

Pre-publication Copy

Chapters 1 through 3

Communicating Effectively

Ninth Edition

by

Hybels

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CHAPTER ONE

The Communication Process

Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define communication and explain it as a process.
- Explain communication as a transaction and how the three principles relate to effective communication.
- Describe the types of communication.
- Explain the elements of communication competence.
- Discuss the principles of ethical communication and the foundation out of which ethical conduct is most likely to grow.





4 Part 1 Basic Principles of Communication

THE FOLLOWING ARE THREE EXAMPLES THAT REVEAL THE POSITIVE role speech communication courses can play in the lives of students. For Ashley, Andrew, and Wanda, they served as pivotal points for changing their lives.

When Ashley visited her guidance counselor in high school, Mr. Vernon, she was really on a personal quest to find out more about herself and to get an expert's advice about her college potential. Ashley had goofed around in high school—far more interested in the social whirl than anything academic. After she told Mr. Vernon what she was doing in high school, and he examined her grades, he uttered the excruciating words: "I'm afraid you're not college material." Those six words were the very wake-up call she needed. In a required speech communication course at a small liberal arts college where she was accepted because of her parents' pleading, she discovered what she needed: an instructor who saw her potential, a course that offered specific information and activities that motivated her and reinforced her talents, and a result—a solid A—that proved she definitely had college potential. It was her speech communication instructor who discovered this bright, fun, articulate young woman who could do anything she put her mind to.

My name is Andrew, and I want to tell you this in the first person: I have never acted before, but my friends said I was a natural-born actor. When I came to college, I was sitting in the cafeteria among a horde of talking, milling students. They all seemed so confident, directed, and older. I was hoping no one noticed me sitting there alone. In walking across campus, I saw the "call" posted on a kiosk. The drama department was looking for actors for an upcoming play. Auditions were the following week. I went to the library, checked out a copy of the play, and read it in one sitting. Although terrified, I tried out. My name did not appear on the call-back sheets, but I knew I could do better, and I knew it could happen. I realized at that moment that any knowledge I could gain about effective communication, and any experience I could get, would help me build the confidence and poise I needed. The course in speech communication was essential for me to face myself and the future I wanted.

Don't ever think that majoring in subjects such as philosophy, literature, or speech has little value in our society because they won't help you get a good job. This crass materialism infects too many students, parents, and employers. I (Wanda Jean DuCharme) studied speech communication at a midsized midwestern university because I wanted to polish my communication skills. I went on to get a master's degree in both speech and English, and now I earn a substantial income as a business consultant, and I run my own business. How did my background prepare me for the work I do now? I learned to think and organize ideas. I could discern patterns and form valid conclusions. I could communicate with senior management, workers, and the public alike. I learned to question, listen, and put ideas into words. My philosophy is, "Do what you love, and the money will follow."

Everyone needs Communication Skills

Your success in this world depends on effective communication skills. The problem isn't a lack of ability to communicate; the problem is simply that you have never mastered the skill. Even the very top students from highly competitive schools frequently are unable to write clearly or make persuasive presentations.¹ This is true for two reasons: (1) We take communication for granted. After all, we've been communicating since

we were born; with that much practice, why wouldn't we be good at it? (2) We often think we are better at it than we really are.

If you were told that there were skills that are *more important* to your success than a knowledge of computers, more important than any job-specific skills, and more important than your knowledge of any content area or major, would you want to pursue those skills and improve your ability to perform them? Those skills—basic oral and written communication skills—are the most frequently cited factors in aiding graduating college students to both obtain and sustain employment. The list of studies that support this conclusion goes on and on.²

What are the benefits? Why should you take a speech communication course seriously? As a result of a speech communication course you will feel more confident about yourself, you will feel more comfortable with others' perceptions of you, you will experience greater ease in reasoning with people, you will use language more appropriately, and you will have improved critical thinking skills.³

This author (Richard) decided on a career in medicine in junior high school. All the courses I took targeted me in that direction. In high school I focused primarily on math and science courses—taking all the school offered. During my first two years at the University of Michigan, as a premedicine major, I did the same. Then came the university's required speech course. Not only did I do well in the course, I decided to use my last free elective slot to schedule a second speech course, and I was hooked. I found out what I could do with a speech major, how it both complemented and supplemented any other major, and I pursued it for the rest of my college career—both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Here is what I discovered that made me switch from a premed major to speech. First, I discovered that speech communication is the ultimate people-oriented discipline. I had pursued premed because I wanted to be in a people-oriented business. I loved the idea that here was a discipline that would develop my thinking and speaking skills. In speech I could apply my imagination, solve practical problems, and articulate my ideas. I was truly free to be human.

The second factor that made me switch majors was that I wanted to be a leader. I knew what skills were important to this goal. Ask yourself, what skills should leaders possess? They are the very same skills every college graduate should have, and they are the same as those that more than 1,000 faculty members from a cross section of academic disciplines selected: skills in writing, speaking, reading, and listening; interpersonal skills, working in and leading groups; an appreciation of cultural diversity; and the ability to adapt to innovation and change.⁴ These are all skills that are developed, discussed, emphasized, and refined in a basic speech communication course. They are the central focus of this textbook.

The third and final ingredient that made me switch majors resulted from my study and experience. I recognized the importance of communication skills to my success. Whether it was oral presentations, time spent in meetings, interpersonal skills, interactions with other employees, or use of multimedia technologies, developing effective communication skills was going to be vital in all areas of my life.

In their investigation of the basic speech communication course at two- and four-year colleges and universities, published in *Communication Education* (2006),⁵ Morreale, Hugenberg, and Worley—citing supporting research—outline the numerous benefits to students. First, students report that basic interpersonal and public speaking courses are useful and relevant for their future career. Second, students with high and moderate communication apprehension (CA) experience both a reduction in CA and improved grades after completing the course. Third, students demonstrate the positive impact

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basic speech communication courses have on their behavioral competence, self-esteem, and willingness to communicate (p. 416). As Patrick Combs wrote in capital letters in his book, *Major in Success*, “THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY HAS BEEN CONSISTENTLY RANKED THE NUMBER ONE PERFORMANCE FACTOR FOR PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS.”⁶

Characteristics of Communication

In this section we look at the process of communication first, then we examine communication as a transaction. Last, we discuss the different types of communication.

Communication is a Process

A Definition of Communication

Communication is any process in which people, through the use of symbols, verbally and/or nonverbally, consciously or not consciously, intentionally or unintentionally, generate meanings (information, ideas, feelings, and perceptions) within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media.

Each of the three opening stories illustrates communication as a process. When we say communication is a process, we mean that it is always changing.⁷ When Ashley visited her guidance counselor, she looked for any sign from Mr. Vernon that would encourage her. Instead, she received a negative verbal message of six words: “I’m afraid you’re not college material.” This message stimulated a number of internal messages of motivation: “I’ll show him. I *am* college material. I’ll prove it.”

The messages Andrew received also show how communication is always changing. Think, first, of the internal messages of lack of confidence, indecision, and immaturity he experienced while sitting in the cafeteria. Think, second, of the cognitive dissonance (mixed internal messages) he experienced trying to reconcile those messages with those from his friends about becoming a great actor. Think, third, of the messages he gave himself when he tried out for the play, saw that he was not on the call-back sheets, knew that he could do better, then pursued a course of action that would build his confidence and poise.

Finally, Wanda Jean DuCharme began her academic career with both direction and focus. Think about how her communication changed as she learned to think, organize ideas, question, listen, and put ideas into words. It changed, too, as her self-confidence and personal strength grew when she discovered she could communicate using her body language, personal allure, and engaging style in communicating with senior management, workers, and the public.

Knowing that communication is a process contributes positively to strategic flexibility and creativity because it provides a foundation for growth, development, and change. Basically, it supports the kind of changes likely to occur as you read, experience, criticize, and put into practice the ideas, theories, and knowledge gained from a textbook and course in speech communication.

The Elements of Communication

The communication process is made up of various elements; sender-receivers, messages, channels, noise, feedback, and setting. Figure 1-1 shows how all these elements work together. The amoebalike shape of the sender-receiver indicates how this person changes depending on what he or she is hearing or reacting to.

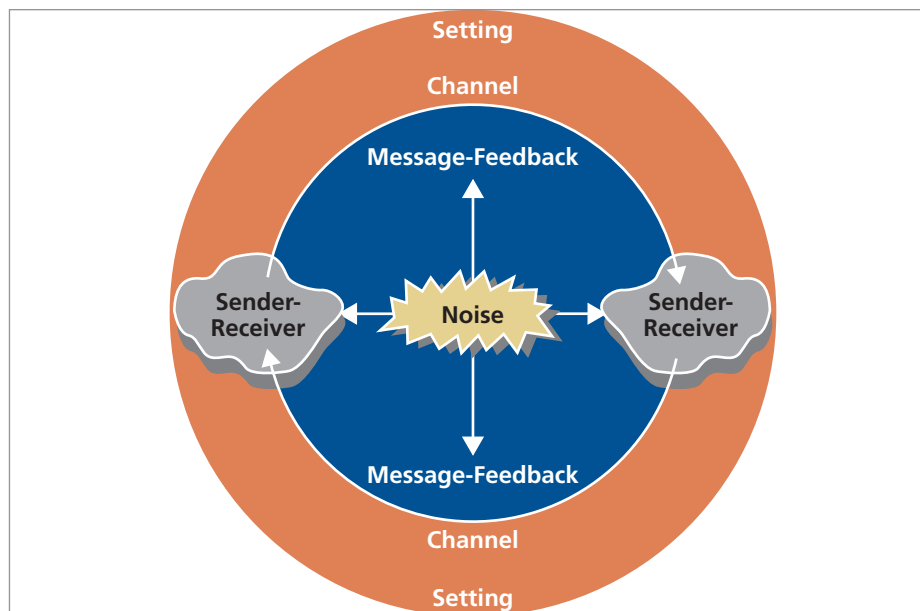


Figure 1-1
The Elements of
Communication

Sender-Receivers. People get involved in communication because they have information, ideas, and feelings they want to share. This sharing, however, is not a one-way process where one person sends ideas and the other receives them, and then the process is reversed. First, in most communication situations, people are **sender-receivers**—both sending and receiving at the same time. When you are discussing a problem with a close friend, your friend may be talking, but by listening closely, you are acting as a receiver. By paying careful attention, putting your hand on his or her arm, and showing genuine concern you are sending as many messages as you get, even though you may not say a word. Second, in all situations, sender-receivers share meaning. In your discussion with a close friend, both of you share the language and also share understanding of the situation.

Messages. The **message** is made up of the ideas and feelings that sender-receivers want to share. In the situation above, your close friend’s message dealt with what had happened to him or her and how he or she was dealing with it, while your message was one of comfort and support. Meaning, however, is *jointly created* between sender and receiver. That is, it isn’t just a sender sending a message to a receiver. There is no message at all if there aren’t common symbols, like an understanding of each other’s language. There is no message—or, perhaps, a very weak one—if there are no common referents, like understanding what the other person is talking about. How often, for example, do you “tune out” teachers if you have no idea where they are coming from?

