

Communication and Competence

Now, I do not deny, nor do I doubt, that should communication be opened, the reaction among mankind would be very strong—not because of the content of the message but simply from the fact that a message could in fact be received. Such an experience would say to us human beings “We are not alone in the universe.” And this, I think . . . might by itself quite justify any expenditures made in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

W. H. McNeill¹

ONLY A FEW YEARS AGO, the idea that humans might one day communicate with extraterrestrials seemed ridiculous. Those who believed it possible were considered to be, at best, misguided and, at worst, lunatics. Since the 1970s, however, some very high-powered astrophysicists have been taking the idea seriously. They are convinced that communication with alien intelligence may one day be possible.²

Think about it for a minute. Try to put yourself in the place of these scientists. Imagine that you are trying to make contact with alien beings. Remember that the beings you are trying to reach—if they exist at all—have given you no address. All you know is that they live somewhere in the vast stretches of the universe, hundreds or thousands of light years away. And even if you succeed in making contact, you still have to design an intelligible message. Movies like *E.T.* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* notwithstanding, extraterrestrials are unlikely to respond (or even look) like any organism you have ever seen. The chances of their being able to

QUESTIONING COMMUNICATION

- What is the best definition of communication?
- What makes a communicator competent?
- Why is culture so important?

understand human language, let alone English, are infinitesimally small. How can you be sure that aliens will recognize your communications? How will you be able to recognize theirs? What if you have already come in contact with their messages without realizing it?

In the face of all these problems, your only choice would be to do exactly what all of us do when we communicate: rely on guesswork and faith. You would begin by assuming a desire for cooperative communication. You would then try to guess what extraterrestrials are like and how they see the world, searching for a point of similarity upon which to make connection. After that, you would simply wait and hope. Of course, the subject of this book is not interstellar communication but a much more mundane one: the way normal human beings communicate as they go about their everyday lives. We believe, though, that unusual examples help us see the commonplace in new ways.³

If you think about it, there are some interesting similarities between earthbound and intergalactic communication. First of all, in both cases we must resist “communicative chauvinism,” the belief that everyone else thinks and acts as we do. Communication depends on sensitivity to differences and on a real desire to establish common ground. Second, people who wish to communicate must learn to “speak the same language”; they must take the time and trouble to adjust to one another. Cooperation and coordination are necessary for any kind of communication, whether it’s with neighbors in the next street or with beings in the next galaxy.

We often take interpersonal communication for granted, overlooking what an amazing process it really is. The purpose of this book is to help you see interpersonal communication in a new light. While it may not be as exotic as interstellar communication, it is still a complex and fascinating process. We hope that by the time you finish this book, you will have a better understanding of how it works.

What Is Communication?

Although communication has been written about for over 25 centuries,⁴ there is still disagreement about how to define it. In this section we’ll look at a number of definitions of human communication, offer our own, and then explore its implications.

Definitions of Human Communication

In 1972, Frank Dance and Carl Larson surveyed the field for definitions of communication. They found

126.⁵ Even more have been formulated since then. Obviously, a process as complex as communication is difficult to summarize or define. Each person who thinks seriously about it brings a different perspective to the task. There are many valid ways to view a process, each providing a different insight.

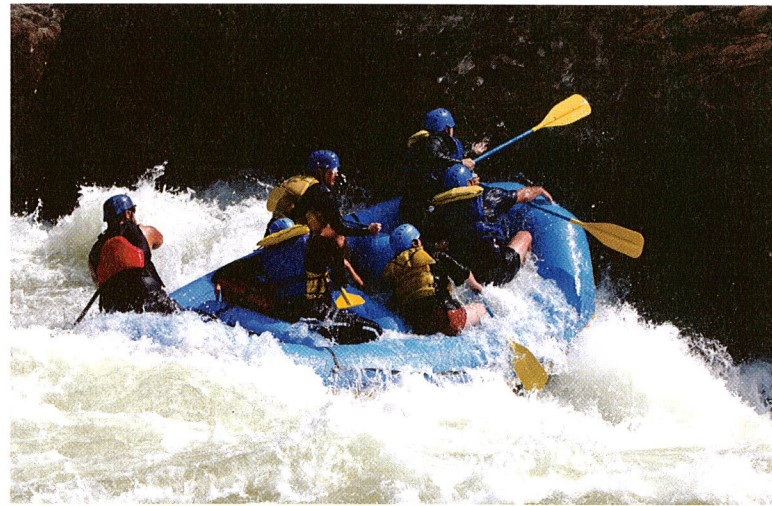
We will give you a number of definitions to consider, but before we do, stop and jot down your own ideas about communication. Then, compare your definition with those that follow. Ask yourself which comes closest to your understanding of what communication is. More important, ask yourself why.

- Communication is the discriminatory response of an organism to a stimulus.⁶
- Communication . . . is an “effort after meaning,” a creative act initiated by man in which he seeks to discriminate and organize cues so as to orient himself in his environment and satisfy his changing needs.⁷
- Speech communication is a human process through which we make sense out of the world and share that sense with others.⁸
- Communication: the transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc., by the use of symbols . . .⁹
- Communication is a process by which a source transmits a message to a receiver through some channel.

The purpose of a definition is to set boundaries and to focus attention. Definitions ask people to look at certain parts of a process while ignoring others. The question to ask in evaluating a definition is not, “Is it right or wrong?” Rather, the question should be, “Is it a useful guide for inquiry?” Each focuses on a different part of the phenomenon we call communication.

The first definition is very broad. According to this view, any response by any living organism counts as communication. A plant seeking out the sun, prey sensing the presence of a predator, a human being reading a book—all would be examples of communication. Furthermore, this definition concentrates on the part the receiver plays in communication and gives almost no attention to the part played by the sender. In comparison, the next definition is narrower, focusing our attention on human communication and emphasizing the reasons we communicate. The third definition adds another concept, that of sharing. According to this definition communication is more than the processing of information; it is also the transmission of that information to others. The fourth definition also takes up the idea of transmission but adds a further limitation: Messages created by humans are made up of symbols. The final definition focuses on the means by which this transmission of messages takes place and introduces the idea of the sender as the initiator of communication.

Each definition tells us something about the process of communication, yet each leaves something out. Each asks us to examine a different aspect of the



Communication is essentially cooperative; it succeeds only when we work in concert with others.

process. While you may prefer one definition over another, one is not necessarily right and the others wrong. Rather, each may be useful for a different purpose. In the next section we offer yet another definition, not because our definition is necessarily closer to what communication really is, but because it allows us to take a more social perspective on communication and because it emphasizes the creativity of interaction. We believe that this definition will be particularly useful in helping us understand communication in the interpersonal context.

Characteristics of Communication

For us, **communication** is the process whereby humans collectively create and regulate social reality. Let's try to understand what this definition has to say about communication by looking at each of its parts.

COMMUNICATION IS A PROCESS

Any object or activity can be viewed as either a thing or a process. A thing is a static object, bound in time, and unchanging. A **process** is moving, it has no beginning and no end, and it is constantly changing. Our first point, then, is that communication is a process, not a thing.

