Theories and Principles of Interpersonal Communication

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Teaching Module

COM 5600

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Learning Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify key principles of interpersonal communication and evaluate their effects on the communication process.

2. Students will understand the relationship between the self and interpersonal communication.

3. Students will be able to employ strategies for establishing and sustaining interpersonal communication, such as listening and feedback.

4. Students will be able to recognize methods of conflict resolution.
I. Interpersonal communication

A. Interpersonal communication defined (Verderber, Verderber, & Berryman-Fink, 2007).

1. The process through which people create and manage their relationships, exercising mutual responsibility in creating meaning.

2. Also known as dyadic communication.

B. Principles of interpersonal communication (Orbe & Bruess, 2005).

1. Interpersonal communication is irreversible and inevitable.
   a. You cannot ever take back something you have said.
2. Interpersonal communication involves rules.
   a. Social rules or expectations of how you act during a conversation.
3. Interpersonal communication is always affected by culture and power.
   a. Different cultures have different ways of expressing themselves.
   b. You communicate differently with your parents than you do your close friends.
4. Interpersonal communication is changing with technology.
   a. Cell phones, instant messaging, and email have changed the way we communicate.

II. Self and communication (Smith & Tague-Busler, 2006)

A. Self-concept

1. Defined as the mental image you have of yourself.

2. Development of self-concept
   a. Authority figures
   b. Social comparisons
   c. Gender expectations
   d. Cultural influences

3. Characteristics of self-concept
   a. Subjective
      i. We are biased in the way we see ourselves.
      ii. We are too involved to be able to see ourselves from another point of view.
   b. Resists change
      i. For example, if you used to get D’s and now you get B’s, you may view it as luck and still see yourself as a D student.
4. Self-fulfilling prophecy
   a. Defined as if we predict, or prophesize, something to be true, we often behave in ways to cause this prediction to become reality.
   b. Can be positive or negative.

B. Self-image
   1. The way you see yourself within the roles you play.

C. Self-esteem
   1. Evaluation or judgment of how you feel about yourself.
   2. Can influence your self-image.

D. Self-perceptions
   1. Ideas we form of how we feel, who we are, and why we are.

E. Intrapersonal communication (Adler & Rodman, 2006)
   1. Communicating with oneself.
   2. Silent, taking place in our heads.
   3. The way we mentally process information that influences our interactions with others.

F. These aspects all effect how we communicate with ourselves and others.

(Self-Concept Development, Activity #1)

III. Establishing and sustaining interpersonal communication

A. Listening

1. Defined (Verderber, Verderber, & Berryman-Fink, 2007)
   a. The process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.
   b. A fundamental communication skill that affects the quality of our conversations and shapes our relationships.

2. There are five types of listening.
   a. Discriminatory listening
   b. Appreciative listening
   c. Comprehensive listening
   d. Evaluative listening
   e. Empathic listening

3. Empathic listening is important in improving interpersonal communication (Trenholm & Jensen, 2004).
   a. Defined as listening to help others.
b. Four important rules.
   i. Respect the other’s point of view.
   ii. Understand what the other has said before responding.
   iii. Check your understanding by paraphrasing not comforting.
   iv. When paraphrasing, express relational as well as content meaning.
      aa. Some people do not express feelings overtly; they hint instead—a good listener tries to read between the lines and see what they really mean.

B. Feedback (Verderber, Verderber, & Berryman-Fink, 2007)

1. Defined
   a. The response to messages that indicates to the sender whether and how that message was heard, seen, interpreted.
   b. Can be verbal or nonverbal.
   c. Helpful in deepening our relationships with ourselves and others.

2. Asking for feedback.
   a. Preparing for feedback from others.
      i. Think of feedback as being in your best interest.
      ii. Before you ask for feedback, make sure that you are ready for an honest response.
      iii. If you take the initiative to ask for feedback, you will avoid surprises.
   b. Increasing the likelihood people will give you good feedback.
      i. Specify the kind of feedback you are seeking.
      ii. Try to avoid negative verbal or nonverbal reactions to the feedback.
      iii. Paraphrase what you hear.
      iv. Show gratitude for the feedback you receive.

3. Giving personal feedback.
   a. Begin by describing the behavior.
   b. Whenever possible, preface a negative statement with a positive one.
   c. Be as specific as possible.
   d. When appropriate, suggest how the person can change the behavior.

IV. Conflict (Verderber, Verderber, & Berryman-Fink, 2007)

A. Five types of interpersonal conflict.
   1. Pseudoconflict
a. Apparent, not real, badgering.
b. Ex.: “Why are you wearing that shirt? It’s so out of style.”

2. Fact conflict
   a. Information presented is disputed by the other.
   b. Ex.: disagreement over the date of a deadline.

3. Value conflict
   a. When people’s beliefs are incompatible.
   b. Ex.: vegetarianism. Usually not resolvable; agree to disagree.

