviewer about yourself is an opportunity for you make a positive professional impression. Consider what experience you can highlight that aligns well with the job duties and match your response to their needs.

In the same way, responses about your strengths are not an opening to brag, and your weakness not an invitation to confess. If your weakness is a tendency towards perfectionism, and the job you are applying for involves a detail orientation, you can highlight how your weaknesses may serve you well in the position.

Consider using the "because" response whenever you can. A "because" response involves the restatement of the question followed by a statement of how and where you gained education or experience in that area. For example, if you are asked about handling difficult customers, you could answer that you have significant experience in that area because you've served as a customer service representative with X company for X years. You may be able to articulate how you were able to turn an encounter with a frustrated customer into a long-term relationship that benefited both the customer and the organization. Your specific example, and use of a "because" response, can increase the likelihood that the interviewer or audience will recall the specific information you provide.

You may be invited to participate in a conference call, and be told to expect it will last around twenty minutes. The telephone carries your voice and your words, but doesn't carry your nonverbal gestures. If you remember to speak directly into the telephone, look up and smile, your voice will come through clearly and you will sound competent and pleasant. Whatever you do, don't take the call on a cell phone with an iffy connection—your interviewers are guaranteed to be unfavorably impressed if you keep breaking up during the call. Use the phone to your advantage by preparing responses on note cards or on your computer screen before the

call. When the interviewers ask you questions, keep track of the time, limiting each response to about a minute. If you know that a twenty-minute call is scheduled for a certain time, you can anticipate that your phone may ring may be a minute or two late, as interviews are often scheduled in a series while the committee is all together at one time. Even if you only have one interview, your interviewers will have a schedule and your sensitivity to it can help improve your performance.

You can also anticipate that the last few minutes will be set aside for you to ask your questions. This is your opportunity to learn more about the problems or challenges that the position will be addressing, allowing you a final opportunity to reinforce a positive message with the audience. Keep your questions simple, your attitude positive, and communicate your interest.

At the same time as you are being interviewed, know that you too are interviewing the prospective employer. If you have done your homework you may already know what the organization is all about, but you may still be unsure whether it is the right fit for you. Listen and learn from what is said as well as what is not said, and you will add to your knowledge base for wise decision making in the future.

Above all, be honest, positive, and brief. You may have heard that the world is small and it is true. As you develop professionally, you will come to see how fields, organizations, and companies are interconnected in ways that you cannot anticipate. Your name and reputation are yours to protect and promote.

Postperformance

You completed your research of the organization, interviewed a couple of employees, learned more about the position, were on time for the interview (virtual or in person), wore neat and professional clothes, and demonstrated professionalism in your brief, informative responses. Congratulations are in order, but so is more work on your part.

Remember that feedback is part of the communication process: follow up promptly with a thank-you note or e-mail, expressing your appreciation for the interviewer's time and interest. You may also indicate that you will call or e-mail next week to see if they have any further questions for you. (Naturally, if you say you will do this, make sure you follow through!) In the event that you have decided the position is not right for you, the employer will appreciate your notifying them without delay. Do this tactfully, keeping in mind that communication occurs between individuals and organizations in ways you cannot predict.

After you have communicated with your interviewer or committee, move on. Candidates sometimes become quite fixated on one position or job and fail to keep their options open. The best person does not always get the job, and the prepared business communicator knows that networking and research is a never-ending, ongoing process. Look over the horizon at the next challenge and begin your research process again. It may be hard work, but getting a job is your job. Budget time and plan on the effort it will take to make the next contact, get the next interview, and continue to explore alternate paths to your goal.

You may receive a letter, note, or voice mail explaining that another candidate's combination of experience and education better matched the job description. If this happens, it is only natural for you to feel disappointed. It is also only natural to want to know why you were not chosen, but be aware that for legal reasons most rejection notifications do not go into detail about why one candidate was hired and another was not. Contacting the company with a request for an explanation can be counterproductive, as it may be interpreted as a "sore loser" response. If there is any possibility that they will keep your name on file for future opportunities, you want to preserve your positive relationship.

Although you feel disappointed, don't focus on the loss or all the hard work you've produced. Instead, focus your energies where they will serve you best. Review the process and learn from the experience, knowing that each audience is unique and even the most prepared candidate may not have been the right "fit." Stay positive and connect with people who support you. Prepare, practice, and perform. Know that you as a person are far more than just a list of job duties. Focus on your skill sets: if they need improvement, consider additional education that will enhance your knowledge and skills. Seek out local resources and keep networking. Have your professional interview attire clean and ready, and focus on what you can control—your preparation and performance.

Key Takeaway

Conversations have universal aspects we can predict and improve. We can use the dynamics of the ritual of conversation to learn to prepare for employment interviews and evaluations, both common contexts of communication in the work environment. Employment interviews involve preparation, performance, and feedback.

Exercises

1. How does the employment interview serve both interviewer and interviewee? Explain and present your thoughts to the class.
2. Identify a company that you might be interested in working for. Use the resources described in this section to research information about the company, the kinds of jobs it hires people to do, and the needs and goals of the organization. Share your findings with your classmates.
3. Find a job announcement of a position that might interest you after you graduate or reach your professional goal. Write a brief statement of what experience and education you currently have that applies to the position and note what you currently lack.
4. What are the common tasks and duties of a job you find interesting? Create a survey, identify people who hold a similar position, and interview them (via e-mail or in person). Compare your results with your classmates.
5. What has been your employment interview experience to date? Write a brief statement and provide examples.
6. What employment-related resources are available on your campus or in your community? Investigate and share your findings.
7. Prepare for a job that you would like to do by finding a job announcement, preparing sample responses, and enlisting a friend or colleague in playing the role of a mock interviewer. Limit your interview to fifteen minutes and record it (audio or audio/visual) and post it in class. If your instructor indicates this exercise will be an in-class exercise or assessment, dress the part and be completely prepared. Use this exercise to prepare you for the moment when you will be required to perform and when you want the job.

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8.2: Types of Interviews

In the process of exploring occupations and landing a job, you will likely participate in a variety of interviews. They are defined by their objective:

- **Informational or networking interviews.** Informational interviewing is particularly useful in helping you explore career options. This is an interview that *you* have requested to learn about a particular job, company, or industry and how best to present yourself to potential hiring managers. An informational interview also gives you an opportunity to create a positive impression. Be sure to get referrals, leads, and recommendations for other networking contacts.
- **Screening interviews.** Generally conducted by a representative of the company's human resources department or a recruiter, a screening interview is used to determine whether you are qualified or overqualified to do the job. This initial interview is often conducted via telephone. As the name implies, the objective of this interview is to find reasons to remove, not include, people in a candidate pool. Do not consider it lightly just because someone other than the hiring manager is conducting it.
- **One-on-one interviews.** In a one-on-one interview, the interviewer asks a set of questions to learn if you have the knowledge and skills to handle the job for which you have applied. The hiring manager conducting the one-on-one interview also wants to get a sense of what it would be like working with you and how you would fit in the organization. It is also used to learn how you behaved in past situations as a predictor of how you are likely to behave in the future. Expect to be asked "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example..." questions. This interview is the one a hiring decision is based on.

8.3: Preparing for Interviews

Just as preparation is important for exams in college, preparation is key to success in interviews. Many of the principles are the same, but in an employment interview, the subject is *you*. Just as in an exam, the first step in preparation is to know your material.

- **Learn about the organization.** In almost every interview situation, you'll be asked, "What can you do for this company?" Practice your answer. Research press releases, stories in the *Wall Street Journal*, annual reports, blogs, Web sites, the news, and so on. Know the company's philosophies, goals, plans, new products, targeted customers, new executives, and major directional changes.
- **Use your network.** Do you know anyone who works for or has worked for this company or organization? Call or have lunch with them before your interview to learn more. Your competition likely won't have done their homework as well as you have. Your prospective employer will notice.
- **Review the job description.** Be prepared to explain how your background qualifies you for the job. Did you find the job posting online? Be sure to have printed a copy, and bring it with you to the interview. Some companies take weeks to start calling people in for interviews, and by then the job description may have been removed from the site where you saw it.
- **Review your résumé.** Think of examples that describe or illustrate your accomplishments. You will be asked about items on your résumé, and you need to be able to support them and go into more detail.(5)

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8.4: Interview Questions

Most interviews consist of many types of questions, but they usually lean toward situational interviews or behavior description interviews. A situational interview is one in which the candidate is given a sample situation and is asked how he or she might deal with the situation. In a behavior description interview, the candidate is asked questions about what he or she actually did in a variety of given situations.

The assumption in this type of interview is that someone's past experience or actions are an indicator of future behavior. These types of questions, as opposed to the old "tell me about yourself" questions, tend to assist the interviewer in knowing how a person would handle or has handled situations. These interview styles also use a structured method and provide a better basis for decision making. Examples of situational interview questions might include the following:

1. If you saw someone stealing from the company, what would you do?
2. One of your employees is performing poorly, but you know he has some personal home issues he is dealing with. How would you handle complaints from his colleagues about lack of performance?
3. A coworker has told you she called in sick three days last week because she actually decided to take a vacation. What would you do?
4. You are rolling out a new sales plan on Tuesday, which is really important to ensure success in your organization. When you present it, the team is lukewarm on the plan. What would you do?
5. You disagree with your supervisor on her handling of a situation. What would you do?

Examples of behavior description interview questions might include the following:

1. Tell me about a time you had to make a hard decision. How did you handle this process?
2. Give an example of how you handled an angry customer.
3. Do you show leadership in your current or past job? What would be an example of a situation in which you did this?
4. What accomplishments have given you the most pride and why?
5. What plans have you made to achieve your career goals?

