

WHY WE STUDY COMMUNICATION

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- The multiple approaches to defining communication
- The complex nature of communication
- The ways that communication is fundamental to everyday life
- The differences between the academic and personal approaches to studying communication

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

- Communication is Complex
- Communication is Vital to Occupational Effectiveness
- Education Does Not Ensure Communication Competence
- Communication is a Popular and Vibrant Field of Study

THEORIES: GUIDES FOR ANALYSIS AND ACTION

- Personal Theories
- Scholarly Theories
- Combining Personal and Scholarly Theories

DEFINING COMMUNICATION

- Level of Observation
- The Question of Intent
- Point of View
- The Issue of Outcomes

FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATION

- Communication is a Process
- Communication is Essential for Individuals, Relationships, Groups, Organizations, and Societies
- Communication Involves Responding to and Creating Messages
- Communication Involves Adapting to People and the Environment

COMMUNICATION: OUR DEFINITION

GOALS OF COMMUNICATION AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

CONCLUSION

KEY POINTS



IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

In nearly every circumstance that confronts us, the process of communication is absolutely fundamental. No activity is more basic to our lives—personally, socially, or occupationally. Indeed, communication is so essential that we often take it for granted, much as we do breathing.

If communication is as natural as breathing, why is it necessary to study and learn more about the process? Good question. The short answer is that we make a number of decisions as we engage in communication. We are aware of some of these decisions; many are not as apparent to us. The better we understand communication, the more we can be aware of our decision-making process, and the better those decisions can be. The way we understand communication influences the way we think about and react to situations and people, and the way we act and relate to others, in turn, can make a major difference in how they respond to us. And, over the short- and long-term, the consequences of these actions and reactions will have significant implications for the kinds of relationships we form,

who we become as people, and the way we contribute as members of families, groups, communities, organizations, and the societies in which we live.

A more detailed answer to the question, “Why should we study communication?” includes a consideration of the following points.

COMMUNICATION IS COMPLEX

The realization that communication is a *basic* process does not, in any way, imply that it is easily understood or controlled. To the contrary, communication is exceedingly complex and multifaceted. Examples abound in personal, family, community, professional, technological, national, and international settings. Whether we think of the goal as improving intercultural or global understanding, avoiding divorce, or reducing teenage smoking and substance abuse, the communication challenges are daunting.

The communication understanding and skills necessary to be more successful in the many complex situations we face as human beings are not simply a matter of common sense. If they were, would these problems emerge in the first place? In fact, competence in communication requires what might be called *uncommon* sense. Common sense, for instance, suggests that when individuals talk or email one another, they *exchange* information. As we will explain later in this book, the process is not nearly as simple, rational, or predictable as this view implies. For example, common sense tells us that a public speaker’s presentation is very important to the outcomes in a speech setting; however, it is “uncommon sense” that helps us understand why it is often the audience members who are most critical in determining the outcomes of this type of public communication. Common sense also leads us to the conclusion that most people have largely the same communication needs and outlooks that we do, and so we believe that our own approaches to communication are likely to work well in dealing with others. While this may sometimes be a workable assumption, often it is not. In this regard, “uncommon sense” leads us to continually question our own assumptions and to become more attentive to others’ needs and perspectives. It is also “uncommon sense” that guides us to carefully assess the communication situations in which we find

FIGURE 1.1

What does your uncommon sense tell you about this scene? How does the audience determine the success of a presentation?



© wavebreakmedia/Shutterstock.com

ourselves, to become more aware of our own and others' goals, and to recognize the need to develop an ever-broadening array of communication understanding and skills (see Figure 1.1). We'll examine these and other challenges of communication in more detail in the pages ahead.

We all face challenges in our personal, family, and workplace relationships. Even when we look carefully at the situations that we assume are going well, we almost always find that there are opportunities for improvement that are possible if we become more aware of how communication works. Whether we think of relationships with roommates, romantic partners, parents, colleagues at work, or acquaintances from another culture, in face-to-face or mediated settings, an understanding of communication is essential to achieving the outcomes we desire.

COMMUNICATION IS VITAL TO OCCUPATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness in any field of endeavor requires communication knowledge and skill. We need the ability to analyze communication situations, understand the people we're dealing with, develop productive communication strategies, receive and present ideas effectively through various communication channels, and collaborate successfully.

Studies of the needs of various occupations consistently reaffirm the importance of specific communication competencies in the workplace as among the most critical to success (Hart Research Associates, 2009; Jones, 2012). One extensive study of college recruiting professionals found that 10 skills and traits, ranked in the following order, were regarded as the most important qualities that employers want (NACE, 2013):

1. Ability to work in a team structure
2. Ability to make decisions and solve problems
3. Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work
4. Ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization
5. Ability to obtain and process information
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. Technical knowledge related to the job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell or influence others

Clearly, communication is critical in at least half of these qualities.

In a number of jobs, such as those listed in Figure 1.2, communication is the primary capability required. For more information, the New Jersey Communication Association has an excellent online resource about careers in communication (<http://njca.rutgers.edu/resources/communication-careers.html>).

FIGURE 1.2**Selected Communication Careers****Managing Communication**

(Integrating communication operations, programs, and services to support the mission of an organization)

Advertising Account Manager	Media Manager
Communication Analyst	Media Buyer
Creative Director	Media Relations Specialist
Corporate and Community Relations	Newsletter Editor
Crisis Communication Manager	Organizational Communication Manager
Employee Communication and Training	Promotions Manager
External Communications Manager	Public Information Officer
Health Communication Director	Public Relations Director
Human Resources Manager	Sales Manager
Marketing Specialist	

Creating Communication Products and Services

(Preparing, packaging, or repackaging communication products or services for use by others)

Advertising Copywriter	Public Information Officer
Art Director	Public Relations Specialist
Consumer Advocate	Reporter
Customer Relations Specialist	Science and Technical Writer
Editing	Special Events Coordinator
Film Producer	Speech Writer
Health Communication Writer	Website Designer
Marketing Specialist	Writer
Photojournalist	

Analyzing Communication

(Studying the foundations and theories related to communication systems, processes, programs, and services, and/or assessing their functioning)

Audience Analyst	Market Researcher
Customer Satisfaction Analyst	Public Opinion Researcher
Health Communication Analyst	Social Scientist
Information Specialist	Web Analysis

Communication Education and Training

(Providing instruction or training in communication)

Admissions Counselor	Human Resource Development
Communication Trainer	Media Training
Drama Coach	Training and Development Specialist
Health Communication Education	Trainer for Communication Technology

In other occupations, communication expertise complements specific technical and disciplinary knowledge and ability. This is the case in fields like teaching, management, health care, international business, human resource management, counseling, politics, sales, computer applications, library and information science, and speech pathology. To perform competently, a teacher, a counselor, or a politician needs *technical* ability plus *communication* ability.

Leadership—whether in workplace, club, or community contexts—also requires a number of core competencies of which communication is one (Ruben, 2006). Focusing specifically on leadership communication skills, Conrad and Newberry (2012) identify the following specific skills (p. 115) as being important to communicating the mission, vision, and values of an organization:

- Arousing enthusiasm
- Being a change agent
- Creating group synergy
- Building team bonds
- Expressing encouragement
- Providing motivation
- Being persuasive
- Building optimism

Although the many studies of desirable communication competencies vary somewhat in their specifics, we believe that the following communication competencies, drawn from various writers (Conrad & Newberry, 2012; Stahl, 1989) and our own observations, are essential to success in many contexts including in the workplace:

- Writing
- Active listening
- Building relationships
- Making convincing presentations
- Motivating and encouraging others
- Networking
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Meeting management
- Communication/information technology skills
- Intercultural sensitivity and skills
- Social media skills
- Media literacy
- Conflict resolution
- Negotiation
- Persuasive skills
- Demonstrating respect

FIGURE 1.3

21st Century Communication Career Skills

Skill Component: Communication (Verbal and Face-to-Face)

Converses easily one-on-one and in small group settings inside and outside the organization; understands and can apply basic principles of client interaction, customer service, and sales appropriately

Presents to groups inside and outside the organization—both with preparation and spontaneously

Listens effectively and conveys to the speaker that s/he has been heard

Negotiates, bargains, persuades, debates, disagrees without being unpleasant, abrasive, or arrogant

Respects the rights of all individuals and strives to understand their point of view and concerns; understands how other cultures (of all types) differ

Skill Component: Communication (Written)

Effectively and professionally conveys in writing knowledge gained through analysis; summarizes complex information concisely and effectively; adapts writing to fit workplace norms (e.g., letters, professional emails, memos, executive summaries, complex reports, talking points, user manuals, etc.); incorporates visual displays, such as graphs, as appropriate

Checks and edits documents to ensure information is correct and complete, tone and emphasis fit audience, and grammar, spelling, and punctuation are error-free

Uses word processing tools and other computer-based tools to create, edit, and format documents, build graphs, and send information electronically

Skill Component: Teamwork, Leadership, and Project Management

Builds collaborative relationships with colleagues and clients; interacts appropriately and effectively with peers, superiors, and assistants including those representing diverse cultures, races, gender, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints.

Teamwork: works cooperatively with others; contributes ideas; completes necessary tasks; listens to and supports others on the team; resolves conflict and motivates others toward the accomplishment of a common goal or vision

Leadership: motivates; assigns responsibilities effectively and coaches others as needed; sets a good example for the team; resolves disputes fairly and effectively.

Understands and applies project management principles to manage own work and the work of teams (sets realistic goals, breaks project down into component steps, prioritizes tasks, links dependent tasks, etc.)

Skill Component: Information Gathering, IT Literacy, and Office Technology

Finds the *most relevant* information from multiple sources using the web and other tools, including social media, to identify and share current research and trends in fields of interest, determine the answers to key questions, and find the causes of and solutions to key problems

Uses commonly accepted standards to evaluate the reliability, accuracy, and usefulness of information; recognizes flawed logic and false accounts (and/or “baloney”)

Identifies and learns to use the core functions of a wide range of software programs typically used in office settings (Word, Excel, etc.) and those relevant to particular areas of interest (e.g., Photoshop for publishing, design, etc.); has at least an intermediate or advanced skill level in one or more programs

Components of skills needed for success in the 21st century workforce adapted from Lawrence (2011).

EDUCATION DOES NOT ENSURE COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

It's all too often the case that education does not ensure competence in communication. One reason is that many aspects of communication are rarely addressed in most PreK–12 academic programs and often insufficiently in colleges and universities. For example, schools place little formal emphasis on listening concepts and practices, perhaps because educators feel that it's just common sense or everyone knows how to do it. Both assumptions are obviously unjustified.

Another important aspect of communication that receives little attention in school is nonverbal communication, though research demonstrates that some of the most significant messages in human communication are created and conveyed through nonverbal behaviors. Interpersonal and group communication skills that are necessary to effective collaboration with members of a workgroup, family, club, or community group also are often not taught in schools. This is also often the case when it comes to persuasion, relationships, organizations, leadership, intercultural and health communication—each a critical area in successful personal, social, and occupational activity. Ironically, in some instances, advanced education and training can actually be an impediment to competent communication. This sometimes happens with physicians, scientists, engineers, and others with technical training who become so programmed to communicate with individuals with an educational background similar to their own that they are much less successful when interacting with people who lack their expertise and training.

COMMUNICATION IS A POPULAR AND VIBRANT FIELD OF STUDY

As we will discuss in Chapter 2, the study of communication is relatively new as a discipline but, at the same time, is one of the oldest fields of study. Historians generally trace the beginnings of the study of communication and human behavior to the early Greeks. Ancient Greece was an oral culture and affairs of business and government were conducted through spoken communication. It was, therefore, not surprising that an interest in understanding the theory and practice of communication would emerge during this era. Interest in communication study grew primarily out of philosophy at a time when that discipline was concerned with all aspects of the pursuit of knowledge.

The scientific revolution and the growing trend toward specialization in the pursuit of knowledge led to the development of separate disciplines for the study of behavior, and communication was among these. August Comte (1798–1857) gave the name *sociology* to the study of society and social existence, whose founders included Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), Max Weber (1864–1920), and Karl Marx (1818–1883). A decade later the psychological laboratories of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) and William James (1842–1910) were established. The origins of anthropology also date to the middle

of the 19th century and the work of British scholars Sir Henry James Sumner Maine (1822–1888), Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), and Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941). In the 20th century, political science and communication, two other fields of study with an ancient heritage, took on contemporary identities as disciplines in their own right. Communication emerged as a behavioral discipline in the 1950s to join the growing list of social sciences, each of which approaches the study of human behavior from a particular vantage point.

As a discipline, communication has also maintained intellectual ties with the humanities—especially philosophy, literature, religion, cultural studies, and art. There are also significant connections between communication and professional fields such as law, education, medicine, business, information science, cognitive science, counseling, social work, computer science, and library science. Communication has always been essential to education and, more recently, the Internet and other communication and information tools have brought new methods and new flexibility to teaching and learning. In the medical, counseling, social work, and other helping professions, researchers and health practitioners have long recognized that communication processes are critical to effectively analyzing and addressing the challenges of maintaining health and wellness. The role of communication in leadership and organizations is also an area of growing interest. Scholars in the fields of information science, information technology, journalism and media studies, and others whose work relates to the creation, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information have very strong linkages to communication.

Today, communication is considered to be a behavioral or social science and an applied liberal art. The discipline shares with psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science the pursuit of knowledge about human individuals and social activity. Communication also draws on the traditions of the humanities as well as professional studies. Thus, another of the attractions of being a student of communication is the opportunity to study a single discipline that integrates and applies knowledge from social sciences, humanities, and professional practice.

So the answer to the question “Why study communication?” comes down to this: whether you are interested in the social sciences, the arts, or the professions; whether your interests are primarily occupational or mainly academic; whether your interests reside in better understanding yourself, relationships, groups, organizations, cultures, or international relations; whether your focus is more applied or more theoretical; communication is an extremely important and useful area of study.

THEORIES: GUIDES FOR ANALYSIS AND ACTION

Communication and Human Behavior is a book about thinking—thinking about communication. That makes it a book that emphasizes *theory* not skills. This is not to say that communication skills are unimportant. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, we believe they are critical. But we also believe that

success in the practice of communication requires, first and foremost, a solid theoretical understanding of the communication process. Such an understanding provides the foundation for successfully employing communication skills. Providing this foundation is the primary goal of this book.

Personal Theories

Essentially, theories are guides to understanding. It has often been said that there's nothing as practical as a good theory (Van de Ven, 1989) and that certainly applies to theories of communication (Lewin, 1951 cited in Cartwright, 1975, p. 169). Theories help us to describe, explain, predict, and sometimes control phenomena and circumstances we encounter.

We all have *personal theories* about a range of things—about relationships, doors, friends, and weather, for instance. Our personal theories, which are sometimes called *native theories* by social scientists (see Mokros, 1993), allow us to navigate in our physical and social environment. For example, our personal theories help us describe particular places and things, explain how to develop close relationships, predict the weather, or control the volume of a television set using a remote control. If we didn't have these theories, we would have to approach each situation we encounter as completely new and unique. We would be unable to think about new situations in more general terms and would be unable to draw on previous experiences in our efforts to describe, explain, predict, or control them. We usually give little conscious thought to the nature of our native theories, how they were developed, or how we are using them. They are based on everyday experience, tend to be taken for granted, are private, and are fairly stable over time.