4. Policy conflict
   a. Disagreement about the appropriate plan, course of action or behavior to deal with a perceived problem.
   b. Ex.: who is going to pay on dates?

5. Ego conflict
   a. When “winning” is central to maintain that person’s positive self-image.
   b. Ex.: when you correct someone and they take it personally.

B. Styles of managing conflict.

1. Withdrawal
   a. Physical or psychological removal from the conflict.
   b. Lose/lose situation.

2. Accommodating
   a. Satisfy others’ needs while ignoring your own.
   b. Lose/win situation.

3. Forcing
   a. Satisfy your own needs with no concern for the others’ needs.
   b. Win/lose situation.

4. Compromising
   a. Each giving up part of what each wants to provide both parties with some satisfaction.
   b. Lose/lose situation (both parties “lose” even as they “win”).

5. Collaborating
   a. Trying to fully address the needs and issues of each party and arrive at a mutually satisfying solution.
   b. Win/win situation.
C. Communication patterns that impede effective conflict management.

1. Ascribing motives
   a. Assuming hidden, often malevolent motives of others.

2. Counterblame
   a. Finding continuous blame from one thing to the next.

3. Demand withdrawal
   a. One partner uses a forcing behavior while the other counters by using withdrawal.

4. Spiraling negativity
   a. Injection of a hostile comment during conflict and the partner matches with his/her own hostile comment.

5. Stubbornness
   a. Clinging to your position just to save face.

D. Communication skills that promote successful conflict management.

1. Initiating conflict
   a. Recognize and state ownership of the apparent problem.
   b. Describe the basis of the potential conflict in terms of behavior, consequences, and feelings.
   c. Avoid evaluating the other person’s motives.
   d. Be sure the other person understands your problem.
   e. Phrase your preferred solution in a way that focuses on common ground.
   f. Mentally rehearse what you will say before confronting them.
   g. Keep it short.

2. Responding to conflict
   a. Put your mental “shields” up.
   b. Respond empathically with genuine interest and concern.
   c. Paraphrase your understanding of the problem and ask questions to clarify issues.
   d. Seek common ground by finding some aspect of the complaint to agree with.
   e. Ask the initiator to suggest alternative solutions.

(Conflict Resolution, Activity #2)
Self-Concept Development, Activity #1

Purpose: To teach students the four ways self-concept develops.

Materials needed: Paper, writing utensil, notes on self-concept development

Directions: Write down at least 10 words you can think of to describe yourself in two minutes. Then categorize your list of descriptive words using the four aspects of self-concept development (authority figures, social comparisons, gender expectations, and cultural influences).

Discussion: Get into groups of 3 or 4 and discuss some of the words you chose and give reasons for how you categorized them.
Conflict Resolution, Activity #2

**Purpose:** To teach students to identify types of interpersonal conflict and to use effective collaboration to manage a conflict.

**Materials needed:** Paper, writing utensil, notes on conflict, example of conflict.

**Directions:** Divide into groups of 3 or 4. Decide which of the five types of interpersonal conflict best describes the example given (pseudo-, fact, value, policy, or ego). Then, using the collaboration style of managing conflict, come up with an effective way to solve the conflict.

**Discussion:** As a group, share with the class what type of conflict your group thought the example described. Provide your solution to the conflict and your reasons for why you came up with that solution.

Conflict: Paul and Mary have been going out together for several months. Early on, Paul paid for most of the expenses on their dates. Since the relationship is progressing, Paul is becoming uncomfortable in paying for all of their dates. He sees his expenses increasing more and more, and he knows that Mary earns more money than he does. Mary enjoys dating Paul and sees his paying for dates as very traditional and gentlemanly.
Theories and Principles of Interpersonal Communication Test

**Multiple Choice:**

_____ 1. Self perceptions are  
   a. evaluations or judgments of how you feel about yourself.  
   b. the ways you see yourself within the roles you play.  
   c. ideas we form of how we feel, who we are, and why we are.  
   d. defined as the mental image you have of yourself.

_____ 2. Intrapersonal communication is  
   a. communicating with oneself.  
   b. silent, taking place in our heads.  
   c. the way we mentally process information that influences our interactions with others.  
   d. all of the above.

_____ 3. Interpersonal communication is also known as  
   a. group communication.  
   b. dyadic communication.  
   c. one-to-one communication.  
   d. mass communication.

_____ 4. Which of the following is NOT a style of managing conflict?  
   a. accommodating  
   b. forcing  
   c. counterblaming  
   d. compromising

_____ 5. Self-concept is  
   a. subjective and resists change.  
   b. evaluative and resists change.  
   c. objective and does not resist change.  
   d. subjective and does not resist change.

**Short Answer:**

6. What are the four ways you can increase the likelihood that someone will give you good feedback?

7. What are the four important rules of empathic listening?

**Essay:**

8. Describe a conflict that you recently experienced. What type of interpersonal conflict was it? Explain how you would resolve it if it happened again. Include what style of managing conflict you would use and what communication skills that promote successful conflict management you would apply.
References


Slide 1

Interpersonal communication

- Interpersonal communication defined
  - The process through which people create and manage their relationships, exercising mutual responsibility in creating meaning.
  - Also known as dyadic communication.

