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The information in this chapter is aimed at reducing communication problems among people and helping you enhance your communication effectiveness. The chapter approaches these ends in two ways. First, it explains the nature of a few key facets of interpersonal communication. Second, it presents guidelines for improving your effectiveness, along with skill-building exercises. We lay particular emphasis on listening as part of achieving good communication. Keep in mind that communication underlies almost every human relations activity, as much as running supports almost every sport. You need good communication skills to get through job interviews, perform well on the job, and get promoted.

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## Steps in the Communication Process

### Learning Objective 1

One way to understand how people communicate is to examine the steps involved in transmitting and receiving a message, as shown in **Figure 4-1**. For effective communication to take place, six components must be present: a sender, a message, a channel, a receiver, feedback, and the environment. In addition, a seventh component, noise, affects the entire communication process. To help understand the communication process, assume that a production manager in a bicycle factory wants to inform a team leader that productivity in her department slipped last month.

1. **Sender (or source):** The sender in a communication event is usually a person (in this case the production manager) attempting to send a spoken, written, sign language, or nonverbal message to another person or persons. The perceived authority and credibility of the sender are important factors in influencing how much attention the message will receive.
2. **Message:** The heart of the communication event is the **message**, a purpose or idea to be conveyed. Many factors influence how a message is received. Among them are clarity, the alertness of the receiver, the complexity and length of the message, and how the information is organized. The production manager's message will most likely get across if he says directly, "I need to talk to you about last month's below-average productivity figures."

**message**

A purpose or idea to be conveyed.

3. **Channel (medium):** Several communication channels, or media, are usually available for sending messages in organizations. Typically, messages are written (usually

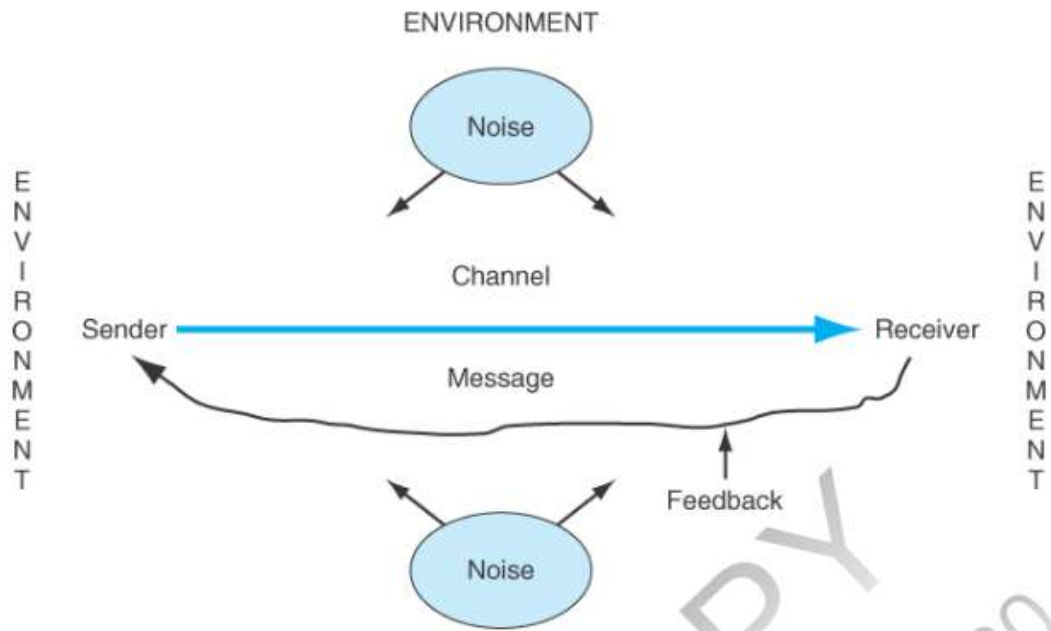


Figure 4-1 A Basic Model of the Communication Process

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electronically), spoken, or a combination of the two. Some kind of nonverbal signal such as a smile or hand gesture accompanies most spoken messages. In the production manager's case, he has chosen to drop by the team leader's cubicle and deliver his message in a serious tone.