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8.5: Wrapping it Up and Looking Ahead

In this textbook, we have explored a variety of interview types, components and skills. You have learned how to develop questions, participate in persuasive and informational interviews as well as employment and appraisal interviews. We have discussed listening, nonverbal cues and ways to minimize filler words in interview settings. Finally, we have examined the prevalence of virtual interviews and provided techniques for mastering them.

Whether you are interviewing a celebrity, being interviewed for a job, or simply gathering information about a topic or person, all interviewing should be conducted with empathy, tolerance and consideration of others. It is often more important to maintain a personal or professional relationship and conduct ourselves in a flexible manner than to achieve an interview goal at any cost.

It is our intention that this textbook be one more tool in your interviewing toolbox. Interviewing is an art that requires ongoing exploration and practice. We hope you will continue your learning by practicing new skills and perfecting existing ones. Let your curiosity be your guide!

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8.6: Virtual Interviews- the New Normal?

In chapter five, we identified a variety of interview types you may experience when seeking employment. A virtual interview is one of them. Virtual interviews are conducted via videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or FaceTime. As early as 2011, hiring managers began to utilize videoconferencing to conduct interviews with candidates who did not reside locally, saving organizations and candidates time and money.(18)

Today, virtual interviews are almost as ubiquitous as face-to-face interviews. When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in 2019, virtual meetings and interviews became a promising practice for staying connected to colleagues and hiring employees. Organizations had to quickly pivot and increase the use of virtual tools in order to keep their current and potential employees and clients safe.

Virtual interviews can also be more convenient for employers and interviewees by saving money and travel time, expanding the candidate pool (no geographical restrictions), and minimizing scheduling conflicts. While there are drawbacks to virtual interviewing, it is now considered the safest and fastest way to conduct business in the era of COVID-19.(19) Embracing virtual interviewing can help enhance and ensure that the appropriate talent is hired and the well-being and safety needs of all parties involved are taken into consideration.

8.7: Ten Tips for Virtual Interviewing Success

Understanding the importance of virtual interviewing and being able to make a positive first impression during a virtual interview is a skill set that can increase your chances of successfully landing a job in an environment that increasingly requires mediated communication skills.

Consider the following ten tips for success as you prepare for your next virtual interview:

1. Prepare notes in advance. However, refer to them sparingly.
2. Show up/sign on a few minutes early and think about your virtual background.
3. Dress to impress (even though it's virtual).
4. Test your set-up: camera glare, eye level toward camera, too far-too close to camera, audio, etc.
5. If you believe hand gestures enhance your communication, be sure to practice slightly elevating hand/arms movements, so they can be seen.
6. Use facial expressions to show when you are really engaged.
7. Incorporate a virtual handshake.
8. Put a disclaimer out that you may feel a little awkward not being in person and that you will do your best to minimize any barriers. Also, feel comfortable communicating barriers on their end as well.
9. Set aside time for practice sessions. Tape record at least 2-4 practice sessions, observe sessions, and do some self-talk/self-reflection. Also, feel free to share practice session(s) with trustworthy friends/family and ask them to give constructive feedback.
 - While practicing, pay close attention to how you sound: too fast/slow, too soft/loud, etc.
 - Also check for good posture: back as straight as possible, face towards camera, shoulders back, etc.
10. Minimize interruptions: put pets in a safe place so you/interviewers won't see/hear them during the interview, ask family/friends to support you by not being seen/heard during the interview, shut doors and windows so that outside/external noise level is decreased.

This is not an exhaustive list but by implementing these tips, you will be better positioned to succeed in a virtual interview.

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9: GROUP COMMUNICATION, TEAMWORK, AND LEADERSHIP

9.1: What is a Group?

9.2: Group Life Cycles and Member Roles

9.3: Group Problem Solving

9.4: Teamwork and Leadership

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9.1: What is a Group?

Learning Objectives

1. Define groups and teams.
2. Discuss how primary and secondary groups meet our interpersonal needs.
3. Discuss how groups tend to limit their own size and create group norms.

Let's get into a time machine and travel way, way back to join early humans in prehistoric times. Their needs are like ours today: they cannot exist or thrive without air, food, and water—and a sense of belonging. How did they meet these needs? Through cooperation and competition. If food scarcity was an issue, who got more and who got less? This serves as our first introduction to roles, status and power, and hierarchy within a group. When food scarcity becomes an issue, who gets to keep their spoon? In some Latin American cultures, having a job or earning a living is referred to by the slang term *cuchara*, which literally means “spoon” and figuratively implies food, safety, and security.

Now let's return to the present and enter a modern office. Cubicles define territories and corner offices denote status. In times of economic recession or slumping sales for the company, there is a greater need for cooperation, and there is competition for scarce resources. The loss of a “spoon”—or of one's cubicle—may now come in the form of a pink slip, but it is no less devastating.

We form self-identities through our communication with others, and much of that interaction occurs in a group context. A group may be defined as three or more individuals who affiliate, interact, or cooperate in a familial, social, or work context. Group communication may be defined as the exchange of information with those who are alike culturally, linguistically, and/or geographically. Group members may be known by their symbols, such as patches and insignia on a military uniform. They may be known by their use of specialized language or jargon; for example, someone in information technology may use the term “server” in reference to the Internet, whereas someone in the food service industry may use “server” to refer to the worker who takes customer orders in a restaurant. Group members may also be known by their proximity, as in gated communities. Regardless of how the group defines itself, and regardless of the extent to which its borders are porous or permeable, a group recognizes itself as a group. Humans naturally make groups a part of their context or environment.

Types of Groups in the Workplace

As a skilled business communicator, learning more about groups, group dynamics, management, and leadership will serve you well. Mergers, forced sales, downsizing, and entering new markets all call upon individuals within a business or organization to become members of groups. In the second of the Note 19.1 “Introductory Exercises” for this chapter, you were asked to list the professional (i.e., work-related) groups you interact with in order of frequency. What did your list include? Perhaps you noted your immediate coworkers, your supervisor and other leaders in your work situation, members of other departments with whom you communicate, and the colleagues who are also your personal friends during off-work times. Groups may be defined by function. They can also be defined, from a developmental viewpoint, by the relationships within them. Groups can also be discussed in terms of their relationship to the individual and the degree to which they meet interpersonal needs.

Some groups may be assembled at work to solve problems, and once the challenge has been resolved, they dissolve into previous or yet to be determined groups. Functional groups like this may be immediately familiar to you. You take a class in sociology from a professor of sociology, who is a member of the discipline of sociology. To be a member of a discipline is to be a disciple, and adhere to a common framework to for viewing the world. Disciplines involve a common set of theories that explain the world around us, terms to explain those theories, and have grown to reflect the advance of human knowledge. Compared to your sociology instructor, your physics instructor may see the world from a completely different perspective. Still, both may be members of divisions or schools, dedicated to teaching or research, and come together under the large group heading we know as the university.

In business, we may have marketing experts who are members of the marketing department, who perceive their tasks differently from a member of the sales staff or someone in accounting. You may work in the mailroom, and the mailroom staff is a group in itself, both distinct from and interconnected with the larger organization.



Figure 9.1.1: Groups and teams are an important part of business communication. plantronicsgermany – calisto_620_group_conference_crop – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Relationships are part of any group, and can be described in terms of status, power, control, as well as role, function, or viewpoint. Within a family, for example, the ties that bind you together may be common experiences, collaborative efforts, and even pain and suffering. The birth process may forge a relationship between mother and daughter, but it also may not. An adoption may transform a family. Relationships are formed through communication interaction across time, and often share a common history, values, and beliefs about the world around us.

In business, an idea may bring professionals together and they may even refer to the new product or service as their “baby,” speaking in reverent tones about a project they have taken from the drawing board and “birthed” into the real world. As in family communication, work groups or teams may have challenges, rivalries, and even “birthing pains” as a product is developed, adjusted, adapted, and transformed. Struggles are a part of relationships, both in families and business, and form a common history of shared challenges overcome through effort and hard work.

Through conversations and a shared sense that you and your coworkers belong together, you meet many of your basic human needs, such as the need to feel included, the need for affection, and the need for control (Schutz, W., 1966). In a work context, “affection” may sound odd, but we all experience affection at work in the form of friendly comments like “good morning,” “have a nice weekend,” and “good job!” Our professional lives also fulfill more than just our basic needs (i.e., air, food, and water, as well as safety). While your work group may be gathered together with common goals, such as to deliver the mail in a timely fashion to the corresponding departments and individuals, your daily interactions may well go beyond this functional perspective.

In the same way, your family may provide a place for you at the table and meet your basic needs, but they also may not meet other needs. If you grow to understand yourself and your place in a way that challenges group norms, you will be able to choose which parts of your life to share and to withhold in different groups, and to choose where to seek acceptance, affection, and control.

Primary and Secondary Groups

There are fundamentally two types of groups that can be observed in many contexts, from church to school, family to work. These two types are primary and secondary groups. The hierarchy denotes the degree to which the group(s) meet your interpersonal needs. Primary groups meet most, if not all, of one’s needs. Groups that meet some, but not all, needs are called secondary groups. Secondary groups often include work groups, where the goal is to complete a task or solve a problem. If you are a member of the sales department, your purpose is to sell.

In terms of problem solving, work groups can accomplish more than individuals can. People, each of whom have specialized skills, talents, experience, or education come together in new combinations with new challenges, find new perspectives to create unique approaches that they themselves would not have formulated alone.

Secondary groups may meet your need for professional acceptance and celebrate your success, but they may not meet your need for understanding and sharing on a personal level. Family members may understand you in ways that your coworkers cannot, and

vice versa.

If Two's Company and Three's a Crowd, What Is a Group?

This old cliché refers to the human tendency to form pairs. Pairing is the most basic form of relationship formation; it applies to childhood best friends, college roommates, romantic couples, business partners, and many other dyads (two-person relationships). A group, by definition, includes at least three people. We can categorize groups in terms of their size and complexity.