The communication process is like a river: active, continuous, and flowing, never the same from one minute to the next. If we try to understand a river by analyzing a bucket of water drawn from it, we are

not studying the river as a whole. The same is true of communication. Individual sentences, words, or gestures make sense only when we see them as part of an ongoing stream of events. To understand communication, we have to look at how what we do and say is connected to what others do and say. We have to view communication as an ongoing process.

COMMUNICATION IS UNIQUELY HUMAN

The term *communication* has been used to describe the behavior of many organisms. Geneticists, for example, describe the instructions for development and growth in the DNA of cells as a kind of communication. Physiologists use the term to describe how the human body maintains and regulates itself. Biologists see all kinds of animal behaviors as communication, including the distress signals of birds, the courtship ritual of jumping spiders, the use of threat displays by Siamese fighting fish, and the play behavior of gorillas and baboons.¹⁰

The kind of communication we are interested in, however, is human communication. We believe that humans communicate in unique and powerful ways that differ markedly from those used by other animals. Although there have been several recent attempts to teach higher primates to use human communication codes, results of these studies are inconclusive. Interdisciplinary Connection 1.1 summarizes some of the research on this subject.

Most everyone will agree that of all creatures, only humans use language naturally and spontaneously, giving us a flexibility and creativity denied to all other animals. Of course, as Aldous Huxley pointed out, this power is not always to our advantage:

For evil, then, as well as for good, words make us the human beings we actually are. Deprived of language, we should be as dogs or monkeys. Possessing language, we are men and women able to persevere in crime no less than in heroic virtue, capable of intellectual achievements beyond the scope of any animal, but at the same time capable of systematic silliness and stupidity such as no dumb beast could ever dream of.¹¹

COMMUNICATION IS A COLLECTIVE ACTIVITY

At heart, communication is social; it can occur only when people enter into relationships with

one another, when they share meaning collectively. Human society and human communication are dependent on one another: One could not exist without the other. On the one hand, what holds a society together is the ability of its members to act as a coordinated whole, which would be impossible without communication. On the other hand, communication presupposes the use of a socially agreed upon symbol system. Interpersonal communication cannot occur unless at least two people mutually engage in creating meaning.

Joost Meerloo tells us that the word *communication* comes from *munia*, meaning “service” and connoting “mutual help, exchange, and interaction of those belonging to the same community.”¹² In ancient times, members of the community who were exempt from public service were referred to as having *immunity*. If an individual committed an offense so terrible that he or she was no longer deemed fit to experience things in common with the rest of society, the offender was *excommunicated*. Meerloo explains, “Wherever the concept of communication comes into play, the emphasis is on the common sharing of material and ideological wealth, on social intercourse, mutual exchange, and the bestowing of feelings and thoughts onto each other.”¹³

COMMUNICATION IS A CREATIVE ENDEAVOR

A direct result of human communication is human creativity. When we agree with others that something can be talked about, we create that thing: We cause it to exist. While some things we agree to talk about (such as books or telephones) already exist in the physical world, others (like truth or justice) exist only in the shared symbolic world created by language. This doesn’t mean, however, that symbols do not have powerful effects upon us.

Let’s take the word *demon*. For most of us, living in America in the 21st century, this word has little reality. For people in many parts of the world, however, demons have a real and objective existence. In Bali, for example, demons can cause human illness; they can make crops fail, pigs die, and volcanoes erupt. In order to survive, the Balinese must pacify and cajole them. On the Day of Silence, for example, everyone must sit “silent and immobile all day long in order to avoid contact with a sudden influx of demons chased momentarily out of hell.”¹⁴

 INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTION 1.1

BONZO GOES TO COLLEGE | ATTEMPTS TO TEACH LANGUAGE TO PRIMATES

PART OF WHAT WE ARE, and part of how we communicate and behave, has been inherited from our animal ancestors. But how much? What is the difference between animal and human behaviors, and what difference does it make? Studies of animal behavior can help answer these questions.

A number of studies have focused on whether primates other than human beings can be taught to use "language." Since the 1950s, when an infant chimpanzee named Vicki was adopted by a human family and taught four human words, a number of chimps have been given language lessons. Four of the most famous of these "students" were Washoe and Nim Chimsky (who were instructed in the use of American Sign Language), Sarah (who was taught to manipulate magnetized plastic tokens), and Lana (a computer-trained chimp). The results of these experiments have led most people to revise their ideas about the nature of the boundaries between human and animal thought.

All of the chimps learned to associate arbitrary signs with physical referents. They could recognize symbols for such objects as bananas, monkey chow, and cola. They could also use symbols to ask for rewards from their keepers. Washoe, for example, could ask her trainer to tickle her, and Lana could type on her console, "Start pour coke stop" to activate a soft-drink dispenser.

The chimps were also capable of more abstract tasks. Sarah, for example, learned to use the tokens symbolizing *same* and *different* in very sophisticated ways. She was able to solve simple visual analogies. For example, when asked whether an apple and a knife were the same as a piece of paper and a pair of scissors, she would indicate that they were. When the scissors was replaced with a bowl of water, she would indicate that the sets were now different. She also seemed able to recognize the class to which tokens belonged. Thus, when given the token "banana" and asked whether it was a name or a color, she would correctly identify it as a name. Similarly she would label the "yellow" token as a color.

Just what can we make of these achievements? The chimps were able to recognize the communicative function of symbols and make simple associations between these symbols and objects in much the same way young human children do when they begin to learn language. However, the chimps never learned to link symbols together into complex "sentences." Although they used language to gain immediate goals, they showed no interest in using it to comment on the world. The ability to make up stories, which develops very early in human children, was absent.

Chimps also did not exhibit linguistic creativity, nor did they use language to direct their activities, as human children do when they guide themselves through a task by talking out loud.

Finally, they never spontaneously developed a language of their own. As Stephen Walker points out, "In a state of nature, we expect humans to talk, and, by comparison, the most unrelenting efforts to induce our closest living relatives to reveal hidden linguistic potential have left the discontinuities [between human speech and animal communication] bloodied but unbowed."

Questions to Think About

- What do you think makes humans unique from other animals?
- What are some of the things we humans can do with language that other animals cannot do? How does the ability to do these things affect our lives?
- Huxley suggests that there is a downside to being able to communicate as we do; for example, we can use language to lie. What other negative actions occur because we have language?

SOURCE: Stephen Walker, *Animal Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

The Balinese live in a symbolic world inhabited by—among other things—demons.

Are we superior to the Balinese? Is our world any less symbolic and more real than theirs? Think for a minute about how much of what you know and believe comes to you from direct experience and how much is a product of talk. You may be surprised to find that most of your reality is created and sustained through communication.

COMMUNICATION IS REGULATORY

Communication allows us not only to create the world around us but to take possession of it as well.

Through communication we can act on our world. In this sense communication is regulatory. If you have ever come down with a bad case of laryngitis, you know how helpless you feel when you can't speak. Such a loss illustrates the connection between communication and power.

This connection is as old as civilization. Even today words are associated with magic. By reciting incantations or writing an enemy's name on a piece of paper and then burning it, primitive people try to control others.¹⁵ Even sophisticated moderns retain some superstitions about communication. One of the most common is reluctance to speak about

good or bad fortune. If two friends are studying for an exam and the first asks, "What if we fail?" the other is likely to respond, "Don't even talk about something like that." We still retain vestiges of the belief that talking about something can either make it come true or jinx it.

