

# Small Group Communication Theory

**Rationale:** Although the textbook does not explain the Investment Model, it is one of the better models of voluntary association in use currently

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Describe the components of the investment model
- Explain how the investment model predicts group membership
- Distinguish a group's value to a person and that person's satisfaction with the group

{video}

You may download a copy of the visual aid used in this video: [L02-small-group-communication-theory-visual-aid.pdf](https://www.blackboard.com/content/contentitem/content?itemID=102&context=102)

## Outline of the Lesson

- I. Review of previous session's content
- II. Lesson Opening:
- III. Overview
  - A. Origins of the Investment Model of Commitment
  - B. The structure of the Investment Model of Commitment
  - C. Uses of the Investment Model of Commitment in communication research

### Body

- I. Origin of the Investment Model of Commitment
  - A. Origin in Economics and Consumer Psychology
  - B. Social Psychology
  - C. Interpersonal Communication
  - D. Team and Group Communication
- II. The Investment Model of Commitment predicts Stay/Leave behavior (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998)
  - A. Persistence (Stay/Leave behavior) is predicted by Commitment
  - B. Commitment is predicted by Satisfaction in Group, Perceived Quality of Alternatives, and Possible Losses
    1. Satisfaction is described really well by Social Exchange Theory (Emerson, 1976):
      - a.  $S = v - e$
      - b. Value (also called worth) = Reward - Costs  
 $w = r - c$
    2. Perceived Quality of Alternatives
      - a. Comparisons with alternatives aren't just group-to-group. They may include multiple replacement groups or no group at all.
      - b. Note that this is the *perception* of these alternatives.

- c. Includes perceived availability of (ability to access) those alternatives.
- 3. Components of Possible Losses
  - a. Intrinsic Investments
    - i. Benefits provided by the group
    - ii. Efforts expended on the group
  - b. Extrinsic Investments
    - i. Benefits from being in the group (but not from the group)
    - ii. Efforts expended because of the group (but not on the group)
- III. Uses of the Investment Model in communication research
  - A. Within team & small group literature
  - B. In other communication literature

## **Conclusion**

- I. Review
  - A. Origins of the Investment Model
  - B. The structure of the Investment Model
  - C. Uses of the Investment Model in communication research
- II. Learning activity
- III. Lesson closing

## **References**

- Emerson, R. M. (1976). Social Exchange Theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2, 335-362.
- Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. (1998) The Investment Model Scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives and investment size. *Personal Relationships*, 5(4), 357-387. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.1998.tb00177.x>

## **Learning Activity**

Complete one of these two class activity options.

## **In the Classroom**

1. Group students into groups of 3-4 individuals (at least 4 groups are needed)
2. Assign groups one construct from the investment model (Commitment, Satisfaction, Perceived Quality of Alternatives, Possible Losses; duplicates are fine)
  - What questions would you ask to measure this construct?
3. Show scales in Appendix (last 4 pages) from [rusbult-martz-agnew-1998-investment-model-scale.pdf](#)
4. Discuss within the group
  - How are your items similar / different?
5. Share discussion with the full class

## **Remote**

1. Download this document: [L02-small-group-communication-theory-activity.docx](#)
2. Think about a group that you are a member of and answer the questions in the document.
3. Upload the completed activity document here

## **Variations and Accommodations**

Follow guidance from local accommodation authorities. Please contact your instructor if any accommodations are necessary.