When we discuss demographic groups as part of a market study, we may focus on large numbers of individuals that share common characteristics. If you are the producer of an ecologically innovative car such as the Smart ForTwo, and know your customers have an average of four members in their family, you may discuss developing a new model with additional seats. While the target audience is a group, car customers don't relate to each other as a unified whole. Even if they form car clubs and have regional gatherings, a newsletter, and competitions at their local race tracks each year, they still subdivide the overall community of car owners into smaller groups.

The larger the group grows, the more likely it is to subdivide. Analysis of these smaller, or microgroups, is increasingly a point of study as the Internet allows individuals to join people of similar mind or habit to share virtually anything across time and distance. A microgroup is a small, independent group that has a link, affiliation, or association with a larger group. With each additional group member the number of possible interactions increases (Harris, T., and Sherblom, J., 1999; McLean, S., 2003).

Small groups normally contain between three and eight people. One person may involve intrapersonal communication, while two may constitute interpersonal communication, and both may be present within a group communication context. You may think to yourself before making a speech or writing your next post, and you may turn to your neighbor or coworker and have a side conversation, but a group relationship normally involves three to eight people, and the potential for distraction is great.

In Table 9.1.1, you can quickly see how the number of possible interactions grows according to how many people are in the group. At some point, we all find the possible and actual interactions overwhelming and subdivide into smaller groups. For example, you may have hundreds of friends on MySpace or Facebook, but how many of them do you regularly communicate with? You may be tempted to provide a number greater than eight, but if you exclude the "all to one" messages, such as a general tweet to everyone (but no one person in particular), you'll find the group norms will appear.

Table 9.1.1 Possible Interaction in Groups

Number of Group Members	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Number of Possible Interactions	2	9	28	75	186	441	1,056

Group norms are customs, standards, and behavioral expectations that emerge as a group forms. If you post an update every day on your Facebook page and your friends stop by to post on your wall and comment, not posting for a week will violate a group norm. They will wonder if you are sick or in the hospital where you have no access to a computer to keep them updated. If, however, you only post once a week, the group will come to naturally expect your customary post. Norms involve expectations that are self and group imposed and that often arise as groups form and develop.

If there are more than eight members, it becomes a challenge to have equal participation, where everyone has a chance to speak, listen, and respond. Some will dominate, others will recede, and smaller groups will form. Finding a natural balance within a group can also be a challenge. Small groups need to have enough members to generate a rich and stimulating exchange of ideas, information, and interaction, but not so many people that what each brings cannot be shared (Galanes, G., Adams, K., and Brilhart, J., 2000).

Key Takeaway

Forming groups fulfills many human needs, such as the need for affiliation, affection, and control; individuals also need to cooperate in groups to fulfill basic survival needs.

Exercises

1. Think of the online groups you participate in. Forums may have hundreds or thousands of members, and you may have hundreds of friends on MySpace or Facebook, but how many do you regularly communicate with? Exclude the “all-to-one” messages, such as a general tweet to everyone (but no one person in particular). Do you find that you gravitate toward the group norm of eight or fewer group members? Discuss your answer with your classmates.
2. What are some of the primary groups in your life? How do they compare with the secondary groups in your life? Write a two- to three-paragraph description of these groups and compare it with a classmate's description.
3. What group is most important to people? Create a survey with at least two questions, identify a target sample size, and conduct your survey. Report how you completed the activity and your findings. Compare the results with those of your classmates.
4. Are there times when it is better to work alone rather than in a group? Why or why not? Discuss your opinion with a classmate.

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9.2: Group Life Cycles and Member Roles

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the typical stages in the life cycle of a group.
2. Describe different types of group members and group member roles.

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 influence 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, discovered talents, and met other people. You learned, worked, 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 a 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. and Levine, J., 1982). 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. In school, people spoke and acted in different ways than at home. Gradually, you came to understand the meaning of recess, the importance of raising your hand to get the teacher's attention, and how to follow other school rules. At work, you may have had academic training for your profession, but the knowledge you learned in school 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 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 Bruce Tuckman. This model, shown in Table 9.2.1, 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.

Table 9.2.1: Tuckman's Linear Model of Group Development

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.

Stages	Activities
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.

Tuckman begins with the forming stage 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. and Calabrese, R., 1975; Berger, C., 1986; Gudykunst, W., 1995). 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 know 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 nametag, but instead 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 more senior to the organization than 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 business 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, who is 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 to serve as a benchmark for success. Wise managers know how 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 congratulate 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, which carries a cost. Managers will be measured by the group's productivity and performance. 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 the success is not focused on you. A manager manages the process while group members perform. If you were a member of the group that 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, all groups will eventually have to move on to new assignments. In the adjourning stage, members leave the group. The group may cease to exist or it may be transformed with new members and a new set of goals. Your contributions in the past may have caught the attention of the management, and you may be assigned to redesign 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.

Life Cycle of Member Roles

Just as groups go through a life cycle when they form and eventually adjourn, so the group members fulfill different roles during this life cycle. These roles, proposed by Richard Moreland and John Levine, are summarized in Table 9.2.2.

Table 9.2.2: Life Cycle of Member Roles

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

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 Web sites, 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 that 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 you feel lost at times, 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). 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 9.2.1: As a member of a new group, you will

learn new customs and traditions. [Wikimedia Commons](#) – public domain.

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. Coworkers who have been working in the department for several years may be unwilling to adapt and change, resulting in tension. 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 awhile. When you line up your next job and submit your resignation, you make it official.

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 business communicator, you will recognize the signs of divergence, just as you have anticipated the storming stage, and do your best to facilitate success.

Positive and Negative Member Roles

If someone in your group always makes everyone laugh, that can be a distinct asset when the news is less than positive. At times when you have to get work done, however, the class clown may become a distraction. Notions of positive and negative will often depend on the context when discussing groups. Table 9.2.3 (Beene, K. and Sheats, P., 1948; McLean, S., 2005) and Table 9.2.4 (Beene, K. and Sheats, P., 1948; McLean, S., 2005) list both positive and negative roles people sometimes play in a group setting (Beene, K. and Sheats, P., 1948; McLean, S., 2005).

Table 9.2.3: Positive Roles

Initiator-Coordinator	Suggests new ideas or new ways of looking at the problem
Elaborator	Builds on ideas and provides examples
Coordinator	Brings ideas, information, and suggestions together
Evaluator-Critic	Evaluates ideas and provides constructive criticism
Recorder	Records ideas, examples, suggestions, and critiques

Table 9.2.4: Negative Roles

Dominator	Dominates discussion, not allowing others to take their turn
Recognition Seeker	Relates discussion to their accomplishments; seeks attention
Special-Interest Pleader	Relates discussion to special interest or personal agenda
Blocker	Blocks attempts at consensus consistently
Joker or Clown	Seeks attention through humor and distracts group members

Now that we've examined a classical view of positive and negative group member roles, let's examine another perspective. While some personality traits and behaviors may negatively influence groups, some are positive or negative depending on the context.

Just as the class clown can have a positive effect in lifting spirits or a negative effect in distracting members, a dominator may be exactly what is needed for quick action. An emergency physician doesn't have time to ask all the group members in the emergency unit how they feel about a course of action; instead, a self-directed approach based on training and experience may be necessary. In contrast, the pastor of a church may have ample opportunity to ask members of the congregation their opinions about a change in the format of Sunday services; in this situation, the role of coordinator or elaborator is more appropriate than that of dominator.

The group is together because they have a purpose or goal, and normally they are capable of more than any one individual member could be on their own, so it would be inefficient to hinder that progress. But a blocker, who cuts off collaboration, does just that. If a group member interrupts another and presents a viewpoint or information that suggests a different course of action, the point may be well taken and serve the collaborative process. But if that same group member repeatedly engages in blocking behavior, then the behavior becomes a problem. A skilled business communicator will learn to recognize the difference, even when positive and negative aren't completely clear.

Key Takeaway

Groups and their individual members come together and grow apart in predictable patterns.

Exercises

1. Is it possible for an outsider (a nongroup 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?
4. 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 two- to three-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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9.3: Group Problem Solving

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and describe how to implement seven steps for group problem solving.

No matter who you are or where you live, problems are an inevitable part of life. This is true for groups as well as for individuals. Some groups—especially work teams—are formed specifically to solve problems. Other groups encounter problems for a wide variety of reasons. Within a family group, a problem might be that a daughter or son wants to get married and the parents do not approve of the marriage partner. In a work group, a problem might be that some workers are putting in more effort than others, yet achieving poorer results. Regardless of the problem, having the resources of a group can be an advantage, as different people can contribute different ideas for how to reach a satisfactory solution.

Once a group encounters a problem, the questions that come up range from “Where do we start?” to “How do we solve it?” While there are many ways to approach a problem, the American educational philosopher John Dewey’s reflective thinking sequence has stood the test of time. This seven-step process (Adler, R., 1996) has produced positive results and serves as a handy organizational structure. If you are member of a group that needs to solve a problem and don’t know where to start, consider these seven simple steps:

1. Define the problem
2. Analyze the problem
3. Establish criteria
4. Consider possible solutions
5. Decide on a solution
6. Implement the solution
7. Follow up on the solution

Let’s discuss each step in detail.

Define the Problem

If you don’t know what the problem is, how do you know you can solve it? Defining the problem allows the group to set boundaries of what the problem is and what it is not and to begin to formalize a description or definition of the scope, size, or extent of the challenge the group will address. A problem that is too broadly defined can overwhelm the group. If the problem is too narrowly defined, important information will be missed or ignored.

In the following example, we have a Web-based company called Favorites that needs to increase its customer base and ultimately sales. A problem-solving group has been formed, and they start by formulating a working definition of the problem.

