

Purpose statement research paper examples

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



The purpose of this paper will be to examine the components of interpersonal communication. In addition to that, this paper will attempt to explain interpersonal communication using existing communication theories. This paper will delve into the dynamics of group communication and theories that define group decision making within groups. It will also highlight the process of workplace assimilation in relation to new employees fitting into the organizational culture. In conclusion, we will summarize the importance of interpersonal communication to group interactions in the creation of meaningful relationships.

Interpersonal communication in its simplest form is the exchange of information between two or more individuals. However, this definition is overly simplistic that it fails to identify the complexities of interpersonal communication. It includes non-verbal communication which occurs even in the absence of words (Knapp 8). A good example of non-verbal examination is when two people are fully aware of each other's presence. In this case communication has already occurred without any intervention of either party. Interpersonal communication can occur within larger contexts such as groups and organizations.

Communication within groups is just as complex, or perhaps even more, as interpersonal communication between 2 people. This is because the factors that inform individual psychology become even more complex in a group setting. Individuals within groups create new levels of interaction not present in the individual elements of the group. These complexities of group interaction have been studied widely in psychology and sociology and will form the focus of this paper.

Interpersonal Communication

There are several, mostly ambiguous, definitions for interpersonal communication. One of the most commonly used definitions describes interpersonal communication as a message transaction intended to build and maintain shared meaning. People assign different meanings to words. Relationships are built on the meanings attributed to words and symbols used during interpersonal communication (Wood 12). So far, most definitions are built around the components of interpersonal communication. They are broken down into, the communicators, the message, barriers to communication, feedback, context and the channel used.

The communicators are the participants in the communication process. They are the sender and the recipient during the communication process. These roles are interchanged during the entire period of communication. This is because the sender becomes the recipient during the feedback process and vice versa (Wood 13). The message sent is the content intended for the recipient to receive. It can be composed of words, pictures, videos or non-verbal components such as gestures and body language. Noise is described in communication as any factor that may distort the original message and contort or destroy it. Noise can therefore be anything from a cacophony in the background to cultural differences that affect the effectiveness of a communication process. The channel is the route through which the message will be transferred from the sender to the recipient and back during the feedback stage. The channel chosen depends on the content and context of the message.

The human component of interpersonal communication is highly dynamic and susceptible to various internal and external influences. An individual could phrase the same greeting differently when addressing a client, colleague, family member, friend, lover and stranger. The differences will be in tone of voice, body language, media used, feedback and length of communication. All these seemingly obvious factors make interpersonal communication an interesting topic for scientific research (Nicotera 25). There are several principals that govern the use of interpersonal communication in real life. These principles are inherent to all types of communication including interpersonal communication. They highlight communication concepts such as unavoidability, irreversibility, symbol exchange, rules, learning, and content and relationship information (Donell 2).

The first principle states that interpersonal communication is inescapable. This is because even when one has no desire to communicate, the process making others aware of this amounts to communication. Communication occurs even when one is asleep. It is inevitable. Once interpersonal communication has occurred, the process is irreversible. Once words have been said, they cannot be unsaid. As soon as the process of communication has started, it is impossible to reverse it. Even when statements are withdrawn, it is not possible to erase the effect (Donell 2).

As stated earlier, the process of interpersonal communication is complex because of the plethora of variables involved. The complexity of interpersonal communication is just one of its principles. Theorists have

identified at least six “ individuals” involved in the communication process. These are who you think you are, who you think the recipient is, who you think the recipient thinks you are, who the recipient thinks they are , who the recipient thinks you are and who the recipient thinks you think they are (Donnell 2). These individuals communicate by exchanging symbols which represent ideas. The words used during communication do not have static meanings. The recipient turns the word into symbols to which they assign ideas depending on the context of the communication.

The context of communication is perhaps one of the most complex environments to understand. The final message is largely influenced by the context within which the communication takes place. The context is a combination of psychological, relational, and situational, environmental or cultural factors. The psychological context of communication is the personal desires, needs, perceptions and personalities of all participants during the process.

Individual relationships are often guided by a set of rules that govern the relationships. These rules are used to determine the appropriate level of interaction and the manner in which this interaction will take place. These rules can either obligate or prohibit certain behavior within the relationship. The choice of whether to proceed with the relationship, the rules notwithstanding, is also dependent on individual factors such as age, authority and responsibility. A child cannot effectively refuse to follow the house rules set by their parents because they are young. Another example is that of a soldier who is obligated by both responsibility and authority to

follow orders from their superiors without question.

Another principle of interpersonal communication states that it is a learned process. Children learn interpersonal communication within the family context. As they grow up, they hone their skills through additional interaction with their teachers and friends. Adults learn better communication in the work place in social gatherings.