Superstitions aside, communication is a powerful regulator of action. Through communication we can persuade, dissuade, anger, hurt, comfort, soothe, entertain, or bore one another. We can even use communication to control our own actions, talking ourselves into taking risks or comforting ourselves when we are afraid. Communication is a potent way of controlling our world.

Summary and Implications

All definitions have implications. What are the implications of our definition of communication? Although we see at least four, perhaps you will be able to think of more.

1. Much of what we think of as real is actually the product of communication. This implies that there is no single reality. Instead, *through communication we each create our own reality*. People with different communication experiences will see the world in different ways. We can never be totally sure that others see the world as we do. If we stop from

time to time to check our perceptions, if we try to view things from others' perspectives, we may be surprised to see how different the world looks.

2. The fact that reality is a product of communication also has another implication: *Too often we allow what we have created through communication to control us*. When the Balinese created demons as an explanation for natural events, they put themselves in the position of spending the rest of their lives placating a concept. We too create our own kinds of demons. The expectations we have for ourselves—about things like success, perfection, and reputation—are examples of concepts that can control our lives and relationships.

3. Of course, individuals are not totally free to create any reality they want. Most of us are strongly influenced by the cultures in which we live. *Communication always takes place in a cultural context*. To forget this fact is to become a prisoner of culture. Erving Goffman has analyzed the powerful but unstated social rules that govern interaction.¹⁶ Although we will have more to say about Goffman throughout this book, it might be useful to introduce one of his concepts now, the concept of *face*.

Goffman defines *face* as an approved social identity, that aspect of ourselves that we present to others for their approval. He believes that we spend a great deal of our time trying to fit face both to situation and to self-image. Communication that is incongruent with face will be judged as socially unacceptable. For Goffman, although face may be an individual's most cherished possession, "it is only on loan to him from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it. Approved attributes and their relation to face make of each man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell."¹⁷

Clearly, many of our most personal behaviors are culturally derived. One tension we all experience is that between independence and conformity. To communicate successfully, we must conform to social rules; to act creatively we must often oppose them.

4. Finally, communication requires cooperation. We are influenced not only by our cultures but by



The way we see the world is a product of communication practices; each of us sees the world (and perhaps distorts it) in a unique way.

every individual with whom we communicate. This means that *what is important in interpersonal communication is what people do when they are together, not what each does separately*. Throughout this text we will stress the idea that interpersonal communication is mutual. In order to understand relationships we must look at the relationship itself, not at each individual participant. Most of the time we don't do this. For example, when a relationship fails, most of us try to figure out who to blame. We may blame the other person, feeling he or she is insensitive or egocentric; or we may blame ourselves, wishing we had been more open or less selfish. The truth is that communication is never the product of only one person's efforts. In order for relationships to work, *both parties have to strive to be competent communicators*.

A Model of Communication Competence

Communication doesn't always run smoothly. This may be one of the main reasons you've decided to study interpersonal communication. If you're like most people, at some time in your life you've run into communication problems. You've probably been in situations in which you couldn't think of what to say next. Or you may have been unable to express yourself clearly. Perhaps you insulted someone unintentionally or blurted out something thoughtlessly. If you've experienced any of these situations, you know how important it is to be able to communicate competently.

What, exactly, does it mean to communicate competently? **Communicative competence** is the *ability to communicate in a personally effective and socially appropriate manner*. Although this definition appears very simple, competence is a complex subject that has generated a lot of research and discussion. One reason is that competent communication involves two separate levels: (1) a surface level, consisting of the part of competence that can be seen—the actual performance of day-to-day behaviors—and (2) a deeper level, consisting of everything we have to know in order to perform. Although the surface level has many different names, we will call it **performative competence**. It is demonstrated every

time someone actually produces effective and appropriate communication behaviors. The underlying level we will call **process competence**. It consists of all the cognitive activity and knowledge necessary to generate adequate performance.

For example, when you hear someone give a particularly gracious compliment, what you observe is only the surface level. What you cannot see is the mental activity that led up to it. Giving a compliment involves a lot of thought. It entails knowing when a compliment is appropriate and when it isn't, predicting whether the recipient will be pleased or embarrassed, choosing content that sounds sincere but not ingratiating, and knowing how to phrase the compliment in a graceful and pleasing style. All of this is part of process competence.

Process Competence: Knowledge about Communication

There are many different models of communicative competence. Some focus on performative aspects,¹⁸ some on process,¹⁹ and some do a little of both.²⁰ The model presented in Figure 1.1 is primarily a process model. It is our way of answering the question, "*What does a person have to know or be able to do in order to communicate in a personally effective and socially appropriate manner?*" The center portion of the model represents the five processes we think are involved.

We believe that people who wish to be competent communicators must know how to do five things well: (1) assign meanings to the world around them; (2) take on social roles appropriately; (3) present valued images of themselves to the world; (4) set goals strategically; and (5) generate intelligible messages. These abilities correspond to the types of process competence outlined in our model: interpretive competence, role competence, self competence, goal competence, and message competence.

When we say that people who wish to be competent must "know" how to do the things listed previously, we are talking about implicit rather than explicit knowledge. **Implicit knowledge** is knowledge we don't stop to think about, that we use unconsciously to guide our behavior. Grammatical knowledge is a good example. From the time we are quite young we can say things in well-structured

