

Meet the fockers: an analysis of interpersonal communication



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Meet the Fockers is a movie about two families who meet to prepare for a wedding, but some funny and surprising things get in the way when secrets are revealed. Ben Stiller plays the groom, Greg Focker, and Teri Polo plays Pam Byrnes, the bride. The two of them decide to finally bring their families together to settle out wedding plans. As the their families get to know each other things do not go well. Greg knows that his family is not a typical family so he tries to impress Pam's family by downplaying the strange ways of his parents.

This paper studies communication in the movie by looking closely at eight specific communication principles and applying them to eight scenes.

1. Elements of Interpersonal Communication – Feed Forward

1. Define feed forward

Feed forward happens when a communicator gives clues about what message is coming up. Feed forward is kind of like setting up the next message by warning someone what mood they should be in or how they will feel about the statement.

2. Apply the concept to the scene

In this scene from Meet the Fockers, Jack, who will be Greg's father-in-law, introduces Greg to Jorge, who is probably Greg's son.

Greg doesn't know he might have a son. In this scene, Jack uses feed forward when he says, " He's never met his father. " This hints at what is to come.

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Jack acts casual, but he has his own motives. When Jack mentions that Jorge is 15 years old, it seems like Greg does the math to figure out how long ago he was in a relationship with Jorge's mother. Jack also says that Jorge never knew his father. Greg says, 'That's a shame,' but it appears as if Greg is wondering if he is Jorge's father.

3. Evaluate the communication strategies in the scene

The communication in the scene is awkward because Greg doesn't know whether Jorge is his son or not. Jack believes Jorge is Greg's son, but he doesn't come right out and say it directly. Instead, he uses feed forward hints to build up a mood and make Greg uncomfortable. The feed forward in the scene is successful in this way because Jack does what he meant to do. Jack doesn't want to say outright that Jorge and Greg are related, so he gives the idea away a little bit at a time with his hints.

4. Suggest improvements

Jack should have been more direct and upfront about his motives.

Jack isn't direct in this scene, so his communication with Greg seems deceptive. Another improvement is that Jack doesn't seem to be concerned about how Jorge feels. Jorge is a young person and he doesn't really know what is going on. The communication here would be better if Jack considered their feelings and prepared Jorge and Greg prior to introducing them.

5. Reflect on your own ability to use the concept

I think it is important to be direct and consider people's feelings especially when you are communicating important information for the first time. Feed forward can be helpful, like when you tell somebody you have bad news.

But in this scene Jack uses it to delay an important idea. If you are honest about your motives and allow people some time to process information, the conversation will be less awkward.

2. Culture – Intercultural Communication

1. Define intercultural communication

Culture is certain events, routines and ways of being that set you apart from those with different backgrounds or customs. Intercultural communication happens when communicators from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other. According to Barbara Burke and Julie Patterson-Pratt (2002), “ Culture and communication are integrally linked. This happens especially in intercultural communication.

2. Apply to scene

In this scene, Pam and Greg are getting married. The ceremony combines both of their original cultural beliefs (Jewish and Christian) to join their families together. Pam’s father, Jack, proves that he has accepted Pam and Greg’s relationship by asking a family friend to perform the ceremony, and by “ giving her away. ” Although Jack walks her down the aisle, he is uncomfortable about letting go of his daughter. By taking part in the ceremony both families are performing behavioral patterns to show that they support the marriage.

3. Evaluate the strategies in the scene

The strategies in this scene are good. It shows that even though families are different culturally, they can come together and set aside differences. It shows that people can change too. Jack did not like Greg at first and tried to

keep him and Pam apart. In this scene, you can tell Jack supports Pam, even if he still is not completely comfortable. Also, part of the ceremony is done in Hebrew. Mark, the friend who does the ceremony, translated from English to Hebrew so that everyone knew what he was saying.

4. Suggest improvements

I think it would be better if Mark would have shared the differences in Pam and Greg's religions and how they came to combine the two as they get married. Sometimes people are in intercultural situations but they don't know it. It wasn't clear in the movie what Pam and Greg would have had to do (in reality) to join the cultures by marriage.