Notice in Figure 1-1 that the message-feedback circle is exposed behind the amoeba-like sender-receiver shapes. This reveals that your “presence” within a message-feedback situation influences you. More than common symbols and common referents, presence can have powerful emotional, intellectual, physical, and, perhaps, spiritual effects. Think of being in the presence of a message-feedback occurrence between you and the president of the United States; an actor you admire; a priest, rabbi, or minister; or your professor. In these cases, it may not be the setting (to be discussed in a later

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Feedback and nonverbal communication are important when we communicate with others.

section), or any other aspect of the message that influences you. It is simply being present within that message-feedback situation.

Ideas and feelings can be communicated only if they are represented by symbols. A **symbol** is something that stands for something else. Our daily lives are full of symbols. We all know that the eagle stands for the United States, the Statue of Liberty equals freedom, and roses express love. Two people walking close and holding hands reflects romance, books represent knowledge, and teachers stand for instruction.

All our communication messages are made up of two kinds of symbols: verbal and nonverbal. The words in a language are **verbal symbols** that stand for particular things or ideas. Verbal symbols are limited and complicated. For example, when we use the word *chair*, we agree we are talking about something we sit on. Thus, *chair* is a **concrete symbol**, a symbol that represents an object. However, when we hear the word *chair*, we all might have a different impression: A chair could be a recliner, an easy chair, a beanbag, a lawn chair—the variety is great.

Even more complicated are **abstract symbols**, which stand for ideas. Consider the vast differences in our understanding of words such as *home*, *hungry*, or *hurt*. How we understand these words will be determined by our experience. Since people's experiences differ to some degree, individuals will assign different meanings to these abstract words.

Nonverbal symbols are ways we communicate without using words; they include facial expressions, gestures, posture, vocal tones, appearance, and so on. As with verbal symbols, we all attach certain meanings to nonverbal symbols. A yawn means we are bored or tired; a furrowed brow indicates confusion; not looking someone in the eye may mean we have something to hide. Like verbal symbols, nonverbal symbols can be misleading. We cannot control most of our nonverbal behavior, and we often send out information of which we are not even aware.

Many nonverbal messages differ from one culture to another just as symbols differ from culture to culture. Black is the color for funerals in Western cultures; in Eastern cultures, that color is white. The crescent moon of male-oriented Islam used to be the symbol for female-oriented worship of the moon mother in ancient Arabia.⁸ In one culture, showing the sole of your foot when you cross your legs is an insult. In another culture, respectful behavior is shown with a bow; while in still another, deep respect is shown by touching the other person's feet. Whether or not you are aware of nonverbal messages, they are extremely important in all cultures. Albert Mehrabian, a scholar of nonverbal communication, believes that over 90 percent of the messages sent and received by Americans are nonverbal.⁹

Channels. The **channel** is the route traveled by a message; it is the means a message uses to reach the sender-receivers. In face-to-face communication, the primary channels are sound and sight: We listen to and look at each other. We are familiar with

the channels of radio, television, CDs, newspapers, and magazines in the mass media. Other channels communicate nonverbal messages. For example, when DeVon goes to apply for a job, she uses several nonverbal signals to send out a positive message: a firm handshake (touch), appropriate clothing (sight), and respectful voice (sound). The senses are the channels through which she is sending a message.

Feedback. **Feedback** is the response of the receiver-senders to each other. You tell me a joke and I smile. That's feedback. You make a comment about the weather and I make another one. More feedback.

Strategic flexibility (SF) is an important aspect of jointly created messages. The ability to change messages in ways that will increase your chances of obtaining your desired result is exactly what SF is all about, and the need to change underscores the importance of SF in communication. People are infinitely varied in their individual traits, and even though you think you have created a message with common symbols and referents, it may not be true. Using SF, you can adapt, change, adjust, correct, or do whatever is needed to get the result you wish.

Feedback is vital to communication because it lets the participants see whether ideas and feelings have been shared in the way they were intended. For example, when Deletha and Jordan decide to meet on the corner of 45th and Broadway in New York City, it would be good feedback for one of them to ask, "Which corner?" since the four corners at that particular intersection are among the busiest and most crowded in the city.

Sender-receivers who meet face-to-face have the greatest opportunity for feedback, especially if there are no distractions—or little noise. But, often in these situations a limited amount of feedback occurs because rather than being sensitive to the feedback, communicators are busy planning what they are going to say next. **Sensory acuity** means paying attention to all elements in the communication environment. Are you paying attention to what others are saying? Are you aware of how they are saying it? Do their nonverbal messages support or contradict their verbal messages? Are you gaining or losing rapport with the other person? Is your communication bringing you closer to achieving your objective? Are you aware of distractions or noise that can derail your communication? You begin to notice at once the contribution that sensory acuity can play in all six steps of SF (discussed later in this chapter).

Noise. **Noise** is interference that keeps a message from being understood or accurately interpreted. Noise occurs between the sender-receivers, and it comes in three forms: external, internal, and semantic.

External noise comes from the environment and keeps the message from being heard or understood. Your heart-to-heart talk with your roommate can be interrupted by a group of people yelling in the hall, a helicopter passing overhead, or a weed wacker outside the window. External noise does not always come from sound. You could be standing and talking to someone in the hot sun and become so uncomfortable that you can't concentrate. Conversation might also falter at a picnic when you discover you are sitting on an anthill and ants are crawling all over your blanket.

Internal noise occurs in the minds of the sender-receivers when their thoughts or feelings are focused on something other than the communication at hand. A student doesn't hear the lecture because he is thinking about lunch; a wife can't pay attention to her husband because she is upset by a problem at the office. Internal noise may also stem from beliefs or prejudices. Doug, for example, doesn't believe that women should be managers, so when his female boss asks him to do something, he often misses part of her message.

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Semantic noise is caused by people's emotional reactions to words. Many people tune out a speaker who uses profanity because the words are offensive to them. Others have negative reactions to people who make ethnic or sexist remarks. Semantic noise, like external noise and internal noise, can interfere with all or part of the message.

Setting. The **setting** is the environment in which the communication occurs. Settings can have a significant influence on communication. Formal settings lend themselves to formal presentations. An auditorium, for example, is good for giving speeches and presentations but not very good for conversation. If people want to converse on a more intimate basis, they will be better off in a smaller, more comfortable room where they can sit facing each other.

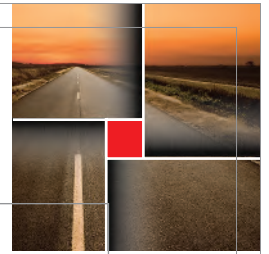
In many situations the communication will change when the setting changes. For example, in the town where one of your authors lives there was an ice cream stand just outside the city limits. People parked in front, got out of their cars, and walked up to a window to order their ice cream. On warm evenings, the place attracted many of the area's teenagers. After years of great success, the owner retired and sold the stand. The new owners decided to enclose it and make it more restaurantlike. You still had to order at the window, but because of the new addition at the front of the building, no one could see you anymore. Once you had your ice cream, you could take it to your car or eat it in the restaurant at one of the tables.

The new restaurant was certainly comfortable. You no longer had to stand in the rain, the place was open year-round, and you could sit down at a table and have dinner. However, comfort wasn't the issue: Every teenager deserted the place and headed for the Dairy Queen down the road. Why? So that they could be seen. For them, eating ice cream was secondary to participating in the social ritual of interacting with or being seen by their peers. In other words, the setting was an important part of their communication.

Setting often shows who has power in a relationship. The question "Your place or mine?" implies an equal relationship. However, when the dean asks a faculty member to come to her office, the dean has more power than the faculty member. When a couple meet to work out a divorce agreement, they meet in a lawyer's office, a place that provides a somewhat neutral setting.



Setting can have a significant influence on communication.



ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

In his book written specifically for college students, Patrick Combs writes in the opening two paragraphs of Chapter 1, “On the Road to Greatness”:

Think of the students around you. What personal characteristic do you think will make the difference between those who become great at something and those who never rise above mediocrity? Intelligence? Family background? Confidence?

The answer is surprising. Benjamin Bloom, a professor at the University of Chicago,

recently studied 120 outstanding athletes, artists, and scholars. He was looking for the common denominators of greatness and mastery. The study concluded that intelligence and family background were NOT important characteristics for achieving mastery of a desired skill. The only characteristic that the 120 outstanding people had in common was extraordinary drive.

Source: *Major in Success: Make College Easier, Fire Up Your Dreams, and Get a Very Cool Job* (p. 3), by Patrick Combs, 2003, Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

The arrangement of furniture in a setting can also affect the communication that takes place. For example, at one college, the library was one of the noisiest places on campus. Changing the furniture solved the problem. Instead of having sofas and chairs arranged so that students could sit and talk, the library used study desks—thus creating a quiet place to concentrate.

All communication is made up of sender-receivers, messages, channels, feedback, noise, and setting. Every time people communicate, these elements are somewhat different. They are not the only factors that influence communication, however. Communication is also influenced by what you bring to it. That is the subject of our next section.

Communication is a Transaction

A communication transaction involves not only the physical act of communicating but also a psychological act: Impressions are being formed in the minds of the people who are communicating.¹⁰ What people think and know about one another directly affects their communication.

The Three Principles of Transactional Communication

Communication as a transaction—**transactional communication**—involves three important principles. First, people engaged in communication are sending messages continuously and simultaneously. Second, communication events have a past, present, and future. Third, participants in communication play certain roles. Let’s consider each of these principles in turn.

Participation Is Continuous and Simultaneous. Whether or not you are actually talking in a communication situation, you are actively involved in sending and receiving messages. Let’s say you are lost, walking in a big city that is not familiar to you. You show others you are confused when you hesitate, look around you, or pull out a map. When you realize you have to ask for directions, you look for someone who might help you. You dismiss two people because they look as if they’re in a hurry; you don’t ask another one because she looks as though she might be lost too. Finally you see a person who looks helpful and you ask for information. As you listen, you give feedback, through both words and body language, as to whether you understand.

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REALITY CHECK

We have defined communication as a transaction, and we have discussed the three main principles involved. Does this make sense? Does it appear logical? Do the facts you know support this? Take any communication situation that you have been part of recently. Are each of the main principles involved? What implications does this have for future communication situations? That is, when you know communication involves more than just a physical act—that a psychological act is involved as well—what might you think, act, or do differently? How might this help you communicate more effectively?

As this person talks, you think about how long it will take to walk to your destination, you make note of what landmarks to look for, and you may even create a visual image of what you will see when you get there. You are participating continuously and simultaneously in a communication that is quite complicated.

All Communications Have a Past, a Present, and a Future. You respond to every situation from your own experiences, your own moods, and your own expectations. Such factors complicate the communication situation. When you know someone well, you can make predictions about what to do in the future on the basis of what you know about the past. For example, without having to ask him, Lee knows that his friend Jason will not be willing to try the new Indian restaurant in town. Lee has been out to eat with Jason many times, and Jason always eats the same kind of food, burgers and fries. Lee also knows that Jason doesn't like changes of any kind, so he knows better than to suggest that they go out of town for a concert because he knows that Jason will respond that they should wait until the group comes to their town.