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**Receiver:** A communication event can be complete only when another party receives the message and understands it properly. In the example here, the team leader is the receiver. Perceptual distortions of various types act as filters that can prevent a message from being received as intended by the sender. If the team leader is worried that her job is at stake, she might get defensive when she hears the production manager's message.

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**Feedback:** Messages sent back from the receiver to the sender are referred to as **feedback** ⓘ. Without feedback it is difficult to know whether a message has been received and understood. The feedback step also includes the reactions of the receiver. If the receiver takes action as intended by the sender, the message has been received satisfactorily. The production manager will know his message got across if the team leader says, "Okay, when would you like to review last month's productivity reports?" Effective interpersonal communication, therefore, involves an exchange of messages between two people. The two communicators take turns being receivers and senders.

**feedback**

In communication, messages sent back from the receiver to the sender.

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**Environment:** A full understanding of communication requires knowledge of the environment in which messages are transmitted and received. The organizational culture (attitudes and atmosphere) is a key environmental factor that influences communication. It is easier to transmit controversial messages when trust and respect are high than when they are low.

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**Noise:** Distractions such as noise have a pervasive influence on the components of the communication process. In this context, **noise** ⓘ is anything that disrupts

communication, including the attitudes and emotions of the receiver. Noise includes such factors as stress, fear, negative attitudes, and low motivation.

***noise***

Anything that disrupts communication, including the attitudes and emotions of the receiver.

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# Relationship Building and Interpersonal Communication

## Learning Objective 2

Another way of understanding the process of interpersonal communication is to examine how communication is a vehicle for building relationships. According to Ritch Sorenson, Grace DeBord, and Ida Ramirez, we establish relationships along two primary dimensions: dominant–subordinate and cold–warm. In the process of communicating, we attempt to dominate or subordinate. When we dominate, we attempt to control communication. When we subordinate, we attempt to yield control, or think first of the wishes and needs of the other person. Dominators expect the receiver of messages to submit to them; subordinate people send a signal that they expect the other person to dominate.<sup>[3]</sup>

We indicate whether we want to dominate or subordinate by the way we speak and write, or by the nonverbal signals we send. The dominator might speak loudly or enthusiastically, write forceful messages filled with exclamation points, or gesture with exaggerated, rapid hand movements. He or she might write a harsh e-mail message such as, "It's about time you started taking your job seriously, and put in some real effort."

In the subordinate mode, we might speak quietly and hesitantly, in a meek tone, and be apologetic. A subordinate person might ask, "I know you have better things on your mind than to worry about me, but I was wondering when can I expect my reimbursement for travel expenses?" In a work setting, we ordinarily expect people with more formal authority to have the dominant role in conversations; however, in more democratic, informal companies, workers with more authority are less likely to feel the need to dominate conversations.

The *cold–warm dimension* also shapes communication because we invite the same behavior that we send. Cold, impersonal, negative messages evoke similar messages from others. In contrast, warm verbal and nonverbal messages evoke similar behavior from

Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker adds additional insight into how warm acquaintances communicate. They go out of their way to look as if they are presuming not a dominant–subordinate relationship but instead a relationship of equals.<sup>[4]</sup> Your friend who values your relationship might say, "If you are going to the recycling center today, is there any chance you might be able to take along my old cell phone and laptop with you?"

An acquaintance not interested in maintaining a relationship with you might communicate in a cold, dominant–subordinate fashion by saying, "When you visit the recycling center today, take along my old cell phone and laptop with you."

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# Nonverbal Communication in Organizations

## Learning Objective 3

A substantial amount of communication between people takes place at the nonverbal level. **Nonverbal communication** ⓘ refers to the transmission of messages through means other than words. These messages accompany verbal messages, or sometimes they stand alone. The general purpose of nonverbal communication is to communicate the feeling behind a message. For instance, you can say no with either a clenched fist or a smile to communicate the intensity of your negative or positive feelings. Workers who rely solely on verbal messages to communicate with employees miss what the majority of what work associates are saying.<sup>[5]</sup>

### ***nonverbal communication***

The transmission of messages through means other than words.