5. Reflect on your own ability to use the concept.

The sports teams that I have played on have had athletes from many different cultural backgrounds. At times, it was hard to understand others who didn't speak English.

This intercultural communication caused confusion on the field. Also it was sometimes hard to talk to those who had different views on certain things or who assumed you understood different play patterns or drills. As a team, we had to work hard on understanding each other. Sometimes, like the people Dale Cyphert studied (2002) who do hard physical labor, we could understand each other because of timing, spacing, and movement instead of spoken words. Once we took time to understand what others were doing and saying, we could react in positive and less confused ways.

3. The Self – Self Concept

1. Define self concept

Self concept is the image that you take on as a being you or the ways you believe you are viewed by others.

2. Apply to scene

In this scene, Jack holds up a nurse picture card to his grandson, LJ. The picture card is of a female nurse and LJ laughs. This relates to self concept because Greg is a nurse. It is implied that it is funny because Pam's dad, Jack, doesn't think it is a manly job for him to have.

3. Evaluate the strategies in the scene

The communication strategy is bad (even though it is funny) because it communicates misconceptions about certain careers on whether they are male or female professions.

We are socially biased when we believe that only certain professions can be held by either males or females. Jack apologizes because the card packet only has a female nurse, but he does not seem sincere. Greg also says, "That's a common mistake," and does not do anything to change the misconception. Greg holds onto a self concept that doesn't agree with Jack or the card with the female nurse.

4. Suggest improvements Jack or Greg could have drawn a male nurse on the card beside the female nurse.

In this way they will help the grandson understand that nurses can be male or female.

5. Reflect on your own ability to use the concept.

My self concept an African American is different than most because I was adopted and raised by White parents. When I moved to New York as a 7th grader, I was asked why I spoke funny and asked if I thought I was smart or something. My classmates noticed that I spoke and dressed differently than African Americans in that area and that made me an easier target for jokes. I was told that I “ talk white. ” The perception is that black people should and do talk differently than white people. Society, or at least the people in my school had generalized who I should be based on my race.

At times I had to be two different people so that I wasn't picked on as much. For example I learned to talk differently when I was with certain groups of people. As years passed, it is more possible to be ‘ myself’ without being ashamed. I have a more mature self concept now. In the movie, Greg did not need to “ okay” society's generalization that nurses are female. It is okay for him to be himself and to fight the generalization. And it is okay for me to be myself despite society's generalization about how I should talk because of my race.

4. Perception – Perceptual Accentuation

1. Define perceptual accentuation

Perceptual accentuation happens when somebody's sees things a certain way because of their outlook on life.

2. Apply to scene

In this scene, Mrs. Focker uses perceptual accentuation. She sees the world as a counselor, as a sex therapist, and as a mom, so she easily notices (from

what she knows as a mom) that Pam is pregnant. Mrs. Focker also notices that Mrs. Byrnes is not happy with her marriage to Jack Byrnes. Mrs. Byrnes and Mrs. Focker talk and Mrs. Byrnes uses her insights about relationships to show Mrs. Byrnes what might be possible ways to improve her marriage.

3. Evaluate the strategies in the scene

Perceptual accentuation helps Mrs. Focker notice things most people wouldn't notice. Mrs. Focker not only perceives a lot, she openly communicates what she perceives and it is obvious that her perceptions are correct. She knows things most people wouldn't know just by looking. Burgoon, Berger, and Waldron (2000) write that "communication may catalyze mindful or mindless states." Mrs. Focker is trying to get Mrs. Byrnes into a more mindful state. She wants Mrs. Byrnes to share her perceptual accentuation or way of seeing the potential in her relationship.

4. Suggest improvements

I think Mrs. Focker goes a little bit overboard by showing Mrs. Byrnes how to massage ears. It goes beyond perceptual accentuation and gets a little awkward. Mrs. Focker took a risk, because if Mrs. Byrnes was not comfortable with it, or if Mrs. Focker's perception was wrong, it would have hurt their relationship.