Interpersonal communication is composed of content and relationship information. The content refers to the information that makes up the message. These can either be the words spoken or written in a letter, text or e-mail. Content can take non-verbal form such as a shrug, voice raised in anger or silence. All messages, invariably, contain relationship information. This is the type of information that can be used to define the kind of relationship that exists between the sender and the recipient. All content is built within the relationship framework.

Interpersonal relationships have been misunderstood by many mainly due to its multidimensionality and its wide application in social interactions. Some of the myths and misconceptions around personal communication are peddled by relationship gurus and talk shows in the name of improving personal relationships. The first myth is that interpersonal communication solves problems. This is only half the truth because communication is just the first step in the solution of many of the personal problems people face. People are encouraged to talk about their problems without being taught the value of listening to good advice.

Another myth is that interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationships are synonymous. This is wrong because interpersonal communications may occur several times between people without developing into an interpersonal relationship. It is possible to have a lively chat with a stranger on a bus without necessarily forming a relationship. A common misconception is that interpersonal communication is always a face to face encounter. This misconception arises from the fact that most of our memorable interpersonal encounters are face to face. Many personal encounters still take place on this basis; however, the internet has revolutionized communication making virtual reality and other new forms of interpersonal interaction possible.

Models of Communication

Linear model of communication

The linear model of communication describes the process of communication as a process that follows a linear projection. The message travels directly from the sender through the channel of communication to the recipient. The sender is identified as the source of the message which can either be spoken, written or non-verbal. In this model, the channel represents human sensory pathways to communication such as sight, touch, smell and hearing. The receiver is the intended audience of the message.

Anything that affects the accuracy and clarity of the message is considered noise. Noises can be physical, physiological, psychological or semantic in nature. Physical noises are caused by external stimuli such as cars hooting in the background. Physiological noises are biological conditions which affect

the reception of a message such as visual impairment. Psychological noises are associated with personal biases and prejudice which affect the individual's reception of a message. Semantics noises refer to the variations in meaning that could be attributed to the same word. The sender and the recipient might infer different meanings to the same word. Semantic noises can take other forms such as technical jargon and native accents.

Information (Source) Message Target (Receiver)

Communication in the linear model occurs within a multidimensional context. The physical context is the tangible environment on which the communication process occurs. This can be in the bedroom, pulpit in church or in a car. Environmental factors such as light, temperature and size form part of the physical environment (Narula 90). The second context is the cultural context. Culture is composed of the norms, rules and regulations which govern individual cultures. Some cultures are open to change while others are rigid and hostile to new relationships. The socio-emotional context of communication involves the relationship that is created during the communication process.) It may be friendly or unfriendly, responsive or unresponsive, supportive or unsupportive (Narula 91. This is why patients may prefer one doctor over another. The final context, the historical context influences communication by making participants draw from previous communications.

The linear model of communication presumes that listeners are passive and that speakers are the only active participants during the communication process. This assumption is wrong because listeners can influence the

speaker by asking questions for clarity and even through their body language. If a speaker notices an audience looks bored, they are often forced to make the topic more interesting, increase the tempo of their speech or reduce the length of the presentation. This model also fails to account for feedback which takes place repeatedly during the course of communication.

Feedback and Interactional Model

The interactional model of communication was developed out of the need to emphasize the bi-directional nature of communication from sender to receiver and back to sender from receiver. This model takes a circular form rather than a linear pattern. The process of communication is continuous and is characterized by feedback. Feedback is defined as the both verbal and non-verbal responses to messages. Feedback can also be categorized as internal or external. Internal feedback is a personal critique of a response while external feedback comes from other people who received your response (Cheng 178).

The interactional model of communication has been criticized for its inability to account for non-verbal communication, and its resultant effect on both the sender and the recipient. To correct this, the transactional model was developed. The transactional model of communication introduced the concept of cooperation between the sender and the recipient. They both take responsibility for their feedback by ensuring that it contributed effectively to the communication process. This model also recognized that communication should be built on both verbal and non-verbal messages. The communication process could be enhanced further by a shared field of

experience. The more individuals shared culture, heredity and past experiences, the better they related. When the fields of experience overlapped, it meant that the people shared common experiences which made communication between them easier.

The transactional model refined the understanding of the process of communication from a simplistic linear model to a model to a complex simultaneous process of sending and receiving messages. This model has also factored in the importance of personal experiences which were hitherto unaccounted for. Despite its broad approach to communication, the transactional model to communication might soon become obsolete thanks to rapid technological advancement which has changed the dynamics of communication.