BASED ON EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE. Personal theories develop over time in response to the situations and people we encounter. For example, our theories about relationships are based on our individual experiences with acquaintances, friends, colleagues, and family members over the course of our lifetime.

TAKEN FOR GRANTED. Most of us do not think very much about our personal theories, the manner in which they are formed, or the way we use them. Once developed, we generally accept them on faith. For instance, we each have our own theories about doors, and we take these theories for granted. We don't think about how we formed these theories and give little conscious attention to our theories when we approach a door, locate the door knob, and turn the knob. We push or pull a door with full confidence that it will open, and we do all this without much thought about the "theory" we are applying, nor the fact that it has emerged over time based on our experiences.

PRIVATE. Personal theories are based on experiences which are to some extent unique for each of us. We often do not discuss our theories or the experiences on which they were based. Our theories about friends are based on our unique experiences, for example, and we generally discuss them only

in a limited range of circumstances. There are some instances where we might discuss the way we think about “friends” or “friendship,” but it’s difficult to imagine many situations where we would be sharing our theories about doors.

STABLE. Once formed, personal theories are generally quite resistant to change. Our personal theories tend to guide us to see and interpret what we observe in particular ways. Often we ignore or unintentionally distort observations that don’t fit in with our personal theories. We are likely to cling to our theories about friends even after we have encountered evidence which seems to contradict our theories. For instance, if a friend has told us something that we know to be untrue, we are likely to tell ourselves he or she probably believed it was true or else altered the facts for a very good reason. Most likely, this kind of “contradictory” event could occur any number of times before we would conclude that the person is purposely lying and no longer worthy of being thought of as a friend. Or, to return to the case of our “doors,” our native theory can present a challenge when we are confronted with what turns out to be an electronically controlled sliding door (see Figure 1.4).

FIGURE 1.4

We develop native theories about many things, including doors.



© RTimages/Shutterstock.com

Scholarly Theories

Theories of a scholarly or scientific nature are similar to personal theories in terms of their basic functions: they, too, are used to describe, explain, predict, and sometimes control objects, people, and events. However, in contrast to personal theories, they are based on systematic observation and testing. They are also questioned, public, and because of this they are subject to modification.

BASED ON SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION AND TESTING. Scholarly theories are developed through research involving systematic observation, information gathering, and analysis. Studies may be

conducted in experimental laboratories or in natural settings. Data are gathered purposefully by means of interviews, questionnaires, or careful observations; and the results are systematically analyzed. For example, a theory about relationships may be based on the analysis of information derived from direct observations or videos. Or a theory could result from an analysis of interviews or surveys of a cross-section of individuals in varying types of relationships.

QUESTIONED. Unlike personal theories, which tend to be accepted on faith and quite stable once they are formed, scholarly theories are continually questioned. Scientific theories are regarded as tentative and may be reexamined through follow-up studies and analyses. Consider our example of doors and door knobs: We have personal theories that allow us to predict that when we turn the door knob and push or pull, a door will open. Rather than be content with a personal theory about doors and door knobs, a scientific theory would be continually and methodically tested to ensure predictability. Thus, engineers in a corporation that manufactures door entry and lock systems would test and retest their products to determine precisely how likely it is that the door knob mechanism will operate as intended or when push, pull, or sliding doors are most appropriate. They might want to determine the average number of uses a sample of door entry mechanisms can tolerate before they fail to function or the relative reliability of push/pull versus sliding doors. Then they would want to study how and why malfunctions occur, and then develop and test theories about how to correct the problem.

PUBLIC. The methods and results of scholarly and scientific theories are disseminated to other scholars and scientists. The goal is to allow others to evaluate particular theories in terms of at least three standards:

- Validity—accuracy
- Reliability—consistency and dependability
- Utility—usefulness and applicability

A scholarly theory will be reported at scholarly conferences or meetings and in journals, book chapters, and books so that other scholars and students can test and apply the ideas. (Exceptions to the public nature of research may occur in the case of studies that are done within a proprietary context, such as those funded by certain profit-making organizations, where findings are purposely not shared for reasons of security or confidentiality.)

SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION. Because scholarly and scientific theories are public—and generally published in print or online—they are available, accessible, and subject to refutation or modification based on new information. Thus, scientific theories can be modified and improved as findings from new research emerge.

Combining Personal and Scholarly Theories

We all have personal theories of communication and human behavior. Like other such theories, our views of communication are based on a lifetime of experience. They are personal. We take them for granted, and they tend to be fairly stable. There are also many scholarly and scientific theories regarding communication and human behavior.

In this book, we will be examining a number of these scholarly and scientific theories. A familiarity with these theories has great value in its own right in helping us to become more aware of the nature and dynamics of communication. Exploring these theories can have the additional value of encouraging and providing tools to help us more critically evaluate our personal theories. That is, we can begin to subject our own theories to some of the more rigorous standards associated with scholarly theory development and testing. Do our personal theories hold up in light of more systematic observation and testing? Are they valid, reliable, and useful? Can we benefit from making our personal theories public and discussing them with other people to see where they converge and where they differ? Are we able to modify our personal theories when evidence warrants? By comparing our personal theories with scholarly theories, we can better understand each and narrow the gap between the two and, in the process, also enrich our understanding of human behavior—and of ourselves.

DEFINING COMMUNICATION

Few words are used in as many different ways, by as many different people, as the word *communication*. To some, the term *communication* brings to mind an image of a speaker addressing an audience from behind a podium, the lively discussion among colleagues at a meeting, or an exchange of glances between lovers. But communication can be a debate, a sermon, a posting on social media, a memorable night at the theater, the efforts of a child trying to overcome a speech disorder, texting, email, a roadside sign, or a thoughtful walk on the beach. Communication is what we think of when we see two friends conversing over coffee, a tear, an outstretched arm, a knowing smile, people using sign language, a kiss, an obscenity scrawled on a restroom wall, even an individual engaged in a silent protest.

The multiple uses of the term *communication* can be confusing. People who are unfamiliar with the discipline may wonder whether the term has any limits. Is everything communication? How does being interested in communication differ from being interested in life?

To address the issue, it is important to understand that:

- *Communication* is the name of a discipline, as well as the label for a phenomenon. That is, the term refers both to an academic area and a focus of study.
- *Communication* has popular, professional, and technical meanings.

The term is commonly used in a very general way by the general public, in a more focused occupational framework in professional circumstances, and in a still more specialized manner in technical and academic settings.

Quite obviously, there are a number of different meanings of the word *communication*. In fact, in one classic study, communication scholars Frank Dance and Carl Larson (1976) identified 126 published definitions. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, often considered the definitive record of the English language, alone lists over 15 definitions.

Definitions of communication have elements in common; they also have a number of differences in terms of the level of observation, the question of intent, the point of view, and the issue of outcome. [The discussion of levels of analysis, the question of intent, and normative judgment is based, in part, on Dance and Larson (1976) and Peters (1999).]

Level of Observation

One can study communication on any number of levels—at the level of cells, individuals, relationships, organizations, a particular culture or society, or even the global level. Definitions may focus on any one, several, or all of these levels. We will explore specific applications of those definitions throughout the book.

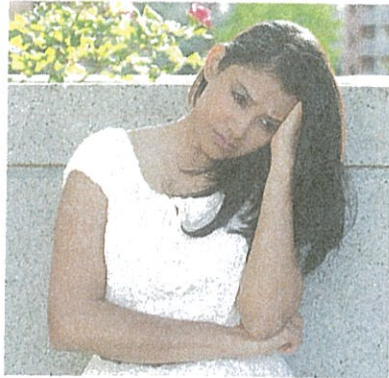
The Question of Intent

Scholars often disagree about whether messages have to be intentionally created to be considered communication. Virtually all communication theorists agree that intentional acts that are noted and reacted to should be considered communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). Thus, if an individual asks another person a question and the person answers, it seems clear that communication has occurred because we can presume that the speaker intended to convey a message. Some scholars would limit their definition of communication only to these acts (e.g., Motley, 1990). These scholars believe that communication refers solely to those events in which there are purposely created messages. They might well exclude from the definition of communication those situations in which it is unclear that an individual meant to create or convey a message to others—even if the behavior had meaning to others.

Other scholars argue that communication occurs any time behavior is attended to and interpreted, whether it was intentional or not (Andersen, 1991). Unintentional behavior that has meaning might include a yawn in class being perceived by others as boredom or an email accidentally forwarded to an unintended recipient. The yawner or the email initiator was not intending to communicate to others, but other recipients of these messages may well have attached a specific meaning to the behaviors, nonetheless (see Figure 1.5).

FIGURE 1.5

Unintentional messages can be as meaningful to communication as messages that are intentionally created.



© A and N photography/Shutterstock.com



© djedzura/Shutterstock.com



© A and N photography/Shutterstock.com



© michaeljung/Shutterstock.com

Point of View

Communication can be thought about from a speaker's or writer's point of view or from the viewpoint of a listener or reader. Most commonly communication is talked about in terms of the activities and efforts of a person who initiates messages—his or her goals, message approach, style, and so forth. But, communication can also be considered from the perspective of a listener or reader, with particular focus on a recipient's needs, goals, reactions, or styles.

The Issue of Outcomes

Some definitions of communication include only situations in which a particular outcome occurs, for example, situations in which understanding, acceptance, and agreement seem to result from an interaction. Such a definition might not see communication as having occurred if misunderstanding, disagreement, or some other unintended outcome resulted from a situation. Other definitions focus on whether the process has taken place, more than upon whether specific outcomes have resulted.

FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATION

To make sense of these many distinctions, to explain the field to others, and to organize our study of the field, we need a comprehensive and unifying definition of communication. A definition that meets these goals should include and integrate the following fundamentals of communication.

Communication Is a Process

Communication is a *process*—an activity that has many separate but interrelated steps that occur over time.

When we prepare for and deliver a public presentation, for instance, we are not engaged in a single, static act. We move, instead, through a sequence of interrelated activities as we plan, gather materials, rehearse, perform, and perhaps adjust the presentation as we're giving it based on the audience's reaction to it.

The communication that occurs in a conversation is, similarly, an activity composed of a number of interrelated steps occurring over time. Consider the following:

“Hi, how are you?”

“Good. What about you?”

Even in such a simple exchange, a number of steps are involved as messages are created, sent, received, interpreted, and responded to.

Communication Is Essential for Individuals, Relationships, Groups, Organizations, and Societies

As individuals, communication is our link to the world, our means of making impressions, expressing ourselves, influencing others, and giving of ourselves. It is also our means of learning about the world and other people, becoming who we are, being entertained, persuaded, amused, deceived, or informed.

It is through communication that we form relationships of all kinds—from the casual exchanges that take place between a customer and a store employee or between strangers on social media or waiting in line at a movie theater, to the intimate conversations or texts between lovers or members of a family. For friends, acquaintances, family, or colleagues at school or work, communication is the means of pursuing joint activities, relating to each other, and sharing ideas.

In groups, organizations, and societies, communication is the means through which we coordinate our own needs and goals with those of others. Within larger organizations, societies, and the global community, communication provides the web of connections that allows for collective action, the establishment of a common identity, and the development of leadership.

Communication Involves Responding to and Creating Messages

It is through the process of creating and responding to messages that we interact with our surroundings and one another. As we will discuss in greater detail later, a *message* is any symbol or collection of symbols that has meaning or utility. Messages may involve verbal codes—such as spoken or written language—or nonverbal codes, involving appearance, gestures, touch, or other means. Examples include a speech, emoticon or emoji, letter, wink, flag, poem, advertisement, or painting.

Responding to messages involves attending to them, interpreting and using them in some way—as individuals and in relationships, groups, organizations, or societies.

We engage in message creation through verbal and nonverbal behavior. For example, we create messages when we introduce ourselves to someone, since we are in the process of constructing a meaningful message—at least, it is meaningful to us. The person we are meeting is engaged in message interpretation when he or she notices, attaches meaning to, and makes use of our introductory comments (see Figure 1.6).

FIGURE 1.6

Introductions are important opportunities for message creation and interpretation.

In face-to-face settings, messages are conveyed from person to person or place to place verbally and nonverbally. In other situations, communication technology—or *media*—play an important role by extending our “natural” capabilities for communication. In these instances, communication between the individuals, groups, organizations, or societies is *mediated*.

Communication Involves Adapting to People and the Environment

We create and interpret messages—as individuals, and in relationships, groups, organizations, and societies—to relate to the environment and to the people around us. In some cases, the process consists primarily of adjusting to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. More often,



© kurlhan/Shutterstock.com

communication involves actively creating situations and coordinating our actions with others. As we will see, the same basic dynamics occur in groups, organizations, and societies, but on a progressively larger scale.

COMMUNICATION: OUR DEFINITION

Communication focuses on the way people create, convey, select, and interpret the messages that inform and shape their lives. More specifically, communication can be defined as *the process through which individuals in relationships, groups, organizations, and societies create and respond to messages in order to relate to the environment and one another.*

This definition is helpful for thinking about the nature of communication and for explaining it in fairly straightforward terms to others. It also provides a useful framework for organizing the ideas presented in this book.

GOALS OF COMMUNICATION AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

The sixth edition of *Communication and Human Behavior* is a book designed to help students learn to think cogently and systematically about communication and its relationship to human behavior. It is based on the assumption that the way we think about communication makes an important difference in the way we understand what is going on around us and in the way we conduct our lives.

This book has three goals:

1. To introduce communication as an area of study. *Communication and Human Behavior* provides an overview and explanation of communication theories, basic concepts, key scholars, issues, and applications.
2. To provide a framework that helps make connections between communication theory and communication processes in action. The objective is to help students develop a communication-oriented perspective on events taking place around them—personally, socially, in work situations, nationally, and internationally.
3. To provide tools to help students use this communication-oriented perspective to analyze, better understand, and be more competent in their own communication behavior.

CONCLUSION

In a broad range of settings and contexts, communication plays a basic and fundamental role. So essential is the role of communication that it is easily taken for granted and thought to be common

sense. When one considers the many problems that result from poor communication, however, the complexity and challenges associated with the process make it clear that this is not the case.

Popular and scholarly writings speak to the importance of communication in our personal and occupational lives. The process is fundamental in many jobs and more generally contributes to professional effectiveness in nearly every field. Communication theory and skills are not assured by one's education, as many of the critical aspects of the phenomenon are underemphasized in formal education. Because of its relevance, its importance, and its many challenges as a topic and field, communication is an extremely popular field.

Theories are the building blocks of understanding. Theories of behavior provide guides to understanding and action. They help to describe, explain, predict, and sometimes control human affairs. Over the course of our lifetimes we each develop personal theories based on our experiences that are quite stable once developed. We typically spend little time analyzing or discussing these theories. In contrast, scholarly and scientific theories are systematically developed, publicly shared, and carefully tested with the goal of achieving validity, reliability, and utility. The two types of theories can be quite complementary and mutually informative.

Communication theories and definitions are numerous and sometimes contradictory. They vary depending on their level of observation, assumptions relative to intention, point of view implied, and perspective on the issue of outcomes. The definition that serves as the foundation for this book is: Human communication is the process through which individuals in relationships, groups, organizations, and societies create and use information to relate to the environment and one another.

