

Interpersonal Communication Theory

Chapter 1

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Introduction

Introduction

- ▶ Verbal communication carries information at the *content level* and the *relationship level*. The relationship level often dictates the frame of conversation and contextual interpretations.
- ▶ The relationship level carries a message about a message. Actions such as a nod, flick of the chin, a glance, etc. provide nonverbal cues to accompany the verbal message.
- ▶ Example: "I'd never trust your driving", followed by a laugh and a playful gesture.

Occasions for relationship message awareness

- ▶ Message is incongruent with the expectations for the relationship. Eg. A stranger acting super friendly with a hug and a hello.
- ▶ Intense times during relationships. This is especially true during turbulent times, when people are keenly aware of relationship messages and reactions to said messages.
- ▶ Disagreements and conflicts.

Relationships are thought of as:

- ▶ Work - effort involved, sacrifices, energy needed.
- ▶ Commitment - for starting a relationship and sustaining it.
- ▶ Involvement - time together, quality and quantity of talk and sharing.
- ▶ Unique/special
- ▶ Manipulation

Relationships are thought of as:

- ▶ Consideration and respect
- ▶ Journey of discover
- ▶ A game
- ▶ Risky and potentially dangerous
- ▶ Uncontrollable forces
- ▶ System of bargaining and trade-offs

Five important misconceptions

Definition

People value consistent behavior in other people. However, someone pointing out one's own inconsistency is often met with hostility. Relationships require both consistent and inconsistent behavior exhibition.

Example

Situations and context changes, giving rise to such inconsistencies. For example, being a 'party person' at social events but requiring 'calm and quiet' at home.

Definition

Verbal components are only one part of communication, and the other meanings and the context for the verbal component is equally, if not more, important.

Example

The same statement "You idiot" means different things when said by a friend, a family member, a stranger, and depends on the setting as well.

Definition

People choose to talk about their relationships from a third party perspective, as if they had no connection to what the partner said or did. The interdependence is not acknowledged as it means accepting one's role in the matter and shoulder responsibility for part of the interaction. Response matching is evidence to the fact that interdependence plays a big role.

Example

"She never listens to me", "He is never serious with me", "She doesn't tell me the truth"

Definition

People assume everyone else's intentions and ascribe the most obvious motivation to any action. Said action may have wildly differing motivation or causes, and one's response based on initial assumptions can lead to mistakes.

Example

"Any plans for the weekend?" can be small talk, pre-cursor to an invitation, or expectation for an invitation to said plans.

Definition

Humans crave closure and finality. Something concluding implies it can be put behind and does not require any time, attention or resources. Thus, humans prefer to act as though something is finished in order to re-allocate available time and resources elsewhere. However, things may re-appear later down the road.

Additionally, people change. It is a constant process to get to know them and maintain relationships. Burning bridges because of a concluding relationship can lead to awkward interactions down the road.

Example

Trauma over loss of someone may resurface again and again, despite feeling like one has put it behind them.

Changes in communication with relationship development

Narrow—Broad

As relationships evolve, so do the breadth and depth of topics covered in conversation. This factor specifically covers the breadth, i.e., the range of topics covered. As relationships form, the breadth of topics increases.

Public—Personal

This refers to the depth of interactions. As relationships grow closer, people are willing to reveal more personal thoughts. These are usually reserved only for self or closest relationships.

Stylized—Unique

Interactions are generic or stylized based on a person's background as opposed to being tailored towards an individual. Relationship growth leads to loss of generic behavior or greetings, leading to individualized interactions. This is observed noticeably when a person is unsure of their relationship standing, or during relationship deterioration.

Difficult—Efficient

Interactions are more accurate in advanced relationships due to more channels of communication, less dependency on stereotyped behaviors and higher accuracy in interpreting nonverbal cues. Less energy is required to communicate with unique styles of communication.

Rigid—Flexible

This concept deals with the number of ways of communicating an idea or emotion. As relationships advance, so does the flexibility. Multiple verbal and non-verbal cues are involved to convey thoughts/emotions in advanced relationships.

Awkward—Smooth

Interactions are smoother with time and familiarity, based on experience and predictive power. This phenomenon is also called *meshing*.

Hesitant—Spontaneous

New interactions are often marked by hesitant behavior, as caution prevails with little information about the other person. Additionally, decay processes trigger hesitancy, either to save the relationship or to accelerate the termination. Close relationships have spontaneity and informality.

Overt judgement suspended—Overt judgement given

Close relationships are more open to overt judgement, positive or negative. Negative interactions between strangers indicate lack of further interest, and overtly positive interactions may indicate ulterior motives.

Dimensions of communication

Stable and varied patterns

Plotting the pattern of communication on the eight dimensions discussed above, the behavior of a relationship may be observed. Fluctuations are expected, and all relationships are composed of coexisting and seemingly contradictory forces. Additionally, there are limits to how much a relationship can vary on any given dimension.

Communication patterns are interdependent

Change on one dimension of communication can/will affect other dimensions.

Quantity vs. quality

At relationship initialisation, the quality and quantity both increase dramatically. However, post peak-intensity, the quality drops down to a more sustainable level. Fluctuations are seen during turbulent periods. For stable relationships, the quality is best indicator of intimacy.

Diversity of communication

Relationships on the private dimension have multiple channels of communication, usually fairly personal and unique patterns.

Relationship patterns

Partners not close on these dimensions will not perceive relationships and intimacy the same way. These differences require resolution, else can end up shortening the lifespan of the relationship.

Perception of communication behavior

- ▶ Communication is more personalized in intimate relationships. This includes depth of communication, channels of communication, or uniqueness.
- ▶ Communication is more synchronized as relationships grow. Conversations are smooth, coordinated, spontaneous, relaxed and synchronized.
- ▶ Level of intimacy did not significantly affect difficulty of communication.

Actual communication behavior

Actual behavior was seen to vary along the proposed dimension in two studies. Specifically, friendships showed behavior on the growth and established end of the spectrum.

Summary

Thank you

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