Observing the nonverbal communication of others is useful in understanding whether they are sending a mixed message. In this context, a **mixed message** ⓘ is a discrepancy between what a person says and how he or she acts. If teammate Rex says he is eager to contribute to a rush project, yet looks angry and distracted and slams his writing pad on the table, you may not get the cooperation you need. To clarify whether Rex is going to put forth full effort today, you might ask, "Rex, you tell us that you are going to work full force today, but you look upset. Is there anything I can do to help?"

### ***mixed message***

A discrepancy between what a person says and how he or she acts.

The following paragraphs summarize the major modes of transmission of nonverbal communication and provide guidelines for improving nonverbal communication.

**Chapter 8** ⓘ, about cross-cultural relations, describes cultural differences in nonverbal communication.

## Modes of Transmission of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication can be transmitted in many modes. You may be surprised that certain factors, such as dress and appearance, are considered part of nonverbal communication.

### Environment

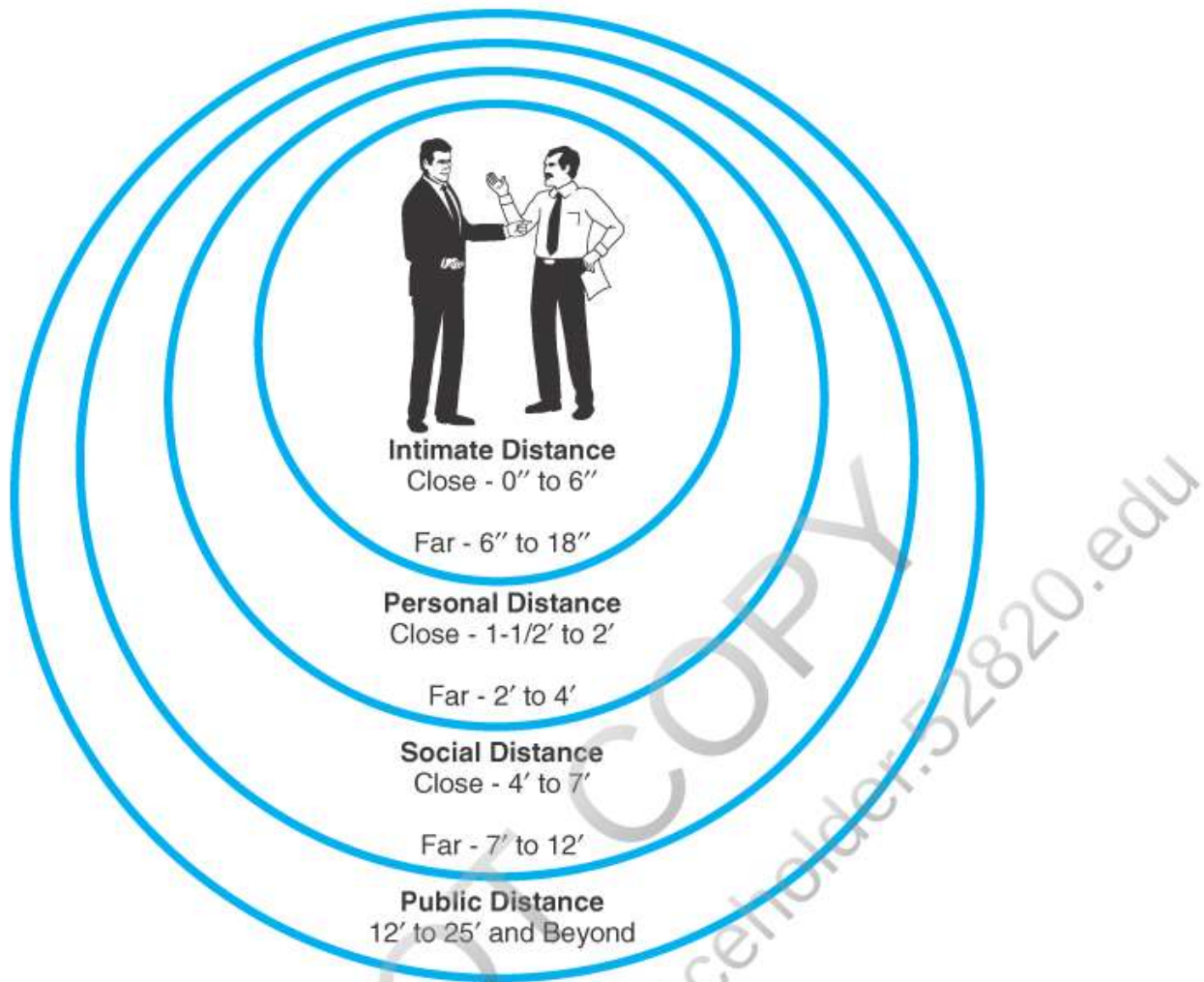
The setting or environment in which you send a message can influence how that message is received. Assume that your manager invites you out to lunch at an upscale restaurant to discuss a problem. You will think it is a more important topic under these circumstances than you would if the manager had lunch with you in the company cafeteria.