5. Reflect on your own ability to use the concept.

I think I struggle with perception accentuation in many ways. When I went to Kenya in 2005 I noticed a lot of things that were different immediately, but my appearance what they actually thought of me was incorrect.

I thought they considered me a foreigner or someone who was different. Instead, they considered me family and by the end of the trip, they gave me a Kenyan name, Musyoki, which is Kikamba for “ one who returns. ” I felt bad for mistaking their laughs as unkind gestures rather than an effort to communicate in a friendly way.

5. Listening – Surface and Depth Listening

1. Define surface and depth listening

Surface and depth listening have to do with how much effort a listener makes to understand, remember, evaluate, and respond to another person who is communicating.

Ratcliffe (1999) says listening “ runs a poor, poor fourth” after reading, speaking, and writing. With good listening, communication is improved. Surface and depth listening are effective approaches when it comes to specific listening skills. I mean that listeners must know when to listen carefully (depth) and when to listen lightly (surface).

2. Apply to scene

In this scene, the Fockers are upstairs in their bed and they are being loud. Greg tells them that they need to be quiet. H wants them to listen to him in depth, but his parents only use surface listening.

They don't really take his message to heart. Greg tries to let his parents know that it is not a good time for them to be messing around and that others can hear them. At first, his parents tell Greg to relax and that their loud noises might be good for their guests, but eventually they let Greg say

what he wants to say. After they act like they listen to his concerns, they go about what they were doing anyway.

3. Evaluate the strategies in the scene

The strategies in this scene represent mostly surface listening. Greg does a good job of making his concerns known. His body language and forcefulness about being heard requires his parents to stop what they are doing to listen in depth to him for at least a while. It reminds us that part of listening has to do with what and who the message is being conveyed.

4. Suggest improvements

Greg was going into the situation with a negative attitude. His first response was telling them to stop what they were doing because Greg was only thinking of his own embarrassment. He could have come into the bedroom and asked them nicely to consider his embarrassment with his future parents-in-law as guests in the house. This might have gotten his parents to listen in depth. Greg could have also listened better himself when his parents were trying to talk with him about the situation.

5. Reflect on your own ability to use the concept.

I think I am becoming better in-depth listener. I have learned how to focus on what people are saying and be of some help. In school especially, I have seemed to learn different ways of processing what teachers say so that I understand better. Listening plays an important part in everyday life as a student, but it is hard for me to always listen deeply.

6. Verbal Communication – Feedback

1. Define feedback

Feedback is the part of a conversation that reports back to a speaker how their message has been received. In face to face conversation, feedback can take the form of verbal messages or nonverbal communication. Feedback helps the speaker understand how to proceed. The speaker can figure out what to say next based on the feedback listeners provide.

2. Apply to scene

In this scene, Greg, Jack, and Bernie are in jail. Jack and Bernie begin to argue. Between the two of them their feedback leads to more and more tension and anger. Greg interrupts them because hearing them argue back and forth is frustrating for him. Greg explains that because he and Pam are getting married, they better stop arguing or neither one are going to be in the new family circle of trust that will be made. They eventually agree on things by communicating their individual needs more clearly, which happens because they received feedback.

3. Evaluate the strategies in the scene

This scene is a good example of feedback because they begin by miscommunicating because they are all just spouting off without being clear or considerate. There is a lot of turn taking. The communication changes because of feedback. At the end, however, they figure out that they can each have a turn and they allow one another a chance to talk without insults that are not helpful.

4. Suggest improvements

This scene could be improved with a different approach to the situation. The argumentative words between Jack and Bernie at the beginning are not helpful. Feedback lets people improve on their communication while it is happening. Also, I think that if Jack trusted people more easily, it wouldn't be so hard for him to communicate.

