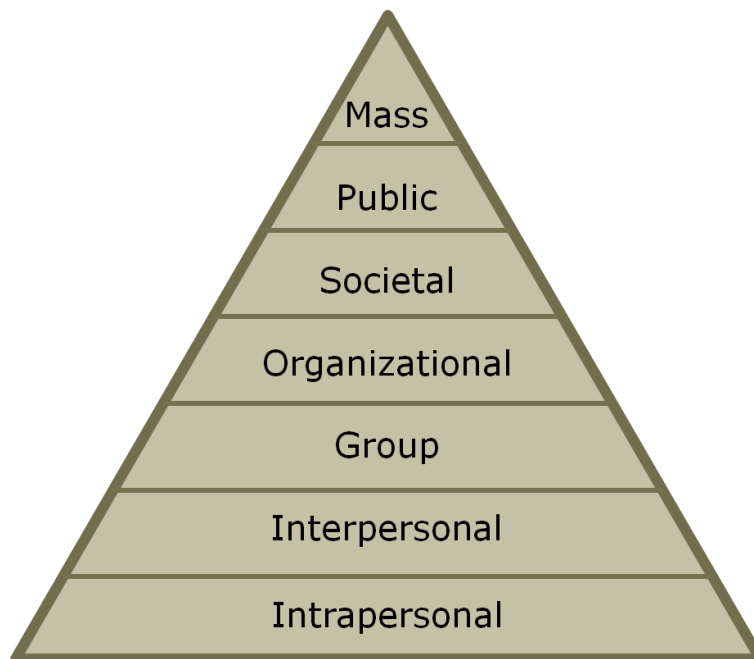


Models of Communication

Speaker: Jennifer Boyenga

Hierarchy of Communication Discipline

To understand interpersonal communication, it helps to understand how it fits within the larger study of communication. The communication discipline is divided into 7 categories that can be easily described through the use of a pyramid. If we were part of the team that constructed any of the great pyramids of Ancient Egypt, we would know that to build a pyramid, you have to start with the foundation of the structure. So, let's imagine we are going to build a pyramid that has 7 layers, or steps, that will take us from the foundation to the top block.



The base layer is the largest and this is called ***intrapersonal communication***. Intrapersonal communication breaks down like this: Intra means “within” and personal means “you.” Therefore, intrapersonal communication is communication within YOU. We consider this the “voice in your head.” In the communication discipline, it is okay to admit that you do have a voice, or even voices, in your head. We all have it. We all have them. Sometimes it feels like it is the devil and the angel on your shoulder. The voices keep us in check. Sometimes, the voice is the voice of someone close to you. I hear my dad’s voice or my mom’s voice – things they have said to me while I was growing up. Sometimes it is me being self-critical, “that was really dumb, Jennifer.” Sometimes it is me building myself up, “You can do this – you’ve got this!” Bottom line, no matter what the voice or voices sound like, this self-talk is the foundation of all of our communication. Intrapersonal communication goes 24/7, even when we are sleeping and we might really like that voice to shut off.

Now, let’s move up one layer on our pyramid. The layer above intrapersonal communication is ***interpersonal communication***. Interpersonal breaks down into: inter and personal. Inter means

“between two” and personal means “you.” Therefore, interpersonal means between you and one other person, or one-on-one communication. This can be you and a friend, you and a lover, you and a professor. As long as it is one-on-one, that is interpersonal communication. Now, because we have moved up a layer on the pyramid, that layer wouldn’t exist without the layer beneath it. Even if you and your friend are talking, you both have the voices in each of your heads going on too. So, the higher up the pyramid we go, the more complex the communication is going to get.

The third layer of the pyramid is *small group communication*. Small group communication is generally considered 3-7 people. Some researchers say that small groups can be up to 25 people, but that seems like a lot. I’m not sure that 25 people is manageable for decision making. Have you ever tried to take 25 people to the movies and everyone agree on what you are going to see? A small group needs to be together for a purpose, and small enough for everyone to participate. A small group could be an immediate family, a group of friends, or even a team at work. Inside of any small group will be a couple of people that will break off and have an interpersonal conversation, and of course, everyone still has the voices in their heads going.

The fourth layer of the pyramid is *organizational communication*. Organizational communication is when groups of people come together for a common purpose. We are all members of the organization of Indian Hills Community College, and probably many other organizations. Our class is one “group” and there are many groups at IHCC – each class, each student organization, each faculty led group, each administrative group – and our entire purpose is higher education. You have been involved in organizational communication your entire life. School districts are all organizations filled with different groups. Large companies are all organized around groups working together to sell a product or service. Civic groups are all part of a larger organizational umbrella. Sports teams are part of larger organizations. So, every team or group you’ve been involved with has been part of a larger organization.