Too broad: “Sales are off, our numbers are down, and we need more customers.”

More precise: “Sales have been slipping incrementally for six of the past nine months and are significantly lower than a seasonally adjusted comparison to last year. Overall, this loss represents a 4.5 percent reduction in sales from the same time last year. However, when we break it down by product category, sales of our nonedible products have seen a modest but steady increase, while sales of edibles account for the drop off and we need to halt the decline.”

Analyze the Problem

Now the group analyzes the problem, trying to gather information and learn more. The problem is complex and requires more than one area of expertise. Why do nonedible products continue selling well? What is it about the edibles that is turning customers off? Let’s meet our problem solvers at Favorites.

Kevin is responsible for customer resource management. He is involved with the customer from the point of initial contact through

purchase and delivery. Most of the interface is automated in the form of an online “basket model,” where photographs and product descriptions are accompanied by “buy it” buttons. He is available during normal working business hours for live chat and voice chat if needed, and customers are invited to request additional information. Most Favorites customers do not access this service, but Kevin is kept quite busy, as he also handles returns and complaints. Because Kevin believes that superior service retains customers while attracting new ones, he is always interested in better ways to serve the customer. Looking at edibles and nonedibles, he will study the cycle of customer service and see if there are any common points—from the main Web page, through the catalog, to the purchase process, and to returns—at which customers abandon the sale. He has existing customer feedback loops with end-of-sale surveys, but most customers decline to take the survey and there is currently no incentive to participate.

Mariah is responsible for products and purchasing. She wants to offer the best products at the lowest price, and to offer new products that are unusual, rare, or exotic. She regularly adds new products to the Favorites catalog and culls underperformers. Right now she has the data on every product and its sales history, but it is a challenge to represent it. She will analyze current sales data and produce a report that specifically identifies how each product—edible and nonedible—is performing. She wants to highlight “winners” and “losers” but also recognizes that today’s “losers” may be the hit of tomorrow. It is hard to predict constantly changing tastes and preferences, but that is part of her job. It’s not all science, and it’s not all art. She has to have an eye for what will catch on tomorrow while continuing to provide what is hot today.

Suri is responsible for data management at Favorites. She gathers, analyzes, and presents information gathered from the supply chain, sales, and marketing. She works with vendors to make sure products are available when needed, makes sales predictions based on past sales history, and assesses the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

The problem-solving group members already have certain information on hand. They know that customer retention is one contributing factor. Attracting new customers is a constant goal, but they are aware of the well-known principle that it takes more effort to attract new customers than to keep existing ones. Thus, it is important to insure a quality customer service experience for existing customers and encourage them to refer friends. The group needs to determine how to promote this favorable customer behavior.

Another contributing factor seems to be that customers often abandon the shopping cart before completing a purchase, especially when purchasing edibles. The group members need to learn more about why this is happening.

Establish Criteria

Establishing the criteria for a solution is the next step. At this point, information is coming in from diverse perspectives, and each group member has contributed information from their perspective, even though there may be several points of overlap.

Kevin: Customers who complete the postsale survey indicate that they want to know (1) what is the estimated time of delivery, (2) why a specific item was not in stock and when it will be available, and (3) why their order sometimes arrives with less than a complete order, with some items back-ordered, without prior notification.

He notes that a very small percentage of customers complete the postsale survey, and the results are far from scientific. He also notes that it appears the interface is not capable of cross-checking inventory to provide immediate information concerning back orders, so that the customer “buys it” only to learn several days later that it was not in stock. This seems to be especially problematic for edible products, because people may tend to order them for special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries. But we don’t really know this for sure because of the low participation in the postsale survey.

Mariah: There are four edible products that frequently sell out. So far, we haven’t been able to boost the appeal of other edibles so that people would order them as a second choice when these sales leaders aren’t available. We also have several rare, exotic products that are slow movers. They have potential, but currently are underperformers.

Suri: We know from a zip code analysis that most of our customers are from a few specific geographic areas associated with above-average incomes. We have very few credit cards declined, and the average sale is over \$100. Shipping costs represent on average 8 percent of the total sales cost. We do not have sufficient information to produce a customer profile. There is no specific point in the purchase process where basket abandonment tends to happen; it happens fairly uniformly at all steps.

Consider Possible Solutions to the Problem

The group has listened to each other and now starts to brainstorm ways to address the challenges they have addressed while

focusing resources on those solutions that are more likely to produce results.

Kevin: Is it possible for our programmers to create a cross-index feature, linking the product desired with a report of how many are in stock? I'd like the customer to know right away whether it is in stock, or how long they may have to wait. As another idea, is it possible to add incentives to the purchase cycle that won't negatively impact our overall profit? I'm thinking a small volume discount on multiple items, or perhaps free shipping over a specific dollar amount.

Mariah: I recommend we hold a focus group where customers can sample our edible products and tell us what they like best and why. When the best sellers are sold out, could we offer a discount on related products to provide an instant alternative? We might also cull the underperforming products with a liquidation sale to generate interest.

Suri: If we want to know more about our customers, we need to give them an incentive to complete the postsale survey. How about a 5 percent off coupon code for the next purchase to get them to return and to help us better identify our customer base? We may also want to build in a customer referral rewards program, but it all takes better data in to get results out. We should also explore the supply side of the business by getting a more reliable supply of the leading products and trying to get discounts that are more advantageous from our suppliers, especially in the edible category.

Decide on a Solution

Kevin, Mariah, and Suri may want to implement all the solution strategies, but they do not have the resources to do them all. They'll complete a cost-benefit analysis, which ranks each solution according to its probable impact. The analysis is shown in Table 9.3.1.

Table 9.3.1: Cost-Benefit Analysis

Source	Proposed Solution	Cost	Benefit	Comment
Kevin	Integrate the cross-index feature	High	High	Many of our competitors already have this feature
	Volume discount	Low	Medium	May increase sales slightly
	Free shipping	Low	Low	This has a downside in making customers more aware of shipping costs if their order doesn't qualify for free shipping
Mariah	Hold a focus group to taste edible products	High	Medium	Difficult to select participants representative of our customer base
	Search for alternative products to high performers	Medium	Medium	We can't know for sure which products customers will like best
	Liquidate underperformers	Low	Low	Might create a "bargain basement" impression inconsistent with our brand
Suri	Incentive for postsale survey completion	Low	Medium	Make sure the incentive process is easy for the customer
	Incentive for customer referrals	Low	Medium	People may feel uncomfortable referring friends if it is seen as putting them in a marketing role
	Find a more reliable supply of top-selling edibles	Medium	High	We already know customers want these products
	Negotiate better discounts from vendors	Low	High	If we can do this without alienating our best vendors, it will be a win-win

Now that the options have been presented with their costs and benefits, it is easier for the group to decide which courses of action are likely to yield the best outcomes. The analysis helps the group members to see beyond the immediate cost of implementing a given solution. For example, Kevin's suggestion of offering free shipping won't cost Favorites much money, but it also may not pay off in customer goodwill. And even though Mariah's suggestion of having a focus group might sound like a good idea, it will be expensive and its benefits are questionable.

A careful reading of the analysis indicates that Kevin's best suggestion is to integrate the cross-index feature in the ordering

process so that customers can know immediately whether an item is in stock or on back order. Mariah, meanwhile, suggests that searching for alternative products is probably the most likely to benefit Favorites, while Suri's two supply-side suggestions are likely to result in positive outcomes.

Implement the Solution

Kevin is faced with the challenge of designing the computer interface without incurring unacceptable costs. He strongly believes that the interface will pay for itself within the first year—or, to put it more bluntly, that Favorites' declining sales will get worse if the Web site does not have this feature soon. He asks to meet with top management to get budget approval and secures their agreement, on one condition: he must negotiate a compensation schedule with the Information Technology consultants that includes delayed compensation in the form of bonuses after the feature has been up and running successfully for six months.

Mariah knows that searching for alternative products is a never-ending process, but it takes time and the company needs results. She decides to invest time evaluating products that competing companies currently offer, especially in the edible category, on the theory that customers who find their desired items sold out on the Favorites Web site may have been buying alternative products elsewhere instead of choosing an alternative from Favorites's product lines.

Suri decides to approach the vendors of the four frequently sold-out products and ask point blank, "What would it take to get you to produce these items more reliably in greater quantities?" By opening the channel of communication with these vendors, she is able to motivate them to make modifications that will improve the reliability and quantity. She also approaches the vendors of the less popular products with a request for better discounts in return for their cooperation in developing and test-marketing new products.

Follow Up on the Solution

Kevin: After several beta tests, the cross-index feature was implemented and has been in place for thirty days. Now customers see either "in stock" or "available [mo/da/yr]" in the shopping basket. As expected, Kevin notes a decrease in the number of chat and phone inquiries to the effect of, "Will this item arrive before my wife's birthday?" However, he notes an increase in inquiries asking, "Why isn't this item in stock?" It is difficult to tell whether customer satisfaction is higher overall.

Mariah: In exploring the merchandise available from competing merchants, she got several ideas for modifying Favorites' product line to offer more flavors and other variations on popular edibles. Working with vendors, she found that these modifications cost very little. Within the first thirty days of adding these items to the product line, sales are up. Mariah believes these additions also serve to enhance the Favorites brand identity, but she has no data to back this up.

Suri: So far, the vendors supplying the four top-selling edibles have fulfilled their promise of increasing quantity and reliability. However, three of the four items have still sold out, raising the question of whether Favorites needs to bring in one or more additional vendors to produce these items. Of the vendors with which Favorites asked to negotiate better discounts, some refused, and two of these were "stolen" by a competing merchant so that they no longer sell to Favorites. In addition, one of the vendors that agreed to give a better discount was unexpectedly forced to cease operations for several weeks because of a fire.