KEY POINTS

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain how communication is a pervasive part of contemporary life with relevance to our lives as individuals, family members, professionals, and members of communities and society
- Describe the different approaches to defining and studying communication
- Analyze the ways that individuals develop personal (native) theories of communication based on their life experiences
- Identify examples of how the study of communication theory can help us better understand human behavior, more fully appreciate the skills and techniques that are important to achieving communication goals, and improve our ability to reflect upon and make sense of our own behavior

REFERENCES

- Andersen, P. A. (1991). When one cannot communicate: A challenge to Motley's traditional communication postulates. *Communication Studies*, 42, 309-325.
- Cartwright, D. (Ed.). (1975). *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers by Kurt Lewin* (1951). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Conrad, D., & Newberry, R. (2012). Identification and instruction of important business communication skills for graduate business education. *Journal of Education for Business*, 87, 112-120.
- Dance, F. E. X., & Larson, C. (1976). *The functions of human communication: A theoretical approach*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, Winston.
- Hart Research Associates. (2010). *Raising the bar: Employers' views on college learning in the wake of the economic downturn*. Retrieved from https://aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2009_EmployerSurvey.pdf
- Jones, L. K. (2012) *The foundational skills*. (Job skills for the 21st century: A guide for students). Retrieved from <http://www.careerkey.org/pdf/TheFoundationJobSkills.pdf>
- Lawrence, S. E. (2011). Composite list of 21st century career readiness skills and competencies. Unpublished ms.
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2010). *Theories of human communication* (10th ed.). Long Grove, IL: Longwood Press.
- Motley, M. T. (1990). On whether one can(not) communicate: An examination via traditional communication postulates. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54, 1-10.
- Mokros, H. B. (1993). The impact of native theory of information on two privileged accounts of personhood. In J. R. Schement & B. D. Ruben (Eds.), *Between communication and information: Information and behavior* (Vol. 4, pp. 57-79). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- NACE. (2013). *Job outlook 2014*. Bethlehem, PA: National Association of Colleges and Employers.
- Peters, J. D. (1999). *Speaking into air: A history of the idea of communication*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ruben, B. D. (2006). *What leaders need to know and do: A leadership competencies scorecard*. Washington, DC: National Association of College and University Business Officers.
- Stahl, D. (1989, March). Managing in the 1990s: Versatility, flexibility and a wide range of skills: A new study outlines the requirements for managerial success in a complex and fast-changing business world. *AT&T Journal*, pp. 8-10.
- Van de Ven, A. H. (1989). Nothing is quite so practical as a good theory. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 486-489.

COMMUNICATION PAST AND PRESENT

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- How communication is considered to be one of the oldest yet newest disciplines
- Why early Greeks saw communication theory and practice as critical
- Why the popularity of communication is a mixed blessing
- Communication as an activity, a social science, a liberal art, and a profession

ANCIENT ROOTS OF COMMUNICATION STUDY

- Rhetoric and Speech
- Origins of Communication Theory: Early Greece

17TH–19TH CENTURIES

JOURNALISM

EARLY 20TH CENTURY: DEVELOPMENT OF SPEECH AND JOURNALISM

THE 1940S-1960S: INTERDISCIPLINARITY

- Lasswell's View of Communication
- Shannon and Weaver's Model
- Katz and Lazarsfeld's Model
- Westley and MacLean's Model

THE 1970S-1980S: GROWTH AND SPECIALIZATION

THE LATE 1980'S-2000: THE INFORMATION AGE

- Information as a Commodity
- Converging Media

THE 21ST CENTURY: COMMUNICATION STUDY TODAY

- Ancient and Newly Emergent
- Discipline and Interdisciplinary Link
- Personal and Professional Applicability
- Old and New Technology
- Problem and Solution
- Practical Skill and Fundamental Life Process

THE EVOLUTION OF THEORY

- Communication Theory Today

CONCLUSION

KEY POINTS

ANCIENT ROOTS OF COMMUNICATION STUDY

It is difficult to determine precisely when and how communication first came to be regarded as a significant factor in human life. According to historians, considerable concern about communication and its role in human affairs was expressed prior to the 5th century BCE, in classical Babylonian and Egyptian writings and in Homer's Iliad (for a detailed summary of the

ally history of speech and rhetorical communication study see Harper, 1979). An essay written about 3,000 BCE offers advice on how to speak effectively, while *The Precepts*, composed in Egypt about 2,675 BCE, provides guidance on effective communication including the importance of listening as well as speaking the truth.

With other disciplines that have sought to explain human behavior, the beginning of systematic theory development in communication can be traced to the Greeks. Their initial interest sprang from the practical concerns of day-to-day life. Greece had a democratic form of government, and virtually all facets of business, government, law, and education were carried on orally. Greek citizens often had to be their own lawyers. Accused and accuser alike presented their cases before a jury of several hundred people who had to be convinced of the rightness of a position. Lawsuits were common in Athens, and, as a result, public speaking in legal contexts became a preoccupation.

Rhetoric and Speech

What might be considered as the first theory of communication was developed in Greece by Corax and later refined by his student Tisias. The theory dealt with courtroom speaking, which was considered the craft of persuasion. Tisias became convinced that persuasion could be taught as an art and provided encouragement for instructors of what was called rhetoric. Corax and Tisias developed the concept of message organization, suggesting that a message should have three parts corresponding to contemporary concepts of introduction, body, and conclusion.

The sophists were a group of itinerant teachers in Athens in the 5th century BCE who set up small schools and charged their pupils for tutoring. Protagoras of Abdera (490–420 BCE) taught concepts that are embodied in the modern idea of debate. He taught that a good speaker should be able to argue both sides of a proposition. In addition, he encouraged students to write short messages that did not refer to a particular occasion to be used whenever they were called upon to speak in public.

Gorgias of Leontini (485–380 BCE) was a contemporary of Protagoras and was one of the first to advocate the use of emotional appeals in persuasive speeches. Gorgias was especially concerned about style and the use of appropriate figures of speech.

Socrates (436–338 BCE), another famous Greek sophist, wrote speeches for others to deliver and was very influential in his time. He is known for his belief that an orator should be trained in the liberal arts and should be a good person.

The writings of two other scholars—Cicero (106–43 BCE) and Quintilian (35–100 CE)—also contributed to the broadening theory of communication. Like Plato and Aristotle, Cicero developed rhetorical theories and saw communication as both an academic and a practical matter. His view of communication

was so comprehensive that it included all of what is now considered the domain of the social sciences. He believed a successful speaker was a knowledgeable person. Quintilian is remembered primarily as an educator and synthesizer, bringing together in his writing the previous 500 years' thinking about communication (Harper, 1979). His practical guidelines demonstrate how a good communicator should be educated.

The view that communication was critical to virtually all aspects of human life was widely held during the Classical period—4th and 5th centuries BCE (for a more detailed discussion see Peters, 1999). However, the comprehensive perspective that characterized communication during this era was largely reversed in the medieval (5th to 15th centuries) and renaissance (14th to 17th centuries) periods. With the decline of the oral tradition and democracy, much of the interest in communication also waned, and the study of rhetoric was dispersed among several different fields.

Origins of Communication Theory: Early Greece

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) and his teacher Plato (428–347 BCE) were the most central figures in early communication study. Both regarded communication as an art or craft to be practiced and as an area of study. As Aristotle noted in the opening paragraph of his classic work on rhetoric:

[T]o a certain extent all men attempt to discuss statements and to maintain them, to defend themselves and to attack others. Ordinary people do this either at random or through practice and from acquired habit. Both ways being possible, the subject can plainly be handled systematically, for it is possible to inquire the reason why some speakers succeed through practice and others spontaneously; and everyone will at once agree that such an inquiry is the function of art. (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Roberts trans. published 1954, p. 19)

FIGURE 2.1

In Greek mythology, Athena was considered to be the goddess of wisdom, courage, mathematics, and war strategy.



© Sergey Rusakov/Shutterstock.com

Not surprisingly, given the history of the field, most of the earliest perspectives on communication focused on public settings in which an orator spoke to a listener or group of listeners with the goal of persuading them of the correctness of a particular point of view (Peters, 1999).

Aristotle (see Figure 2.2) saw communication as the means through which citizens participated in democracy. He described communication in terms of an orator or speaker constructing an argument to be presented in a speech to hearers—an audience as depicted in Figure 2.3. The speaker's goal was to inspire a positive image of himself or herself and to encourage the members of the audience to be receptive to the message. As Aristotle (see Roberts trans., 1954) wrote:

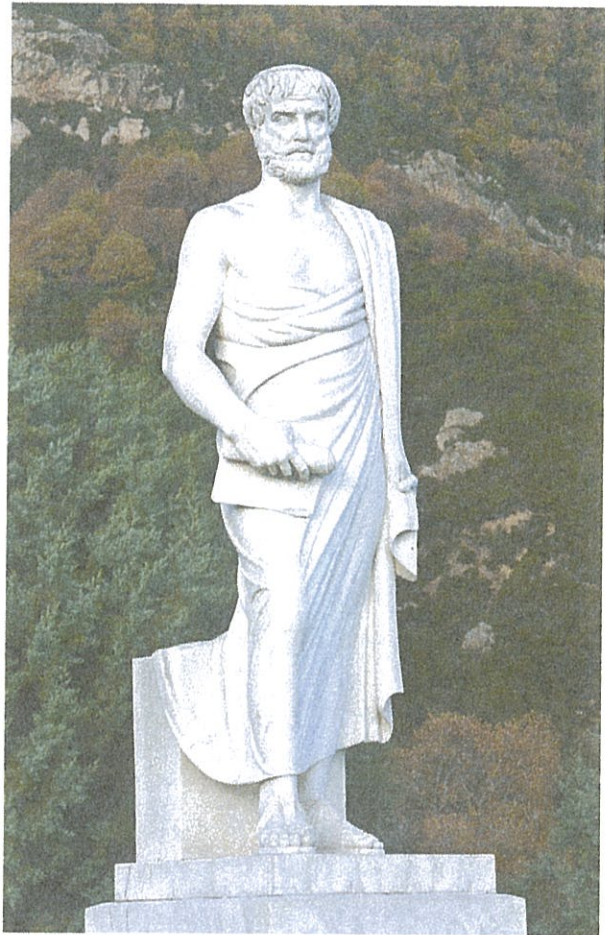
[R]hetoric exists to affect the giving of decisions . . . the *orator* must not only try to make the argument of his *speech* demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his own character look right and put his *hearers*, who are to decide, in the right frame of mind. (p. 90) (Emphasis added)

For Aristotle, communication was primarily a verbal activity through which speakers tried to persuade—to achieve their own purposes with a listener through skillful construction of an argument and delivery of a speech.

Eventually, the work of Augustine (354–430 BCE) led to a rediscovery of classical Greek theory. His writings applied communication to the interpretation of the Bible and other religious writings and to the art of preaching. In so doing, Augustine united the practical and theoretical aspects of communication study.

FIGURE 2.2

Aristotle



© Panos Karas/Shutterstock.com

FIGURE 2.3

Aristotelian View

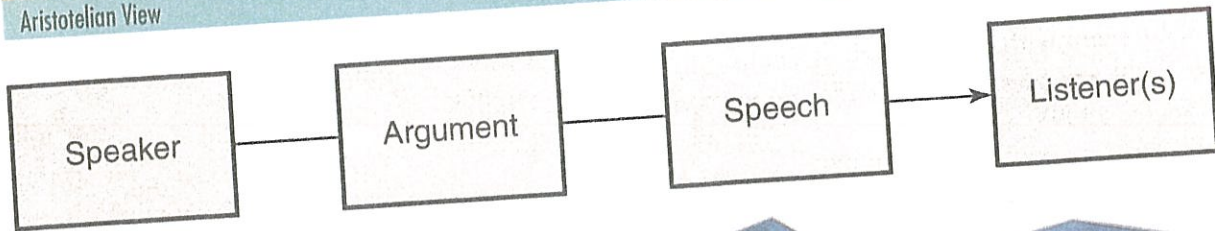
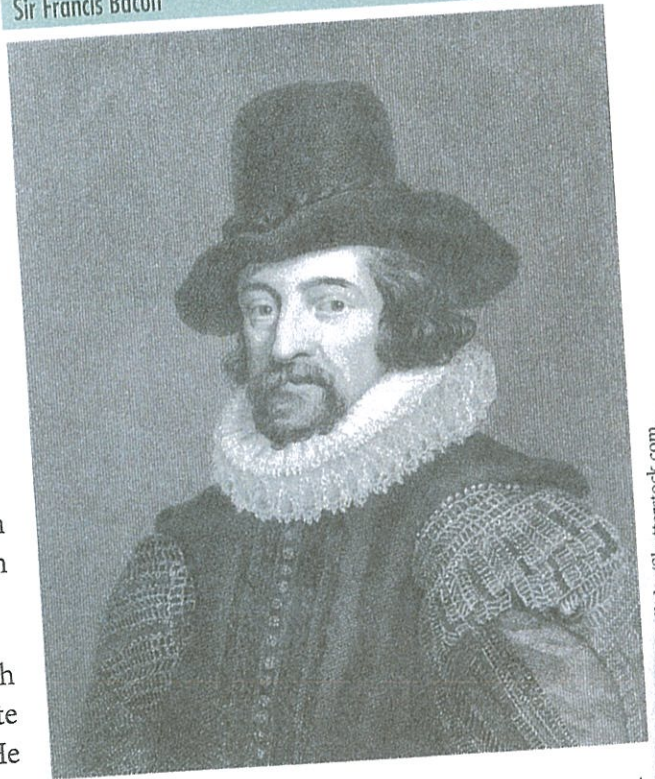


FIGURE 2.4

Sir Francis Bacon



© Georgios Kollidas/Shutterstock.com

17TH – 19TH CENTURIES

Early in the 17th century, Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626) included both speechmaking and writing that was designed for more practical purposes in his theories (see Figure 2.4). He proposed an ethical basis for communication and argued that the function of true rhetoric was the furtherance of good. His ideas had a major influence on later writers.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, emphasis in communication study was placed on written argument and literature.

George Campbell (1719–1796), a Scottish philosopher and professor of divinity, wrote on the philosophical aspects of rhetoric. He maintained that rhetoric had four purposes: to enlighten, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will. Another 18th century Scottish writer, Hugh Blair, proposed theories that could be applied either to writing or to speaking. His book, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, was a guide to composition and was very influential at the time.

There was also great interest in speaking style, articulation, and gesture, leading to the formation of the National Association of Elocutionists in 1892. The elocutionists were a powerful force at this

time and produced a very stylized mode of delivery that included vocal manipulation and physical gestures. A *New York Times* article on July 3, 1892 about their first convention noted that it was “an extraordinary gathering of men and women, its proceedings were interesting and picturesque and we may scarcely doubt that its beneficent influence will be exerted more or less vigorously all over the land. The formation of a dignified national association of elocutionists should not be considered a commonplace event in a nation of careless talkers” (p. 4).

By the end of the 19th century, most colleges and universities were organized into departments, and rhetoric and speech were often taught within departments of English.

JOURNALISM

The other field that contributed significantly to the heritage of communication study is journalism. Like rhetoric and speech, journalism also dates back several thousand years. The practice of journalism began some 3,700 years ago in Egypt, when a record of the events of the time was transcribed on the tomb of an Egyptian king. Years later, Julius Caesar (100–4 BCE) had an official record of the news of the day posted in a public place, and copies of it were made and sold (Frank, 1961, p. 2)

Early newspapers were a mixture of newsletters, ballads, proclamations, political tracts, and pamphlets describing various events. Like speech and rhetoric, they were forms of public communication. The mid-17th century saw the emergence of the newspaper in its modern form; and the first paper published in the United States, *Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick*, appeared in 1690 in Boston, but only lasted for one issue. The second newspaper, *The Boston News-letter*, wasn't published until 1704 (Brown, 2015).