The fifth layer of the pyramid is *societal communication* or *cultural communication*. These terms are used interchangeably inside the communication discipline. Societies and cultures are made up of many organizations. This could be as large as the United States negotiating with Iraq or Afghanistan, or something simpler like when I go to purchase bread and baked goods from the Amish community in Davis County, Iowa. These are both cultural exchanges between people or societies that each hold different belief structures.

The sixth layer of the pyramid, and one from the top, is *public communication*. Public communication is when one person, or even a small group, addresses an audience they can see. Think of this as a public presentation or a speech. When a person gives a speech, they are speaking to people from different societies or cultural backgrounds, different organizations, different couples, and everyone in the audience has a voice in their head.

The top, and final layer, to the communication pyramid is *mass communication*. Mass communication is when one person, or even a small group of people, addresses an audience they cannot see. Mass communication is something we all indulge in on a daily basis. Mass communication examples include television, radio, internet, social media, newspapers, magazines, billboards, advertisements, and the list

goes on. The key is that when we either put something out on social media or we read something or we watch something, we don't know who sees it or who wrote it. The author is not immediately in front of us like they are if we are listening to a live speech.

Now look at the entire pyramid. Each of the layers of the pyramid is a different subject that is studied in the communication discipline. Notice that the layer we are studying in this course, interpersonal communication, is a foundational layer. There is only one layer below interpersonal communication. Every layer above interpersonal communication has interpersonal communication happening in it too.

Definition of Interpersonal Communication

According to West and Turner (2016) the definition of interpersonal communication is the strategic process of message transaction between people to create and sustain shared meaning. Let's break down the definition a bit. A **process** is something ongoing, ever changing, and evolving so our interpersonal communication is not the same at age 2 as it is at age 5, 10, 16, or 85. Our relationships evolve and change over the course of a relationship, so what we talk about in the early stages of a relationship are not the same as later in a relationship. Process also relates to the difference between genders, cultures, and power or control in a relationship. These things also evolve and change. Think of how different your interpersonal communication is with your parents as an adult from what it was at age 3. The **message exchange** is a transaction of verbal and nonverbal messages that happens simultaneously between the participants. In a nutshell, this is what is being said or indicated between the participants. **Meaning** is the deeper part of interpersonal communication. This is what people extract from the verbal or nonverbal messages. The words or gestures themselves have no meaning. The people involved give the words or gestures meaning. The participants co-create meaning through their interaction. Meaning is when we "make sense" of the communication.

Linear Model of Communication



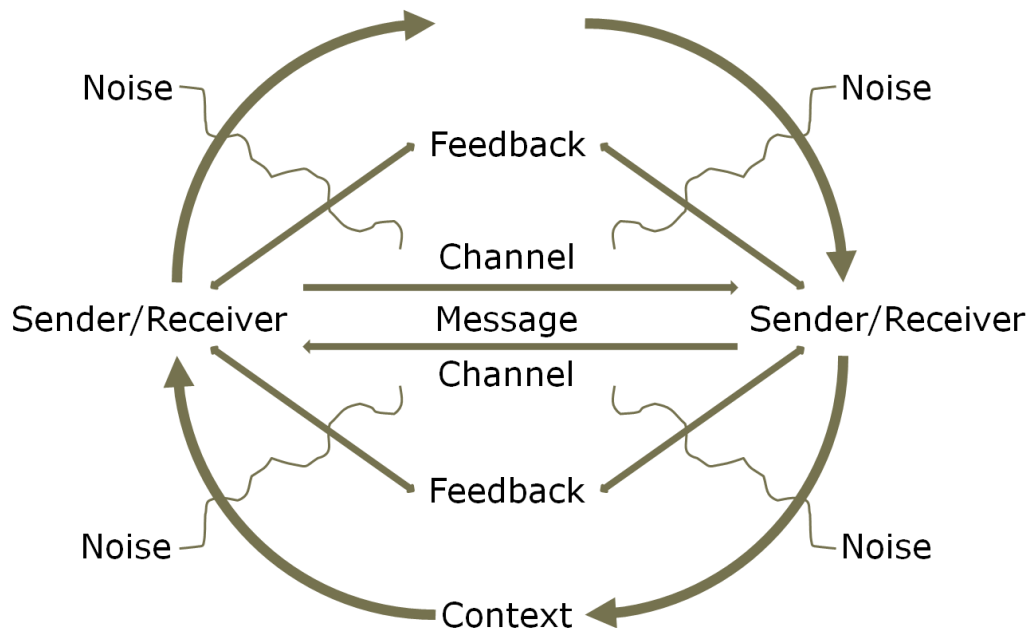
One way we can visually depict communication is through the use of models. One of the first models of communication that was developed was the **Linear Model**. Developed by Shannon & Weaver in 1949, this was a very simplistic view of communication. This model shows the communication process as a one way message between a **sender** and a **receiver** using a channel. The sender originates the **message** and the message travels through a **channel** to the receiver. The channel is whatever pathway the message travels in between the sender and receiver. Today, a channel could be a telephone, social media, or even face-to-face talking. We know that there is a lot more that happens when two people communicate than what the Linear Model shows.