Other important environmental silent messages include room color, temperature, lighting, and furniture arrangement. A person who sits behind a large, uncluttered desk, for example, appears more powerful than a person who sits behind a small, messy desk.

### Interpersonal Distance

The placement of one's body in relation to someone else is widely used to transmit messages (see [Figure 4-3](#)). In general, getting physically close to another person conveys a positive attitude toward that person. Putting your arm around someone is generally interpreted as a friendly act. (Some people, however, recoil when touched by someone other than a close friend. Touching others on the job can also be interpreted as sexual harassment.) Watch out for cultural differences in preferences for interpersonal distance, such as French people standing much closer to each other while conversing than do Americans.

Closely related to interpersonal distance is where and how you sit in relation to another person during a meeting. Sitting across the table from a person during a negotiation session creates a defensive, competitive atmosphere, often leading to each party taking a firm stand on his or her point of view. The table becomes a tangible and psychological barrier between both parties. Recognition of this observation leads many managers and salespeople to sit down with another person with either no table or a coffee



**Figure 4-3 Four Circles of Intimacy**

table between the two. Even when seated on separate chairs instead of a sofa, removal of a large table or desk separating the two parties leads to a friendlier, more open negotiation or sales discussion.

### Posture

Posture communicates a variety of messages. Standing erect usually conveys the message that the person is self-confident and experiencing positive emotion. Slumping makes a person appear to be lacking in self-confidence or down in the dumps. Another interpersonal message conveyed by posture involves the direction of leaning. Leaning toward the sender suggests that you are favorably disposed toward his or her message; leaning backward communicates the opposite. Openness of the arms or legs serves as an indicator of liking or caring. In general, people establish closed postures (arms folded and legs crossed) when speaking to people they dislike.

Can you think of an aspect of your posture that conveys a specific message?

## Hand Gestures

Frequent hand movements show positive attitudes toward another person. In contrast, dislike or disinterest usually produces few gestures. An important exception is that some people wave their hands furiously while arguing. Gestures are also said to provide clues to a person's levels of dominance and submission. The gestures of dominant people are typically directed outward toward the other person. Examples include a steady, unwavering gaze and touching one's partner. Submissive gestures are usually protective, such as touching oneself or shrugging one's shoulders. A person who tucks his or her thumbs under his arms so that only the fingers are exposed is resisting what is being said.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Facial Expressions and Eye Contact

Using your head, face, and eyes in combination provides the clearest indications of interpersonal attitudes. Looking at the ceiling (without tilting your head), combined with a serious expression, almost always communicates the message "I doubt what you're saying is true." Maintaining eye contact with another person improves communication. To maintain eye contact, it is usually necessary to move your face and eyes to follow the other person. Moving your face and eyes away from the other person is often interpreted as defensiveness or a lack of self-confidence.