

Interpersonal Communication Theory - Class Notes

Priyadarshan Patil

September 26, 2020

Class 1 - Importance of communication

Centrality of communication

People judge us by our communication. We are perceived as smart through effective communication of our knowledge. We accomplish almost everything we do through communication. This is the evolutionary advantage we have, speech makes us different. Survival is enhanced by communication, i.e., our survival in social groups was and is facilitated by communication.

Communication also impacts our happiness and health. Social interactions reduce anxiety and depression and enhances our immune system. Low interaction reduces our immunity and has been shown to be equivalent to either smoking 15 cigarettes each day or doubly harmful compared to obesity.

Importance of first exchange

The first interaction with a person is often the most important interaction with said person. First impressions matter and people make their minds up about people in under a minute. People meet for various reasons, but the core underlying need for connection (personal, romantic, business, etc.) is what drives these social interactions. Two key factors for first interaction behaviours are conveyance of warmth and competence, and managing one's impression on the other party.

An important aspect of first interactions is reduction of uncertainty. When meeting a new person, people tend to make assumptions based on various factors to try and put the person into some known characteristics that they can connect to. An example of said factors can be cultural factors, but they aren't very effective due to heterogeneity within cultures. Alternatively, sociological level predictions rely on social groups that a person may associate with, such as hobbies or volunteering or sports. Lastly, interpersonal level predictions are made based on difference from the groups that one belongs to, defining a rather unique identity.

Class 2 - Propositions about communication

The following are some core propositions about communication.

1. A person cannot not communicate. Even reluctance or lack of communication sends a message.
2. The meaning of any message or communication is within people, not the words themselves. Different people can perceive the same words differently. Similarly, punctuation can make a difference, and change the meaning of a message dramatically.
3. Communication is irreversible. Words once conveyed cannot be taken back
4. Communication is functional, i.e.e, used to serve a purpose. Purposes for communication can vary from information transfer or persuasion to entertainment and influence.
5. Communication is a neutral tool, it is not inherently good or bad.
6. Communication is learned, it is not an innate skill.
7. Communication can be both intentional and unintentional.
8. Communication has a physical context and a psychological context. E.g. the same conversation with a boss may have different connotation in office v/s in a supermarket.
9. Communication has both content and relational aspects. Content is the words or text, the relational aspect is the mental aspect of whether we like something, whether its fun, etc. Along similar lines, it can be conveyed verbally or non-verbally.
10. Communication is relationship and relationships are communication.

Class 3 - Model of communication

Interpersonal communication is the process whereby one stimulates meaning in the mind of another through verbal and/or nonverbal meanings. Communication is constant, there is no real pause in communication. The visualization for the model of communication can be seen in Figure 1. There exists a communication source, which produces a message. It is then encoded, i.e., a good way to convey the message is found. This message then travels through a channel or multiple channels to the receiver, who has to decode said message before understanding it. The more the channels of communication, the more personal the message, and along the same lines, better communication.

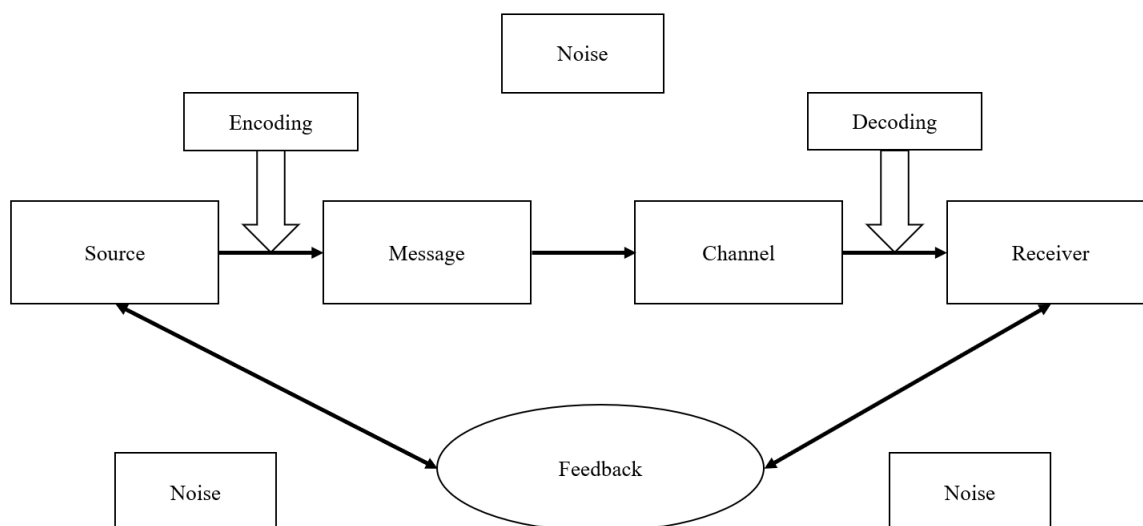


Figure 1: Model of communication

The feedback between the source and receiver is important to tune future communication accordingly. Within this model, there can be multiple noise sources, such as external background noise, or internal noise. External noise is easily dealt with, but internal noise within one's head is not so easily dealt with. Most communication problems arise when encoding and decoding procedures differ. There are multiple ways to ensure message quality retention.