Slide 2

Principles of interpersonal communication

- Interpersonal communication is irreversible and inevitable.
- Interpersonal communication involves rules.
- Interpersonal communication is always affected by culture and power.
- Interpersonal communication is changing with technology.

Slide 3

Self and communication

- Self-concept is defined as the mental image you have of yourself.
  - Developed by authority figures, social comparisons, gender expectations, and cultural influences.
  - Characteristics: subjective and resists change
Slide 4

Self and communication

• Self-fulfilling prophecy: if we predict, or prophesize, something to be true, we often behave in ways to cause this prediction to become reality.
• Self-image: the way you see yourself within the roles you play.
• Self-esteem: evaluation or judgment of how you feel about yourself.

Slide 5

Self and communication

• Self-perceptions: ideas we form of how we feel, who we are, and why we are.
• Intrapersonal communication
  – communicating with oneself.
  – silent, taking place in our heads.
  – the way we mentally process information that influences our interactions with others.
• These aspects all effect how we communicate with ourselves and others.

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Self-Concept Development, Activity #1

• Directions: Write down at least 10 words you can think of to describe yourself in two minutes. Then categorize your list of descriptive words using the four aspects of self-concept development (authority figures, social comparisons, gender expectations, and cultural influences).
• Discussion: Get into groups of 3 or 4 and discuss some of the words you chose and give reasons for how you categorized them.
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Establishing and sustaining interpersonal communication

- Listening: defined as the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.
- There are five types of listening.
  - Discriminatory listening.
  - Appreciative listening.
  - Comprehensive listening.
  - Evaluative listening.
  - Empathic listening.

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Empathic listening

- Defined as listening to help others.
- Four important rules:
  - Respect the other’s point of view.
  - Understand what the other has said before responding.
  - Check your understanding by paraphrasing not comforting.
  - When paraphrasing, express relational as well as content meaning.

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Feedback

- Defined as the response to messages that indicates to the sender whether and how that message was heard, seen, interpreted.
- Can be verbal or nonverbal.
- Helpful in deepening our relationships with ourselves and others.
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Asking for feedback

• Preparing for feedback from others
  – Think of feedback as being in your best interest.
  – Before you ask for feedback, make sure that you are ready for an honest response.
  – If you take the initiative to ask for feedback, you will avoid surprises.

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Asking for feedback

• Increasing the likelihood people will give you good feedback.
  – Specify the kind of feedback you are seeking.
  – Try to avoid negative verbal or nonverbal reactions to the feedback.
  – Paraphrase what you hear.
  – Show gratitude for the feedback you receive.

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Giving personal feedback

• Begin by describing the behavior.
• Whenever possible, preface a negative statement with a positive one.
• Be as specific as possible.
• When appropriate, suggest how the person can change the behavior.
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Conflict

- Five types of interpersonal conflict
  - Pseudoconflict
  - Fact conflict
  - Value conflict
  - Policy conflict
  - Ego conflict

Slide 14

Styles of managing conflict

- Withdrawal
- Accommodating
- Forcing
- Compromising
- Collaborating

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Communication patterns that impede effective conflict management

- Ascribing motives
- Counterblame
- Demand withdrawal
- Spiraling negativity
- Stubbornness
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**Communication skills that promote successful conflict management**

- **Initiating conflict**
  - Recognize and state ownership of the apparent problem.
  - Describe the basis of the potential conflict in terms of behavior, consequences, and feelings.
  - Avoid evaluating the other person’s motives.
  - Be sure the other person understands your problem.
  - Phrase your preferred solution in a way that focuses on common ground.
  - Mentally rehearse what you will say before confronting them.
  - Keep it short.

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**Communication skills that promote successful conflict management**

- **Responding to conflict**
  - Put your mental “shields” up.
  - Respond empathically with genuine interest and concern.
  - Paraphrase your understanding of the problem and ask questions to clarify issues.
  - Seek common ground by finding some aspect of the complaint to agree with.
  - Ask the initiator to suggest alternative solutions.

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**Conflict Resolution, Activity #2**

- **Directions:** Divide into groups of 3 or 4. Decide which of the five types of interpersonal conflict best describes the example given (pseudo-, fact, value, policy, or ego). Then, using the collaboration style of managing conflict, come up with an effective way to solve the conflict.

- **Discussion:** As a group, share with the class what type of conflict your group thought the example described. Provide your solution to the conflict and your reasons for why you came up with that solution.

- **Conflict:** Paul and Mary have been going out together for several months. Early on, Paul paid for most of the expenses on their dates. Since the relationship is progressing, Paul is becoming uncomfortable in paying for all of their dates. He sees his expenses increasing more and more, and he knows that Mary earns more than he does. Mary wants to continue to date Paul and sees his paying for dates as very traditional and gentlemanly.