This scenario allows us to see that the problem may have several dimensions as well as solutions, but resources can be limited and not every solution is successful. Even though the problem is not immediately resolved, the group problem-solving pattern serves as a useful guide through the problem-solving process.

Key Takeaway

Group problem solving can be an orderly process when it is broken down into seven specific stages.

Exercises

1. Think of a problem encountered in the past by a group of which you are a member. How did the group solve the problem? How satisfactory was the solution? Discuss your results with your classmates.
2. Consider again the problem you described in Exercise 1. In view of the seven-step framework, which steps did the group utilize? Would following the full seven-step framework have been helpful? Discuss your opinion with a classmate.

3. Research one business that you would like to know more about and see if you can learn about how they communicate in groups and teams. Compare your results with those of classmates.
4. Think of a decision you will be making some time in the near future. Apply the cost-benefit analysis framework to your decision. Do you find this method helpful? Discuss your results with classmates.

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9.4: Teamwork and Leadership

Learning Objectives

1. Define teamwork and explain how to overcome various challenges to group success.
2. Describe the process of leader development.
3. Describe several different leadership styles and their likely influence on followers.

Two important aspects of group communication—especially in the business environment—are teamwork and leadership. You will work in a team and at some point may be called on to lead. You may emerge to that role as the group recognizes your specific skill set in relation to the task, or you may be appointed to a position of responsibility for yourself and others. Your communication skills will be your foundation for success as a member and as a leader. Listen and seek to understand both the task and your group members as you become involved with the new effort. Have confidence in yourself and inspire the trust of others. Know that leading and following are both integral aspects of effective teamwork.

Teamwork

Teamwork is a compound word, combining team and work. Teams are a form of group normally dedicated to production or problem solving. That leaves us with the work. This is where our previous example on problem solving can serve us well. Each member of the team has skills, talents, experience, and education. Each is expected to contribute. Work is the activity, and while it may be fun or engaging, it also requires effort and commitment, as there is a schedule for production with individual and group responsibilities. Each member must fulfill his or her own obligations for the team to succeed, and the team, like a chain, is only as strong as its weakest member. In this context we don't measure strength or weakness at the gym, but in terms of productivity.

Teams can often achieve higher levels of performance than individuals because of the combined energies and talents of the members. Collaboration can produce motivation and creativity that may not be present in single-contractor projects. Individuals also have a sense of belonging to the group, and the range of views and diversity can energize the process, helping address creative blocks and stalemates. By involving members of the team in decision-making, and calling up on each member's area of contribution, teams can produce positive results.

Teamwork is not without its challenges. The work itself may prove a challenge as members juggle competing assignments and personal commitments. The work may also be compromised if team members are expected to conform and pressured to go along with a procedure, plan, or product that they themselves have not developed. Groupthink, or the tendency to accept the group's ideas and actions in spite of individual concerns, can also compromise the process and reduce efficiency. Personalities and competition can play a role in a team's failure to produce.

We can recognize that people want to belong to a successful team, and celebrating incremental gain can focus the attention on the project and its goals. Members will be more willing to express thoughts and opinions, and follow through with actions, when they perceive that they are an important part of the team. By failing to include all the team members, valuable insights may be lost in the rush to judgment or production. Making time for planning, and giving each member time to study, reflect, and contribute can allow them to gain valuable insights from each other, and may make them more likely to contribute information that challenges the status quo. Unconventional or "devil's advocate" thinking may prove insightful and serve to challenge the process in a positive way, improving the production of the team. Respect for divergent views can encourage open discussion.

John Thill and Courtland Bovee provide a valuable list to consider when setting up a team, which we have adapted here for our discussion:

- Select team members wisely
- Select a responsible leader
- Promote cooperation
- Clarify goals
- Elicit commitment
- Clarify responsibilities
- Instill prompt action

- Apply technology
- Ensure technological compatibility
- Provide prompt feedback

Group dynamics involve the interactions and processes of a team and influence the degree to which members feel a part of the goal and mission. A team with a strong identity can prove to be a powerful force, but it requires time and commitment. A team that exerts too much control over individual members can run the risk of reducing creative interactions and encourage tunnel vision. A team that exerts too little control, with attention to process and areas of specific responsibility, may not be productive. The balance between motivation and encouragement, and control and influence, is challenging as team members represent diverse viewpoints and approaches to the problem. A skilled business communicator creates a positive team by first selecting members based on their areas of skill and expertise, but attention to their style of communication is also warranted. Individuals that typically work alone or tend to be introverted may need additional encouragement to participate. Extroverts may need to be encouraged to listen to others and not dominate the conversation. Teamwork involves teams and work, and group dynamics play an integral role in their function and production.

Leadership

Whether or not there is a “natural leader,” born with a combination of talents and traits that enable a person to lead others, has been a subject of debate across time. In a modern context, we have come to recognize that leadership comes in many form and representations. Once it was thought that someone with presence of mind, innate intelligence, and an engaging personality was destined for leadership, but modern research and experience shows us otherwise. Just as a successful heart surgeon has a series of skill sets, so does a dynamic leader. A television producer must both direct and provide space for talent to create, balancing control with confidence and trust. This awareness of various leadership styles serves our discussion as groups and teams often have leaders, and they may not always be the person who holds the title, status, or role.

Leaders take on the role because they are appointed, elected, or emerge into the role. The group members play an important role in this process. An appointed leader is designated by an authority to serve in that capacity, irrespective of the thoughts or wishes of the group. They may serve as the leader and accomplish all the designated tasks, but if the group does not accept their role as leader, it can prove to be a challenge. As Bruce Tuckman notes, “storming” occurs as group members come to know each other and communicate more freely, and an appointed leader who lacks the endorsement of the group may experience challenges to his or her authority.

A democratic leader is elected or chosen by the group, but may also face serious challenges. If individual group members or constituent groups feel neglected or ignored, they may assert that the democratic leader does not represent their interests. The democratic leader involves the group in the decision-making process, and insures group ownership of the resulting decisions and actions as a result. Open and free discussions are representative of this process, and the democratic leader acknowledges this diversity of opinion.

An emergent leader contrasts the first two paths to the role by growing into the role, often out of necessity. The appointed leader may know little about the topic or content, and group members will naturally look to the senior member with the most experience for leadership. If the democratic leader fails to bring the group together, or does not represent the whole group, subgroups may form, each with an informal leader serving as spokesperson.

Types of Leaders

We can see types of leaders in action and draw on common experience for examples. The heart surgeon does not involve everyone democratically, is typically appointed to the role through earned degrees and experience, and resembles a military sergeant more than a politician. The autocratic leader is self-directed and often establishes norms and conduct for the group. In some settings we can see that this is quite advantageous, such as open-heart surgery or during a military exercise, but it does not apply equally to all leadership opportunities.

Contrasting the autocrat is the laissez-faire, or “live and let live” leader. In a professional setting, such as a university, professors may bristle at the thought of an autocratic leader telling them what to do. They have earned their role through time, effort, and experience and know their job. A wise laissez-faire leader recognizes this aspect of working with professionals and may choose to focus efforts on providing the professors with the tools they need to make a positive impact. Imagine that you are in the role of a television director and you have a vision or idea of what the successful pilot program should look like. The script is set, the lighting correct, and the cameras are in the correct position. You may tell people what to do and where to stand, but you

remember that your job is to facilitate the overall process. You work with talent, and creative people are interesting on camera. If you micromanage your actors, they may perform in ways that are not creative and that will not draw audiences. If you let them run wild through improvisation, the program may not go well at all. Balancing the need for control with the need for space is the challenge of the laissez-faire leader.

Not all leaders are autocrats or laissez-faire leaders. Thomas Harris and John Sherblom specifically note three leadership styles that characterize the modern business or organization, and reflect our modern economy. We are not born leaders but may become them if the context or environment requires our skill set. A leader-as-technician role often occurs when we have skills that others do not. If you can fix the copy machine at the office, your leadership and ability to get it running again are prized and sought-after skills. You may instruct others on how to load the paper or how to change the toner, and even though your pay grade may not reflect this leadership role, you are looked to by the group as a leader within that context. Technical skills, from Internet technology to facilities maintenance, may experience moments where their particular area of knowledge is required to solve a problem. Their leadership will be in demand.

The leader-as-conductor involves a central role of bringing people together for a common goal. In the common analogy, a conductor leads an orchestra and integrates the specialized skills and sounds of the various components the musical group comprises. In the same way, a leader who conducts may set a vision, create benchmarks, and collaborate with a group as they interpret a set script. Whether it is a beautiful movement in music or a group of teams that comes together to address a common challenge, the leader-as-conductor keeps the time and tempo of the group.

Coaches are often discussed in business-related books as models of leadership for good reason. A leader-as-coach combines many of the talents and skills we've discussed here, serving as a teacher, motivator, and keeper of the goals of the group. A coach may be autocratic at times, give pointed direction without input from the group, and stand on the sidelines while the players do what they've been trained to do and make the points. The coach may look out for the group and defend it against bad calls, and may motivate players with words of encouragement. We can recognize some of the behaviors of coaches, but what specific traits have a positive influence on the group? Thomas Peters and Nancy Austin identify five important traits that produce results:

1. Orientation and education
2. Nurturing and encouragement
3. Assessment and correction
4. Listening and counseling
5. Establishing group emphasis

Coaches are teachers, motivators, and keepers of the goals of the group. There are times when members of the team forget that there is no "I" in the word "team." At such times, coaches serve to redirect the attention and energy of the individuals to the overall goals of the group. They conduct the group with a sense of timing and tempo, and at times, they relax and let the members demonstrate their talents. Through their listening skills and counseling, they come to know each member as an individual, but keep the team focus for all to see. They set an example. Coaches, however, are human and by definition are not perfect. They can and do prefer some players over others and can display less than professional sideline behavior when they don't agree with the referee, but the style of leadership is worthy of your consideration in its multidisciplinary approach. Coaches use more than one style of leadership and adapt to the context and environment. A skilled business communicator will recognize that this approach has its merits

Key Takeaway

Teamwork allows individuals to share their talents and energy to accomplish goals. An effective leader facilitates this teamwork process.