Interaction Model of Communication



In 1954, Wilbur Schramm developed the *Interaction Model* of communication. This was closer to what happens when people communicate. This model shows that communication goes in two directions, back and forth between the sender and the receiver. This is the first model where we see *feedback*, or a response to the message from the receiver.

Transactional Model of Communication



As fast as the Linear Model became outdated, Schramm's Interaction model was replaced by the *Transactional Model of Communication* (first introduced by Barnlund in 1970). Basically, the Linear Model and the Interaction Model were too simplistic of models for people who study human communication – they weren't dynamic enough! The Transactional Model has been adapted by several professionals over the years across several academic disciplines.

The Transactional Model is the most complex model of communication and provides an excellent visual of the communication process. The *sender* and *receiver* we had in the Linear Model are now shown as simultaneous beings in the Transactional Model because we know that we don't just throw one message and wait for another to come back – we send and receive messages at the same time. I may say something to you, but my body language may say something else entirely. The Transactional Model was the first model to acknowledge non-verbal communication, or all those great facial expressions and body language components of communication. *Feedback* from Schramm's model can be either verbally or nonverbally delivered in the Transactional Model.

The message travels through a **channel** in the Transactional Model. The channel is the method or mode of how the communication passes between the participants. Common channels include the cell phone, social media, or text messages.

The model also includes **noise** which is any interference which can occur during the communication process. Interferences may be internal or external. **Internal noise** would include anything internal to the body or mind – things like a hungry stomach or a stressful situation which might interfere in participating in the communication. Internal noise could be **Physiological Noise** (hungry stomach, for example) or **Psychological Noise** (worry or anxiety, for example). **External noise** would include anything environmental which might infringe upon the communication – like a noisy train going by or a car honking. This is **Physical Noise** or **Environmental Noise**. There is one last noise that can impede our communication and that is **Semantic Noise**, or the noise that happens when the two participants don't have the same meaning for the same message. This happens when jargon or technical language is used and one person doesn't understand the terminology.

The last component of the model is **Context**. Context is multi-faceted. **Physical Context** is the environment the communication takes place in. For instance, as I'm saying this to you, my context is my office at the college – I'm surrounded by books, resources, and music is playing. What context are you receiving the message in? If we were in the same location, the context would be the same. **Cultural Context** determines the rules, norms, and patterns of communication that are unique to the culture the communication is taking place in. **Social-emotional Context** involves the nature of the relationship between the communicators. Is it friendly, is it stressed, is it angry? The last aspect of context is the **Historical Context** or the **Relational History** of the relationship. Messages are understood between two people based upon their previously sent messages. The history of the people involved influences how the messages are interpreted between them.

Each participant in an interpersonal communication has a **field of experience**. This is the person's culture, past and current experiences, personal history, and heredity. When two people's field of experiences overlap, they can communicate more effectively because they have shared interest, history, background, and experiences. Fields of experience change and evolve over the course of a person's lifetime, just like interpersonal communication evolves and changes. **Relational rules** develop over the course of a relationship that impact the communication between the participants. Rules may include what is talked about and when communication takes place. Bottom line, all relationships are unique and so is the interpersonal communication that occurs inside it.

Future Learning

Over the course of the semester we will learn that interpersonal communication is:

- **Unavoidable:** We cannot **not** communicate with people. Communication is necessary for our lives.
- **Irreversible:** What we say to others cannot be reversed, so we must be very careful in what we say and how we say it.

- **Symbolic:** Communication is made up of symbols (words and letters), and it takes people to give meaning to these arbitrary labels.
- **Rule governed:** Each person in a relationship agrees on rules involving communication in the relationship.
- **A learned process:** We can refine and cultivate our communication skills to become better communicators.
- **Content and relationship based:** Each conversation has both content and relational elements. Content is the information in a message and relational meaning depends on how you feel about the person communicating with you.
- **Ethical or unethical:** This is the perceived right or wrong of a communication situation.

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