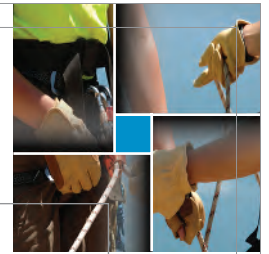
Even when you are meeting someone for the first time, you respond to that person on the basis of your experience. You might respond to physical traits (short, tall, bearded, bald), to occupation (accountant, gym teacher), or even to a name (remember how a boy named Eugene always tormented you and you've mistrusted all Eugenes ever since?). Any of these things you call up from your past might influence how you respond to someone—at least at the beginning.

The future also influences communication. If you want a relationship to continue, you will say and do things in the present to make sure it does ("Thanks for dinner. I always enjoy your cooking"). If you think you will never see a person again, or if you want to limit the nature of your interactions, this also might affect your communication. You might be more businesslike and thus leave the personal aspects of your life out of the communication.

All Communicators Play Roles. Roles are parts you play or ways you behave with others. Defined by society and affected by individual relationships, roles control everything from word choice to body language. For example, one of the roles you play is that of student. Your teachers may consider you to be bright and serious; your peers, who see you in the same role, may think you are too serious. Outside the classroom you play other roles. Your parents might see you as a considerate daughter or son; your best friend might see the fun-loving side of you; and your boss might see you as hardworking and dependable.

Roles do not always stay the same in a relationship. They vary with others' moods or with one's own, with the setting and the noise factor. Communication changes to meet the needs of each of your relationships and situations. For example, even though Eduardo and Heidi have been married for 10 years and have three children, they still try to reserve Saturday night for a romantic date. While they are out, they try not to talk about children and family issues. Instead, they focus on each other and what the other is thinking and feeling. On Sunday morning, their roles change. Eduardo fixes breakfast while Heidi gets the children ready to go to church. Now their roles are children and family centered.

The roles you play—whether established by individual relationships or by society—may be perceived differently by different people. These perceptions affect the communication that results. For example, Tom, in his role of youth director, is well organized and maintains tight control over the activities he directs. The kids who play the games he coaches know they have to behave or they'll be in big trouble. Therefore they speak



WORKING
TOGETHER

Working with classmates as a group, create a model of communication as a transaction. Drawing on everything that each person has read and all the information received in class, the group is to develop a complete model of communication as a transaction by following each of these steps:

Step 1: Talk through the process of communication as a transaction, making certain each group member contributes his or her thinking.

Step 2: Create a list of all the elements that need to be included in a model of communication as a transaction. Remember to include,

as well, any important subpoints to the major principles.

Step 3: Have each member of the group create the same visual representation of the model in his or her own notebook. Each aspect of the model should be entered simultaneously, only when it is agreed upon by all members.

Step 4: One member of the group should explain the group's model to the entire class.

If there is time before this group exercise is complete, discuss as a group the question, "Why are visual representations effective tools for explaining a theory, idea, or process?"

to him in a respectful voice and stay quiet when they're supposed to. To some kids, however, Tom's discipline seems rigid and inflexible. These kids avoid the youth center; they choose not to communicate with him at all.

Types of Communication

As you can see in Figure 1-2, there are different kinds of communication. The figure shows four of the kinds most often used: intrapersonal, interpersonal, small-group, and public communication. In this section we will also discuss intercultural and computer-mediated communication.

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication is language use and/or thought that occurs within you, the communicator. It involves your active internal involvement in the symbolic processing of messages. You become your own sender and receiver and provide feedback to yourself in an ongoing internal process (see Figure 1-3). It occurs in your mind in a communication model that contains a sender, receiver, and feedback loop.

Intrapersonal communication can encompass daydreaming, talking to oneself, and reading aloud. Speaking and hearing what one thinks and reads can increase concentration and retention. Using gestures while thinking can assist concentration, retention, and problem solving as well. Another aspect of intrapersonal communication that has the potential of increasing self-understanding and concentration is writing one's thoughts and observations. Some people use such writing to assist them in ordering their thoughts and producing a record that can be used at a later time.

Interpersonal Communication

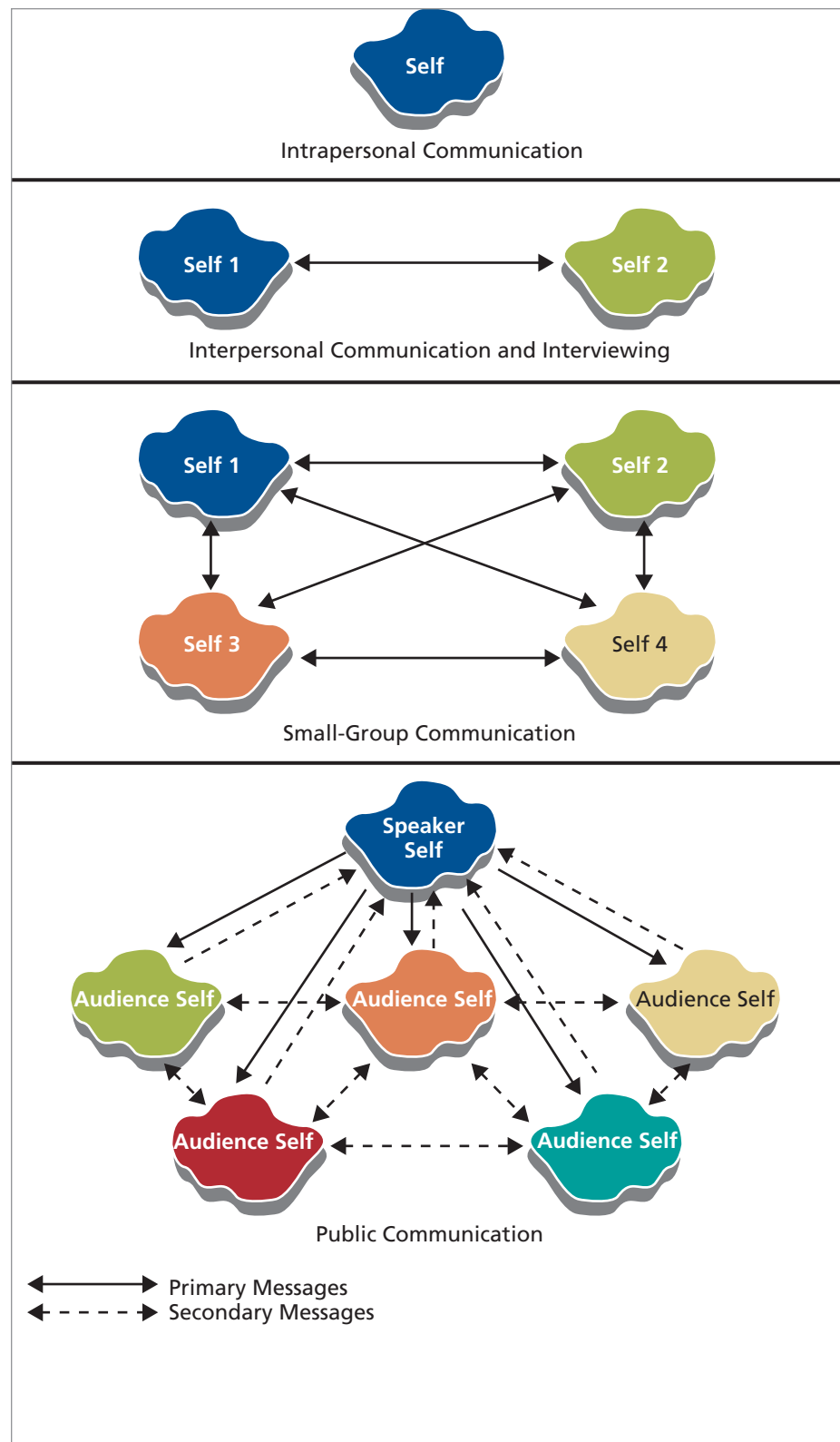
Interpersonal communication occurs when you communicate on a one-to-one basis—usually in an informal, unstructured setting. This kind of communication occurs mostly between two people, though it may include more than two.

Interpersonal communication uses all the elements of the communication process. In a conversation between friends, for example, each brings his or her background and

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Figure 1-2

Types of Communication



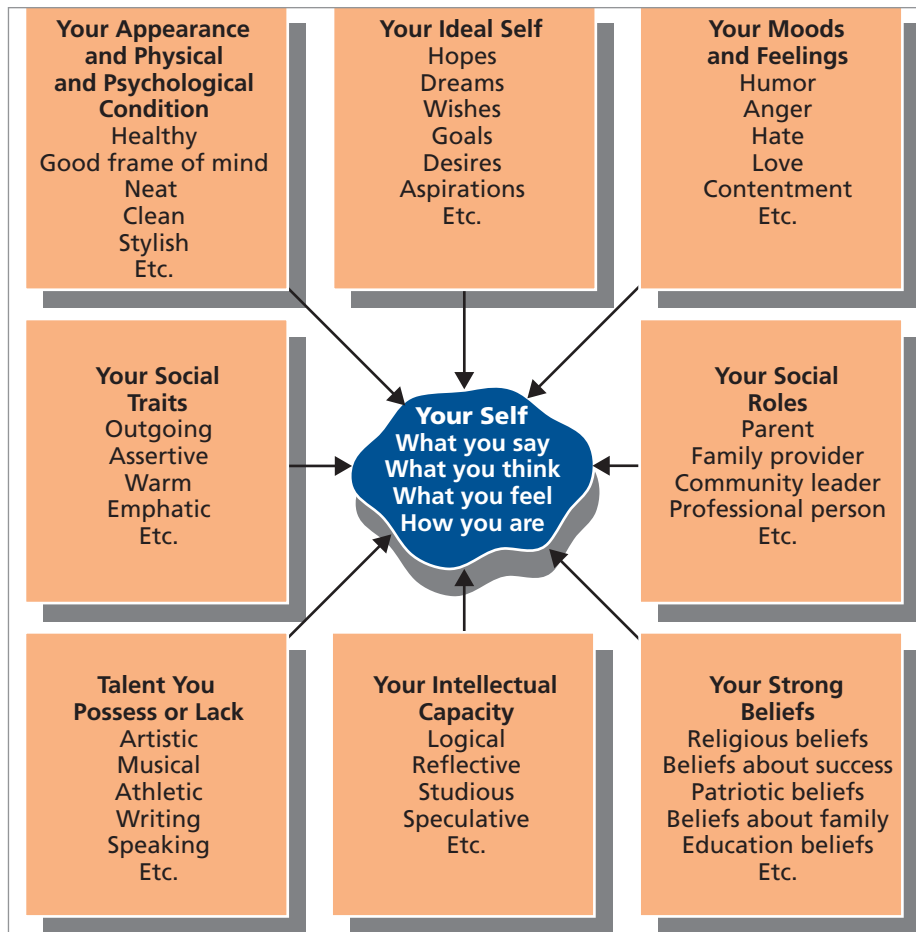


Figure 1-3

Intrapersonal Communication

experience to the conversation. During the conversation each functions as a sender-receiver: Their messages consist of both verbal and nonverbal symbols. The channels they use the most are sight and sound. Because interpersonal communication is between two (or a few) people, it offers the greatest opportunity for feedback. Internal noise is likely to be minimal because each person can see whether the other is distracted. The persons involved in the conversation have many chances to check that the message is being perceived correctly. People who want to engage in interpersonal communication usually look for informal and comfortable settings.