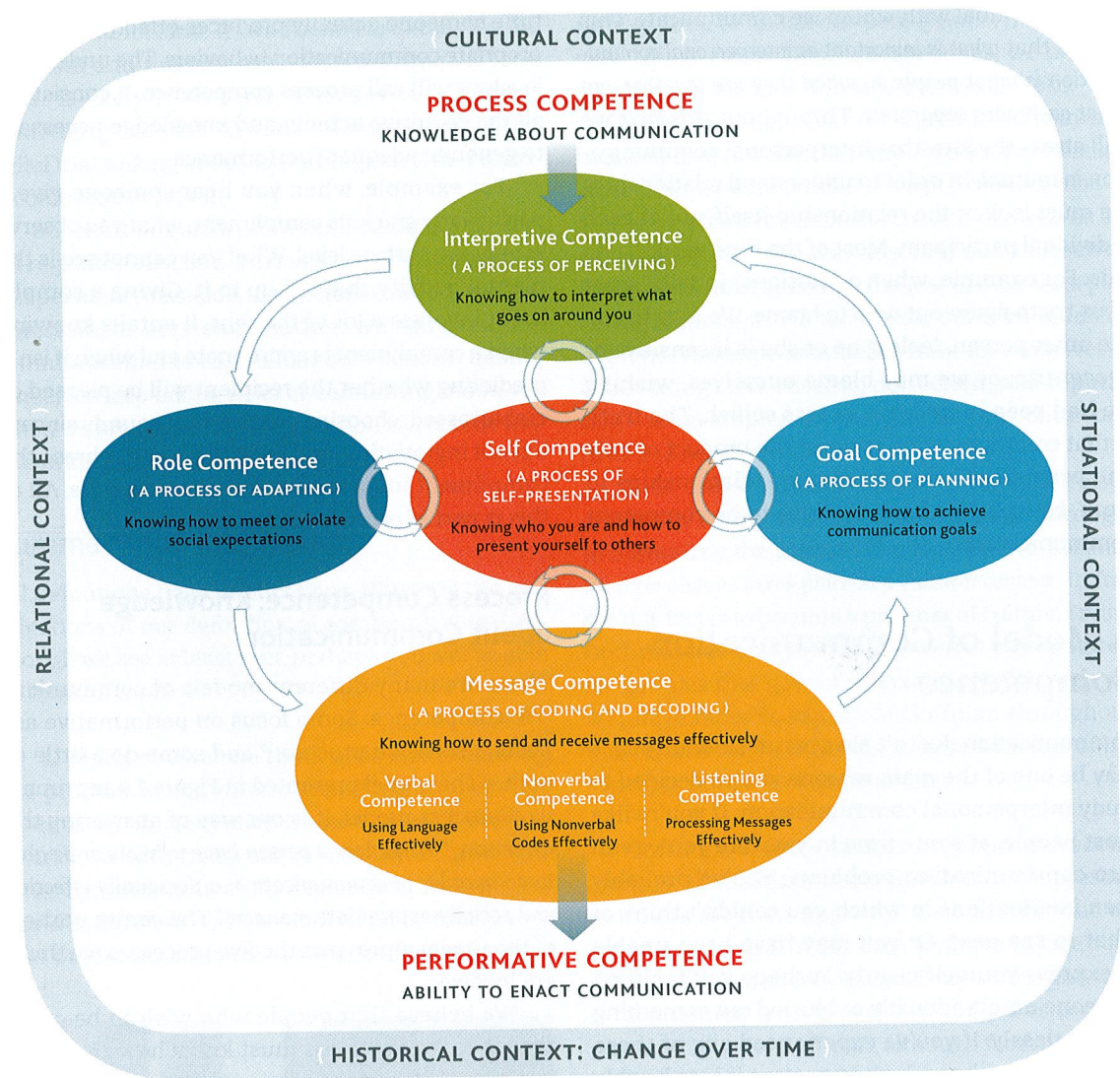


FIGURE 1.1 Human interaction is a complex blend of many interrelated processes.

and meaningful ways. We can even recognize and correct errors when we make them. However, most children (and indeed most adults) would be hard-pressed to recite the rules of grammar. The formal grammatical rules we learn in English class are attempts to express explicitly the implicit rules we follow when speaking.

The first kind of implicit knowledge we need about the world is perceptual. In order to communicate, we must be able to assign meaning to the world; we must know how to "see" it. This kind of competence we call *interpretive competence*. We must also be able to adapt our behavior to those around

us. We must know what behaviors are appropriate and expected and what are prohibited. This we refer to as *role competence*. At the same time we are learning to adapt to others, we must also learn to be true to self. We must develop our own individual styles based on our sense of self. This we call *self competence*. We must also be able to set communicative goals, to foresee the results of communication and make adequate plans. In other words, we must show *goal competence*. Finally, we must be able to use all of this knowledge in actual speech situations. To do this we need *message competence*, the competence that allows us to create and process

verbal and nonverbal messages. If we lack any of these kinds of process competence, communication becomes impossible: Messages are unclear and relationships flawed.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will give a brief overview of each of the elements in our model. Later in this book, we will revisit each kind of competence in more detail. As you read the brief descriptions that follow, remember that all five types of competence are interconnected. Because interpretive competence is at the top of our model and message competence is at the bottom, it may appear that interpretation comes before message making. This isn't necessarily the case. There are times when we make language choices based on prior perceptions, but there are also times when the way we talk about something affects the way we perceive it. To emphasize the fact that the relationship between types of competence is complex and nonlinear, we will start at the bottom of the model and work our way up.

MESSAGE COMPETENCE

Probably the first kind of competence most people think of when they think of communication is **message competence**, *the ability to make message choices that others can comprehend as well as to attend to and understand the message choices of others*. Without the ability to code and decode messages, communication would be impossible. Schizophrenics, for example, often use language in a bizarre and individualistic way. Their lack of message competence means that they must live apart from others in an impenetrable private world. Luckily, this kind of disruption in basic competence is rare. Most of us have an innate ability to understand and create messages.

The most obvious part of message competence is **verbal competence**, *the ability to process and use linguistic devices to convey content in effective ways*. Language is the basic currency through which meanings are exchanged. Without the ability to understand the rules of language, we would be unable to communicate in a fully human way. But language isn't everything. To communicate effectively we also need **nonverbal competence**, *the ability to process and use nonverbal codes to convey content in effective ways*. Body movement, facial expression, use of time and space, physical appearance, and vocal characteristics all convey meaning.

Although verbal and nonverbal competence are important, to communicate competently, we must be able to do more than simply make messages; we must also be able to consume them as well. **Listening competence**, *the ability to process and understand the messages that are sent to us*, is thus a fundamental, though often overlooked, part of message competence.

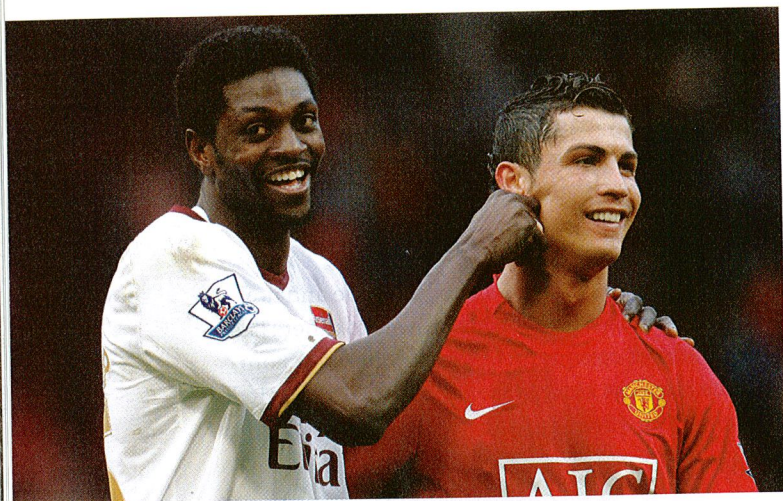
The ability to make effective linguistic and nonverbal choices and to listen attentively to others lies at the heart of communication. But message competence does not exist in a vacuum. It is connected to each of the other kinds of competence shown in our model.

INTERPRETIVE COMPETENCE

We live and communicate in a world full of diverse stimuli. Because we cannot pay attention to everything, we must learn to pick out information that is important and disregard information that is irrelevant and we must be able to make sense of this information. This ability to gather basic data about the contexts in which we communicate depends on **interpretive competence**: *the ability to label, organize, and interpret the conditions surrounding an interaction*.

If you have ever been in a completely unfamiliar situation, you know how difficult it can be to sort out sensory impressions. First-time campers lying alone in a tent in the dead of night hear all kinds of unfamiliar and inexplicable sounds, sounds that an experienced camper could easily dismiss as unimportant. Novices in any situation lack interpretive experience: They pay attention to meaningless details while overlooking important information and often don't know how to organize what they do see. If they have basic interpretive competence, however, they quickly learn what is important and what is not.