Exercises

1. Do you prefer working in a group or team environment, or working individually? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Discuss your thoughts with classmates.
2. Imagine that you could choose anyone you wanted to be on a team with you. Who would you choose, and why? Write a two- to three-paragraph description and share it with a classmate.
3. Think of a leader you admire and respect. How did this individual become a leader—for example, by appointment, democratic selection, or emergence? How would you characterize this leader's style—is the leader autocratic or laissez-faire, a technician, or a coach?

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10: APPENDIX

10.1: Time Management Strategies

10.2: Avoiding Procrastination

10.3: Defining Goals

10.4: Setting a Time Frame for Your Goals

10.5: Writing Specific Goals

10.6: Using Audio in Business

10.7: Stages of a Telephone Call

10.8: One-on-One Audio Calls

10.1: Time Management Strategies

Introduction

Do you ever wonder where the hours in the day go? Do some days seem to just fly by—leaving you feeling like there just isn't enough time to do everything you need to do?

People in modern society often struggle to balance the time-consuming needs of going to school, working, and taking care of families. Even doing the things we love can consume so much time that it becomes stressful or anxiety-producing.

Is there a way to accomplish the things we *need* to do, along with the things we *want* to do, each day?

There are many strategies out there for organizing our daily activities. Using skills to arrange our time can help relieve our stress and allow us to take care of a variety of things in our lives. There is nothing quite like sitting down after a long day and feeling like you were productive. Smiling with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, you can cross off the items on your to-do list, knowing that you made the most out of the day.

In this lesson, we'll explore useful ways to organize your days—and even your weeks—to get the most mileage out of your time.

How to Make a Daily To-Do List

We often have many tasks and activities to take care of during the day or throughout the week. When keeping track of responsibilities for work, school, or home, you can make a to-do list to help you stay organized; it can also be an effective way of prioritizing what needs to be done first—or last.

Here are useful ways you can organize the day's activities:

Step 1: Brainstorm tasks. List all of the tasks you want to get done tomorrow. Each task will become an item on a to-do list. Don't worry about putting the entries in order or scheduling them yet. List everything you want to accomplish on a sheet of paper or in a notebook. You can also use 3 × 5 cards, writing one task on each card. Cards work well because you can slip them into your pocket or rearrange them, and you never have to copy to-do items from one list to another.

Step 2: Estimate time. For each task you wrote down in Step 1, estimate how long it will take you to complete it. This can be tricky. If you allow too little time, you end up feeling rushed. If you allow too much time, you become less productive. For now, give it your best guess. If you are unsure, overestimate rather than underestimate how long it will take for each task.

Now, pull out your calendar or Time Monitor/Time Plan. A Time Monitor or Time Plan is a structured document where you can plan your day, week, or month—but you can write your activities on your calendar as well. You've probably scheduled some hours for events such as classes or work. This leaves the unscheduled hours for tackling your to-do list.

Add up the time needed to complete all of your to-do items. Also add up the number of unscheduled hours in your day. Then compare the two totals. The power of this step is that you can spot time overload in advance. If you have eight hours' worth of to-do items but only four unscheduled hours, that's a potential problem. To solve it, proceed to Step 3.

Step 3: Rate each task by priority. To prevent overscheduling, decide which to-do items are the most important, given your available time. One suggestion for making this decision comes from the book *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life*, by Alan Lakein (1973): Simply label each item as A, B, or C.

The A items on your list are tasks that are the most critical. They include assignments that are coming due or jobs that need to be done immediately. Also included are activities that lead directly to your short-term goals.

The B items on your list are important, but less so than the A items. The B items can be postponed, if necessary, for another day.

The C items are often small, easy tasks with no set timeline. They, too, can be postponed.

Once you've labeled the items on your to-do list, schedule time for all of the A tasks. The B and C items can be done randomly during the day—when you are in between tasks and are not yet ready to start the next A task. Even if you get only one or two of your A items done, you'll still be moving toward your goals.

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Make Choices About Focus

When we get busy, we get tempted to do several things at the same time. It seems like such a natural solution: Watch TV and read a textbook. Talk on the phone and outline a paper. Write an e-mail and listen to a lecture. These are examples of multitasking.

There's a problem with this strategy: Multitasking is much harder than it looks.

Despite the awe-inspiring complexity of the human brain, research reveals that we are basically wired to do one thing at a time (Lien, Ruthruff, and Johnston 2005). One study found that people who interrupted work to check e-mail or surf the Internet took up to 25 minutes to get back to their original task (Thompson 2005). In addition, people who use their cell phones while driving get into more traffic accidents than other drivers do, except for drunk drivers (Medina 2009, 87).

The solution is an old-fashioned one: Whenever possible, take life one task at a time. Develop a key quality of master students—focused attention. Start by reviewing and using the Power Process: *Be here now*. Then, add the following strategies to your toolbox:

Unplug from technology. To reduce the temptation of multitasking, turn off distracting devices. Shut off your TV, cell phone, computer, and/or tablet. Disconnect from the Internet, unless it's required for your task. Later, you can take a break to make calls, send texts, check e-mails, or browse the web or social media.

Capture fast-breaking ideas with minimal interruption. Your brain is an expert nagger. After you choose to focus on one task, it might issue urgent reminders about 10 more things you need to do. Keep 3 × 5 cards or paper and a pen handy to write down those reminders. You can take a break later and add them to your to-do list. Your mind can quiet down once it knows that a task has been captured in writing.

Monitor the moment-to-moment shifts in your attention. Whenever you're studying and notice that you're distracted by thoughts of doing something else, make a tally mark on a sheet of paper. Simply being aware of your tendency to multitask can help you reclaim your attention.

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Make Choices About Multitasking

Learning how to improve your focus and overall attention can help you be more effective in your academic pursuits. Sometimes, though, we simply may not be able to devote our entire time to the same activity. In that case, it becomes necessary to multitask. Can multitasking be productive or even beneficial? It depends on the situation. Some activities require total focus, while others can be more easily juggled.

Here are some strategies for refining your ability to multitask:

Handle interruptions with care. Some breaking events are so urgent that they call for your immediate attention. When this

happens, note what you were doing when you were interrupted. For example, write down the number of the page you were reading or the name of the computer file you were working on. When you return to the task, your notes can help you get up to speed again.

Multitask by conscious choice. If multitasking seems inevitable, then do it with skill. Pair one activity that requires concentration with another activity that you can do almost automatically. For example, studying for your psychology exam while downloading music is a way to reduce the disadvantages of multitasking. Pretending to listen to your children while watching TV is not.

Align your activities with your passions. Our attention naturally wanders when we find a task to be trivial, pointless, or irritating. At those times, switching attention to another activity becomes a way to reduce discomfort.

Handling routine tasks is a necessary part of daily life. But if you find that your attention frequently wanders throughout the day, ask yourself: Am I really doing what I want to do? Do my work and my classes connect to my interests?

If the answer is no, then the path beyond multitasking might call for a change in your academic and career plans. Determine what you want most in life. Then, use the techniques in this lesson to set goals that inspire you. Whenever an activity aligns with your passion, the temptation to multitask loses power.

Break It Down, Get It Done: Using a Long-Term Planner

With a long-term planner, you can eliminate a lot of unpleasant surprises. Long-term planning allows you to avoid scheduling conflicts—the kind that obligate you to be in two places at the same time three weeks from now. You can also anticipate busy periods, such as finals week, and start preparing for them now. Goodbye, all-night cram sessions. Hello, serenity.

Find a long-term planner, or make your own. Many office supply stores sell academic planners that cover an entire school year. You can also create your own planner. A big roll of newsprint pinned to a bulletin board or taped to a wall will do nicely. Also search online stores for free or cheap software or smartphone apps designed for long-term planning.

Enter scheduled dates that extend into the future. Use your long-term planner to list commitments that extend beyond the current month. Enter test dates, lab and study sessions, no- classes days or holidays, and planned and other events for the current and next terms.

Create a master assignment list. Find the syllabus for each course you're currently taking. Then, in your long-term planner, enter the due dates for all of the assignments in all of your courses. This step can be a powerful reality check.

The purpose of using a planner is *not* to make you feel overwhelmed by all of the things you have to do. Rather, its aim is to help you take a first step toward recognizing the demands on your time. Armed with the truth about how you use your time, you can make more accurate plans.

Include nonacademic events. In addition to tracking academic commitments, you can use your long-term planner to mark significant events in your life outside of school. Include birthdays, doctors' appointments, concert dates, credit card payment due dates, and car maintenance schedules.

Week of	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<u>9 / 5</u>							
<u>9 / 12</u>		English quiz					
<u>9 / 19</u>			English paper due		Speech #1		
<u>9 / 26</u>	Chemistry test					Skiing at the lake	
<u>10 / 3</u>		English quiz			Speech #2		
<u>10 / 10</u>				Geography project due			
<u>10 / 17</u>				--- No classes ---			

Planning a day, a week, or a month ahead is a powerful practice. Using a long-term planner—one that displays an entire quarter, semester, or year at a glance—can yield even more benefits.

Use your long-term planner to divide and conquer. For some people, academic life is a series of last-minute crises punctuated by periods of exhaustion. You can avoid that fate. The key is to break down big assignments and projects into smaller assignments and subprojects, each with its own due date.