First, a good message is organized. The purpose and intent are clear, unimportant parts have been dropped, and important parts are 'chunked' together. Second, redundancy helps improve memorability. Redundancy involves conveying the same information in multiple different ways. It differs from repetition, which involves conveying information in the exact same manner repeatedly. Within this system, it is important to reduce 'seductive' details that take attention away from the rest of the message. Following the tell-show-do-respond model is a good way to convey a message. Third, focus on the receiver's schema, i.e., their system of categorizing information, and encode messages in line with their schema.

Lastly, asking questions is important for quality communication. Open-ended questions work wonders. When possible, avoid asking question, re-frame as a request for advice. Be interested, not interesting. Avoid choosing a position based on limited information early on in the conversation. Use questions in a savvy manner, not just vaguely. Implementation related questions make someone more like to do a task rather than outright task status questions. Lastly, wait and let people talk. Use silence to your advantage and follow up on their answers.

Class 4 - Selectivity

Selective exposure has a few features as follows:

- Involvement - how involved is a person in a given activity (e.g. class v/s hobby)
- Proximity - 8PM shows and 9PM shows have similar view counts because proximity
- Supportive beliefs - choosing to associate with things aligning with one's belief
- Utility/value - choosing activities that have a higher payoff/value
- Reinforcement - People like people who reinforce our behavior and belief

People pay attention when there is any of the following factors: Novelty, Unfamiliar subject matter, concrete subjects (as opposed to abstract or distant subjects), limited distractions, usefulness, involvement in said activity, and lastly, perceived positive affect. People also have selective perception. Some of the factors in selective perception are: personal bias, ambiguity, redundancy (or lack thereof), focus on people's needs, situational control, inclusion, affection, and efficacy. Selective retention occurs when the following factors are present:

- Redundancy and repetition - e.g. Spongebob theme song
- Visual superiority effect - Visual retention is higher than aural retention
- Primacy/Recency
- Relevance and utility

Class 5 - Rumors

There are three types of rumors:

- Reflection of fear or anxiety
- Intention to create divisions or undermine relationships
- Reflection of hopes and dreams

Rumors are caused by anxiety or worry, ambiguity about something, important or relevant people/events, and credibility. Gossip is always about people that we know or feel like we know, whereas rumors tend to be about events. Rumors are reasonable, simple, and difficult to disprove. They also travel rapidly and are amplified by social media. Rumors are usually likely in smaller groups and require willing communicators. There is usually a kernel of truth to the rumors, and the rumors are often self-fulfilling.

People gossip for a variety of reasons. Some reasons are because it is fun, it can be used to hurt people or exact some revenge, forward propaganda, maintain control over some situation or group, convey solidarity or similarity, maintain exiting relations or socialize newcomers, or even to protect others and hold others accountable. Gossip can be negative or positive, usually highly efficient, has to be interesting, used as a measure of integration/belonging, and short lived. Extroverts tend to gossip more, and while both genders gossip, the nature of gossip is different. Women talk more about relationship and appearances (usually negative aspects), whereas men talk about themselves (more positive aspects).

There are a few ways to cope with gossip. Some classic techniques to deal with gossip about self are to outright ignore or deny any gossip, or label it so. Alternatively, questioning the motive for the gossip or going to the source or asking for additional information works equally well. Using support groups to combat gossip is also useful, and if all else fails, distract from said gossip about oneself. Coping with gossip about others is slightly different. One can immediately shut it down using pre-emptive positive evaluation or actual comparable facts, or just ignore it by changing topic. Lastly, sarcasm is a useful tool to deflect external gossip.

Class 6 - Charisma

Charisma is perceived, not innate. People can gain and lose charisma. Charisma is important because it helps with exposure, attention, retention and influence. Charisma biases us towards certain people. Here are certain dimensions to analyse charisma:

- It helps with credibility. Charismatic people are considered more competent, both about product (knowing information) and process (creating information).
- Charisma helps adjust composure, and improve trustworthiness.
- Trustworthiness is composed of reliability, honesty, goodwill, and vulnerability. Finish what you start, master small commitments, spotlight your mistakes and own up. Be nice, not creepy.
- Charisma gives the impression of extroversion and sociability.
- For great socialization, appearance matters and do not embarrass yourself. Say "nice to see you" rather than "nice to meet you".
- Beware of secret tests, for you are never not communicating. Have a social presence, in terms of 'owning' the room. This involves social confidence.
- Social confidence is characterized by calm confidence in face of crisis, lack of desperation, self affirmation, and immediacy.
- For appearances, be one level more formal than expected and have a strong posture.