FIGURE 2.5

Elizabeth Jane Cochran (1862–1922) was a journalist who wrote investigative articles about the plight of women factory workers, the lives and customs of people in Mexico, and the mistreatment of women in a mental hospital, as well as chronicling her adventurous round-the-world trip. At a time when women did not use their own names as bylines, she adopted the pen name Nellie Bly.



© Nefali/Shutterstock.com

EARLY 20TH CENTURY: DEVELOPMENT OF SPEECH AND JOURNALISM

In the early 20th century, speech emerged as a discipline in its own right. In 1909, the Eastern States Speech Association—now the Eastern Communication Association—was formed and, in 1910, held its first annual conference. The National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, which became the Speech Association of America and the Speech Communication Association—now, the National Communication Association—was formed in 1914 (Cohen, 1994). In 1915, the *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* was first published, followed soon after by the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. *Communication Monographs* began publication in 1934. Unlike previous publications, which emphasized speech practices, the new journal stressed research. Most of the studies published in the early volumes dealt with speech phonetics and phonology, physiology, and pathology (Bormann, 1965). By 1935, the speech association had 1700 members, and speech was well established as a field.

Although the practice of journalism dates back many years, formalized study in the area did not progress rapidly until the early 1900s. In 1905, the University of Wisconsin offered what were perhaps the first courses in journalism, at a time when there were few, if any, books on the topic. By 1910, there were half a dozen volumes available, and between 1910 and 1920 some 25 works on journalism and newspaper work were compiled, signaling a pattern of continued growth (Hyde, 1937).

The advent of radio in the 1920s and television in the early 1940s resulted in the wider application of journalistic concepts. These new (at the time) media contributed to the development of an expanded view of the nature of journalism.

Interest in communication was not limited to speech and journalism. In philosophy, scholars wrote about the nature of communication and its role in human life. Anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists focused on communication and its role in individual and social processes; and writers in the area of language also contributed to the advancement of communication study.

THE 1940S – 1960S: INTERDISCIPLINARITY

In the 1940s and early 1950s, the scope of the study of communication broadened substantially. A number of scholars from the various behavioral and social science disciplines began to develop theories of communication which extended beyond the boundaries of their own fields. In anthropology, for example, research concerned with body positioning and gestures in particular cultures laid the groundwork for more general studies of nonverbal communication. In psychology, interest focused on persuasion, social influence, and, specifically, attitudes—how they form, how they change, their impact on behavior, and the role of communication in these dynamics. Researchers were especially concerned with issues of

persuasion, including how propaganda persuaded individuals, how public opinion was created, and how the developing media contributed to persuasive efforts (Delia, 1987). Kurt Lewin (1890–1947) and his colleagues conducted a major research program on group dynamics. Carl Hovland (1912–1961) and Paul Lazarsfeld (1901–1976) conducted early research on mass communication.

Sociologists and political scientists studied the nature of mass media in various political and social activities, such as voting behavior, and other facets of life. In zoology, communication among animals began to receive considerable attention among researchers. During these same years, scholars in linguistics, general semantics, and semiotics, fields that focused on the nature of language and its role in human activity, also contributed to the advancement of communication study.

By the end of the 1950s a number of writings had appeared that paved the way for the development of more integrated views of communication. It was during these years that the National Society for the Study of Communication (now the International Communication Association) was established with the stated goal of bringing greater unity to the study of communication by exploring the relationships among speech, language, and media (Weaver, 1977).

These developments set the stage for the rapid growth of communication as an independent discipline. In the 1960s, scholars synthesized thinking from rhetoric and speech, journalism and mass media, and the other social science disciplines. The term communication became linked to speech and rhetoric in basic books on the field during these years.

Communication was of interest in many disciplines during the 1960s, including sociology, psychology, political science, anthropology, linguistics, and administrative studies.

During this period, a number of very influential models of communication were published by scholars. Among the most influential were those of Harold Lasswell, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, and Bruce Westley and Malcolm MacLean. Each of these scholars offered perspectives on the nature of communication that built on the earliest concepts of the phenomenon.

Lasswell's View of Communication

One of the most often cited characterizations of communication was advanced by political scientist Harold Lasswell (1902–1978) in 1948 as an outgrowth of his work in the area of political propaganda. Lasswell provided a general view of communication that extended well beyond the boundaries of political science. He said that an act of communication could best be explained by the answers to the following questions:

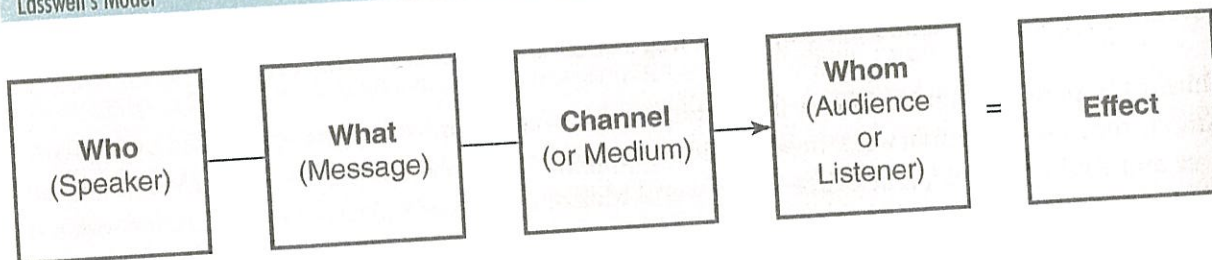
Who
Says What
In Which Context
To Whom
With What Effect? (Lasswell, 1960, p. 117)

Lasswell's view of communication, as had Aristotle's some 2000 years earlier, emphasized the elements of speaker, message, and audience, but used different terminology (see Figure 2.6). Both scholars viewed communication as a one-way process in which one individual influenced others through messages.

Lasswell offered an expanded definition of *channel* that included mass media along with speech as part of the communication process. His approach also provided a more generalized view of the *goal* or *effect* of communication than did the Aristotelian perspective. Lasswell's work suggested that there could be a variety of outcomes or effects of communication, such as to inform, to entertain, to aggravate, as well as to persuade.

FIGURE 2.6

Lasswell's Model



Shannon and Weaver's Model

The model developed by Claude Shannon (1916–2001) and Warren Weaver (1894–1978) described the communication process in this way:

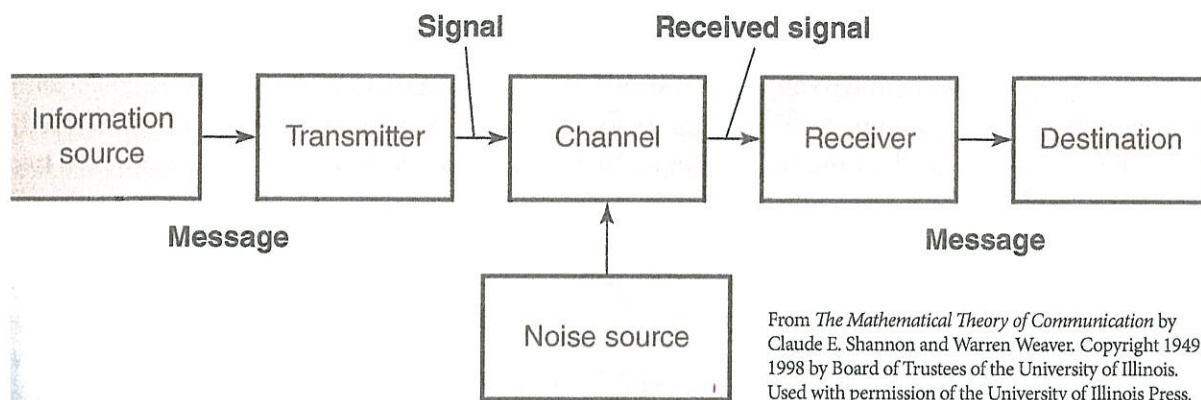
Communication include[s] all the procedures by which one mind may affect another. This, of course, involves not only written and oral speech, but also music, the pictorial arts, the theatre, the ballet, and in fact all human behavior. (Shannon & Weaver, 1949, p. 3)

Like Lasswell, Shannon and Weaver saw communication in terms of a one-way process by which a message was sent from a source through a channel to a receiver. Their model (see Figure 2.7) was somewhat more detailed, however, because they made several distinctions that the other models had not. Specifically, they differentiated between a signal and a message, an information source and a transmitter, and a receiver and destination. They described the workings of the model as follows:

The information source selects a desired message out of a set of possible messages. . . . The selected message may consist of written or spoken words, or of pictures, music, etc. . . . The transmitter changes the message into the signal which is actually sent over the communication channel from the transmitter to the receiver. (Shannon & Weaver, 1949, p. 7)

FIGURE 2.7

Shannon and Weaver's Model



If one considers the example of a dramatic series carried on "cable television," the channel is the cable; the signal is the varying electrical current carried by the cable; the information source is the performers, their backdrop, and so on; the transmitter is the set of devices (camera, audio and video amplification system, and so on) that converts the visual and vocal images of the performers into electrical current. In this example, the receiver is the television set and cable converter equipment. The receiver's purpose is to change the signal back into a message that can be received and interpreted at the destination (a viewer, in this case).

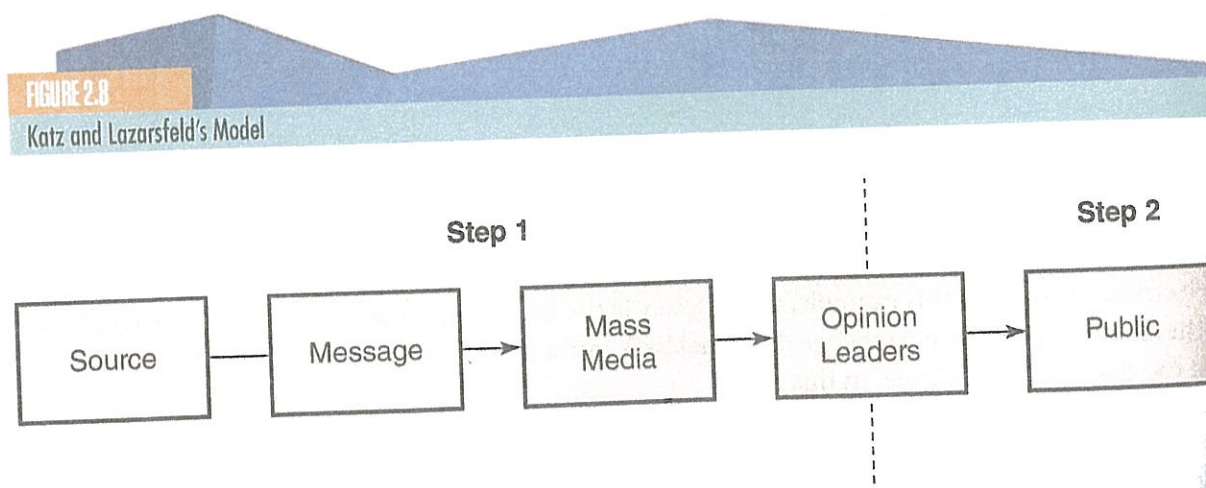
Shannon and Weaver introduced the term noise as the label for any distortion that interferes with the transmission of a signal from the source to the destination. In this example, an illustration of noise would be electrical interference, leading to audio or video distortion, in the cable line. They

also advanced the concept of correction channel, which they regarded as a means of overcoming problems created by noise. The correction channel was operated by an observer who compared the initial signal that was sent with that received; when the two didn't match, additional signals would be transmitted to correct the error.

Katz and Lazarsfeld's Model

In 1955, political scientists Elihu Katz (1926–) and Paul Lazarsfeld (1901–1976) presented a two-step flow concept of communication in their book *Personal Influence* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The model was based on earlier research in which they found that information presented in the mass media did not reach and have an impact on individuals as previous views of communication seemed to suggest it would. Specifically, their research found that political radio and print messages had a negligible effect on individuals' voting decisions.

In searching for an explanation for this lack of effect, they developed a view that linked interpersonal dynamics to mass communication. They determined that undecided voters were influenced more by people around them than by information provided by the mass media; husbands and wives were influenced by their spouses, club members by other club members, workers by their colleagues, children by their parents, and so on. Their research also indicated that some people were consistently more influential than others, leading them to conclude that "ideas often seem to flow from radio and print to opinion leaders and from them to the less active sections of the population"—in a two-step flow (see Figure 2.8).



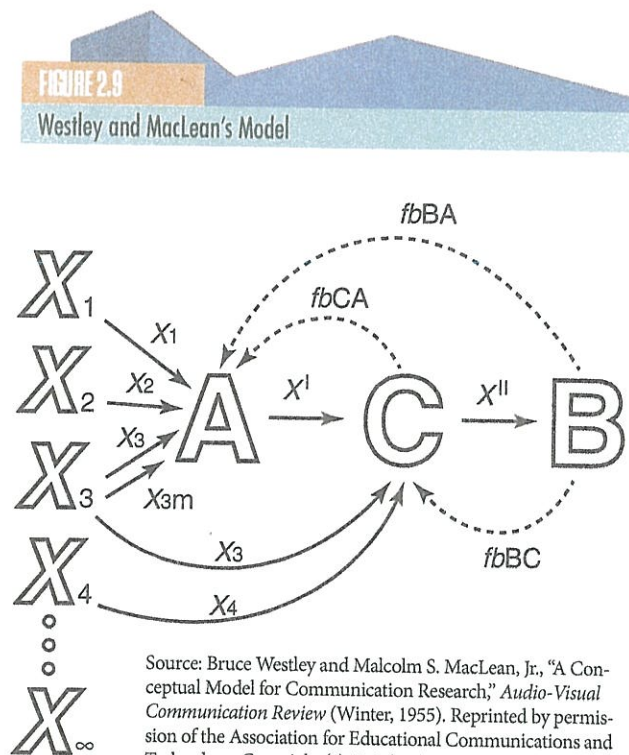
Although research has since suggested that the two-step concept is only applicable in some situations, this formulation has been very influential over the years. It served to link face-to-face and mass communication, and also introduced the idea of opinion leaders. It also has served as the basis for the development of diffusion theory, which describes the process by which new ideas and technological innovations are introduced and adopted within a group, organization, or community.

Westley and MacLean's Model

A somewhat different approach to communication was developed by Bruce Westley (1915–1990) and Malcolm S. MacLean, Jr. (1913–2001). They suggested that the communication process begins with receiving messages, rather than sending them. To be more precise, Westley and MacLean's view indicates that the process actually begins with a series of signals or potential messages. As depicted in Figure 2.9, there are a large number of signals—potential messages—in a communicator's environment, which are referred to as "Xs" in their model.

Signals may involve a single sense modality such as sight or sound (X), or they may involve a combination of several modalities, for instance, sight, sound, and touch. The designation for such a signal would be X_{3m} —the "3m" indicating that three modalities are involved.