The need to interpret the world correctly is especially important in interpersonal interactions. In order to communicate effectively, we must understand the situations in which we find ourselves as well as the kind of people with whom we are dealing. We must also be able to identify our own feelings and needs. If we misinterpret our surroundings or misjudge our partners or overlook our own feelings, we may find ourselves in serious trouble. Without basic data about people and situations, we are



Communication takes teamwork; people in relationships work together to coordinate their actions and to create a shared worldview.

likely to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. The kind of people who blurt out whatever they think, with no regard for where they are or who they are with, lack interpretive competence.

Interpretive competence helps us size up situations and people, name them, identify their outstanding characteristics, and, inevitably, decide upon an attitude toward them. If we succeed at this, we will make appropriate message choices; if not, we will do or say the wrong thing and will appear to be personally insensitive and impervious to our surroundings.

ROLE COMPETENCE

Communication is a cooperative activity, a transaction in which people adapt to one another. Because of this, effective message choices must be culturally approved and socially shared. This brings us to a kind of competence we call **role competence**, the ability to take on social roles and to know what is appropriate behavior given these roles.

In order to communicate effectively, we must know the roles we may safely play in any situation; we must recognize what behaviors are appropriate and what are off-limits. When conflicting social demands arise, we must be able to choose between them. We must also be able to maintain our own social identities while protecting the identities of others. If we fail to recognize the subtle rules that govern interaction, our message choices will seem

odd or out of place. This often happens when we leave the safety of our own cultures. While most of us manage to learn the norms of our own groups, we're often at a loss when we have to interact with people not brought up as we were. The individual who is snatched from his or her own environment and placed in a very different one often lacks role competence. Plays and movies are full of such characters. The working-class heroine who suddenly finds herself in high society (*My Fair Lady*) or the time traveler who ends up in a different era (*Back to the Future*) are examples of characters who must somehow learn new ways of behaving. While their ineptness is a source of comedy in the movies, in real life the consequences of role-inappropriate behavior are more serious. Although a certain amount of individuality is charming, too much is socially costly. People who lack role competence often make message choices that lead others to perceive them as rude or willful or crazy.

SELF COMPETENCE

Of course communicating competently is not just a matter of following social rules. People who follow every rule of etiquette precisely, who let society define them completely, are merely social robots. We label such people as phony or fake, for they lack an essential characteristic that most of us value highly: individuality. Because all of us are individuals with our own unique thoughts and feelings, we must express them in our own ways. Thus, another important part of communicative competence is **self competence**, the ability to choose and present a desired self-image. Individuals with self competence know who they are and who they want to be and can convey that self to others.

One of the most important aspects of growing up is developing a sense of individuality and a personal communication style. Central to this process is the development of a healthy self-concept, for who we think we are is closely tied to how we present ourselves to others. If our self-concept contains negative elements (if our self-esteem is low) we are likely to avoid certain communication situations and to communicate tentatively and self-consciously. If, on the other hand, our self-concept is positive and our self-esteem high, we will communicate with confidence in a variety of situations. People who lack

self competence lack a consistent communication style. Because they are not sure of who they are, they have trouble expressing thoughts and feelings. Others may perceive them as inconsistent or cold.

GOAL COMPETENCE

A final process necessary for communicative competence is planning. This process involves **goal competence**, *the ability to set goals, anticipate probable consequences, and choose effective lines of action*. Although not all communication is intentional, a great deal involves “strategic verbal choice-making.” In order to make adequate message choices, a communicator must know what he or she is trying to achieve, determine the obstacles that lie in the path of goal attainment, and find a line of action that will overcome those obstacles.²¹ This sequence is well known to salespeople who often carefully plan their approaches and use “canned” sales pitches to make sure their goals are achieved. Everyday planning takes a great deal more creativity and imagination. Seldom are our objectives completely clear and our

lines of argument explicitly laid out; we must be able to think “on our feet.”

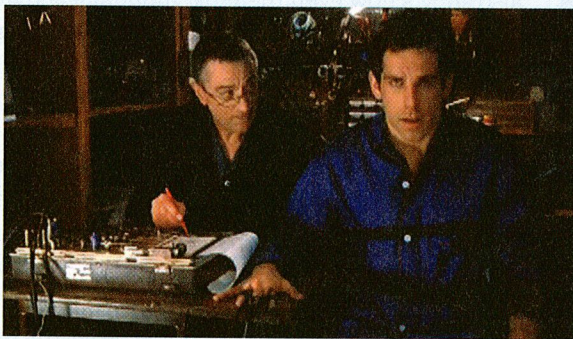
Goal competence doesn’t come easily. If we lack goal competence, we have few behavioral alternatives. We don’t know how to approach others or what to do once we gain their attention. People without goal competence can’t imagine the world as others see it, and their range of behaviors is limited. They don’t know how to frame an argument or make an effective appeal. They may realize that their way of communicating is not working, but they don’t know what to do about it. People who lack this form of competence make poor strategic choices. Others are impervious to their messages and may well perceive them as awkward or offensive.

In real life, incompetence at communicating can be a serious detriment. It can impede personal and professional advancement. It’s not a laughing matter. But it can be entertaining when it’s not happening to you. For a humorous view of what can happen when everything a person says or does comes out wrong, see Screening Room 1.1, the portrait of a man

Screening Room 1.1

Communication Incompetence | MEET THE PARENTS

Jay Roach, 2000



MEETING PROSPECTIVE IN-LAWS for the first time is a situation that can challenge even the most accomplished communicator. Unfortunately, Greg Focker (Ben Stiller) is far from accomplished. His desperate attempts to make a good impression on his girlfriend Pam’s (Terri Polo) parents backfire at every turn, especially when he meets Pam’s father Jack (Robert DeNiro), a potential groom’s worst nightmare. All Greg wants to do is make himself

agreeable, but his small social lies soon escalate, especially after he claims to have milked a cat.

Anyone who’s ever been in a stressful communication situation can identify with Greg, although, admittedly, most of us don’t set other people’s houses on fire, flood their septic tanks, or substitute counterfeit cats for beloved pets. This very funny movie explores what happens when the need to win people over triumphs over common sense, and it provides an over-the-top example of communication incompetence. It’s a relief to know that no matter what social faux pas we may make from time to time or what negative impressions we inadvertently create, it will never get as bad for us as it was for Greg Focker.

Thinking about This Movie

- Have you ever made a bad first impression on someone you wanted to impress? If so, what happened, and how was it resolved?
- What advice would you give to someone meeting a boyfriend’s or girlfriend’s parents for the first time?
- Greg’s desire to make a good impression made him try too hard, with disastrous results. In addition to trying too hard, what are some other factors that can turn a competent communicator into an incompetent communicator?

who, in an attempt to make a good impression, goes from bad to worse.

Culture and Context

So far our discussion of the competence model has focused on individual abilities. We've looked at what a single individual has to know in order to communicate effectively. We've based our discussion on the assumption that people bring individual strengths and weaknesses with them when they communicate, and these strengths and weaknesses affect how successful they will be as communicators. We have had very little to say about the context in which communication occurs. Yet it is clear that the same behavior can be viewed as competent in one context and incompetent in another. Although we believe that interpretive, role, self, goal, and message competence are essential in all cultures, we also believe that the way these forms of competence are defined differs depending on cultural values and beliefs. Therefore, in Figure 1.1, competence is "framed" by four kinds of contexts: cultural, historical, technological, and relational. That is to say, in order to demonstrate competence, communicators must take into account constraints imposed on them by cultural customs, historical values, and relational understandings, as well as by the technologies at their disposal.