Small-Group Communication

Small-group communication occurs when a small number of people meet to solve a problem. The group must be small enough so that each member has a chance to interact with all the other members.

Because small groups are made up of several sender-receivers, the communication process is more complicated than in interpersonal communication. With so many more people sending messages, there are more chances for confusion. Messages are also more structured in small groups because the group is meeting for a specific purpose. Small groups use the same channels as are used in interpersonal communication,

however, and there is also a good deal of opportunity for feedback. In keeping with their problem-solving nature, small groups usually meet in a more formal setting than people involved in interpersonal communication.

Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is defined as “a wide range of technologies that facilitate both human communication and the interactive sharing of information through computer networks, including e-mail, discussion group, newsgroups, chat, instant messages, and Web pages.”¹¹ Using this definition alone, CMC is strictly about the variety of channels that serve as conduits for conveying messages and feedback between senders and receivers. However, when CMC is conjoined with digital literacy—“the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computer”—then the combination of CMC and digital literacy fits neatly into the communication model presented earlier in this chapter with few changes except for the type of CMC technology used.¹²

The most important aspects of CMC over face-to-face communication (FtFC) include the fact that CMC occurs over a single channel, it is asynchronous (the time and place for communication is at the discretion of the individual), and the mode of communication can support thought-out prose. CMC also exhibits social leveling (it brings all people, of whatever status they hold in society, to a near-equal footing or level) as the cues to social status are removed. There are a wide variety of reasons—personal, interpersonal, and experimental—why you would choose CMC over FtFC.

Public Communication

In **public communication** the sender-receiver (the speaker) sends a message (the speech) to an audience. The speaker usually delivers a highly structured message, using the same channels as in interpersonal and small-group communication. In public communication, however, the channels are more exaggerated than in interpersonal communication. The voice is louder and the gestures are more expansive because the audience is bigger. The speaker might use additional visual channels, such as slides or the computer program PowerPoint. Generally, the opportunity for verbal feedback in public communication is limited. The audience members may have a chance to ask questions at the end of the speech, but usually they are not free to address the speaker during the speech. However, they can send nonverbal feedback. If they like what the speaker is saying, they may interrupt the speech with applause. If they dislike it, they may fidget a lot or simply stop paying attention. In most public communication, the setting is formal.

Intercultural Communication

There are cultural and technological forces that are now reshaping the world. It is communication skills—whether of senders or receivers—that determine how well individuals, organizations, industries, and even nations do in acquiring and applying knowledge, thus broadening their chances for success in this information-driven world. The better you are at negotiating the cultural issues in communication, the greater the competitive edge you gain in a global society.

When we talk about **culture**, we mean “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors (which can include a common history,

geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion).¹³ Cultures could include the Amish or Pennsylvania Dutch, groups with a common history. Cultures could include the Japanese or Taiwanese, groups with a common geographic location. Cultures also could include those who speak the French or Islamic languages.

By **co-culture**, we mean people who are part of a larger culture but also belong to a smaller group that has some different values, attitudes, or beliefs. For example, co-cultures could include the socially elite, those in the top 1 percent income bracket, the Baptists, Catholics, Unitarian-Universalists, or Jews—all part of the larger U.S. culture, yet smaller groups possessing some different values, attitudes, and beliefs. African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans make up large co-cultures within the U.S. culture. Within the U.S. culture are co-cultures made up of gay and lesbian people, older people, and people with physical disabilities.

To help people understand each other better, scholars, teachers, and worldwide business leaders have developed the field of **intercultural communication**—the communication that occurs whenever two or more people from different cultures interact. This field studies how differences between people affect their perceptions of the world and, thus, their communication. Of course, there is no way to understand all cultures and co-cultures. There are, however, certain characteristics that occur again and again, and the study of intercultural communication rests on these characteristics.

Why should you be concerned about intercultural communication? What if your job involved coordinating international student services and exchange programs at your university or college campus? What if you were the manager of a biotech company responsible for leading a diverse team of scientists doing innovative research? What if you were a member of a campus group interested in gathering the support of diverse groups on campus to extend an invitation to a controversial speaker? In each case, to overlook the different cultural backgrounds of those receivers might mean your communication would be less constructive and might result in misunderstandings and breakdowns as well. There are inherent cultural issues associated with any form of communication.



Every year the United States becomes more culturally diverse.

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Although people throughout the world have many characteristics in common, there are also many differences. Thus, if people from different cultural or co-cultural groups want to communicate, they must be aware that they may have different systems of knowledge, values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors. For example, crossing your legs in the United States reveals a relaxed attitude, but in Korea it is a social faux pas. In West Africa, the comment “You’ve put on weight” means you look healthy and prosperous and is a great compliment; in America it is an insult. In Japan, they put business cards in safe places and handle them with great care, because they view them as an extension of the person; in America they are viewed as a business formality and convenience, and Americans are quick to put them away, a behavior insulting to the Japanese.¹⁴ Understanding differences and then utilizing them in the preparation, development, and presentation of your ideas can only help you become a more effective communicator.

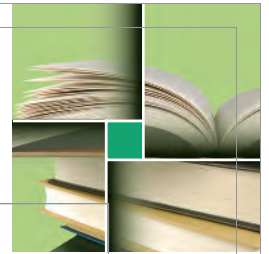
Communication Competence

What is competent communication? It is the ability to communicate in a personally effective and socially appropriate manner. In their book, *Interpersonal Communication Competence*, Spitzberg and Cupach outlined three components: (1) knowledge, (2) skill, and (3) motivation. First, communicators must recognize what communication practice is appropriate. Second, they must have the ability to perform that practice; and third, they must want to communicate in an effective and appropriate manner.¹⁵

What is effective and appropriate? It varies according to the situation. However, if communicators display the following elements, regardless of the situation, it is more likely their communication will be considered competent. The first element is *respect*, which suggests communicators must be courteous, polite, and civil. The second element is *empathy*, which means identifying with, sharing the feelings of, or being on the same wavelength as the other person or persons. *Tolerance* is the third element, and this means communicators must be open minded, understanding, and patient. Given differences between people and the potential for misunderstanding, communicators must recognize that ambiguity and error are inherent, automatic parts of almost any communication. Along with tolerance, the fourth element is *flexibility*. Communicators must be willing to adjust and compromise. The fifth element is *interaction management*, and this includes how they participate or involve themselves in any communication situation: their posture, comfort, appropriate role, and willingness to self-disclose.

Strategic Flexibility (SF)

Strategic flexibility (SF) means expanding your communication repertoire (your collection or stock of communication behaviors that can readily be brought into use) to enable you to use the best skill or behavior available for a particular situation. Let’s say you’re caught in an unfamiliar situation, but you realize that if you can communicate your position effectively, you will free yourself from this uncomfortable position. You suddenly need all of the best skills and behaviors you can call upon. SF is a primary characteristic of successful people, a vital component of excellent relationships at work and at home, a trait of effective group leaders and participants, and the attribute of public speakers who can adapt to changing circumstances or unexpected occurrences.



CONSIDER
THIS

In her book *Letitia Baldrige's New Manners for New Times: A Complete Guide to Etiquette*, the author writes the following as the opening paragraph in a chapter titled "The Key to Good Communication: More Than Electronics":

You can spend your life pressing keys, buttons, and whistles to get your thoughts across electronically, but the ability to use language, to communicate with people in

times of joy and sorrow, and to persuade, soothe, enchant, or calm another person, is a great gift. It's also an art. We all can become accomplished in this art, if we just make ourselves aware of how important it is to both our success and happiness.

Source: *Letitia Baldrige's New Manners for New Times: A Complete Guide to Etiquette* (p. 593), by Letitia Baldrige, 2003, New York: Scribner's.

People who possess SF are happier and more fulfilled because they are not only aware of their own communication skills and deficits, but also they can bring to bear on any situation they encounter a broad range of potentially valuable behaviors. Going into a new situation, they don't always know exactly what will be required, but they realize that their own background, experience, and repertoire will be sufficient to not just meet the new circumstances but to succeed in them as well. The knowledge that SF provides yields confidence and security, and helps reduce any unnecessary and unwanted fear.

Those without SF are those who approach every situation with their own limited resources. Often, this results in knee-jerk responses that depend on nothing more than the same set of behaviors used to approach any and every situation that confronts them. The problem with this approach is that there is no single way to behave in the world. The world is too complex; problems are too complicated; circumstances are too intricate and involved. It's a little like the leader who applies exactly the same set of solutions to every problem, saying, "You may not like my solutions, but at least you know exactly where I stand." This is discomfoting information simply because it shows no recognition of SF. All problems require different sets of solutions that result from study, thought, and the serious application of a wide variety of potential behaviors.

The power of the SF concept is in its application. The six steps of SF make this possible. These steps will allow you to take SF into the world and apply it to the real-life circumstances you encounter daily:

1. **Anticipate** = Think about potential situations and the needs and requirements likely to arise because of them. The key to anticipation is forecasting. Remember Louis Pasteur's famous dictum: "Chance favors only the prepared mind."
2. **Assess** = Take stock of the factors, elements, and conditions of the situations in which you find yourself. The key to assessment is alertness.
3. **Evaluate** = Determine the value and worth of the factors, elements, and conditions to all those involved and how they bear on your own skills and abilities. The key to evaluation is accuracy.
4. **Select** = Carefully select from your repertoire of available skills and behaviors those likely to have the greatest impact on the current (and future) situations. Here, one must also predict and forecast the potential effects of the skills and behaviors that will be used. The key to the selection process is appropriateness.

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5. **Apply** = Now, with care, concern, and attention to all the factors that are likely to be affected—including any ethical considerations that may be appropriate—apply the skills and behaviors you have selected. The key to application is relevance.
6. **Reassess and reevaluate** = For every action taken, there is likely to be feedback as well as actions taken by others as a direct result of those taken by you. There will be other effects as well—some immediate that can be observed, some long-range that can only be surmised and anticipated. Reassessment and reevaluation may result in the application of further skills and behaviors needed to clarify, extend, continue, or even terminate the situation. The key to reassessment and reevaluation is accurate, careful observation.