When planning to write a paper, for example, enter the final due date in your long-term planner. Then, set individual deadlines for each milestone in the writing process—creating an outline, completing the research, finishing the first draft, editing the draft, and preparing the final copy. By meeting these interim due dates, you make steady progress toward completing the assignment throughout the term. That sure beats trying to crank out all those pages at the last minute.

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10.2: Avoiding Procrastination

Introduction

Procrastination is a common problem that many of us struggle with. It can negatively affect work, school, and even relationships. Putting something off until later can often lead to never quite completing the task or activity, creating a variety of problems as a result.

“I’ll do it tomorrow.”

“I’ll take care of that later.”

“Oh, that can wait just a bit.”

Have you ever made excuses for why a task didn’t get completed? Do you ever find yourself putting something off until a later time, only to forget about it indefinitely?

In college, procrastination can have real negative effects on your academic success. Waiting to write that essay until the night before it’s due will likely mean you can’t put in your best effort— and it will show! Cramming the morning of the final exam can have disastrous results as well. But how do you avoid these behaviors when they are part of your daily life?

In this lesson, you’ll dive deeper into the common issue of procrastination and explore some ways you can break this destructive pattern.

Stop Procrastination Now

When it comes to putting things off, the remedy is to avoid delaying tasks and activities altogether. Consider that bold idea: The way to stop procrastinating is to stop procrastinating. Giving up procrastination is actually a simple choice. People just make it complicated.

Sound crazy? Well, test this idea for yourself.

Think of something that you’ve been putting off. Choose a small, specific task—one that you can complete in five minutes or less. Then do that task today.

Tomorrow, choose another task and do it. Repeat this strategy each day for one week. Notice what happens to your habit of procrastination after just one week.

If that suggestion just doesn’t work for you, then experiment with any of the strategies that follow.

Discover the costs. Think about whether procrastination keeps you from getting what you want. Clearly seeing the side effects of procrastination can help you kick the habit.

Trick yourself into getting started. If you have a 50-page chapter to read, then grab the book and say to yourself, “I’m not really going to read this chapter right now. I’m just going to flip through the pages and scan the headings for 10 minutes.” Tricks like these can get you started on a task you’ve been dreading.

Let feelings follow action. If you put off exercising until you feel energetic, you might wait for months. Instead, get moving now. Then, watch your feelings change. After five minutes of brisk walking, you might be in the mood for a 20-minute run. This principle—*action generates motivation*—can apply to any task that you’ve put on the back burner.

Choose to work under pressure. Sometimes, people thrive under pressure. As one writer puts it, “I don’t do my best work under deadline. I do my only work under deadline.” Used selectively, this strategy might also work for you.

Create goals that draw you forward. A goal that grabs you by the heartstrings is an inspiration to act now. If you’re

procrastinating, then set some goals that excite you. You might wake up one day and discover that procrastination is part of your past.

The 7-Day Anti-Procrastination Plan

Listed here are seven strategies you can use to reduce or eliminate many sources of procrastination. The suggestions are tied to the days of the week to help you remember them. Use this list to remind yourself that each day of your life presents an opportunity to stop the cycle of procrastination.

Monday

Make it meaningful. What is important about the task you've been putting off? List all the benefits of completing that task. To remember this strategy, keep in mind that it starts with the letter M, as does Monday.

Tuesday

Take it apart. Break big jobs into a series of small ones you can do in 15 minutes or less. Even the biggest projects can be broken down into a series of small tasks. This strategy starts with the letter T, so mentally tie it to Tuesday.

Wednesday

Write an intention statement. If you can't get started on a term paper, you might write, "I intend to write a list of at least 10 possible topics by 9 p.m. I will reward myself with an hour of guilt-free recreational reading." File in your memory the first word of this strategy—write—under Wednesday.

Thursday

Tell everyone. Publicly announce your intention to get a task done. Make the world your support

group. Associate *tell* with Thursday. Friday

Find a reward. Construct rewards for yourself carefully. Be willing to withhold them if you do not complete the task. Remember that Friday is a fine day to find a reward.

Saturday

Settle it now. Do it now. The minute you notice yourself procrastinating, plunge into the task.

Link *settle* with Saturday. Sunday

Say no. When you keep pushing a task into a low-priority category, reexamine your purpose for doing that task at all. If you realize that you really don't intend to do something, quit telling yourself that you will. Sunday—the last day of this seven-day anti-procrastination plan—is a great day to finally let go and say no.

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10.3: Defining Goals

Introduction

An important part of being a successful student is defining your goals and developing a plan to meet those goals. Your goals are the overarching principles that help guide your decisions and help you make your plan for success. Goals are broad, general ideas about what you want to accomplish.

Objectives then, are the smaller, more defined steps you take to meet your goals. Objectives are more specific than goals. They must be measurable. For example, the objective “to learn more about project management” is not measurable. How would you determine if you met that objective?

Objectives should be realistic as well. For example, let’s say you set the objective of taking five classes per term for the next two years to meet your goal of graduating with a bachelor’s degree in project management. However, you also have a full-time job, which requires you to travel, and three children under the age of five to care for. Would this be a realistic objective? Likely not.

The first step of setting and attaining appropriate goals is to define the areas in which you want to create goals.

Identifying Goals

An important part of setting goals is to figure out the areas of your life where you can set goals. You should write goals in several areas of life. People who set goals in only one area of life— such as their career—may find that their personal growth becomes one-sided. They might experience success at work while neglecting their health or relationships with family members and friends.

To avoid this outcome, set goals in a variety of categories. Consider what you want to experience in these areas:

- Education
- Career
- Finances
- Family life or relationships
- Social life
- Spirituality
- Health

Add goals in other areas as they occur to you.

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10.4: Setting a Time Frame for Your Goals

Introduction

Once you have defined the areas in your life for which you want to set goals, then you want to think about the time frame in which you want to accomplish those goals.

Let's say your goal is to complete your degree in project management in four years. That is a measurable goal and certainly attainable. However, the end time is four years away. What happens during those four years? How do you know if you are meeting the necessary smaller steps along the way? Should all goals have the same timeline?

It is important to feel a sense of accomplishment when you set and attain goals. Part of a comprehensive plan is to set goals that have different time frames: long-term, mid-term, and short-term goals.

Setting a Time Frame for Your Goals

Not all goals can or should be accomplished in the same time frame. As you create your plan of setting and attaining goals and to get a comprehensive vision of your future, include the following time frames:

- **Long-term goals.** Long-term goals represent major targets in your life. These goals can take 5 to 20 years to achieve. In some cases, they will take a lifetime. They can include goals in education, careers, personal relationships, travel, or financial security—whatever is most important to you.
- **Mid-term goals.** Mid-term goals are objectives you can accomplish in 1 to 5 years. They include goals such as completing a course of education, paying off a car loan, or achieving a specific career level. These goals usually support your long-term goals.
- **Short-term goals.** Short-term goals are the ones you can accomplish in a year or less. These goals are specific achievements, such as completing a particular course or group of courses, hiking down the Appalachian Trail, or organizing a family reunion.

Setting your goals to include long-term, mid-term, and short-term time frames will not only help you create a more comprehensive plan but also allow you to more easily identify your accomplishments along the way.

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10.5: Writing Specific Goals

Introduction

Once you have defined your goals and set the time frame for each of your goals, you are ready to create your plan. Your plan should have goals in several areas of your life and include short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. To create a plan that is achievable, make sure you write it down.

Having goals you talk about or that only exist in your mind may not give you the motivation you need to attain them.

In addition, once you create your plan, you want to take immediate action to increase your odds of success. Decrease the gap between stating a goal and starting to achieve it. If you slip and forget about the goal, you can get back on track at any time by *doing* something about it.

Writing Specific Goals

One of the most important things to do when creating your goals is to write down your goals. Writing down your goals greatly increases your chances of meeting them. Writing exposes undefined terms, unrealistic time frames, and other symptoms of fuzzy thinking.

One idea to keep track of your goals is to write each one on a separate 3 × 5 card or type them all into a file on your computer. Update this file as your goals change.

In addition to writing down your goals, make sure your goals are specific. Make clear what actions are needed or what results are expected. Consider these examples of vague goals and specific goals. Which goals are written in a way that is measurable and realistic?

Vague Goal	Specific Goal
Get a good education.	Graduate with a B.S. in engineering, with honors, by 2012.
Get good grades.	Earn a 3.5 GPA next semester.
Enhance my spiritual life.	Meditate for 15 minutes daily.
Improve my appearance.	Lose 6 pounds during the next 6 months.
Get control of my money.	Transfer \$100 to my savings account each month.

When stated specifically, a goal might look different to you. If you examine it closely, a goal you once thought you wanted might not be something you want after all. Or you might discover that you want to choose a new path to achieve a goal that you are sure you want.

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10.6: Using Audio in Business

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the strengths and weaknesses of audio in a business context



The strengths of audio—as compared with written communication—are appropriate in a lot of business situations.

A conversation is **synchronous**. That is, everyone is participating at the same time. Email or IM is **asynchronous**, meaning you may not get a response right away, and when you do hear from other people, their responses are usually carefully considered and edited. Sometimes, this is good, especially if you want people to spend some time on a question or idea.

However, there are situations when you don't necessarily want this, and audio represents a stronger choice:

- When a decision needs to be made quickly, you don't want people to take their time to answer an email and then respond to all the other emails they receive on the topic
- When it's helpful to hear people's tone of voice so you can gauge their certainty, enthusiasm, or other emotion
- When you want to ensure that everyone has understood what's being said; conversation allows people to ask questions and clarify their comments in the moment, which can cut down on confusion later

Audio is generally also pretty easy. Everyone understands how to work a telephone. Even if there are steps to go through to get on a conference line, it's a relatively unintimidating technology. This also means that having audio in place as backup for more complex technologies is always a good idea.

Audio does have its **downsides**, especially compared with other, more sophisticated methods of remote conferencing.

