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Interpersonal Theory Paper

Introduction to Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Humans are, by nature, uncomfortable with the lack of concrete evidence or unknowns in any given situation. We dislike not knowing what will be on an exam, we are stressed as a result of the ever-changing economy, and we even become uncomfortable at the prospect of attending an event when we are unsure of who will be there. The uncertainty reduction theory is founded on the notion that people are uncomfortable with the lack of knowledge in a relationship the same way that we are disgruntled by other unknowns in life, and that we communicate in order to reduce that uncertainty.

The uncertainty reduction theory is an emergent or causal theory. The form of this theory is important because we understand that it can explain or predict why we communicate, but that it is not established enough to be axiomatic or law-based. We can begin to recognize that members of society do indeed feel more secure the more they understand about the situation that they are in, and the tool we use to gain that security is communication.

Claims and Assumptions

As stated previously, the uncertainty reduction theory is founded on the notion that people are uncomfortable with the lack of knowledge in any given situation, and that we communicate in order to reduce uncertainty. The principle claim of this theory is that people will

communicate with the intention to gain understanding about the other person and the shared relationship in order to therefore reduce overall uncertainty. The primary assumption of the theory is that people are uncomfortable with uncertainty in a relationship the same way that they are uncomfortable with the unpredictability of the future (Christensen, Kyle). This primary assumption leads to corollary assumptions such as the thinking that humans will control the things we can, and that because of this widespread discomfort with unknowns, communication with the intent to reduce uncertainty will be plentiful.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory in our Society

When breaking down a theory it is important to identify the locus of power. The locus of power identifies where the effect of the theory is occurring. In the case of uncertainty reduction theory, the effect is a decrease in uncertainty. While two people are communicating, the speaker is sending information while the recipient is receiving the information and therefore having their uncertainty reduced. This pattern of communication means that the effect of the theory is observed with the receiver of the message, and we observe the locus of power moving back and forth between the two communicators depending on, at any given moment, which communicator is playing the role of recipient.

This theory about interpersonal communication explains that communication results in a decrease in uncertainty for individuals and is therefore observed in small and individualistic differences. This means that the uncertainty reduction theory has effects in our society on a micro scale. When monitoring this theory and its presence in society it is important to note the key variables playing into the equation. This interpersonal communication theory is affected by the extent to which the two people already know each other, the relative newness to the social

situation for either of the communicators, and the personal confidence of either person. These are variables which need to be taken into account because they each affect the extent to which the communicators are uncomfortable with uncertainty. The presence of variables which can affect the theory means that this theory can be tested in our society. Even since studying it, I have been able to recognize that when people are in an unfamiliar situation they tend to communicate with others in order to decrease their uncertainty.

Importance of Interpersonal Relationships

Relationships create the very fabric of our society. Relationships between people and the land they live on determine how the physical infrastructure is built, relationships between groups of people contribute to how the community functions, relationships from person to person create units that eventually form societies, and at the most fundamental level, a person's relationship with themselves affects the way they interact with those around them.

The uncertainty reduction theory focuses on interpersonal relationships, which are relationships from one person to another person. These communications between two people can range from impersonal to highly personal. We all have these relationships, and communication within these relationships is important in that it facilitates the sharing of information, provides coping opportunities, encourages strategic problem solving, and can accomplish many other objectives. The uncertainty reduction theory suggests that one role of interpersonal communication is to reduce uncertainty. This theory highlights why communication between two people begins, and makes clear that people depend on gathering knowledge from those around them, suggesting that interpersonal relationships are destined to continue because of our human nature.

Works Cited

https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/2346/11049/Christensen_Kyle_Thesis.pdf?sequence