Creativity

Another factor that must be mentioned within the umbrella of SF is the notion of **creativity**—the capacity to synthesize vast amounts of information and wrestle with complex problems. Creativity is not a rare or special power, and it relates directly to communication because every time you open your mouth, the unique combination of words emitted is a creative extension of who you are. Creativity requires this synthetic ability—this capacity to draw together and make sense of vast amounts of information. The more information you have (from whatever sources you can draw upon, including this instructor, this course, and this textbook), the more you have to bring to or bear upon your noticing, remembering, seeing, speaking, hearing, and understanding language and nonverbal communication. Not only are these processes important—a definite understatement—but they also allow you to search and transform the spaces on this earth you occupy. Your creativity frees you to generate possibilities, which of course is the very foundation of SF.

So, what you have is a complementary set of processes that are interwoven and mutually contributing: Creativity offers some of the creative force that drives successful SF, and SF provides the opportunities when you can apply your best creative thinking to a task.

To live, then, is to communicate. To communicate effectively is to enjoy life more fully. Consider this textbook, then, a *guide* for empowering effective communicators—for encouraging both SF and creativity. On the premise that increased knowledge helps you do things better, let's begin with a discussion of how communication works.

Communicating Effectively

Once you understand the process of communication, you can begin to understand why communication does or doesn't work. In an ideal communication situation the message is perceived in the way it was intended. But when messages don't work, it is useful to ask these questions: Was there a problem with the message? Was the best channel used? Did noise occur? Knowing the right questions to ask is essential to building skills in communication.

Most of us already have considerable communication skills. You have been sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal signals all your life. Nevertheless, you have probably had times when you have not communicated as effectively as you should. If you got a lower grade on a paper than you expected, you unintentionally hurt somebody's feelings, or if the instructor did not understand a question you asked in class, you are not communicating as effectively as you could.

Where to Begin

The information about communication is so vast that most of us could spend a lifetime studying the subject and not learn even a fraction of what there is to know. However, as you begin your study of communication, the following five questions are a good starting point.

Which Communication Skills Am I Most Likely to Need? Find out what communication skills are important to you. What do you intend to do in your life? What kind of work do you expect to do? What communication skills are required in this work? Which of these skills do you already have? Which ones need improvement? Which ones do you need to acquire?

For example, a career in business requires almost every communication skill. You need interpersonal skills to get along with the people you work with, intercultural communication skills if you are going to work with people from other countries, and public-speaking skills for making presentations. Although you may use some communication skills more than others, at one time or another you are going to need every one we have discussed in this chapter.

Which Communication Skills Am I Most Lacking? Which kinds of communication are most difficult for you? Intrapersonal? Interpersonal? Intercultural? Small group? Public speaking? What are the symptoms of difficulties in these areas? What problems do you have to overcome before you can perform effectively?

Many people would prefer to avoid, rather than work in, the area that gives them the most trouble. For example, if you are anxious about public speaking, you might feel inclined to avoid any circumstance where you have to give a speech. A better approach, however, would be to get over this fear: You'll be able to offer a wedding toast, give a presentation at a meeting, consider many more job possibilities, and so forth. If you can conquer fear by plunging in and practicing the thing that gives you the most trouble, you will expand the possibilities in your life.

How Can I Get Communication Practice? Are there situations, other than class, where you can practice communication skills that will be useful to you? Are there groups and organizations you can join that will help you develop these skills? It's always a good idea to take what you have learned in class and try it out on the world. Using new skills helps to develop and refine them.

Where Can I Get Help? What people do you know who will help you develop communication skills and give you feedback on how you are doing? Are there people you can ask who will give you support when you are trying something new and threatening? Are you willing to ask them to support you? You can usually count on this kind of support from your friends. Don't you have a friend who would be willing to listen to one of your speeches and tell you whether it works and how you might improve it? Also, don't forget your instructors. Many of them sit in their offices during office hours hoping that students will drop by.

What Timetable Should I Set? Have you set a realistic timetable for improvement? Knowing that it is difficult to learn new skills or break bad habits, are you willing to give yourself enough time? Your speech communication class is going to last for a semester or a quarter, and although you will be making steady progress in your interpersonal communication and public-speaking skills, change will not happen overnight. The act of communicating—whether with a single person or a classroom audience—takes time and effort. The most realistic timetable is one in which you say, "I'm going to keep working at this until I succeed."

Ethical Communication

Ethical communication, a component of each of the six types of communication, is communication that is honest, fair, and considerate of others' rights. Communication is honest when communicators tell the truth; it is fair and considerate when they consider listeners' feelings. Most people reading this believe that truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason are essential to the integrity of communication, just as it is written in the National Communication Association's (NCA's) Credo for Ethical Communication.¹⁶

The problem, of course, is neither with what you know to be true nor with what you want to have happen. The problem occurs as you are faced with complex demands (too much being asked of you), limited resources (like time), or the easy access to alternatives to ethical behavior (being handed an exam, paper, or speech)—or what is often likely, the combination of some or all of these. There is always the very human temptation to try to make life easier by nullifying some of your fundamental ethical responsibilities. That, of course, is when your true ethics are revealed.

You have undoubtedly heard numerous excuses for unethical conduct. The most often may be "I didn't know that was considered unethical." Others include "Everyone does it," "I'm sorry, I just didn't have the time [to be ethical]," "What harm is there in it?" "I've been sick," "I've never done it before," "You know, I'm very busy." It is not surprising that those who engage in unethical behavior have quick and easy excuses for what they do. No excuse, of course, is good enough to justify truly unethical conduct.

Why should you be concerned about ethical communication? It is clearly stated in the NCA's Credo: "Unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live."¹⁷ As the Credo states in its opening paragraph, ethical communication is "fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media. Ethical communication enhances human worth and respect for self and others."¹⁸

"Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate," the Credo states; thus, it is important to establish a basic code of ethics as you begin a course in speech communication. As you read the following principles of ethical communication, notice the two ethical communication themes of caring and responsibility. These seven principles have been paraphrased from the Credo:

- Protect freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance for dissent.
- Strive to understand and respect others' communications before evaluating and responding to their messages.
- Help promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that protect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.
- Condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortions, intolerance, intimidation, coercion, hatred, or violence.
- Commit yourself to the courageous expression of your personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.
- Accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences of your own communication, and expect the same of others.
- Avoid plagiarism—presentation of the work of another person in such a way as to give the impression that the other's work is your own, whether it be:
 - the verbatim use of part of a book or article without using quotation marks and without citing the original source.

- paraphrasing another's words without noting this is a paraphrase essentially taken from another source.
- using another person's illustrative material without citing the source and, thus, giving credit where credit is due.

The basic idea in avoiding plagiarism is simply to give credit when using someone else's ideas. If you have any doubts, give the credit—using a footnote or a reference *during* (as part of) the communication.¹⁹

If you conduct yourself as an ethical person in your dealings with family, friends, and others, refraining from activities that may be construed as unethical—whether they are governed by written or unwritten codes of personal conduct, rules, or regulations—and if you continue your wholehearted commitment to being a credible, quality person who demonstrates care, consideration, and dedication to values and morals, you will promote ethical thinking and living and be an example to others.

The Internet And the Communication Process

Seventy-five percent of the U.S. population has access to the Internet. It has displaced television watching and a range of other activities, including socializing with friends and even sleeping.²⁰ Any factor that does that must be considered significant.²¹

“The Internet is not about technology, it is not about information, it is about communication—people talking with each other, and people exchanging e-mail. . . . The Internet is mass participation in fully bi-directional, uncensored mass communication. Communication is the basis, the foundation. . . . The Internet is a community of chronic communicators.”²²

The Internet can be related to the communication model; however, it contains many different configurations. For example, **synchronous communication** means talk that occurs at the same time with no time delay. With respect to senders and receivers, it could be one-to-one, one-to-a-few, one-to-many, or even many-to-one. The best examples of synchronous communication are instant messaging (**IM**) and chat rooms. **Asynchronous communication** does not occur at the same time, such as e-mail messages or when you seek information from Web sites. Usenet, electronic bulletin boards, and Listservers are asynchronous. Most of the exchanges between people on the Internet consist of asynchronous communication. The words *synchronous* and *asynchronous* help categorize Internet communication, but also reveal some of the problems in trying to categorize it.

The fact that the Internet is two-way is important. Media such as radio, television, and newspapers are one-way, with restricted access, meaning that not everyone owns a radio station, television station, or newspaper with which to communicate his or her ideas. But on the Internet you can communicate with many senders, and they with you.

An Internet model of communication must have an active receiver who emits information, interacts with—or has the potential of interacting with—the sender or Web site, and selects his or her own information and decodes it according to personal interests.

Messages can be as simple as conversations between two people, but they can also be traditional journalistic news stories created by a reporter or editor, stories placed on blogs by people with unknown or uncertain credentials, stories created over a long period by many people, or outdated stories that have been stored on a Web site and never updated since their creation years ago—the latter is called *Web rot*.

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The Internet is represented in the communication model by the word *channel*—the route a message travels or the means it uses to reach sender-receivers. Many differences between the channels of communication in face-to-face communication (FtFC) and those over the Internet are obvious, but the differences in the social cues to communication—especially the social leveling and the differences in turn taking—are important. The computer could easily be labeled “the great leveler” because many of the cues to social status are removed. It is precisely because of this that source validation for information gained from the Internet becomes so important. *Anyone can be publisher on the Internet.*

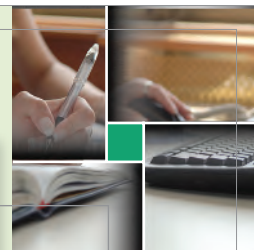
Another aspect of leveling, too, is that often in FtFC the assertive, highly confident individual may have an edge with respect to credibility or gaining an audience for his or her ideas—even, perhaps, at having greater opportunities (turns) for talking. On the Internet, assertiveness traits are often not detected, so shy, nonassertive individuals have an equal opportunity for self-expression and for initiating and taking turns.

In one study that compared the Internet and FtFC, Lisa Flaherty, Kevin Pearce, and Rebecca Rubin found that use of the Internet as a communication channel is not perceived by users as a functional alternative to FtFC. “The FtF channel,” they found, “has more social presence than the Internet; the possibility of immediate feedback with FtF interaction conveys greater personal closeness.”²³

One final thought about a similarity between FtFC and the communication that takes place on the Internet. On the Internet, facial expression, eye contact, gestures, and body movement are missing, but the mind plays a role in completing the interpersonal picture. That is, we mentally supply the vocal tone and emphasis because of what we know of others’ uses of words, phrases, and expressions.

The Internet’s effect on communication has four characteristics that make it different from normal FtFC. The first is **globalization**—there are no limitations because of borders. The second is **temporality**—there are no limitations because of time. The third is **access to roles**. Whoever has the technical capacity to receive messages with a computer can also send them. The fourth characteristic is **content openness**. There are no limitations on content. Within the obvious boundaries of a computer’s capabilities, content can take on any form.

These characteristics make audiences more independent of traditional media sources, but they involve a loss of control over source reliability, selection of information, and control over verification. It increases risks because of the loss of traditional journalistic controls—or any controls—over the information market, and, as a result, it raises the responsibility for communicators using the Internet to be both wise consumers and ethical users.