Culture helps us make sense of the world around us, tells us what to value and how to act, and gives us the tools to exchange meaningful messages.

The first, and arguably the most important, context is culture. **Culture**—that set of values, beliefs, customs, and codes that bind people together—is a powerful factor in determining communication practices. It affects the way we see the world, telling us what to notice and what to disregard. It generates the rules and norms that allow us to coordinate our lives with others'. It offers us models of who we can be and how we should think about ourselves. It tells us what we should and shouldn't do to meet our goals. And it presents us with the verbal and nonverbal tools that allow us to form messages.

Throughout this book we will offer examples of ways culture affects communication, and in chapter 13 we will conclude with a "capstone" discussion of cross-cultural communication. In the following chapters, when we discuss communication games in urban America, or modesty in the deserts of South Africa, or comforting strategies among the southwestern Apache, or greeting rituals in Japanese companies, our intention is not to prepare you to communicate in those contexts. You may or may not ever go to Japan or South Africa. Nor do we describe these cultures because they are intrinsically interesting (although we believe they are). Rather, we focus on cultural differences to let you know that when it comes to communicating, there are many possibilities. Thinking about how people from different cultures communicate helps us to understand and make choices about our own communication. It also shows how even the most mundane activities are the products of group agreements that are made for us by others we may not even know. To take just one example, let's consider the everyday action of complaining.

How we complain and who we complain to may feel like personal choices, untouched by culture, but, as Tamar Katriel shows us, in her study of "gripping" in Israel, complaining can be a communication ritual with its own rules and regulations.²² When middle-class Israelis gripe, Katriel tells us, the topic must relate to public life. It usually takes place during a Friday night gathering with friends and family, and begins when someone offers a complaint. This is then taken up by the rest of the people present, who comment in turn about the difficulties of life in Israel. The ritual usually ends when everyone has had a say and has agreed that things are getting

worse and worse. In addition to allowing Israelis to vent their frustrations, this communication ritual helps them affirm their cultural identity. Of course, other people in other cultures complain, but they do so in their own particular ways. Americans, for example, often see complaints as an invitation to offer support and find solutions to individual problems. Other cultural groups may shun complaints altogether, preferring not to communicate in ways that could be construed as negative.

What is true of complaining is also true of other communication episodes: Their functions

and structure are determined, in part, by culture. Interdisciplinary Connection 1.2 provides another example, this time looking at the cultural values associated with modesty and boasting among the !Kung of South Africa.

HISTORICAL CHANGE AND CULTURAL VALUES

Cultures are dynamic. They change with the times. The way your parents communicated interpersonally is not the same way you do, and, frightening though it may be, your children will communicate in ways you'll probably think are very strange. Even

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTION 1.2

INSULTING THE MEAT | AN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION RITUAL

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS GUIDE virtually every aspect of our lives. They show us how to dress and move and speak. They tell us how to make friends, how to make enemies, and how to make love. They indicate what objects to hoard, what people to value, and what gods to worship. But precisely because they tell us so much, we often fail to realize their influence. Studying the customs of different cultures can remind us that the way we do things is not the only natural and proper way.

One example of how another culture communicates is described by Richard Lee, who studied the Dobe !Kung, the so-called Bushmen of the Kalahari. The !Kung are nomadic foragers who survive in a harsh environment by hunting and gathering. They have developed a number of rituals that have helped them adapt to this way of life. One of the most interesting is known as "insulting the meat."

In !Kung society the wild game and edible plants gathered by members of the group are normally shared with the entire tribe. A lot of time and attention are devoted to the fair distribution of goods, particularly of meat. One way of ensuring fair distribution is demonstrated by the following communication pattern.

Strict norms govern the way a hunter announces his results when he returns from a successful hunt. He must sit in silence until someone asks him how the hunt went. He must then say that he found nothing of any worth. On the following day, when his companions go out with him to collect the kill, they are expected to do so with a minimum of enthusiasm, complaining loudly about the distance and wretchedness of the game. Instead of being offended, the hunter agrees, apologizing for his lack of skill.

What can we make of this behavior? Wouldn't it be more "natural" for a hunter to boast of a good kill? Lee tells us that the "heavy joking and derision are directed toward one goal: the leveling of potentially arrogant behavior in a successful hunter." Lee believes that "insulting the meat" is a way of maintaining a sense of equality. Because

the !Kung depend on sharing for survival, generosity is something that should not be praised but simply expected. Praise might lead to pride and arrogance, potential threats to the !Kung way of life. As Tomazho, one of the !Kung, expressed it,

When a young man kills much meat, he comes to think of himself as a chief or a big man, and he thinks of us as his servants or inferiors. We can't accept this. We refuse one who boasts, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody. So we always speak of his meat as worthless. In this way we cool his heart and make him gentle.

For most of us, this is a peculiar way of doing things. We believe that people should take pride in their accomplishments and show gratitude for generosity. But stop for a moment and think about the social results of concepts such as "gratitude" and "accomplishment" and "generosity." How do they affect our relationships with others? The answer to this question may make you see more clearly how seemingly innocent and trivial patterns of communication are tied to larger social issues.

Questions to Think About

- The !Kung are encouraged to speak more modestly about their accomplishments than we are. Why do you think our culture encourages us to take credit for our successes?
- Although we are less modest than the !Kung, there are times when our society instructs us to be modest. When do you feel it is appropriate to be modest? When do you feel it is appropriate to take pride in your accomplishments?
- Can you think of other ways we communicate that say something about our cultural values?

SOURCE: Richard B. Lee, *The Dobe !Kung* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984).

within a single culture, change happens. For this reason, we include historical time period as a context that frames competence.

Even something as fundamental as Americans' attitudes toward sex have changed over the years. In George Washington's America, sex was not a matter for false prudery; it was talked about with great directness, and couples were advised to engage "with equal vigor" in the conjugal act. In fact, women were thought to be ruled by sexual passions more than men, who were considered more rational

and controlled.²³ By the time that Abraham Lincoln became president, things had changed. Romantic love was all the rage, and women had been recast as pure and disinterested when it came to purely sexual matters. Today, our attitudes have once again shifted. Although we still believe in romance, many in our society no longer consider nonprocreative sex as an offensive act.

The topics we talk about and the ways we do so have also changed over time. In modern-day America, for example, we value direct, open, and honest communication. We believe that problems should be brought into the open and discussed. But during earlier time periods, for example in the 19th century, such behavior would have been seen as incompetent. At that time, a more guarded style was considered appropriate. In fact, being too open or too glib was once considered a character defect. Today, there is wide acceptance of a general "sell yourself" mentality. We emphasize history as a communication context because cultural change is inevitable and adapting to change is a prerequisite for effective and appropriate communication.

HOW TECHNOLOGY AFFECTS CULTURAL CONTEXT

One reason competence is affected by history is that, over time, new technologies are discovered, technologies that make it possible to communicate in new ways. Each time that happens, people must adapt to the technology and find ways to use it competently. One person may be reticent in face-to-face contexts but confident online, whereas someone else may be completely ineffective when communication is mediated. New technologies present new opportunities and new challenges, although at the beginning, emerging communication technologies are often viewed with suspicion.