The model indicates that in a given situation only some of the many signals (Xs) in one's environment at any point in time are attended to by an individual (A). When individual A processes these signals and interprets them, what is, in effect, a new message (X^1) results. It is this new message—A's personal representation of the sum of all the Xs—that is passed along when individual A describes what he or she saw or heard to a second individual (C).



THE 1970S – 1980S: GROWTH AND SPECIALIZATION

The expansion and specialization that began in the late 1960s reached new heights in the 1970s. Interpersonal communication became an increasingly popular area, as did the study of nonverbal interaction. Information science, information theory, and information and communication systems were other topics of increasing interest. During these same years, group, organizational, political, international, and intercultural communication emerged as distinct areas of study.

Interest in communication was apparent in the popular, as well as the academic, realm. In 1975, the *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* listed communication as a “vogue word—a word . . . that suddenly or inexplicably crops up . . . in speeches of bureaucrats, comments of columnists . . . and in radio and television broadcasts.”

One factor that contributed to the widespread usage of the term communication, but also some ambiguity, was the use of a single term to refer to a field of study, a set of activities, and a profession. People study communication, people communicate (or, more accurately, engage in communication), and people earn their livelihood creating communication products and services. The use of a single term in these three ways was, and is, fairly unique among disciplines.

Another factor adding to both the broad usage but also some confusion was the use of communication and communications. Traditionally, communications had been used to refer to media or to specific messages being transmitted through these media. Communication has historically been used to refer to the activity of sending and receiving messages (through media or face-to-face) and to the discipline as a whole. With the increasing interest in communication technology, the term communications began to be used interchangeably with communication in popular—and sometimes academic—contexts, blurring what had originally been a useful technical distinction.

THE LATE 1980S – 2000: THE INFORMATION AGE

The Information Age is a popular term used to refer to the period beginning in the late 1990s, and in many senses continuing to the present time. This has been a period in which communication and information technology came to play an increasingly important role in our society. So pervasive are the impacts of these new media and the communication and information services they have created that it is difficult to find an aspect of our personal and professional lives that has not in some way been affected (see Figure 2.10).

Information as a Commodity

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was an increasing interest in information communicated via messages as an economic good or commodity—something that can be bought and sold—and in the technologies by which this commodity is created, distributed, stored, retrieved, and used. In the United States communication and information companies have emerged as some of our largest businesses.

Communication and information became central in the telecommunication, publishing, Internet, and computer industries, as well as in banking, insurance, leisure and travel, and research. People in these fields spent an increasing amount of their time packaging information into products and services that could be sold in domestic and foreign markets. In the United States, Japan, Sweden, England, and a number of other countries at least half of the society's labor force was engaged in communication and information-related work.

Converging Media

New and converging media were a fundamental feature of the landscape of the period. Certainly the most obvious change during this period was the growth of the Internet, and other information storage, transmission, and retrieval systems using computers.

During these years, media were brought together to form hybrid technologies that permitted communication sources and receivers to carry out functions that were once difficult, time-consuming, or even impossible. In earlier periods, specific technologies had more or less specific uses. Television was a medium for viewing mass-produced and mass-distributed programs that reached a "television set" via the airwaves. During the Information Age, television became not only a medium for the mass distribution of standardized programs but also a device for use with the Internet, DVDs, video games, cable systems, and a display for print as well as visual computer

FIGURE 2.10

Grace Hopper (1906–1992), one of the earliest computer programmers, popularized the term "debugging" to refer to fixing computer code.



© Bettmann/CORBIS

The telephone underwent a similar transformation. Designed for one-to-one conversation, telexes and telephone lines were used not only in this way but also in conjunction with computers and facsimile machines for the transmission of text and graphics as well as voice. Typewriters, once used solely for print correspondence and report preparation, were combined with the telephone and computer screen to form new, hybrid telecommunication systems.

The infamous "Information Age" brought new labels, new and hybrid media, extended horizons of communication and information, changing economic realities, and new jobs for an increasing number of communication and information workers. During these years our perspective changed to include newer media and the nature and function of communication technology in our world. The Information Age greatly heightened attention to the pervasive role of technology in our world and its impact on human behavior.

21ST CENTURY: COMMUNICATION STUDY TODAY

In preceding sections of this chapter have traced the development of the communication discipline from its early beginnings, through periods marked by interdisciplinary development, through its emergence and growth as a discipline in its own right through the end of the 20th century. From this overview, we can draw a number of conclusions about the present period that are helpful in understanding communication study as it exists today.

Ancient and Newly Emergent

The core of modern communication study has its origins in the work of the early Greek philosophers. In the 1900s, however, brought a number of changes to the discipline, including a new name. Within the last 50 years, the scope of the field has broadened, its structure has changed, and every facet of it has grown substantially. In this respect, communication can be viewed as a newly emergent field, the newest of the disciplines concerned with the study of human behavior.

Discipline and Interdisciplinary Link

As has been the case for at least the past half century, communication in the present period is a strong discipline in its own right. At the same time, interest in communication extends well beyond the boundaries of the communication field.

This duality attests to the central role of communication in human affairs. And, at a time when the boundaries between these and other fields are becoming less rigid, communication serves as an important intellectual link among scholars of various persuasions and points of view.

In communication studies, we approach issues such as these from the perspective of the creation, transmission, interpretation, and use of information by individuals in relationships, groups, organizations, cultures, and societies. The value of integrating our efforts with the works of scholars in other disciplines has become increasingly apparent in the years since.

Personal and Professional Applicability

The importance attached to communication in contemporary life can also be seen in the extent to which the phenomenon is regarded as essential to our personal as well as our occupational roles. The shelves of libraries and bookstores are filled with writings emphasizing the importance of communication to the establishment and maintenance of meaningful interpersonal and family relationships. And, but a few rows away, are an equal number of books describing the importance of communication to successful professional and organizational functioning. Such publications address the importance of communication for individual leaders, team collaboration, organizational effectiveness, and marketplace competitiveness, among other topics.

Old and New Technology

Speaking and listening are as basic to communication and human behavior at the early years of a new millennium as they were at the time of the ancient Greeks. And yet, in the present period, we benefit from any number of technologically enhanced forms of communication, which give permanence and portability to the messages of face-to-face communication. Beyond taken-for-granted media such as newspapers, radio, television, and magazines are a broad array of new technologies that find their way to the market every year. Whether one thinks of smart-phones, tablets, wireless local networks, global positioning systems, high definition televisions, video games, or the many other emerging tools, toys, and technologies, the possibilities for new forms of communication are quite remarkable. And yet as we shall discuss in greater detail later, for all the new forms of communication, many if not most of the basic communication challenges and functions remain.

Inquiring minds might legitimately ask if all the new communication forms that fill our pockets, briefcases, homes, and offices have improved the quality of our lives. Are we better informed than we were 50 years ago? Are we better entertained? Is world understanding improving? Are our personal and family relationships better, more meaningful? These are good questions, we think,

and are precisely the kind of questions that should increasingly be addressed by those interested in communication study in the 21st century and beyond.

Problem and Solution

Few topics are as pervasive in the popular culture as communication. We have become so accustomed to hearing and reading commentaries on the challenges we face in crossing social, demographic, political, gender, cultural, lifestyle, religious, or occupational boundaries that it is easy to overlook the central role communication is perceived to play in these matters. In such conversations, communication—or, more precisely, the lack thereof—is seen as the fundamental problem. And yet, as Peters (1999) has pointed out, communication is also seen as the essential solution. Paradoxically, communication is seen as both a chasm and a bridge. The significance afforded to the phenomenon in our time is quite remarkable, and a factor that contributes to the vitality and importance of communication study and communication practice.

Practical Skill and Fundamental Life Process

Another interesting contrast regarding communication study today is its breadth. In many communication courses, the primary emphasis on communication continues to be as a skill and, more specifically, on the set of techniques associated with creating and disseminating messages, orally or in written form, in face-to-face or technologically mediated settings. There are other courses, however—more often the type that would make use of a book such as this—that approach communication theoretically, viewing it as a fundamental life process, one that is basic to our physical, personal, social, political, and cultural existence. The fact that communication study encompasses such a broad range of interests is a source of some confusion and frequently requires definitional clarification in discussions. At the same time, as in previous periods, this breadth also creates what is a useful tension for the field—a tension between the search for practical technique and the quest for theoretical understanding. Each makes a useful and complementary contribution to the field in its effort to advance human knowledge and capability.

THE EVOLUTION OF THEORY

The earliest perspectives on communication were concerned with public speaking with the goal of persuasion. Orientations broadened to include communication in private as well as public settings; nonverbal and technologically mediated as well as verbal messages; multiple as well as single sources and receivers; and a broad array of purposes, functions, and outcomes.

In the midst of many of the obvious changes in form, certain underlying themes have remained relatively constant for most of the 2,500-year history of the field. Perhaps the most fundamental of these additional themes is the view that communication consists of a source constructing and transmitting a message to one or more receivers in order to bring about a particular effect. In this way of thinking, depicted in Figure 2.11, communication is a one-way event consisting of a one-way transfer of information from source to receiver(s). This $S \rightarrow M \rightarrow R = E$ characterization of communication has been so pervasive in the thinking of the field that it represents what philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) and others refer to as a paradigm. Paradigms are broad theoretical orientations that guide the work of scholars in a field over a substantial period of time. They are pervasive and highly influential, and shape and are reflected in scholars' theories, research, and practice.

Eventually, the paradigms of a field change. Although there is no simple explanation as to how and why this happens, it is often the case that change is stimulated by new observations and evidence that cannot be accommodated by the prevailing paradigm. Research findings, observations, or events that cannot be explained by, or are inconsistent with, existing paradigms are termed anomalies. Often, then, anomalies are the stimulant for discarding one paradigm and searching for an alternative (Kuhn, 1970).

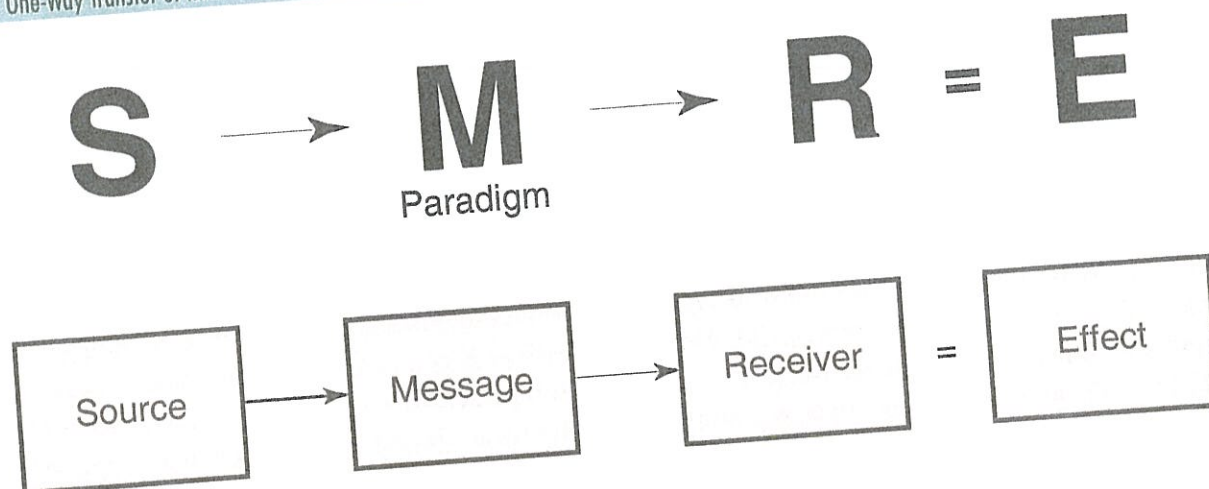
From our review of the recent history of communication models, it is evident that this kind of change has been occurring in communication. Further examination reveals that the anomaly that has given impetus to this transition is relatively simple: message sent is not equal to message received: $MS \neq MR$.

Even as Aristotle advanced his orator-to-listener view of communication, he and his contemporaries acknowledged that the persuasive efforts of the speaker were not always successful. It was presumed that the match between the message sent and that received could be made more predictable if sources learned more about how to construct and deliver messages effectively.

The idea of opinion leaders and the two-step flow, first suggested in the work of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), again reflected an awareness of the fundamental anomaly. The two-step concept provided an explanation for the lack of predictive value of the classical paradigm.

The work of Westley and MacLean dealt with the $MS \neq MR$ anomaly by creating a model that did not begin with the sending of messages, but rather with an individual surrounded by Xs—information sources—some of which were intentionally provided by other people and some not. This way of

FIGURE 2.11
One-Way Transfer of Information



thinking provided a logical and expanded explanation as to why the message as interpreted by a receiver often had little in common with the message as intended by a particular source.

Communication Theory Today

Whereas the $S \rightarrow M \rightarrow R = E$ paradigm predominated during much of the history of the field, the past 50 years have brought a number of changes to this perspective. As you can see from Table 2.1, the evolution of the concept of communication has been:

- From source- and message-centered to receiver- and meaning-centered
- From one-way to interactive and transactional
- From event- to process-oriented
- From an exclusive emphasis on information transmission to an emphasis on interpretation and relationships, as well as information transmission
- From public speaking to a framework that takes account of communication in a variety of contexts including the individual, relationships, families, groups, organizations, societies, and media

TABLE 2.1

Models of Communication: An Overview

Model	How Communication Works	Major Factors Stressed in Explaining Communication Outcomes	Direction Flow
Aristotle	Speaker constructs messages that bring about persuasive effects among listeners	Source and Message	One-way
Lasswell	Speaker constructs messages, selects a channel, and thereby brings about a range of effects among listeners	Source, Message, and Channel	One-way
Shannon and Weaver	Source encodes message and transmits through channel to receiver	Source, Message, Noise	One-way with feedback
Katz and Lazarsfeld	Source encodes messages and transmits information through mass media to opinion leaders who relay it to public	Channel, Message, Receiver, Opinion Leader	One-way (mediated)
Westley and MacLean	Source selectively encodes messages and transmits information in modified form to receiver who decodes, encodes, and transmits information in modified form to other individual(s) with feedback at every step	Receiver, Meaning, Feedback	Circular (through feedback)

CONCLUSION

Communication has a rich and lengthy history, which can be traced back to Babylonian and Egyptian writings prior to the 5th century BCE. The initial contributions to communication study came from scholars in what was termed rhetoric. They viewed communication as the practical art of persuasion. Aristotle and Plato, who were particularly significant to early communication study, saw rhetoric and the practice of public speaking not only as an art but also as a legitimate area of study.

Along with rhetoric and speech, journalism also contributed to the heritage of communication study. As with rhetoric, journalism initially was concerned primarily with practical rather than

theoretical matters. By the beginning of the 20th century, rhetoric and speech were clearly established as disciplines in their own right, and journalism began to take shape as a field of study as well.

During the early 20th century, interest in communication continued in rhetoric and speech, and the advent of radio and later television led to the wider application of journalistic concepts and the development of more theories of the overall process. The 1940s and 1950s were years of interdisciplinary growth, as scholars from various disciplines advanced theories of communication that extended beyond the boundaries of their own fields.

The 1960s were a period of integration. A good deal was done to synthesize the writings of rhetoric and speech, journalism and mass media, as well as other disciplines. A number of landmark books appeared within the discipline.

During this time, additional models of the communication process were advanced, extending the work of earlier scholars.

The 1970s and early 1980s were a time of unprecedented growth within the field. It was also a period in which much specialization occurred, giving rise to progress in our understanding of interpersonal, group, organizational, political, international, and intercultural communication.