- While audio does allow you to hear emotion in people's voices, it doesn't let you read facial expressions, which can be helpful when a topic is sensitive or challenging.
- Another aspect of not being able to see faces is that people tend to interrupt each other more because there are no visual cues that someone is starting to speak or intends to keep speaking.
- Audio-only also allows people to be distracted or to engage in multitasking while still technically being "on the call" since no one can see what they're doing. The result of this is that you have people dialed in but tuned out.
 - Colleagues may be checking emails or reading other materials while on the call, especially if they are not expected to participate much in the conversation.
 - One consultant who works from home confessed that he used monthly board meeting calls as an opportunity to clean the cat box while on the call.

As we will see in the sections that follow, sometimes video or screen sharing offers a more effective means of remote conferencing, but if audio does what you need it to, it's easy and familiar.

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10.7: Stages of a Telephone Call

Learning Objectives

- Identify the five stages of a telephone conversation

Setting aside for the moment large dial-in experiences such as presentations or meetings in which just a few people will be doing all the talking, there are five stages to one-on-one and small-group business conversations via audio:

1. Openings and Greetings
2. Establishing Expectations
3. Content, Conversation, Business
4. Wrap-up, Next Steps, and Feedback
5. Closing

If you're talking to just one or two people, calls can be pretty spontaneous. If you are talking to a larger group, these five stages assume that you have sent an invitation with some detail about the purpose, length, and expectations of the call.

Openings and Greetings

In a one-on-one call, you can simply exchange greetings as you would with a friend.

DAVE: (answering phone): David Jeffries.

LANIE: Hi Dave, it's Lanie. How are you this morning?

DAVE: Hi Lanie, I'm fine, how are you?

LANIE: Great, thanks.

In a group call, the call host generally establishes who's on the line and greets each person as they dial in. If the call is unusually large, the host might do a roll call to be sure everyone has dialed in.

CHARISSE (the host of the call): Hi everyone. Thanks for calling in. I know we have Lori, Sophia, Charles, and Rudi on the line. How are you all doing?

GROUP: Fine, great, still sleepy, etc.

CHARISSE: Are Michael and Ginger on the call yet?

MICHAEL: I'm here.

GINGER: Yes, sorry I'm a bit late.

CHARISSE: Great! Let's get started.

Establishing Expectations

Sometimes, this is called the "feedforward" section. In this part of the call, you establish two key points: the timing of the call and the topics to be covered. It sounds simple, but it's easy to forget, and it can lead to frustration if expectations are different among the people on the call.

In one-on-one situations, this is really all you need to do:

LANIE: Do you have fifteen minutes or so to talk about the last batch of job applications we received?

DAVE: Sure. I have another call at ten o'clock, but I'm all yours until then.

In a larger group setting, you should also address how elements of the call—such as questions and answers—will be handled.

CHARISSE: This call is scheduled to last until 11:00. What I'd like to do is to let Lori and Michael tell us what they learned at their store visits. Michael will go first and tell us what he learned about merchandising and then Lori will discuss operations. I'd like to save Q&A for the end so that both of them can get through everything they have to say.

Content, Conversation, Business

In this part of the call, the work gets done. This is the part of the call people prepare for, but it goes much more smoothly if you remember to include what comes before and what comes after.

Wrap-up, Next Steps, and Feedback

Once the business has been conducted, the final task is to recap the conversation and set next steps, if there are any. This is pretty much the same for both one-on-one and group conversations. In a group call, it's especially important for the call leader to make sure she's left time for this stage. It shouldn't be rushed or feel like an afterthought.

LANIE: This has been really helpful, Dave, thanks. So you will review and sort the applications for assistant manager, and I'll go over the ones for stockroom staff, right? Then we can talk again on Friday about which ones to interview.

DAVE: Sounds good. If anymore assistant manager applications come in, just email them to me, okay? Oh, and I have a dentist appointment on Friday afternoon, but I can talk any time before 3:00.

LANIE: Great, I'll send you a meeting invite through Outlook.

Closing

This is where you say good-bye and thank you just as you would in a personal conversation.

DAVE: Thanks for taking the initiative on this call. I'll talk to you soon!

LANIE: Have a great day, Dave. Bye!

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10.8: One-on-One Audio Calls

Learning Objectives

- Identify strategies to increase comprehension and reduce misunderstanding in one-on-one telephone / VOIP communications

In many ways, one-on-one calls are the easiest because they are the most familiar. However, this familiarity can also lead to people being underprepared for the call and wasting time, which is frustrating for both parties. Needless to say, you shouldn't eat or chew gum during the call; a quiet sip of water now and then is fine. You should also make sure you complete all five stages of the call.

If the call is planned and on the calendar, make sure you call on time. It's human nature to feel more pressure when several people are waiting rather than just one, but it's no less rude to that one person when you're late. If the call is unplanned and it's likely to take more than a few minutes, it's courteous to send an IM or email asking whether the person is available now and letting them know how long the call may take: "Hi Dan, are you free to talk for about 20 minutes right now? If not, might you have some time before the end of the day? Thanks."

Listen as actively as you talk. No matter what means of communication you are using, this is one of your most important guidelines. A lot of time and confusion is saved when people actively listen to one another rather than thinking about what they're going to say next.

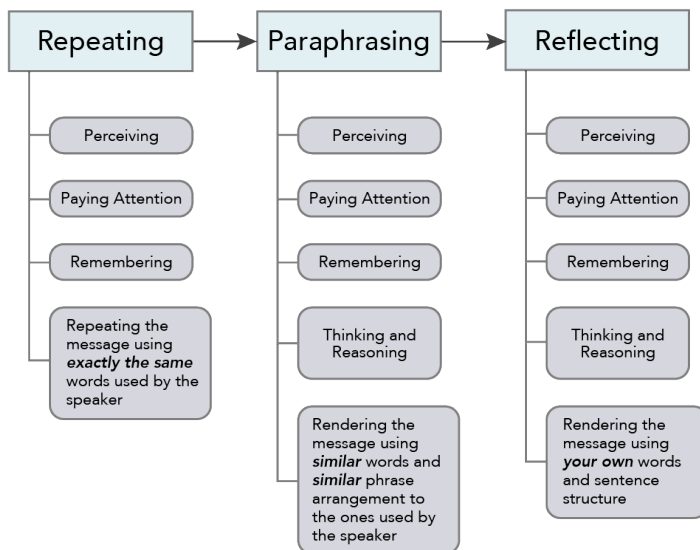


Figure 1. Degrees of Active Listening.

Because of quirks in the technology, using more complex systems such as VOIP on your laptop or conferencing applications can make calls a bit more complicated even when it's just you and one other person. As we have already discussed, allow a bit of time when scheduling the call to make sure that you can attend to technology issues and still get your important business done.

If there's a staticky or hard-to-hear line, there are a couple of things to do:

- Find out where the other person is calling from. If they are outside or at a busy coffee shop, the background noise behind them may be what's making your call hard to hear. To fix this, they can either move to a quieter place (which may mean rescheduling the call), or mute their phone when they are not actively talking. However, muting can be pretty inconvenient if there are only two people are on the call since there will likely be a lot of back-and-forth conversation.
- If it's the line itself, hang up the call and dial back in. You are likely to get a clearer line on your second try.

If one person cannot hear the other, there are a few things you can try. Let's go back to Dave and Lanie's call and assume they

are using VOIP through their laptops. If Lanie can hear Dave just fine but he can't hear her, he might try the following solutions:

- Dave should check to make sure that his speakers are on and the volume turned up. There are a few places on a laptop to check this.
 - On a PC, at the bottom-right corner of the screen, there's a speaker icon. If that icon has an X (or a circle with a line through it) next to it, that means the speaker is on Mute. If there's no X, click on the speaker anyway to see how far the volume is turned up.
 - On a Mac, the volume control icon is at the top right of the screen. If there are no waves coming out of the speaker icon, your Mac is muted.
- If either Dave or Lanie is using a headset or headphones with a microphone, they should both make sure that the headphones are plugged all the way into the proper jack on the laptop. If they're using Bluetooth headphones, they should make sure the Bluetooth connection is established.
- If the problem is not with Dave's speakers or anyone's headset, Lanie should check her microphone settings.
 - If Lanie is on a PC, she'll go to Settings in the Windows menu and search on Microphone. She'll make sure the mic is set up. Then she'll check her microphone privacy settings to be sure she hasn't blocked the app she's using from access to the microphone.
 - If she's on a Mac, she'll click on the System Preferences icon and then click the Sound icon. She'll make sure the Internal Microphone is chosen and then adjust the Input Volume to be sure she can be heard.
- If none of that works, they may need to start over with a new line or switch to a regular phone call.

If there's an echo on the line that makes it hard for one or both people to hear, this can really mess with the pacing of the call and be frustrating for those involved. There are a few steps you can take to eliminate this problem.

- Ask whether either person is using their speaker instead of their handset. If multiple people are using speakers, this can cause an echo. The more people on the call, the worse this can get. The solution is to ask people who don't absolutely need to use their speakers to switch to their handsets. Using cell phones can sometimes make this even worse.
- Restart the call to get another line.

One more thing to take into account when using VOIP, especially through a laptop or tablet, is that there may be a delay between what the speaker says and when the hearer hears it. This is why active listening is so important. Take the time to be sure the other person has finished speaking, and have some phrases ready to use if you get interrupted because of the delay. Here's what to do:

- Acknowledge the delay: "We seem to have a little bit of a lag in the audio. I want to make sure you get to finish your thoughts before I start talking, so please let me know if I interrupt you."
- When you step on someone else's conversation: "Sorry, please continue."
- When someone steps on your conversation: "I'd like to finish that thought, and the sound delay got in the way. If I could have one more minute . . ."

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