5. Reflect on your own ability to use the concept.

I see myself as a person that knows how to provide appropriate verbal feedback. There are times when having a conversation is necessary. For example when I am playing soccer there is a lot of interacting with teammates. Like when the goalie says something like "keeper," they are letting their teammate know that they have control of the ball. On the field, usually using words that are positive, direct, and forceful is better than just random unimportant chatter.

7. Nonverbal Communication – Body Gestures

1. Define body gestures

Body gestures are a form of communication that do not use words. Sign language is one of the most common nonverbal communication skills seen in life.

2. Apply to scene

In this scene, Greg goes up to LJ, the grandson, and talks "baby talk" to him. Jack becomes upset and tells him to stop. Jack explains that LJ is learning baby sign language because LJ is a baby and he's too young to learn to speak and that sign language is better than baby talk. Jack decides to show Greg what LJ knows. LJ signs, "I would like to eat more please, 'I'd like a <https://assignbuster.com/meet-the-fockers-an-analysis-of-interpersonal-communication/>

nap, and then later I'll enjoy a nice poop. LJ does not speak a word. He uses body and hand gestures to communicate.

3. Evaluate the strategies in the scene

This scene is a good example of body gestures as nonverbal communication. When watching this scene I noticed that LJ was able to communicate effectively without speaking. The problem is that LJ is limited to what he is taught using sign language. He doesn't have many other body gestures other than the hand signs. He cannot communicate things he's thinking that he has not learned to communicate and he can only communicate with others who also know sign language.

4. Suggest improvements

The director could have let Jack explain that it is not a perfect way for LJ to communicate with others who do not know baby sign language. Also, Greg could have referred to this scene later in the movie when he is frustrated that he cannot communicate effectively with LJ and LJ becomes upset.

5. Reflect on your own ability to use the concept.

Our family used baby sign language with my little sister. I remember having a hard time at first with learning it the signs. There were some signs that she knew and I didn't. I finally learned enough to help us communicate well.

Knowing sign language helps in other situations too. I still remember some signs and can use them with others who also know signs without interrupting others around us. It is a good way to communicate non-verbally.

8. Relationship Development – Relationship Deterioration

1. Define relationship deterioration

Relationship deterioration happens when people get irritated by each other or when the reasons people are together begin to weaken and fall apart.

Deterioration can happen for a lot of reasons including work, finances, and intimacy.

2. Apply to scene

In this scene, Greg is on his way to talk with Jack when he sees his mom counseling Mrs. Byrnes. Mr. and Mrs. Byrnes are suffering from relationship deterioration because they are no longer intimate. Mrs. Byrnes has two puppets in her hand—one female and one male—in which she is doing a role play on how she wants things to be with her husband. Mrs. Byrnes adds in sound effects when she puts the puppets together as if they were having an “intimate” relationship.

3. Evaluate the strategies in the scene

The strategies in this scene are good because Mrs. Focker uses role playing to give guidance to Mrs. Byrnes to make their relationship better. Mrs. Focker wants to reverse the relationship deterioration between Mr. and Mrs. Byrnes.

4. Suggest improvements

The director could have maybe extended this scene to show that Mrs. Byrnes and Mrs. Focker were becoming closer than expected and that the relationship between these women helped the two families bond.

5. Reflect on your own ability to use the concept.

Having been in two long term relationships, I have learned different things about why relationship deterioration happens. One of my relationships fell apart because we lived far apart. I also see ways that relationship deterioration happens not only between couples but between parents and kids or between friends. Relationships are usually either getting stronger or deteriorating, depending on how much effort we give them and how we communicate.

Conclusion

Meet the Fockers is a family comedy that shows many different communication situations. By looking at some of the situations, it is clear how human interaction depends on specific kinds of communication: feed forward, intercultural communication, self concept, perceptual accentuation, surface and depth listening, feedback, body gestures, and relationship deterioration.

In addition, we can see that understanding general communication concepts like nonverbal communication, listening, and perception is important to expressing ideas and avoiding misunderstanding. Meet the Fockers includes scenes where communication is a mess, and these scenes are funny. A study of the scenes still provides students of interpersonal communication different ways of thinking about these concepts.