Continuing growth and interdisciplinary advancement distinguished the communication field in the late 1980s and 1990s, and developments of the Information Age were important influences. Converging media, along with economic and marketplace developments, underscored the pervasive impact of communication and communication media on our lives.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the discipline of communication and the phenomena it studies are center stage in human affairs. The subject is at once ancient and newly emergent, a discipline in its own right and an interdisciplinary crossroad for scholars from a wide variety of fields. Communication is as relevant to personal as it is to professional affairs, and the role of new and old technology continues to be a focus of the times and the discipline. As Peters (1999) has noted, communication study is concerned with both the major problem and most hopeful solution of contemporary life, and the focus of the field of communication is at once on some of the most practical of skills and on the most fundamental of life processes.

This overview of the history of communication reveals a number of changes during the 2,500-year heritage of the field—changes both in the theory of the communication process and in the discipline in which it is studied. We have seen that the communication field is both ancient as well as a product of the 20th century, interdisciplinary in heritage, the home of scholars and professionals, a discipline which benefits from the approaches of both the humanities and behavioral sciences, and an area in which media are of continuing concern.

KEY POINTS

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the ways that communication has long been regarded as important to the practice and understanding of human affairs and, in the past half century, an increasingly popular academic subject
- Explain the development and evolution of the key communication models
- Identify how the communication discipline is the basis for linkages between scholars and practitioners from many other fields
- Articulate the paradox of communication and how it is both the basis for many of the problems of human affairs and also the potential solution

REFERENCES

- Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. (1954). Published in *Aristotle: Rhetoric and Poetics* (W. R. Roberts, Trans.). New York: The Modern Library.
- Bormann, E. G. (1965). *Theory and research in the communicative arts*. New York: Holt.
- Brown, R. J. (Ed.). (2015). HistoryBuff.com. Retrieved June 14, 2015, from <http://www.historybuff.com/library/reffirstten.html>.
- Cohen, H. (1994). *The history of speech communication: The emergence of a discipline, 1914-1945*. Annandale, VA: National Communication Association.
- Delia, J. G. (1987). Communication research: A history. In C. R. Berger & S. H. Chaffee (Eds.), *Handbook of communication science* (pp. 25-30). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Frank, J. F. (1961). *The beginnings of the English newspaper 1620-1660*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Harper, N. L. (1979). *Human communication theory: History of a paradigm*. Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden.
- Hyde, G. M. (1937). Foreword. In G. F. Mott (Ed.), *Survey of journalism* (p. vii-viii). New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc.
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Lasswell, H. D. (1960). The structure and function of communication in society. In W. Schramm (Ed.), *Mass communications* (pp. 117-130). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Peters, J. D. (1999). *Speaking into air: A history of the idea of communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). *The mathematical theory of communication*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Weaver, C. H. (1977). A history of the International Communication Association. In B. D. Ruben (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook I* (pp. 607-609). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

COMMUNICATION AS A BASIC LIFE PROCESS

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- The ways that communication is a basic life process
- The similarities and differences between human and animal communication
- The primary modes of communication
- The symbolic meaning of communication

BEYOND $S \rightarrow M \rightarrow R = E$: THE ADAPTATION
PERSPECTIVE

COMMUNICATION PROCESSES IN ANIMALS AND
HUMANS

COMMUNICATION MODES

- Visual Messages
- Tactile Messages
- Olfactory and Gustatory Messages
- Auditory Messages

BASIC LIFE FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATION

- Courtship and Mating
- Reproduction
- Parent-Offspring Relations and Socialization
- Navigation
- Self-Defense
- Territoriality

THE COMMUNICATION ICEBERG

- The Visibility and Invisibility of Human Communication

VISIBLE ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION

- People
- Symbols
- Permanence and Portability

INVISIBLE ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION

- Meaning
- Learning
- Subjectivity
- Negotiation
- Culture
- Interacting Contexts and Levels
- Self-Reference
- Self-Reflexivity
- Ethics
- Inevitability

CONCLUSION

KEY POINTS

BEYOND $S \rightarrow M \rightarrow R = E$: THE ADAPTATION PERSPECTIVE

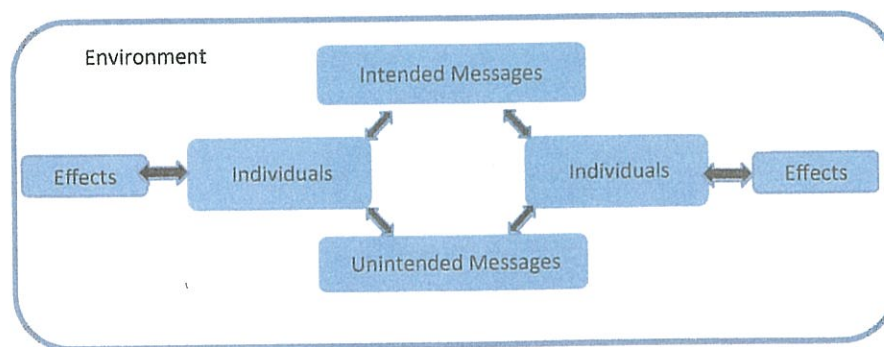
In this chapter we will present a view of communication that builds upon and substantially extends the “transmissional” view of communication that was so important to the history of communication thinking.

The traditional $S \rightarrow M \rightarrow R = E$ approach viewed communication primarily from the perspective of message transmission, where the goal is presumed to be sending messages to establish a commonness between source and receiver. The framework presented in this chapter and throughout this book envisions communication more broadly as the process whereby humans and animals process messages in order to adapt—to cope with and shape the demands and challenges of life. It is the process through which living beings create, transform, and use information in order to relate to their environment and one another.

The model of communication provided in Figure 3.1 illustrates a systems view of the communication process. Rather than view communication as involving the purposeful sending of messages from a source to a receiver, a systems model characterizes the process as one in which individuals are bombarded by a large number of messages as they go about their daily routines within their environments. Some of these messages are sent intentionally by others through language, writing, and conscious expression; some are accidental such as nervous gestures, unintentional choices of clothing, unplanned facial expressions and movements; and some of the messages which may make a difference to individuals may have their source in the physical environment—a sunset, a tree, the wind, or a twinkling star. We will talk more about the nature of the dynamics involved in the perception and reception of messages in later chapters. For now, the key point is that in a systems view, communication is recognized to be multidimensional, multidirectional, and extremely complex—involving messages which are created and transmitted and others that are not.

FIGURE 3.1

A Systems Perspective on Communication. A multiplicity of factors are at play in even the most basic situation, and the net result is that the communication process is multidimensional, multidirectional, and extremely complex—involving messages that are intentionally created and others that are not.



© Kendall Hunt Publishing Co.

While animal communication is clearly not the focus of this book, an appreciation of the role communication plays in activities of all living systems is very helpful as a foundation for better understanding the role this process plays in human affairs.

COMMUNICATION PROCESSES IN ANIMALS AND HUMANS

Plants, animals, and humans are *open systems*, which is to say they participate in continual give-and-take transactions with their environment. These transactions are essential to life. The basic process is one in which a living system takes in, uses, and in the process transforms materials that are necessary to its life functioning.

As one moves from plants to animals, the nature of the system-environment transactions becomes increasingly complex. Animals not only depend for their survival on chemical and physical exchanges but also on communication. Through communication animals and humans create, gather, and use information to interact with and adapt to their environment and its inhabitants.

Just as animal and human systems take in oxygen and foodstuffs and transform them into materials necessary to their functioning, they also transform and use information. In this most basic sense, *communication is the essential life process through which animals and humans create, acquire, transform, and use information to carry out the activities of their lives.*

COMMUNICATION MODES

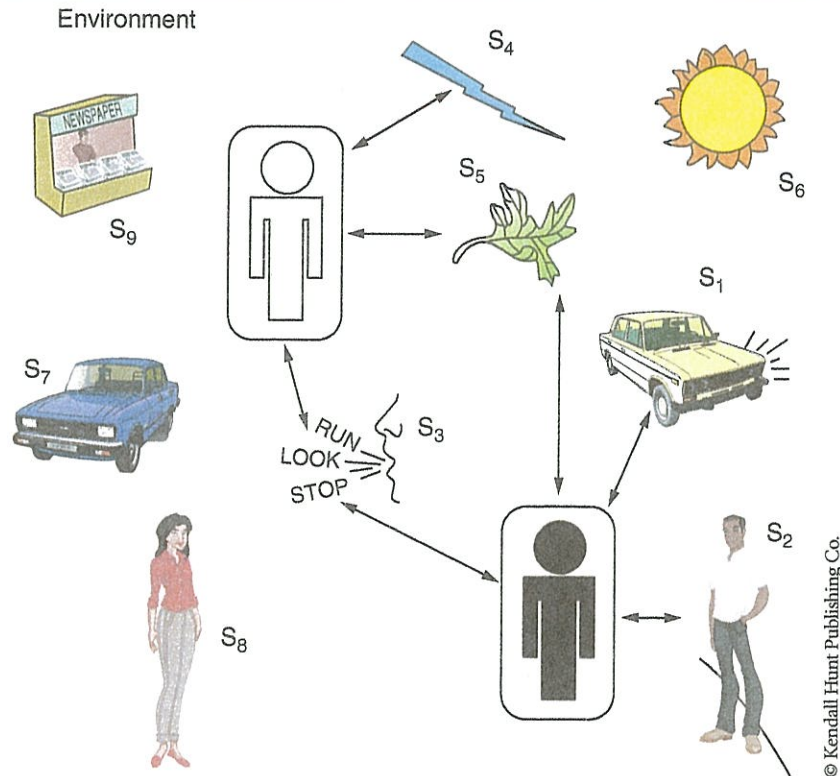
For any living system, information used to guide behavior is derived by processing messages in the environment. The world in which animals and humans exist is filled with a vast array of such messages. Some of these (such as the words exchanged between friends or the mating call of a bird) are purposefully created by living things. Other cues (such as a flash of lightning or the sound of a falling tree) are not. Both purposeful and nonpurposeful cues are vital as potential sources of the information that shapes behavior.

Visual Messages

For humans, visual messages are particularly important. A wave and a smile from a friend, a blush of embarrassment, a tear, new clothes or a new car, a text, or the subject line on an email, are all

FIGURE 3.2

Communication Sources and Modes. Within an environment there are a number of potential message sources to which a living thing may attend and react, represented by S1 through S9 in this illustration. Some of these messages may be produced by inanimate sources, such as the visible flash of lightning or the touch of a leaf blowing past in the wind—S4 and S5. Other messages, S1, S2, and S3, taking the form of a smell, taste, sound, or sight, are produced by other living things. These messages may be unintended, like the sound created by a person walking down the street (S2), or they may be more purposeful, such as honking a car horn (S1) or spoken words (S3). At any instant, many potential messages are not taken account of at all—S6, S7, S8, and S9—and thus have no information value at that moment in time for the people involved.



potential sources of information that can hold great significance for us when they are noticed and attended to, as illustrated in Figure 3.2.

Some animals also make substantial use of visual cues. The color and calls of birds, the alluring colored wings of a butterfly, the rhythmic light of a firefly, and the movement of head, ears, or tail by primates all serve as valuable information sources.

As significant as sight is for humans and some animals, it is generally not as crucial as other communication modes in most species. Many animals lack the visual capacities necessary for processing light and depend instead on touch, sound, smell, or taste as primary modalities for relating to their environment or to one another. See Table 3.1 for a listing of some of these communication modes.

TABLE 3.1

Communication Modes

Modality	Form of Message
Visual	Sight Facial Displays Movement of Body Parts Distance and Spacing Position Dress Other Symbols, Adornment, and Emblems
Tactile	Touch Vibration Stroking Rubbing Pressure Pain Temperature
Olfactory and Gustatory	Smell and Taste (Pheromones) Body Odors Special Chemicals Food Sources, Fragrances, and Taste
Auditory	Sound Incidental Sounds Vibrations Whistling Drumming Rubbing Vocalization

Tactile Messages

For animals and human beings, touch, bumping, vibration, and other types of tactile messages are important. From before birth through the first months and years of life, physical contact plays a critical role in the biological and social development of human infants, as well as the young of other species. Tactile messages remain crucial throughout the lives of many animals, in parent-young relations, courtship and intimate relations, social greetings, play, and aggression and combat. These cues also play a vital role in self-defense and self-preservation.

Olfactory and Gustatory Messages

Many animals also use olfactory and gustatory information to relate to their environment and to one another. *Pheromones* is the technical term used to refer to these chemical messages. Pheromones are carried through water or air. Vertebrates receive these messages through a nose, fish through a sense or odor-sensitive cells on the body, and insects by means of sensors located in their antennae. With other modes, the brain and nervous system filter out irrelevant cues and guide the system to respond only to those signals to which the animal is attuned or to which it has learned to attend.

Auditory Messages

For humans and many animals, auditory messages provide critical links to the environment and to one another. Some sounds—thunder, an earthquake, or the surf splashing against the shore—come from inanimate sources. Other auditory messages are produced by living things through speaking, whistling, honking a horn, drumming, or striking a part of the body against an object, the ground, or another part of the body.

In order for auditory signals to be useful, the vibrations must be detected, received, and processed by means of a special organ which converts the data into electrical impulses that can be interpreted by the brain. Lower-order animals generally respond to sound either by approaching or moving away from the source; most higher-order animals and humans are able to act on auditory messages in a number of ways due to prior learning. Auditory messages are important in the lives of a wide range of species, including birds, insects, and primates, in addition to humans—all of which depend on these cues in caring for their young, learning, courtship and mating, and “language” acquisition and use (Baker, 2001; Slater, 2003; Stumpf, 2001).

BASIC LIFE FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATION

The significance of communication and the various information-processing modes is clearest when one considers some of the basic life functions they serve. See Table 3.2 for a list of basic life functions.

TABLE 3.2**Basic Life Functions of Communication**

Courtship and Mating
Reproduction
Parent–Offspring Relations and Socialization
Navigation
Self-Defense
Territoriality

Courtship and Mating

Although differences exist in the specific courtship and mating practices of various species, all involve communication. Humans and other animals must be able to identify other individuals of their own species. Also, individuals must attract and sometimes persuade one another, and the mating activity must be synchronized.

As with other species, human courtship involves the identification and attraction of mates. These processes occur primarily through visual, auditory, and tactile modes, although some studies suggest that chemical cues may also play a role. Human courtship and mating involve persuasion and negotiation.

The songs of grasshoppers and crickets serve this purpose, as does the odor of moths and the light flashing of fireflies. With birds, mating involves the creation and reception of auditory messages ranging from a simple, repetitive, and not necessarily musical call to complex song-and-dance presentations, acrobatics, and rituals.

Reproduction

Offspring of any species, as they reach adulthood, bear a strong physical resemblance to their parents. A bear cub grows up to look and act like a bear, not a cat or a dog. Physiologically, structurally, in general appearance, and in a number of behavioral patterns, the young of any species replicate or reproduce their parents. This reproduction comes about through a biological communication process in which the sperm cell of a male and egg cell of a female merge to provide a blueprint for the growth and development of the offspring.

DNA, located within cells, is the molecular basis of heredity. The general pattern of growth of living things is through division of cells. A single cell divides to produce two, each of which divides to produce two more, and so on. In some organisms, this continues until thousands, millions, or billions of cells are produced. Division, growth, and development proceed according to the blueprint, as the cells form into layers and masses that fold together and intermesh to form tissues, organs, and more complex structures.