ASSESS YOURSELF

Do You Have Strategic Flexibility?

For each question circle the numerical score that best represents your performance, skill, or ability using the following scale; 7 = Outstanding; 6 = Excellent; 5 = Very good; 4 = Average (good); 3 = Fair; 2 = Poor; 1 = Minimal ability; 0 = No ability demonstrated.

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Do you try to anticipate situations—think about them <i>before</i> they occur—to prepare yourself mentally (and physically) for what is likely to happen? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2. Do you generally look at new situations with an eye toward determining if communication will be needed or required by you? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3. From your assessment of a situation, is it easy for you to determine <i>when</i> communication is necessary? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4. Do you find it easy to know—once engaged in communication—what the purpose of the communication is? What people hope to accomplish? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 5. When you are with a group of people, can you—from simple, preliminary observations—determine what their needs and assumptions are? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 6. When you are with a group of people, do you automatically know what their relationship is to you? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 7. Do you also know what your relationship to this group of people is? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 8. Are you able to anticipate how an audience would use any communication you shared with them? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 9. When you are talking with another person or other people, are you able to determine—in advance—what effect your communication <i>should</i> have on them? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 10. Can you tell from preliminary assessments what kind of communication might be appropriate in particular situations? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 11. Do you feel you have the breadth of knowledge, experience, and skills to more than effectively meet most of the communication-related situations you encounter? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 12. Do you feel comfortable when you encounter a situation where you know you will have to communicate? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 13. Do you feel confident, secure, and free of nervousness when facing communication situations? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 14. When you have to communicate with others, do you feel as if the behaviors and skills you put into use are the same ones you always use? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 15. When you communicate, do you feel that you use some of the techniques, styles, or behaviors of the other gender? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 16. Do you believe there is a possibility of and value for expanding your range of communication skills and behaviors? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

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Summary

Everyone needs effective communication skills. They will help you feel more confident about yourself, more comfortable with others' perceptions of you, greater ease in reasoning with others, better at using language, and improvement in your critical thinking skills. Speech communication is the ultimate people-oriented discipline, fundamental to effective leadership, and a key to professional success.

Communication is any process in which people, through the use of symbols, verbally and/or nonverbally, consciously or not consciously, intentionally or unintentionally, generate meanings (information, ideas, feelings, and perceptions) within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media. The elements of communication include senders-receivers, messages, channels, feedback, noise, and setting. The essence of communication is making meaning, and meaning is jointly created between sender and receiver.

Every communication is a transaction. Viewing communication as a transaction focuses on the people who are communicating, the changes that take place in them as they are communicating, and the psychological aspects of the event. It also implies that all participants are involved continuously and simultaneously; that communication events have a past, present, and future; and that the roles the participants play will affect the communication.

Six types of communication are discussed. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) refers to a wide range of technologies that facilitate both human communication and the interactive sharing of information through computer networks. Intercultural communication occurs whenever two or more people from different cultures interact. Intrapersonal communication is language use and/or thought that occurs within you, the communicator. Interpersonal communication is informal communication with one or more other persons. Small-group communication occurs when a small group of people get together to solve a problem. Public communication is giving a speech to an audience.

Communication competence is revealed when communicators, using any one of the six types of communication, communicate in a personally effective and socially appropriate manner. Effectiveness and appropriateness are likely when the following

five elements characterize your communication: respect, empathy, tolerance, flexibility, and interaction management. Interaction management includes a communicator's posture, comfort, appropriate role, and willingness to self-disclose.

Strategic flexibility (SF) means expanding your communication repertoire to enable you to use the best skill or behavior available for a particular situation. The six steps of SF are anticipate, assess, evaluate, select, apply, and reassess and reevaluate.

Creativity is the capacity to synthesize vast amounts of information and wrestle with complex problems. Your creativity frees you to generate possibilities, which of course is the very foundation of SF.

Communication can be improved if you concentrate on several important areas. Find out what communication skills are important to you. Discover the kinds of communication that are most difficult for you and work to improve them. Seek out people who will help you develop these skills and give you support and feedback, and set a realistic timetable for improvement.

Ethical communication, a component of each of the six types of communication, lies at the core of strategic flexibility and should be an important aspect of any program of improvement. Ethical communication is communication that is honest, fair, and considerate of others' rights. Underlying the seven principles of ethical conduct paraphrased from the National Communication Association's Credo are the themes of caring and responsibility. Proper ethical conduct often grows out of an individual's personal commitment to live an ethical life.

The Internet is about communication—people exchanging messages. It can be related to the communication model but has many different configurations when the sender-message-receiver features are examined. It is represented in the communication model by the word *channel*, but there are many differences between the channels of communication in face-to-face communication (FtFC) and those on the Internet. Major differences include both social leveling and the differences in turn taking. Four characteristics make the Internet different from FtFC: globalization, temporality, access to roles, and content openness. Internet users are considered ethical if they reflect competence,

integrity, responsibility, and respect for others' rights and diversity. There are questions to be used when faced with making ethical decisions online, and when evaluating what you read online, the best guideline is to be wary of how much you trust the source.

Key Terms and Concepts

Use the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/hybels9 to further your understanding of the following terms. www.mhhe.com/hybels9 >

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Abstract symbol •• | Evaluate •• | Select •• |
| Access to roles •• | External noise •• | Semantic noise •• |
| Anticipate •• | Feedback •• | Sensory acuity •• |
| Apply •• | Globalization •• | Sender-receivers •• |
| Assess •• | Intercultural communication •• | Setting •• |
| Asynchronous communication •• | Internal noise •• | Small-group communication •• |
| Channel •• | Interpersonal communication •• | Strategic flexibility (SF) •• |
| Co-culture •• | Intrapersonal communication •• | Symbol •• |
| Communication •• | Message •• | Synchronous communication •• |
| Computer-mediated communication (CMC) •• | Noise •• | Temporality •• |
| Concrete symbol •• | Nonverbal symbol •• | Transactional communication •• |
| Content openness •• | Public communication •• | Verbal symbol •• |
| Creativity •• | Reassess and reevaluate •• | |
| Culture •• | Roles •• | |
| Ethical communication •• | | |

Questions to Review

1. What are the most frequently cited factors important to aiding graduating college students both to obtain and sustain employment?
 2. What is the meaning of strategic flexibility (SF)?
 3. What are the six steps of SF, and what is the key to each step?
 4. What is the role of creativity in communication?
 5. Why is communication called a process?
 6. What is the significance in knowing that meaning is jointly created between sender and receiver?
 7. What are the differences between the symbols that make up communication messages?
 8. Why is communication called a transaction? What are the three principles of transactional communication?
 9. How do intrapersonal and interpersonal communication differ from each other?
 10. What is the difference between culture and co-culture?
 11. Why should you be concerned about intercultural communication?
 12. What are the principles of ethical communication, and what is likely to be the foundation for ethical conduct?
 13. What are the four characteristics that make Internet communication distinctive from face-to-face communication?
 14. What are the risks involved regarding Internet communication? www.mhhe.com/hybels9 >
- Go to the self-quizzes on the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/hybels9 to test your knowledge of the chapter concepts.

CHAPTER TWO

Self, Perception, and Communication

Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain the role of self and perception in communication.
- Describe self-concept and how to improve a weak or poor self-concept.
- Discuss the perceptual steps of selecting, organizing, and interpreting and how each step differs from the others.
- Explain perceptual filters and how they influence perceptions.
- Describe the different ways of adjusting to perceptual influences.





RAANI BENAZIR WAS A SHY 17-YEAR-OLD LIVING IN BANGLADESH (formerly known as East Pakistan). Raani lived in a large house with her parents and younger sister and brother. Although Raani attended private school because her father worked for the government, she knew her chances of attending an American university were slim because very few from her country ever did so and because she was not number one in her graduating class. Having heard of Raani's desire, a friend of her father's gave him a scholarship form for Raani to complete. Raani's computer skills and English fluency came to her aid, and she was accepted. In her first-year student orientation class, she met Cheryl Davis, another new student, who helped her understand U.S. customs, interpret others' behaviors, and clarify perceptions and observations.

Raani, experiencing her first time in the United States, was overwhelmed. Her shyness, being a female from a country where women generally occupy a secondary position (to men), and her newness to the university and to this country all created an environment that, in most cases, would produce a weakened self-concept, distorted perceptions, and hesitating (or ineffectual) communication. For Raani, however, it both challenged and motivated her. It was, after all, her dream, and she was determined to be the best she could be—to fulfill her dream and then some.

The Role of Self and Perception in Communicating Effectively and Strategic Flexibility

An obvious question when beginning a chapter titled "Self, Perception, and Communication" is "What does this have to do with communication?" Or, perhaps, "Why do I need to know this?" Both self and perception are foundations for effective communication. Your **self-concept** is how you think and feel about yourself. **Self-concept** and **perception** are so closely related that they are often difficult to separate. **Perception** is how you look at others and the world around you. Now, here's the connection: How you look at the world depends on what you think of yourself, and what you think of yourself will influence how you look at the world. Thus, your communication—the words and non-verbal cues you use when you talk with others—will be a direct and obvious result of both your self-concept and perceptions. As noted in Chapter 1, your communication is always changing because, in part, your self-concept and perceptions are always changing.

Realize that your self-concept can set limits on your behavioral possibilities. Because of your self-concept, you may consider yourself unlovable, irrational, inadequate, incompetent, worthless, or inferior. If you think of yourself as unlovable, this may cause you to believe you are ineligible for the love of another person. If you think of yourself as irrational, this may cause you to believe that you are ineligible to render logical, well-grounded judgments and decisions.

Another limitation imposed by your self-concept has to do with risk taking. Being who you take yourself to be, some action or experience becomes unthinkable. To take *that* action or have *that* experience would so violate who you are that, should you do it, you could no longer take yourself to be the same person. You would be forced to see yourself as someone different. Think of what it might take, for example, to leave a destructive relationship, defend your rights in an assertive and forceful manner, or take the initiative to lead a group in a dramatic new direction.

A third limitation imposed by your self-concept relates directly to perception, but because of its importance, needs to be restated. You will perceive the world in ways that are in keeping with your self-concept. For you, that will be “just the way the world is.” If you, for example, think of yourself as “world’s greatest failure,” then you might read anyone else’s positive comments about you as cases of misunderstanding or praise as ill-motivated, deceitful flattery. To have a self-concept, then, is not just to have a certain appraisal of yourself, it is to live in a certain world.

Imagine, for a moment, Raani’s situation. Undoubtedly, how she thinks and feels about herself is determined in part by the role and perception of women in Bangladesh, by the way she was raised by her parents, and by the perceptions and reactions of her friends and teachers. It will take her a while to understand the place that women hold in the United States and how she fits into those roles, the function of students at a university and how active they must be to impact their own education, and the perceptions and reactions of her new friends and instructors.