Communication within small groups

Robert Bales was the first social psychologist to conduct a significant research on the process of communication within small groups. The study conducted in the 1950s revealed a series of interesting findings. Bales found that group discussions often changed back and forth between the task behind the groups' formation and other issues related to the relationships within the group. Bales believed that this was a deliberate attempt to promote group cohesion while conducting group tasks. Secondly, he found that the group discussions followed a linear model throughout the decision making process. Finally, Bales suggested that the most vocal member of the group contributed about 40%-50% of comments during discussions (253). The second most vocal member contributed 25%- 30% of the comments. In

his analysis, he indicated that the percentages were the same regardless of the size of the group. This means that group communication is controlled by 1 or 2 members at the expense of the other less vocal members (Bale 253).

Decision making within groups

The earliest research conducted into group communication between the 1950s and 1970s came up with similar conclusions. The studies conducted by B. Aubrey Fisher identified four distinct stages of decision making. The first stage in this linear phase model of decision making is the orientation stage. The second step the conflict stage which is followed by the stage at which the decision is made. The fourth and final stage involves group reinforcement of the decision. This model was criticized for influencing individual group results by combining all data before analysis. This made it virtually impossible to identify individual group differences in their decision making sequence. The second flaw in this model is that the researchers predetermined that the decision making process had only four stages. It was therefore impossible to determine whether some groups used more or less sequences during decision making.

During the first stage of decision making, group discussions are conducted with the intention of collecting as many ideas as possible from the group members. During this process, viable ideas are adopted through consensus while the least usable ones are dropped. Only the best decisions are carried forward for implementation. According to Snell this phenomenon was referred to as “ spiraling”, (100).

The process of group decision making is affected by social influences bearing down on its members. Social influences can be informational or normative. Informational influences occur when individuals within a group make their decision based on the context the information they used to form an opinion. An individual could be affected by the opinion of an influential person in their lives such as a preacher, expert, mentor or political leader. Normative influences are caused by persuasion within the group especially where the majority holds the same opinion and are able to convince the minority to agree with their position. Compliance occurs when individuals opt to change their opinion to fit into that of the majority (Friedkin, Noah & Eugene 76).

The theory of social influence was later discarded in the 1960s when it emerged that group decision making could occur from factors beyond the individual social predisposition of each member (Schramm 57). It was originally thought that groups made riskier decisions than their constituent members. This notion was known as the risky shift. It was later found that group polarization was determined by the individual positions of the members prior to the group discussion. The group could be polarized in any extreme direction depending on the positions held before (Burgoon, Berger & Weldon 200).

Group polarization was further defined using the theories of social comparison and persuasive arguments theory (PAT). Social comparison theory claims that group members use one another's positions to determine the socially correct position. This is because none of them wants to come across as socially deviant. Members then adjust their position to the extreme of the socially acceptable position. PAT begins by assuming each member

enters a discussion with some information on both sides of the argument and chooses the side with the most information. Some members may be privy to more information than others. This disparity is usually corrected during the course of discussions. Sometimes, members may choose to take the socially correct side despite the revelation of additional information supporting a contrary opinion (Bergoon, Berger & Waldron 201).

There are many scientific methods used to reach group decisions. Western cultures use the rule of the majority where a vote is carried and the side with the most votes wins (Snell 142). Other methods employed during group decision making include consensus and averaging. Consensus allows all participants to express their opinion before the majority opinion carries the day. This method is time consuming and may not be very accurate in case of close margins. Averaging requires group members to compromise in order to arrive at the best decision. The final method of decision making is by authority. The group leader has the power to make the final decision on which of the members' ideas will be adopted. He has the final word.

Communication within the workplace

Every organization has a set of rules and regulations which guide relationships and interactions within the company. All decisions have to be made within the existing policy guidelines of the organization. New employees have to be assimilated into this culture through the process of organizational assimilation. New members of the organization are taught the skills they need to work alongside social and cultural factors within the organization. Proper organizational assimilation produces well adopted

individuals who are able to fit properly with the rest of the organization. The assimilation process does not have a timeline. Research has revealed that the process continues long into the tenure of new employees (McIntosh, Richard & Jeffery 98).

Communication is important in the creation, nurturing and maintenance of relationships. Dyadic and group interactions help employees to create connections, clarify issues and negotiate better terms. The working group is the most basic unit of group formation within the organization. Older members of the working group assume leadership officially or unofficially. New comers learn the technical aspects of their job through their interaction with members of their working group. The influence of the smaller working group could be stronger than the influence of the organization (McIntosh, Richard & Jeffery 100).

Conclusion

Interpersonal communication is a form of communication that is aimed at creating meaningful interactions. Communication within the group is composed of interpersonal communication but within a dynamic context. It is important to understand interpersonal relationships before attempting to comprehend the process of group communication. Group communication is just as complex within the working environment. Organizational success is pegged on its ability to manage both formal and informal interpersonal relationships within the organization.

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