Class 7 - Charisma (contd.)

The second and third dimensions of charisma after credibility are similarity and attraction. Similarity involves implicit egotism. People like other people who share similarities, because it reinforces their beliefs, makes interactions predictable, and allows for social harmony. Similarity can be background-related, attitude-related, or a combination of both (optimal). Attraction has three types: task attraction, social attraction, and physical attraction. Task attraction is about wanting to work with someone, social is for social company, and physical attraction is self-explanatory.

Physical attraction is perceived and normative. It depends on the time, social group, culture, and setting. Physical attraction affects perceptions of people and can create a halo effect. Some correlates of physical attraction are:

- Matching - predominant dresser effect in couples
- Compensation
- Esteem
- Age and gender
- Dress code guidance is obtained from media, parent, peers.
- Tips for appearance: Know who one is dressing for, dress to be invited, one level above other people, know your style and be comfortable with it.

Class 8 - Charisma (contd.)

Power is not inherent, it is something assigned by other people. Being perceived as sensitive involves listening, understanding, and empathy. Pay attention to retain what was said, eliminate distractions, reformulate and summarize, limit urge for counterarguments, and grasp hidden/underlying message. Compassion and kindness matter, despite being exhausting to maintain. Sympathy is not the same as empathy.

To comfort someone, do not minimize what they are feeling. Avoid problem solving and do not offer unsolicited advice. Usually, it is a good strategy to reflect, validate, and ask. Comforting involves listening, understanding, and empathizing with them. Perceived power has seven bases:

- Punishment: all about fear and leads to avoidance
- Reward: gets people's attention because humans crave rewards. Intrinsic rewards are given by self, and are longer lasting. Extrinsic rewards are external rewards like money or candy. Rewards can be spontaneous or calculated. Best rewards are intrinsic and spontaneous, worst punishments are extrinsic and calculated. Remember small things about people, recognize them in unexpected places, do small things that matter, appreciate what people do, show up for things that matter. Make people feel important and thank them frequently.
- Assigned: is derived from a role or position of power such as teachers or police.
- Referent: also known as admiration power, someone has power because one wants to emulate them.
- Wisdom: derived from experience
- Network: derived from social and professional contacts
- Informational: content- and process- based power

Class 9 - Change

Change is inevitable and unpredictable. People want to change, but dislike actual change. People make small changes all the time, and large changes are often an accumulation of these small changes. There is only so much change that can be asked by a person (change capital, if you will), so focus on what is to be asked. Address the fear associated with change to make it easier.

People want consistency, and dislike being forced to change. Therefore, threatening autonomy does not work. Manipulating messages to create change happens in the following ways:

- Evidence: when someone is highly involved, evidence has a lot of power. New evidence is usually the only one that matters, and irrelevant evidence won't matter. Cite the source before the evidence, make it diverse, make it understandable, and improve your credibility.
- Fear appeals: fear can be used properly to persuade or dissuade change. Best fear is vivid and scary, but not so much that people fully shut down. New fear gets more attention than familiar fear. Fear must be relevant and immediate for greatest impact. The best fear targets loved ones, not the person itself.
- WIIFT (What's in it for them?): People have different WIIFTs and are focusing on themselves, not you. One can figure out someone's WIIFT by analyzing their complaints, questions, atypical behavior, decorations, predictions. One-on-one messaging is easier using WIIFTs over group messaging. WIIFT may be replaced by fear of losing something/someone.
- Organizing the message: There are a few strategies to efficiently organize one's message. Consider the following strategies:
 - Foot in the door: Ask for something small first, then something larger.
 - Door in the face: Get rejected asking for something big, and then ask for something smaller.
 - Good news vs bad news: Give good news before bad news.
 - Problem vs. solution: State problem first, then explain solution in that context.
 - Agreement vs. disagreement: Agree with people first to get them in a positive frame of mind.
 - Revealing intent: Do not reveal intent, people often become strongly opposed to stated intent.
 - Use power words: Words that are infallible to a person have lots of impact and do not generate opposition.
 - Drawing conclusions: Tell people what you want them to do after persuading them.
 - Sidedness: Provide both sides of an issue and drawbacks of the other side. Providing only one side leaves a huge opportunity for the other side to persuade by creating doubt.