Reproduction of human offspring by their parents begins after a sperm and egg join. The egg cell, most of which is filled with food, is about one two-hundredth of an inch across. In this space are all the instructions that represent the mother's contribution to the inherited characteristics of the child. The sperm cell, which is only about 1/80,000 the size of the egg, carries only the messages necessary to the father's contribution to the developmental blueprint. Through the union of these two cells, all the information needed for the continuity of the species is transmitted in what is undoubtedly life's most fundamental communication process.

Parent–Offspring Relations and Socialization

Children's survival depends on relations with adults. Human infants, in fact, are dependent on others of their species longer than are other creatures. In lower-order animals, the survival of a species and the communication capabilities necessary to this end are largely assured through inheritance.

With many social animals, extended contact between parent and young is required. When this contact does not occur, the important role of communication in the survival of a species is underscored. Some birds that are raised without interaction with others of their kind become totally confused about their identity. Zoologist Konrad Lorenz (1903–1989) was the first to study the processes by which birds and other animals learn or imprint their identity in early social interaction. Simon (1977) recalls one of Lorenz's most famous observations:

One of the most striking as well as pathetically comical instances [of “identity confusion”] concerned an albino peacock in an Australian zoo, the lone survivor of a brood that had succumbed to a spell of bad weather. The peafowl chick was placed in the only warm room available, . . . the one in which the giant tortoises were housed. Although the young peacock flourished in these surroundings, the peculiar effect of its reptilian roommates on the bird became apparent not long after it had attained sexual maturity and grown its first train: beginning then and forever after, the peacock displayed his magnificent plumes in the amorous “wheel” position *only* to giant tortoises, eagerly if vainly courting these reptiles while ignoring even the most handsome peahens with which the zoo supplied him. (p. 23)

Navigation

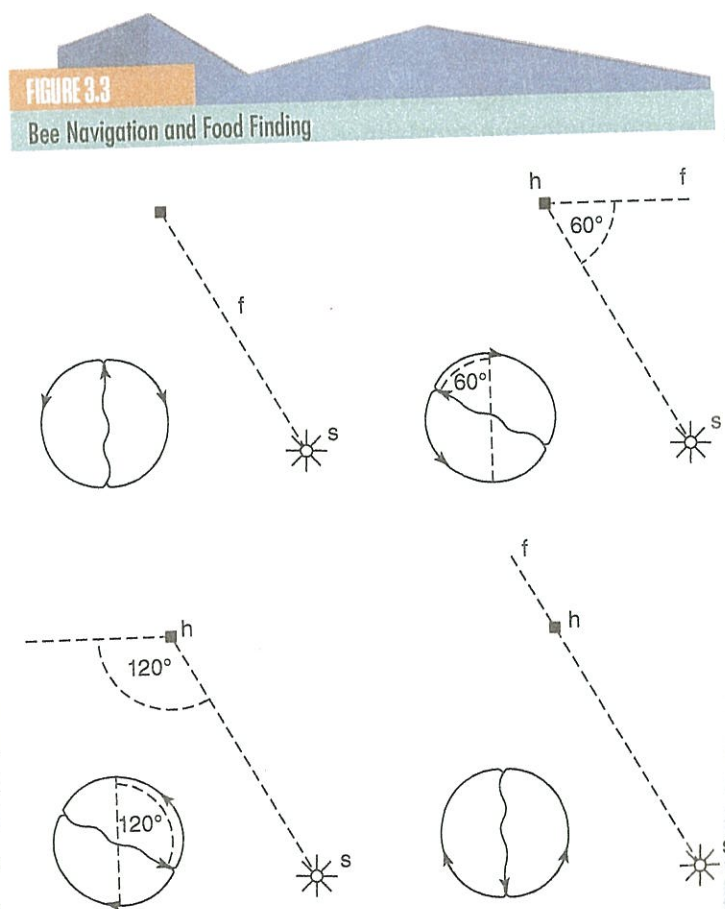
The term *navigation* refers to the purposeful movement of an animal through space, from one location to another. Goal-directed movement of this kind is necessary for nearly all of life's activities, including mating, food location, and self-defense.

In each of these activities, sound, sight, odor, temperature, or other messages must be used. Information must also be processed to determine present location and also to guide movement in a desired direction.

Many animals have highly developed navigation capabilities and can travel great distances with precision. The skills of cats, horses, and homing pigeons are well known in this regard, as are those of ducks and geese, who may maintain two seasonal homes several thousand miles apart. Apparently, some animals orient themselves by processing data about landmarks, the sun, or stars. Other animals use a sonarlike system of sounds and echoes for navigation. The echolocation skills of bats are so well developed that in total darkness they can pass between two black silk threads placed less than a foot apart without touching them. And, the dolphin's echo system has such sensitivity that the animal can distinguish two different fish at a distance of 15 to 18 feet (Méry, 1975).

One of the most elaborate navigation processes is that used by social bees in locating and securing food. Nobel Prize recipient Karl von Frisch (1886–1982) found that when a worker bee locates a desirable source of food, it announces the find to other bees in the hive by a dance (Lindauer, 1961; Wilson, 1971), as shown in Figure 3.3.

Navigation processes are also essential for humans, although the communication forms and modalities involved differ. In a basic sense, a person striding along a busy sidewalk at rush hour or driving on a crowded highway has a great deal in common with the navigation activities of an ant,



Source: Karl von Frisch, *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language*, revised edition. Copyright 1950. © 1971 by Cornell University. Reprinted with the permission of Cornell University Press.

bat, dolphin, or songbird. Each must analyze an immense quantity of information in order to arrive safely at the intended destination.

FIGURE 3.4
Fight or Flight?



© iLike/Shutterstock.com

Self-Defense

Communication plays an important role in the processes through which living systems identify and respond to potential threats to their safety and well-being. If an animal senses the presence of a danger—a predator, a falling tree, the headlights of a car, and so on—it prepares instinctively to defend itself or to flee as illustrated in

Figure 3.4. As a part of what has been called the *stress response*, hormonal and muscular systems are activated, readying the animal for maximum physical output (Selye, 1956; Schusterman, Reichmuth, & Kastak, 2000).

The outlet for this stress energy—the act of fighting or retreating—is often the basis for information used by other animals. This is so, for instance, when the alarm response of one bird evokes a reaction in others that in turn produce their own distress calls.

Among humans, the natural fight-or-flight response is often constrained or channeled into other culturally sanctioned actions. When this occurs, communication also plays a central role in ways that will become clear in later discussion.

Territoriality

The establishment and maintenance of a home or territory is another activity in which communication is essential. Humans and most other animals become attached to particular places, often to those locations where they were born, spent their youth, or mated; and many living creatures mark and even defend these territories.

Territories also play an important role in the lives of social insects. Many species go to great lengths to construct their dwellings and to compete for prime housing sites. Often insects can determine the presence of a foreigner and will often attack if an individual violates the territory. Animals also

establish and maintain what might be thought of as *mobile* or *transitory territories*, and these, too, involve communication. Some fish and birds, for example, travel or rest in groups, and a stranger that violates the boundary may well meet with considerable resistance.

Territoriality is as important to human life as it is to the lives of many other animals, although often less obviously so. In many situations, humans maintain *personal space*—portable or transitory territories—in a manner similar to other animals. Face-to-face interaction provides another example. In such contexts, interactants become uncomfortable unless a customary amount of personal space is maintained between the individuals. The specifics depend on the situation, culture, and relationship among them. A coat or backpack on an empty seat in a library, or a towel or umbrella on a beach, may also serve to mark transitory territories, in much the same way as a bird's song claims a section of a forest.

Humans also use communication to mark their territories in more permanent ways. Over the years a great deal of human effort has been directed toward acquiring, dividing, and maintaining space of one kind or another—countries, states, counties, municipalities, and personal properties. The use of fences as territorial boundary markers is an interesting human invention to accomplish this goal.

THE COMMUNICATION ICEBERG

As we have seen, humans have a good deal in common with other animals in terms of the basics of communication, and yet human communication is also unique in many respects. In this section we examine the unique and differentiating aspects of human communication.

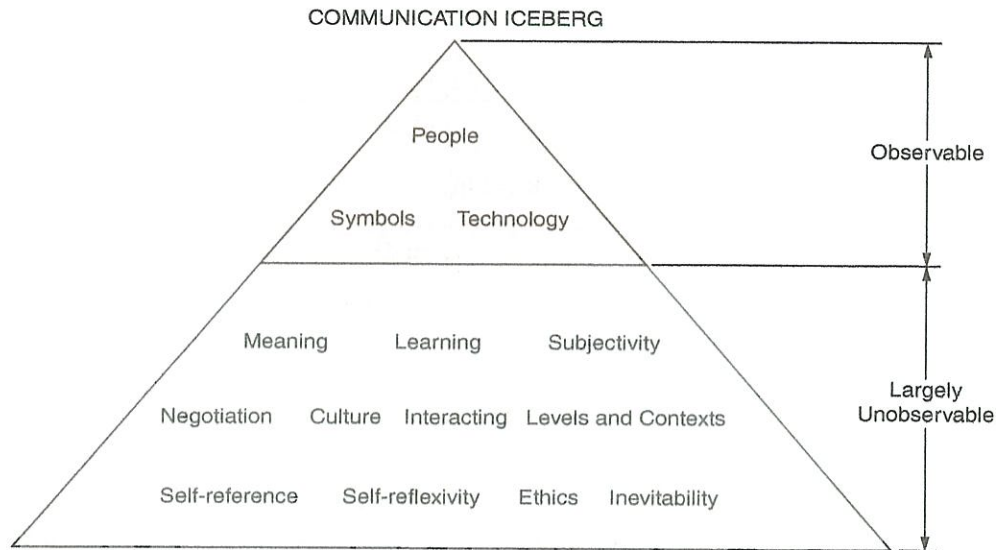
The Visibility and Invisibility of Human Communication

When a person without a background in communication theory listens to two people engaged in conversation, watches a group standing to salute a flag, observes a small group decision-making session, or orders products through the Internet, the communication process appears to be rather simple and straightforward. Messages are sent, messages are received, people behave accordingly, and that's that.

Or so it seems. Actually, in the case of human communication, the aspects of the process that can be easily observed are really only the tip of the communication iceberg, as suggested by Figure 3.5.

FIGURE 3.5

Communication Iceberg



Most of the operations and functions that are necessary to make the communication process “work” are invisible to the untrained eye. Consider the following situation. Jamal says: “Casey, please pass the salt.” Casey picks up a salt shaker and passes it to Jamal. In this circumstance as in others, it seems that meaning has been transferred from Jamal to Casey through a verbalized message. However, even in an elementary situation like passing salt, the communication process is far more complex than it appears. And most of that complexity is invisible.

In this simple example, a number of elements are involved in the communication process, and each affects the outcome. First, Jamal must decide to engage in communication. Then, he must formulate a message that he believes will convey a desire for the salt. Next, the message must be sent. At this point, Casey has to “decide” to attend to the message, must interpret it appropriately, and must choose to act on it in accordance with Jamal’s intent.

In order for either party to be able to use language in this transaction, substantial learning is required; “pass” and “salt” are useful symbols only because their meanings have come to be standardized through a complex process of social communication. Given all this, a simple communication event that begins with a verbal request for salt and ends up with the salt being passed is no small accomplishment.

To appreciate fully the complexities of communication, it is necessary to have an understanding of both the “visible” and “invisible” characteristics of human communication.

VISIBLE ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION

When we observe communication taking place, three important components of the process are readily observable: people, symbols, and media.

People

In this context, when we refer to *people* we are thinking in terms of individuals functioning as message senders and/or receivers. We include in this category public speakers, as well as individuals speaking to one other person, a group, or an organization. Individuals engaged in writing, electronic messaging, or other forms of message creation and transmission are also included. We also include individuals who are the recipients of messages in a communication situation, either as listeners, readers, or observers.

Symbols

What do we mean by the term *symbols*? *Symbols* are characters, letters, numbers, words, objects, people, or actions that stand for or represent something besides themselves. There have been many attempts to identify precisely what it is that makes us different from other living things. A number of writers have pointed to our social nature. However, many animals depend for their survival on other members of their species. Other scholars have suggested that our capacity for communication might be the distinguishing characteristic. As we know, however, the production, transmission, and reception of messages is essential to the social lives of many species; and communication in one form or another is necessary to the adaptation and survival of all animals. As humans, we *do* have a unique communication capability; we can create and use symbols and symbolic language, and it is this skill and the many consequences of it that perhaps best highlight the special nature of the human animal (Rapoport, 1973).

What exactly does it mean to say that humans create and use symbolic language? A *language*, in the most general sense, is a set of characters, or elements, and rules for their use in relation to one another. There are many types of languages. Most familiar are spoken and written languages, such as English, Spanish, or Swahili. The Morse code, Braille, genetic code, and various computer “languages” are less obvious examples. See Figure 3.6 for an illustration of this concept.

With language, we code and transmit messages from one point to another using one or more communication modes. Oral, spoken, and other acoustically coded languages make use of the auditory mode. Written or light-utilizing languages utilize the visual channel.

Most languages are based on arbitrary symbolization. While letters and words are the most obvious elements in our symbolic language, there are many others that are important to human life. An illuminated red light located on a pole near an intersection is a symbol, as is George Washington, the Eiffel Tower, or a rectangular piece of cloth with thirteen red and white stripes and fifty white stars on a blue field in the upper corner.

Symbols represent things or ideas about things. Words are symbols because they represent objects, ideas, relationships, people, places, and feelings—to name just a few of the concepts or objects that are referenced by words.

FIGURE 3.6

The English alphabet, Morse Code, sign language, Braille, and the ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) computer code are among our most used languages. Each has evolved to meet a specialized set of human needs. The languages differ from one another in their form, yet in terms of the more basic functions served, they have much in common.

Morse Code Manual (Deaf)	Braille	ASCII		
L				01001100
O				01001111
V				01010110
E				01000101

Artwork © Kendall Hunt Publishing Co.

The symbols (words) in a language that represent concepts and objects are arbitrary. In most cases, there is no direct or obvious connection between the symbol and the referent (the thing the symbol stands for). Individuals in a society have to learn which words represent which things. For example, we learn that “window” is the appropriate word for the pane of glass that is in the middle of a wall. This symbol may refer to other objects, too. All windows are not the same size and shape, but we continue to use the word “window” to label them. In fact, some windows may even be opaque. Problems in communication often result when we forget that the symbol is not the referent and that many symbols have more than one referent.

Another fundamental, but easily overlooked, illustration of symbolic language is our monetary system. We think little about the communication process that occurs when we go into a store, pick out an item priced at \$15, go to the cashier, hand over a ten- and a five-dollar bill, and leave the store with a “thank you” and the item in a bag. This exchange is very much a communication event, one in which symbolic language plays a crucial role. When we give the clerk a ten- and a five-dollar bill, in effect, we are only handing over two pieces of high-quality paper. They have no inherent value, other than the expense of the paper and ink. They are symbols and as such their value to us comes about as a consequence of the meanings we have learned to attach to them—but more about that

later. We live, quite literally, in an environment filled with symbols of various kinds (see Figure 3.7 for one example of important symbols).