John Bargh and Katelyn McKenna tell us, for example, that, when the telegraph came into use, governments feared it would lead to revolution.²⁴ And it was generally feared that the telephone could harm social interaction by undermining the practice of visiting friends. Radio and television were also met with concern as critics warned that people would no longer engage in civic activities and children would abandon wholesome activities once these new



We depend on communication technologies to connect us, yet they can become obsolete almost before we've mastered them.

forms of entertainment entered the home. Although a study by sociologist Robert Putnam gives some support to the fear that television can undermine social group membership, none of the other fears have been realized.²⁵ In fact, in all of the other cases, interpersonal communication has been enhanced. Early on, for example, telegraph operators formed social networks and used code to exchange news and gossip. In fact, Thomas Edison, who started out as a telegraph operator, proposed to his wife over the telegraph.²⁶ The effect of the telephone was also positive: It increased contact between distant friends and relatives and strengthened local ties.²⁷ And radio and television both allowed the rapid dissemination of news.

Now, in the 21st century, advances in information and communication technologies are giving rise to the same old fears of social isolation and the uncontrolled spread of dangerous information. The Internet, for example, has been accused of turning people into mindless zombies who spend hours surfing the Web looking for pornography—and neglecting family and friends. In an amusing aside, Bargh and McKenna report that the Internet has even been denounced by the head of the Miss France committee as “an uncontrolled medium where rumormongers, pedophiles, prostitutes, and criminals could go about their business with impunity.” This tirade occurred when rumors that the reigning Miss France was, in fact a man, spread across the world.²⁸ Yet, despite the hysteria, most researchers now agree that the overall effect of the new media has been to strengthen interpersonal communication, not to weaken it. In fact, national surveys have found that Internet users actually have larger offline social networks than nonusers do.²⁹

Despite the positive effects of more connectivity, new media, including mobile telephones as well as networked computers, present challenges. Being able to communicate more quickly does not mean that one will communicate more competently. Where in the instruction manual for an iPhone or Blackberry will you find guidelines for using these devices to communicate effectively? And novel ways of using new media are constantly evolving. Currently, the mobile phone is the favorite communication device for most U.S. teens. According to a study published

in 2010 by the Pew Research Center, 75 percent of 12- to 17-year-old Americans owned a cell phone, and the most popular form of contacting friends was through text messaging.³⁰ Texting was more popular than talking on landlines or face to face, or connecting through IM. It was even more popular than talking on one’s cell. And, by 2010, e-mail, previously hailed as the “killer app” of the Internet, was barely used as a means of contact among this population. Interestingly, the study found a gender difference in texting, with boys typically sending about 30 texts a day, and girls 80.

How has the wide availability of cell phones changed communication? One way is the rise of **approximeeting**. Because people can contact one another so easily, they no longer make specific appointments. This often leads to entire evenings spent trying to figure out where everyone is and where to meet up, with the eventual outcome that nothing ever gets decided. Another challenge lies in negotiating space. Cell phone users exist in physical space, yet they communicate in virtual space, an effect that can be confusing when trying to walk along a busy street while fighting with a friend or trying to comfort a distraught roommate. And how should attention be divided between co-present friends and a ringing cell phone?³¹

One use of mobile technology that has received a lot of attention recently is **sexting**. Despite furor in the mainstream media, only a small number of teens admit to sending suggestive photos of themselves to others. According to a study done in 2009, however, 15 percent of teens had received nude or near nude images of someone they knew. Sexting most often occurs between romantic partners, but it can also be a way of trying to initiate a relationship and can serve as a form of entertainment, with teens frequently passing along sexts as a joke. The phenomenon is not surprising given the fact that interest in sexual exploration is high during the teen years. When this is combined with a tendency to take risks and an ability to connect easily with others, a “perfect storm” for sexting is created. According to Amanda Lenhart of the Pew Research Center, “Teenagers have always grappled with issues around sex and relationship but their coming of age mistakes and transgressions have never been so easily

transmitted and archived for others to see.”³² Like all technologies, new communication media can be a blessing or a curse.

RELATIONAL CULTURES AS CONTEXT

Another kind of context that affects the way we communicate is the relational context. When people form relationships, they create what has been called a “dyadic culture,” consisting of shared beliefs, norms, and values. People often act quite differently when they are together than when they are apart. For example, someone who is normally reticent and indirect may open up when he or she is with a significant other, and create a close, comfortable relationship. Conversely, some relationships cause people who are normally outgoing and expressive to turn inward. In extreme cases, individuals may even suffer from *folie à deux*, a shared delusional mental state. Although this kind of psychiatric disorder is rare, it is not rare for people to change another’s behavior. Indeed, if two people do not in some ways affect one another we would hardly consider them to be in a relationship. As we will see in Chapter 11, married couples differ in the ways they communicate with one another. Some carefully avoid conflicts; others love to fight and make up. Obviously their definitions of effective and appropriate communication differ, yet each can build strong, enduring relationships. Communication is highly relational by nature.

Performative Competence: Acting on Knowledge

The five processes we have discussed are all necessary for good performance. Unfortunately, knowing how to communicate does not guarantee we will say or do the right thing. A person can know perfectly well what is required in a given situation and still not perform adequately. A number of factors can cause communication to fail: individual physical states such as fatigue or anxiety; contradictory attitudes, beliefs, and values; poor motivation; and sheer stubbornness. Finally, lack of practice can cause a performance to come off as stilted and artificial.

In this book we’ll provide you with some of the theoretical knowledge you’ll need to understand and analyze communication. Although we believe that

the first step to becoming a better communicator is understanding the basic processes of competence, we believe that theory is not the whole picture. To be fully competent you must be able to translate theory into practice through performance. To help you do that, at the end of each chapter we include a section on skill building. This section offers guidelines to help you improve your interpersonal skills. Through classroom activities and by working through some of the activities in the “Process to Performance” section at the end of each chapter, we hope you will find a way to take these general guidelines and make them work for you.

Skill Building: On Taking a Process Perspective

As we progress through the text, we will be looking at ways to improve specific skills such as listening, giving and receiving feedback, becoming more assertive, and so on. For now, we want to say a few general words about how to build skills. An important step in improving your communication is learning to take what we call a **process perspective**. This means becoming aware of what’s going on when you communicate, and beginning to recognize how the underlying processes involved in communication manifest themselves in everyday performance. Too often people communicate in a mindless way. They are so busy thinking about what they are saying or doing (the content of communication) that they fail to consider how they are going about it (the form of communication). Taking a process perspective means concentrating on *form* in addition to *content*. It means sitting back and watching yourself as you communicate.

At first this is not an easy thing to do, for it involves a kind of “double consciousness.” The competent communicator must be able to act naturally and spontaneously and at the same time observe and analyze communication patterns. This is somewhat like being a good actor. On the one hand, actors exist within the imaginary world of the play, reacting as their characters would. On the other hand, they remain aloof and in control, watching for the cues that signal exits and entrances, remembering their positions and lines, and adjusting to audience

 Research in Review 1.1

Getting the Most Out of College | COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

WHAT DOES it mean to be an effective student? Is it just a matter of knowing how to study? Or is there something more? Ann Bainbridge Frymier suggests that being a good student also means being a competent classroom communicator. In her article "Students' Classroom Communication Effectiveness," she looks at some of the communication skills that increase students' abilities to communicate effectively with their teachers.

Frymier hypothesized that four communication skills are related to positive classroom outcomes. These skills, the study's independent variables, are interaction involvement (the ability to attend to, understand, and react to ongoing interaction), assertiveness (the capacity to stand up for oneself without attacking another), responsiveness (the ability to understand others' needs and to listen actively), and frequency of out-of-classroom communication (how often one meets with the instructor after class to seek advice or to get to know him or her better). The positive classroom outcomes measured in this study, the dependent variables, were student reports of learning, motivation to study, satisfaction with instructors, and grades.

Two hundred ninety-seven students enrolled in introductory communication courses were asked to think of the instructor they had immediately preceding the course in which data were collected and then to fill out scales measuring all of the independent and dependent variables.

Results showed that out of all the independent variables, interaction involvement was the best predictor of positive classroom outcomes. There were positive correlations between involvement and all of the dependent measures, which means that students who scored high in involvement also felt they learned more, were more motivated and satisfied, and reported higher grades. Responsiveness was associated with learning, motivation, and satisfaction but not with grades. Assertiveness did not appear to be of particular importance, and frequency of out-of-class communication was related most strongly to satisfaction, but not to the other dependent variables.

What can you learn from this study? The results suggest that if you want to be a more effective student, you should focus on increasing your interaction involvement. This means becoming more aware of how your teacher responds to you, listening rather than letting your attention wander, and finding ways to meet your teacher's expectations. It is easy to sit back passively in class, but the more involved you are the better you will like your instructor, the more motivated you will be to study, and the more satisfied you will be with classroom communication. Of course, communication style cannot make up for poor study skills, but combining the two may just make you happier with school and give you better grades.

SOURCE: Ann Bainbridge, "Students' Classroom Communication Effectiveness," *Communication Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2005): 197–212.

reaction. Beginning actors often have a hard time finding just the right mixture of involvement and distance.

The beginning interpersonal communication student must also find the right balance point between performing and analyzing. At first students have problems removing themselves from the content level; they have not yet learned to see process. Later on, as they learn more about communication, they may become too analytical, annoying their friends by giving instant analyses of every interaction. But with practice it is possible to learn when to act and when to analyze. The transitions become easy and automatic.

We cannot stress strongly enough how important it is to begin to start analyzing interactions. For one thing, it will make learning theory more interesting and enjoyable. You will begin to see connections between what you read about in this text and what you and those around you actually do. Even more important, developing the ability to observe

behavior will allow you to diagnose and improve your own performance.

As a beginning, look at the study described in Research in Review 1.1 and think about your own level of interaction involvement. If it is low, think about ways you might be able to increase it. ■

Process to Performance

QUESTIONING COMMUNICATION REVISITED

What is the best definition of communication?

This is a "trick" question. There are many different definitions of communication, each of which helps us understand some part of this complex process, and none of which paints the entire picture. Although we offer our own definition, "communication

is a process whereby humans collectively create and regulate social reality," we don't see it as any better or worse than the others we reviewed.

What makes a communicator competent?

Competent communicators must know how to interpret their worlds (interpretive competence), understand social norms (role competence), present themselves to others (self competence), get their needs met (goal competence), and create and process verbal and nonverbal messages (message competence) in ways that are effective and appropriate. They must also be able to translate this knowledge into action.

Why is culture so important?

Culture is important because the social groups to which we belong provide us with specific instructions on how to communicate effectively and appropriately. Although members of all cultures must show interpretive, role, self, goal, and message competence, they do so in different ways. Each culture presents us with a different set of possibilities. There is never just one way to do communication.

REVIEW TERMS

The following is a list of major concepts introduced in this chapter. The page where the concept is first discussed is listed in parentheses.

- approximate meeting (16)
- communication (5)
- communicative competence (9)
- culture (14)
- face (8)
- goal competence (13)
- implicit knowledge (9)
- interpretive competence (11)
- listening competence (11)
- message competence (11)
- nonverbal competence (11)
- performative competence (9)
- process competence (9)
- process perspective (18)
- process (5)
- role competence (12)

self competence (12)

sexting (17)

verbal competence (11)

SUGGESTED READINGS

Galvin, Kathleen M., and Pamela J. Cooper. *Making Connections: Readings in Relational Communication*, 5th ed. New York: Oxford, 2010. The essays in this collection give an overview of the field of interpersonal communication and provide a feel for the ways in which communication affects the building of relationships.

Segerdahl, Par, William Fields, and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh. *Kanzi's Primal Language: The Cultural Initiation of Primates into Language*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. For 18 years, Sue Savage-Rumbaugh maintained a relationship with a chimpanzee named Kanzi. In this book, she and her colleagues give a behind-the-scenes look at how Kanzi acquired the ability to use a form of language.

ONLINE STUDENT RESOURCES

www.oup.com/us/trenholm

OBSERVATION GUIDE

1. Analyze a recent conversation by applying the model of communication competence presented in this chapter. Identify the level of interpretive, goal, role, and message competence that you and your partner achieved. For instance, how successful were you in sizing up the situation? Did you accurately perceive your partner's intentions? How many message strategies did you consider? Did you have a clear understanding of the social roles called for? Were there any verbal or nonverbal misunderstandings? Judge your performance. How well did you do what you wanted to?
2. Take a look at the other courses you're enrolled in this semester. How can these courses give you an understanding of communication? Make a list of at least 15 topics from other courses that are related to interpersonal communication. Take one and describe what it taught you about the communication process. For example, you may have read a short story in a literature class

that described interpersonal relationships. You may have come across a theory in psychology that explains some aspect of communication. Describe in detail what you learned.

EXERCISES

1. Work in pairs. Begin by individually thinking of the best and worst communicators you ever knew. Describe them to your partner. Working together, come up with a list of at least 10 attributes that differentiate your good and bad communicators. Now ask your partner to describe his or her best and worst communicators and repeat the process. How did your ideas differ? How do you stack up on both your own and your partner's list? What is your strongest point? What areas need more work? Discuss.
2. Taking a process perspective means becoming aware of how people communicate with one another. It means looking for cues that signal what's going on between people. Choose a partner and go to a public area on campus. Find a group of people who look interesting, and observe them for 10 or 15 minutes. As you observe, make notes on what's going on in their interaction. Share your notes with your partner. From your combined observations, make a list of all of the things you were able to tell about interpersonal relationships just by observing. At the next class, share your list with others. Together come up with an observation guide—a list of things to look for in interaction. Use this observation guide to observe another group. You should begin to see more and more happening as you gain experience in observing others.
3. A model is a simplified explanation of a process. Models can help us understand the characteristics of a process, the factors that affect it, the way it operates, and so on. There are many ways of describing any process; consequently there are many models of it.
 - a. To get some practice in model making, think of a fairly complex process or object that you're familiar with (for example, a football game, eating at a restaurant, graduating from high school, a first date). Working in groups, construct a model of that process. Pretend that you are preparing materials for people from a vastly different culture who will be visiting your college. Your model will help these people learn how things are done in your culture. You can create a verbal description, a flowchart, a diagram, a rule book. Share your model with the class.
 - b. Now try constructing your own model of communication.