PERMANENCE AND PORTABILITY.

For most animals, visual, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and auditory signals are transitory in nature, and, in most cases, animals must be within sight or hearing range in order to respond to messages from another individual; even olfactory cues used to mark a territory or provide a trail are generally fleeting.

For humans, through the use of technology, symbols can have permanence and significance apart from the situation in which they were originally used. Information provided in a letter sent to a friend, a book, a poem, a scientific formula, the blueprint for a building, or signs along a highway is not transitory in nature. Such messages may have a virtually unending existence and use. In fact, their life is limited only by our human capacity for preserving the physical materials on which they are recorded.

Technology makes it possible for us to accumulate and transmit information from one generation to the next. This enables us to “bridge” or “bind” time—to use records of the past, as well as the present, and to create messages today that will be a part of the environment of future generations.

Because of technology, human communication also has the capacity for “portability”—for bridging space. The objects or people to which particular symbols refer need not be present in order for the symbol to be useful in communication. Information coded and packaged in one geographic location can be transmitted to people in a distant location, for example. Communication technologies extend and provide an alternative to face-to-face communication as a means of sending and receiving messages.

FIGURE 3.7

How many of these currency symbols can you identify?



© Vectortguru/Shutterstock.com

INVISIBLE ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION

Ten other aspects of communication are critical but invisible to the untrained eye. These include: meaning, learning, subjectivity, negotiation, culture, interacting contexts and levels, self-reference, self-reflexivity, ethics, and inevitability.

Meaning

We invent symbols. In order to use them in communication, we also have to invent their meanings and the responses we make to them. To illustrate the point, consider the word *bird*. *Bird* has no inherent, intrinsic meaning or significance. It is simply a particular pattern of auditory vibrations that comes about by the manipulation of the vocal cords, lips, tongue, and mouth, or a configuration of ink on paper in the case of written language. The characteristics of the word and sounds of its spoken pronunciation comprise a symbolic code that is useful only to those who are able to decipher it. The word is arbitrary in the sense that it has no relation to the animal to which it refers, other than that which we have invented and accepted. Any word could have been chosen in its place.

As another illustration, let's return to the example of a red light at an intersection. In casual conversation, we may say that the light "means" stop. Actually, however, the light means nothing in and of itself. It is a symbol. Its meaning was invented. Through custom and habitual use—and, in this case, legislation—people have come to interpret the symbol as a guide to behavior: to stop. Similarly, the red, white, and blue cloth that we know as the American flag has no intrinsic meaning other than that which we have created and accepted.

As humans, we are not only capable of creating events, but also the significance and meaning those events will have for us. Even matters as basic as determining what and how to eat are not solely matters of biology and genetic programming. While some people, for example, look forward with enthusiasm to celebrating a summer holiday with a juicy barbecued steak, a vegan would find that thought revolting. In a similar sense, decisions as to whether to eat with fingers, fork and knife, or chopsticks, and whether to use one's left hand to eat (as would be acceptable in some cultures) or only one's right hand, as is customary in many Muslim cultures, depend on the meanings we have invented and attached to life's circumstances.

Learning

A bird is born knowing how to build the nest necessary for mating and survival; the instructions are inscribed on the chromosomes of the fertilized egg cell from which it developed. Lightning bugs inherit the knowledge needed to emit and respond to luminescent messages of a potential mate,

and bees are apparently born programmed with the information needed to create and interpret the waggle dance. Human beings have to actively learn much of the physical and communication skill that is “natural” for many other animals. As Vickers (1967) has noted, “Insofar as I can be regarded as human, it is because I was claimed at birth as a member of a communication network, which programmed me for participation in itself” (p. 272).

Analytical reflection will remind us of the underlying complexity of human communication. Whether we consider interactions between scientists using mathematical equations, the “value” of the money we carry around in our pockets, the significance we attach to our flag, a spoken exchange between acquaintances, or facial expressions and gestures between colleagues at work, the symbols and their meanings have to be created, agreed upon, and learned to be useful for communication. Their significance is created by us, and they are useful for communication only to the extent that we learn and are able to use them appropriately.

Subjectivity

The symbols we use in human communication will not necessarily mean the same things to all of us. We relate to messages in a particular way as a product of our experiences. No two of us have precisely the same experiences, and, therefore, no two of us attach precisely the same meaning to the messages around us. To put it differently, we do not all encode and decode messages in the same way. (See Chapter 5 for a more extensive discussion of these concepts.) Furthermore, even one individual may not attach exactly the same meaning to a particular message at different points in time or in different circumstances.

The subjective aspect of human communication extends to all types of symbols—words, art, money, flags, and so on. When two people look at a work of art, for instance, the meanings it will have for them are in part personal, reflecting their own experience. Consider the illustration in Figure 3.8. Some may see an attractive flag hanging in front of a building and not attach any meaning to it beyond admiring its colors. Others may see it as a

FIGURE 3.8

What does this symbol mean to you?



symbol of gay pride while others may believe that it signals something about the feelings of the owners of the business in the building. The meanings one attaches to this picture as a whole provide a further illustration of the subjectivity of communication.

Monetary symbols also illustrate the personal nature of human communication. The value of money is subjective. While a child walking in a crowd may bend down to pick up a penny, many adults will not. To some people, a birthday gift of twenty dollars is regarded as generous; for others it may be seen as insignificant.

A recognition that much of communication is subjective and personal has led to the observation that the amazing thing about human communication is not that it sometimes seems to *fail* but, rather, that it ever seems to *succeed*. Is it any wonder that two lovers, colleagues, or countries come away with very different interpretations of who is to blame in a conflict?

Negotiation

As unique as we and our meanings may be, communication between people generally seems to work pretty well. How can this be? For symbols to work in our efforts to relate effectively to others, our meanings must mesh with the meanings of others. As we engage in communication, we take part in a process of negotiation through which we reconcile our meanings with those of others.

Unlike efforts by management and representatives of a labor union to arrive at terms for a contract, this negotiation process is essentially invisible. It involves individuals adjusting and readjusting the messages they send and the interpretations they attach to the messages of others, in an effort to make sense of, cope with, and adapt to the demands and opportunities that present themselves.

Culture

The fact that our meanings often seem to mesh reasonably well with others' meanings is no accident, nor is it simply the result of the negotiation that takes place within a given interaction. Rather, we are influenced through our participation in groups, organizations, and as members of society. Through this participation, we establish a commonness of cultural experience with other people through social communication. Our symbols and their meanings become shared and standardized (or *intersubjectified*) and take on an objective quality; that is to say, our symbols come to seem real. Thus, we seldom question whether our money has value or if our words have meaning. With continued use, symbols and their meanings become part of the cultural environment we take for granted.

Through human communication, we create a common culture and a shared view of reality and come to be able to understand one another—to coordinate the meanings for the symbols we use. The more we develop common meanings for symbols with another person, the better the communication process will “work.” Store owners who trade pieces of high-quality green paper for goods or services do so because they have learned to attach a similar meaning to the pieces of paper as customers do. Merchants also operate in the belief that the bank and creditors will attach a similar significance to them. When those pieces of paper are “checks,” the effectiveness of the communication may dissolve, as the problems of subjective meaning loom large.

Artist Ben Shahn (1972) makes this point very eloquently:

It is the images we hold in common, the characteristics of novels and plays, the great buildings, the complex pictorial images and their meanings, and the symbolized concepts, principles, and great ideas of philosophy and religion that have created the human community. The incidental items of reality remain without value or common recognition until they are symbolized, recreated, and imbued with value. (pp. 130-131)

Interacting Contexts and Levels

Human communication operates in various contexts and at various levels. It is the lifeblood of individuals, relationships, groups, organizations, and societies. Intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organizational, public, mass, and societal communication do not operate in isolation. There is interplay among all levels. The relationships in which we are involved, the groups of which we are members, the organizations we work for, and the society and world community in which we live, all have an impact on our individual communication activities. In turn, intrapersonal communication and the ways we feel and think about ourselves influence our interactions in relationships, groups, organizations, and society, as well as public and mediated communication. Human communication is the web that unites and gives mutuality to the various forms and levels of human activity.

Self-Reference

The meanings we learn to attach to the symbols we use—and the symbols others use—always reflect our own experiences. As a result, the things we say and do and the way we interpret others’ words and actions are a reflection of—and a statement about—our meanings, experiences, needs, and expectations. When people say, “It certainly is cold outside today,” “Kimchi is spicy,” “That movie was exciting,” or “That course is really hard,” they are talking as much about their own feelings, meanings, and experiences as about the temperature, Korean food, a movie, or a course.

It is in this sense that human communication is self-referencing and autobiographical: What we see in and say about other people, messages, and events in the environment always says as much about us as it does about them.

Self-Reflexivity

Another related characteristic of human communication is our capacity for self-reflexiveness or self-consciousness. This human capacity which allows individuals to view themselves as “self,” as a part of and apart from their environment, is the core of the communication process (Budd & Ruben, 1987). Because of *self-reflexiveness*, we are able to think about our encounters and our existence, about communication and human behavior. This capability enables us to set goals and measure our progress toward them, to have expectations of ourselves, and to recognize when we have met them. On the other hand, it is also through self-reflexiveness that we recognize our failures, expectations we do not meet, and qualities we admire but do not possess.

It is our capacity for self-reflexiveness that allows us to theorize about ourselves and our experiences—to “get outside ourselves” in order to look at ourselves. In effect, we enter into a relationship with ourselves that is similar in many ways to the relationships we have with others. We talk to ourselves, think about ourselves in particular ways, and “act” in particular ways toward ourselves. Our patterns of self-reflexive communication have great implications for how we talk to, think about, and act toward others. These behaviors, in turn, have consequences for how we relate to ourselves.

Ethics

Up to this point, we have discussed various approaches to the communication process without acknowledging that there are some very individual choices embedded within this process. Models of communication deal with an idealized process. In real life, however, individuals often have to make some very difficult choices when communicating with others. For example, most societies value honesty as a fundamental principle. But if a friend who has been seriously ill asks “How do I look?” what is an appropriate response? Truthfully, the friend may look very weak, but if we care about our friend’s well-being, is it right to be totally honest and say “You look terrible”? In this instance, many well-meaning individuals might try to cheer up the friend by telling the person he or she looks fine even though this response is a lie.

Deciding when or if it is acceptable to deceive others and what type of deception is acceptable is only one instance of the ethical choices we make every day as communicators. Ethical issues arise in all types of communication situations including interpersonal communication, organizational communication, political communication, advertising, and the news media (Johannesen, 1996).

Inevitability

"We cannot not communicate." This is a phrase coined by Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) to emphasize the point that we are inevitably engaged in the process of creating and processing messages during every waking moment. Our verbal and nonverbal behaviors are ongoing sources of information for others, and, in turn, we are continually and unavoidably processing messages created by the people, circumstances, and objects in our environment, and about ourselves.

From this perspective, we can see the technical inaccuracy of concepts such as "communication breakdown" or "failure to communicate." Communication is always taking place. Messages are inevitably being created and processed. Most often, what are termed "breakdowns" and "failures" result not from the lack of message sending and receiving but, instead, from differing interpretations of messages, expectations, intentions, or outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have examined visible and invisible characteristics that are fundamental to human communication. Visible characteristics include people, symbols, and media. We create and use symbols and symbolic language. A language, in the most general sense, is a set of characters or elements, and rules for their use in relation to one another. Symbols are characters, letters, numbers, words, objects, people, or actions that stand for or represent something besides themselves. Through the use of technology, symbols have the potential for permanence and portability. For most animals, visual, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and auditory signals are transitory in nature. Human symbols have significance apart from the situation in which they were originally used and may have a virtually unending existence and use.

Invisible characteristics include meaning, learning, subjectivity, culture, interacting levels and contexts, negotiation, self-reference, self-reflexivity, ethics, and inevitability. Human communication involves meaning. In order to use symbols in communication, their significance and the responses to them must be created. Learning is another characteristic. Animals are born with the knowledge of the meanings to attach to the signals necessary for their survival; humans must learn communication patterns and meanings. The characteristics of words and the sounds of their spoken pronunciation comprise a symbolic code that is useful only to those who have learned to decipher it.

Human communication is subjective. The symbols used in human communication will not necessarily mean the same things to those who create and send messages as they do to those who receive them. People relate to messages in a particular way as a product of their experiences. No

two individuals have precisely the same experiences, and no two people attach precisely the same meaning to the messages in the environment.

Negotiation is another characteristic of human communication. When we engage in communication with others, we negotiate a shared culture. Generally, our meanings mesh reasonably well with others' meanings, because others' meanings are learned through social interaction. In this social communication process, symbols and their meanings become shared and standardized—intersubjectified.

Human communication operates in various contexts and at various levels. It is the lifeblood of individuals, relationships, groups, organizations, and societies, and there is interplay between contexts and between levels.

Self-reference is another characteristic of human communication. The meanings we learn to attach to the symbols we use reflect our own experiences. As a result, things that we see in or say about other people, messages, and events in the environment are always autobiographical—they say as much about the person offering the description as they do about the objects being described.

Another related characteristic of human communication is our capacity for self-reflexiveness. Because of our symbol-using capacity we are able to reflect upon ourselves and our actions, to set goals and priorities, to have expectations.

Ethical choices are a very fundamental aspect of everyday communication dynamics. Key ethical considerations include fostering dialogue, valuing diversity, tolerating disagreements, and valuing integrity. Finally, human communication is inevitable. “We cannot not communicate.” Our verbal and nonverbal behaviors are ongoing sources of information for others; and, in turn, we are continually and unavoidably processing information about the people, circumstances, and objects in our environment, and about ourselves.

KEY POINTS

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Analyze the significance of symbols in our daily interaction
- Explain the largely invisible nature of communication and how it differs from commonly observable aspects
- Identify the multiple modes of communication and their related effects
- Describe the main characteristics of the communication process

REFERENCES

- Baker, M. C. (2001). Bird song research: The past 100 years. *Bird Behavior*, 14, 3-50.
- Budd, R. W., & Ruben, B. D. (1987). *Beyond media* (2nd ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Johannesen, R. L. (1996). *Ethics in human communication* (2nd ed.). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.
- Lindauer, M. (1961). *Communication among social bees*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Linden, E. (2002). *The octopus and the orangutan*. New York, NY: Dutton.
- Méry, F. (1975). *Animal languages* (M. Ross, Trans.). Westmead, UK: Saxon House.
- Rapoport, A. (1973). Man, the symbol user. In L. Thayer (Ed.), *Communication: Ethical and moral issues*. New York, NY: Gordon and Breach.
- Schusterman, R. J., Reichmuth, C. J., & Kastak, D. (2000). How animals classify friends and foes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9, 1-6.
- Selve, H. (1956). *The stress of life*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Shahn, B. (1972). *The shape of content*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Simon, H. (1977). *The courtship of birds*. New York, NY: Dodd, Mead, & Co.
- Slater, P.J. B. (2003). Fifty years of bird song research: A case study in animal behavior. *Animal Behavior*, 65, 633-640.
- Stumpf, M. P.H. (2001). Language's place in nature. *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, 16, 475-476.
- Vickers, G. (1967). The multivalued choice. In L. O. Thayer (Ed.), *Communication: Concepts and perspectives* (pp. 259-278). Washington, DC: Spartan Books.
- Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J. H., & Jackson, D. D. (1967). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Wilson, E. O. (1971). *The insect societies*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.