Because Raani has defined the differences as challenges, and has used her situation to motivate personal growth, development, and change, you can see how readily both her self-concept and perceptions will change and how her communication will change as well. Improvements are likely to be observed in her readiness to ask and answer questions, speak out on her observations and perceptions, and take a more active, assertive role in her relationships with others. If you could stand back and observe Raani’s changes, you would likely see a much stronger, more certain, and—definitely—more effective communicator emerge.

How do self-concept and perception fit into the six steps of strategic flexibility? First, with stronger self-confidence, you will have a sturdy base of operations—more strength and confidence in your ability to anticipate, assess, and evaluate communication situations. Second, with more accurate perceptions you will increase your repertoire of available skills and behaviors, thus you will have more from which to select and, likely, more accuracy and precision in their application. Reassessment and reevaluation become more effective as well because the context for all your actions will be broader, more immediate, and relevant.

What is important to know is that it doesn’t take much change in your self-concept or in your perceptions to influence your communication. The starting point can be just as soon as you want it to be. Nothing is likely to change if you are closed-minded, reluctant, and hesitant or full of fear, doubt, and concern. Nothing is likely to change either if you think you know everything you need to know, or if you think there is no need or room for improvement. You must be open to change, since change is going to happen. You must be open to new findings and understandings. And you must be open to options, alternatives, and possible new choices. It can be a great journey, but without a commitment from you, there’s likely to be no journey at all—just words on a page or ideas that travel in one ear and out the other—if, indeed, they get that far. “Can we will ourselves to change?” Joann Ellison Rodgers asks, then answers her own question in her article “Altered Ego: The New View of Personality Change.” “Yes,” says Rodgers, “especially if we think we can. . . . The power of belief is the key.”¹

Self-Concept

The case of Raani Benazir reveals that the self is mobile, personal, self-reflexive (causing one to think and reflect), and subject to change. Although she was born into a rigid social structure in her native country of Bangladesh, in the United

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States she became freer to create her own identity. (The words *self* and *identity* are being used synonymously.) How she thinks and feels about herself is socially constructed as she assumes different roles throughout her lifetime. Her identity is established as a result of mutual recognition from others combined with self-validation. For example, those who had contact with Raani discovered a soft-spoken, intelligent, witty, and incredibly perceptive individual who was more than willing to share her background, history, and insights—mutual recognition. Because of what they discovered and the respect and admiration they revealed, Raani became more outspoken, charming, and humorous—self-validation. Her thoughts of being a second-class citizen (how many women are often viewed in Bangladesh) changed, and she emerged from a self- and culture-imposed shell to become more self-confident, self-assured, and self-reliant.

Just as in Raani's case, your self-concept is based on the values of the culture and the community you come from. Your culture tells you what is competent and moral by defining attitudes and beliefs; the community you belong to tells you what is expected of you. The extent to which you reflect the attitudes and beliefs of your culture and live up to the expectations of your community will determine how you see yourself. If Raani were to spend her life in the town where she grew up, her self-concept would be formed by a very limited group of people. When she moved from Bangladesh to the United States, there were many more influences. If she moved between two or more cultures—which she might do because of her interest in international relations—the influences would be even greater.

Self-concept is made up of three distinct elements: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perception. Let's look at each of them.

Reflected Appraisals

Remember the story of Tarzan? Although Tarzan was a human, he believed he was an ape because he was brought up by apes and had no human experience. Tarzan's story reminds you that you are not born with an identity—others give it to you. Your parents, your friends, and your teachers all tell you who you are through **reflected appraisals**: messages you get about yourself from others. Most reflected appraisals come from things people say about you. Your college speech communication instructor may say you are a good speaker, your peers may say you are a good friend, and your coach may tell you that you must work harder. All such messages from others help create your self-concept.

Besides being given messages about yourself, you are also given lines to speak.² These lines are often so specific that some people refer to them as **scripts**. Some scripts are given to you by your parents, and they contain directions that are just as explicit as any script intended for the stage. You are given your lines ("Say thank you to the nice woman"), your gestures ("Point to the horsie"), and your characterizations ("You're a good girl/boy"). The scripts tell you how to play future scenes ("Everyone in your family has gone to college") and what is expected of you ("I will be so happy when you make us grandparents"). People outside your family also contribute to your scripts. Teachers, coaches, religious leaders, friends, the media, and the Internet all tell you what they expect from you, how you should look, how you should behave, and how you should say your lines. Sometimes you receive the messages directly, and sometimes you get them by observing and then imitating others' behavior.

Writer and radio personality Garrison Keillor gives a list of scripts we get as we are growing up. Have you heard any of them or used them on your own children?

I. I don't know what's wrong with you.

- A. *I never saw a person like you.*
 - 1. *I wasn't like that.*
 - 2. *Your cousins don't pull stuff like that.*
- B. *It doesn't make sense.*
 - 1. *You have no sense of responsibility at all.*
 - 2. *We've given you everything we possibly could.*
 - a. *Food on the table and a roof over your head.*
 - b. *Things we never had when we were your age.*
 - 3. *And you treat us like dirt under your feet.*
- C. *You act as if*
 - 1. *The world owes you a living.*
 - 2. *You've got a chip on your shoulder.*
 - 3. *The rules don't apply to you.*

II. Something has got to change and change fast.

- A. *You're driving your mother to a nervous breakdown.*
- B. *I'm not going to put up with this for another minute.*
 - 1. *You're crazy if you think I am.*
 - 2. *If you think I am, just try me.*
- C. *You're setting a terrible example for your younger brothers and sisters.*

III. I'm your father and as long as you live in this house, you'll—

- A. *Do as you're told, and when I say "now" I mean "now."*
- B. *Pull your own weight.*
 - 1. *Don't expect other people to pick up after you.*
 - 2. *Don't expect breakfast when you get up at noon.*
 - 3. *Don't come around asking your mother for spending money.*
- C. *Do something about your disposition.*

IV. If you don't change your tune pretty quick, then you're out of here.

- A. *I mean it.*
- B. *Is that understood?*
 - 1. *I can't hear you. Don't mumble.*
 - 2. *Look at me.*
- C. *I'm not going to tell you this again.³*

If you were given positive reflected appraisals when you were young, you probably have a good self-concept; if the appraisals were largely negative, your self-concept may suffer. The messages you receive about yourself can become **self-fulfilling prophecies**—events or actions that occur because you (and other people) have expected them. For example, at the beginning of the semester Professor Farley said to Kevin, "You're going to be a very good student." Because of this expectation, Kevin wanted to be a good student and worked hard to live up to Professor Farley's prophecy. Similarly, negative prophecies can have a negative impact. If someone tells a child that he or she will "never amount to much," there is a good chance the child will not.

Social Comparisons

When you compare yourself with others to see how you measure up, you are making a **social comparison**. Social comparisons are not just important, they are necessary in helping develop an accurate self-perception. An accurate self-perception is crucial for navigating and responding to the social world through effective communication.

If you think about it, you can't evaluate yourself without some form of comparison. You may, for example, compare yourself with your peers. You might ask, "Do I look as good as she does?" or "What grade did you get on your midterm?" or "What kind of car do you drive?" If you are a parent, you might compare your child to your friend's child. "Can he talk yet?" "Did she get a position on the softball team?" In your job, you are likely to ask yourself if you are doing as well as your co-workers. Did you get as big a raise as your colleague got? Does the boss ever notice you and praise your work? The answers to these social comparison questions all contribute to your self-concept.

Social comparisons are pivotal to self-evaluations. They depend less on objective circumstances than on how you judge yourself in relation to others on particular attributes. You prefer to compare yourself to others who are similar for the attribute of concern. For example, the first question in the paragraph above, "Do I look as good as she does?" may refer to body image. Social comparisons also can be employed to gather information about highly valued attributes (personality, money, or success), social expectations (appropriate attire and expected behavior), and norms (rules, laws, and acceptable practices). That is why comparisons are likely to be made to a variety of targets—there is such a broad range of information needed.

Let's focus on a single attribute of concern: body image evaluation. The repeated media images of thin females and muscular males make these forms seemingly the standard of attractiveness. The gender differences in the attributes associated with body image are those that would be expected. Weight is the primary feature predicting body dissatisfaction among women. Height and shoulders—or muscular shape—is the attractiveness concern of males. From where do the standards come? Pressures for the proper

The way we see ourselves is often a reflection of how we compare ourselves with others.





As a group, work together to list as many items as you can think of over which you have direct control. Each should be an item that will help people like those in your group to *appreciate themselves more*. After listing items, arrange them in hierarchical order with the most important items listed first. With the list complete, answer the questions that follow.

In her book *In the Dressing Room with Brenda*, Brenda Kinsel suggests some of the following items:

- The color or curl of your hair
- The shape or form of your body
- How your eyes open every morning and allow you to see life
- How your legs take you to your car or to your classes every day
- How your fingers can soothe a sore muscle

Which of the following plays the most important role in determining which items get listed and why: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, or self-perception? Which of these three is likely to have the most impact on each of the members of your group?

What is the point of this group exercise? Kinsel suggests two points:

1. When you begin practicing appreciation, it gets easier.
2. Self-appreciation has its most direct effect on your self-concept.

Source: *In the Dressing Room with Brenda: A Fun and Practical Guide to Buying Smart and Looking Great*, by Brenda Kinsel, 2001, Berkeley, CA: Wildcat Canyon Press, (a division of Circulus Publishing Group, Inc.).

body image come from parents, peers, dating partners, as well as the media. They can be direct, such as a parent encouraging a daughter to diet or a son to lift weights, or indirect, such as a peer voicing admiration of a particular model who reveals the attributes. Constant exposure is likely to make both men and women self-conscious about their bodies and make them obsess over and consider their physical appearance a measure of their worth. Of course, this is both a narrow and limited measure.

In a single day, you see many images of how people should look and behave. In a lifetime, you may receive 40 to 50 million commercial messages. Magazines, movies, and videos all contribute to what the “ideal you” should be. Even if you can discount these images as being unrealistic, many of the people around you believe them and judge you and others by what they see and hear.

Self-Perception

You think, feel, speak, and act in accordance with your self-image. The way you see yourself is called **self-perception**. The process of accumulating views of your self is both complex and ongoing. Consciously and subconsciously you weigh whether others' thoughts, attitudes, actions, and reactions will work for you. It is a little like putting pieces of a puzzle together; however, not only does the puzzle picture constantly change, but seldom does anyone have all the pieces that make up the picture. Even when you may have a puzzle piece in your hand, the piece may not fit where you think it goes, or it may not fit the picture you thought it would. Why is this process so confusing?

First, self-perception is made up of so many variables. They include physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual elements such as convictions about principles; basic personal wants and desires; moral, religious, and political feelings; as well as responses to personal freedom, social controls, and oppression of one kind or another. They include, too, how you respond to failings and difficulties (or achievements and successes) as well as mental stress and self-deception.



ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

Debra Rosenberg, in *Newsweek's* feature article on gender, "(Rethinking) Gender," suggests that a growing number of Americans are taking their private struggles with their identities into the public realm. Rosenberg writes:

Genesis set up the initial dichotomy: "Male and female he created them." And historically, the differences between men and women in this country were thought to be distinct. Men, fueled by testosterone, were the providers, the fighters, the strong and silent types who brought home dinner. Women, hopped up on estrogen (not to mention the mothering hormone oxytocin), were the nurturers, the communicators, the soft, emotional ones who got that dinner on the table. But as society changed, the stereotypes faded. Now even discussing gender differences can be fraught. . . . Still, even the most diehard feminist would likely agree that, even apart from genitalia, we are not exactly alike. In many cases, our habits, our posture,

and even cultural identifiers like the way we dress set us apart.

Now, as transgender people become more visible and challenge the old boundaries, they've given voice to another debate—whether gender comes in just two flavors (p. 53).

Questions

1. Do you think the old categories—that everybody's either biologically male or female—are beginning to break down?
2. How does gender identity affect one's self-concept?
3. How does gender identity bear on effective communication?

Source: "(Rethinking) Gender," by D. Rosenberg, *Newsweek*, May 21, 2007, p. 53. © 2007 NEWSWEEK Inc. Reprinted by permission.

Second, self-perception depends on the phase of your development, which is constantly changing as well. Often, as one ages, one becomes more open to the ideas of others, okay with being wrong, less attached to particular outcomes, and a better listener.⁴ When all is said and done, self-perception is a little like what a state trooper told a woman when he stopped her for speeding: "My measure of your speed is but a momentary picture of what occurs in a fraction of a second. That's all it can be."

Numbers of variables and constant change, however, don't deny the importance or application of self-perception. Accept your self-perception as a momentary picture. What can you do to make it positive? First, make certain you have a positive attitude, because how you think about what you do will affect your persistence, attitudes, and achievements. Second, keep your focus objective. For example, look specifically at what is required to achieve success—the steps, resources, or abilities—and not at subjective elements such as your feelings, reactions, and interpretations of the events, people, or situations. Third, try to focus on small achievements because your ability to perform successfully will have a direct effect on your actual performance. Your state of mind clearly impacts your ultimate performance.⁵

Gender, Sex, and Self-Concept

Several research studies show that men and women gain their self-concept in different ways.⁶ Two researchers found that when forming self-concept, men give the most importance to social comparisons, whereas women attach more importance to reflected appraisals. Men put more value on reflected appraisals from their parents, while women give more importance to reflected appraisals from their friends.

Other studies have shown that female self-confidence comes primarily from connections and attachments, while male self-confidence comes primarily from achievement.⁷

This relates to research findings about gender and language. (In Chapter 5 we discuss how women's language is tied to social networks, while men's language is tied to competition and achievement.)

Although your family and peers may influence how you act as a male or female, there is some evidence that your sexual identity is established when you are born. Researchers know this because of a terrible accident that occurred to an infant boy when he was eight months old. A surgeon was trying to repair a fused foreskin and accidentally cut off the boy's penis. Because the doctor thought the child could never live as a boy, he recommended to the parents that they rear him as a girl. When the parents agreed, the boy's testicles were removed and a vagina was constructed.

From this point on, the parents treated the child as a girl. They got her feminine clothes, gave her toys that girls liked, and even put her in the care of a female psychiatrist to help her adjust.

The child, however, never accepted her female identity. She tore off the dresses, refused the dolls, and looked for male friends. Instead of using makeup like her mother, she imitated her father by shaving and urinating standing up.

When she was 12, the doctors began estrogen treatments that enabled her to grow breasts. She did not like the feminizing effects of the drug and refused to take it. When she was 14, she refused any more treatment to feminize her. By this time she was so unhappy that her father told her what had happened to her, and her first feeling was that of relief.

At this point she went back to being a man. The youth took male hormone shots and had a mastectomy (an operation to remove breasts), and a surgeon began to reconstruct male genitals. Although the surgery was only partially successful, he married and he and his wife adopted children.

From this and other cases involving ambiguous genitals in newborns, many scientists have concluded that an infant with a Y chromosome will be a boy, regardless of his genitalia, and that nothing will ever change this.

One reason gender is important is that it "helps us organize the world into two boxes, his and hers, and gives us a way of quickly sizing up every person we see on the street."⁸ Judith Butler, a rhetoric professor at University of California, Berkeley, says, "Gender is a way of making the world secure."⁹ When it comes to social comparisons or reflected appraisals, these distinctions have an enormous bearing on both self-development and self-confidence.

Can You Improve Your Self-concept?

To make any change in your self-concept requires hard work—"great determination," says Rodgers, cited earlier when discussing one's will to change. In a landmark study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, a team of researchers surveyed more than 132,000 adults ages 21 to 60 over the Internet to determine if one's self-concept is set by the age of 30 or whether change is ongoing. They discovered that well into adulthood people change to meet their needs. Experiences such as education, courtship and marriage, parenting, the need to make a living, and exposure to an expanding network of social, family, and business connections will alter your self-concept for the good.¹⁰ Conscientiousness—being organized, self-disciplined, and goal-directed—will rise over time, but the biggest increases occur during the 20s. This is good news and answers directly the question posed at the head of this section.

According to Annie Paul, in her review article on “Self-Help,” “The only way to change the final product—your self-esteem—is to change what goes into making it—feedback from other people.” Then, she quotes Swann, who says, “If you find yourself in bad relationships where your negative self-view is getting reinforced, then either change the way those people treat you by being more assertive, or change who you interact with.”¹¹ In one of the most succinct, profound, and instructive summaries, she writes, “Stand up for yourself. Surround yourself with people who think you’re great, and tell you so. Do your best to live up to their high opinions. And be patient. Self-esteem is the sum of your interactions with others over a lifetime, and it’s not going to change overnight.”¹²

The point here is that change *can* occur, and those who believe their self-concept and abilities can change will be more resilient, more open to experience, and more likely to take risks.¹³ If your goals include being more skilled, more effective, more resilient, more extroverted, more nurturing, and more tolerant, your first step, according to Stanford University developmental psychologist Carol Dweck, author of *Mindset*, should be to assume a “growth mindset”—defined as a desire to change.¹⁴

Where Should Change Begin?

What is important to understand as you begin any kind of improvement program is that a poor self-concept is part of many human problems. For example, it could be part of a lack of purpose, inadequate motivation, lack of confidence, sadness and pessimism, lack of assertiveness, self-put-down games, and even the lack of wisdom and equality in selecting a mate. When it is related to sadness, just one of these human problems, it could relate to self-criticism, anger turned inward, guilt, shame, feeling inferior, low self-concept, and pessimism. That is why a poor self-concept isn’t an easy problem to overcome. Wouldn’t it be great if you could just erect a mental wall that would block out all your previous problems, and begin anew, with a blank slate—much as Raani Benazir did in our opening example?

Where would you start if you could erect a solid barrier between where you are today and where you were yesterday (see Figure 2-1)? First, silence your internal critic, nip negative thoughts in the bud, and stop bullying yourself. Replace criticism with encouragement and treat yourself kindly. Second, stop depending on others for your self-esteem; do your own self-evaluation. Stop letting others dominate your life. Take responsibility for your feelings. Just as you can’t make others feel happy, don’t expect others to make you feel happy or good about yourself. Third, accentuate your strengths and assets. Fourth, accept yourself—warts and all. Give yourself permission to decide that you’re doing the best you can. Fifth, avoid your perfectionistic tendencies—the tyranny of all the “shoulds” in your life. Accept flaws, mistakes, and imperfections as part of being human. Sixth, avoid your overreactions to criticism. You needn’t feel guilty about things beyond your control.

There are other areas, too, where you can begin to change. A seventh way to get to where you want to be is to modify your negative traits. Focus on what you *can* do, not on what you can’t. Eighth, feel good and adequate by being good and adequate—behave morally. Ninth, become a high achiever. It is more about doing what is expected of you, and then some, than it is about high intelligence or excessive brilliance. Tenth, learn new skills. Open yourself to new possibilities, areas for potential growth, and new ways to develop positive attributes. Eleventh, don’t feel responsible for everything. Don’t try to be all things (and do all things) for people. Twelfth, forgive and forget. Avoid hanging on to painful memories and bad feelings. Your past can control you if you don’t

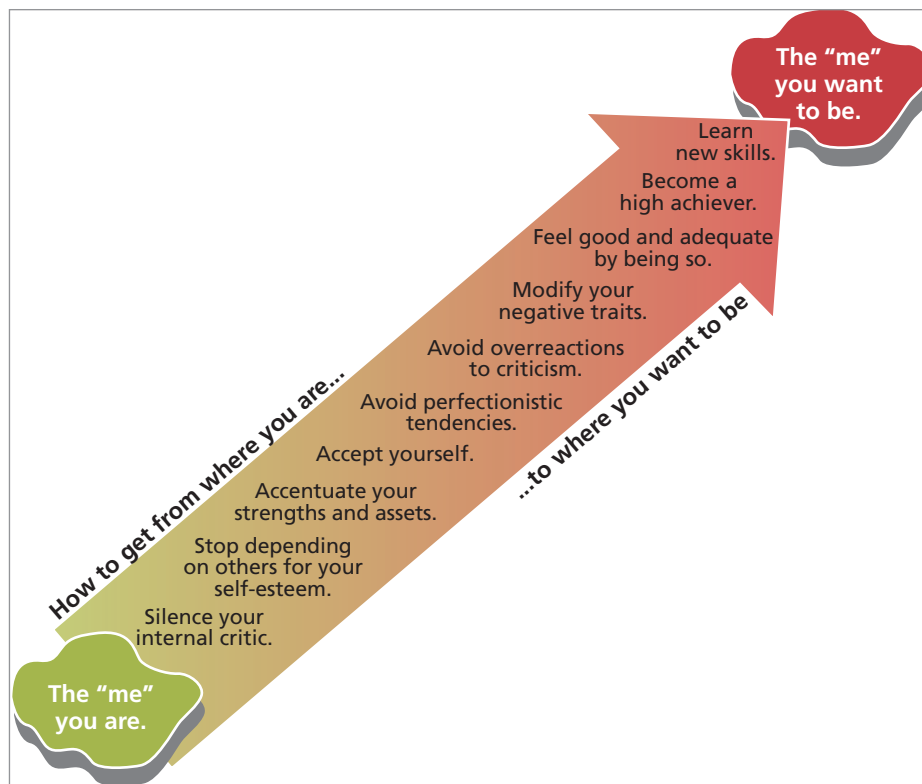


Figure 2-1
How to Begin a Program of Change

control it. Finally, begin a program of personal change in specific desired areas by working through the following steps.

What Do You Want to Change about Yourself?

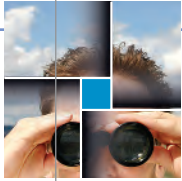
Pick one area in which you would like to improve yourself. See if you can figure out why you have had problems in this area. Were you given a script saying you were inadequate in this area? Are you living out a self-fulfilling prophecy?

Are Your Circumstances Keeping You from Changing?

Are you living in circumstances that are holding you back? Do the people around you support you if you want to do something differently, especially if it involves taking a risk? Sometimes the people you live with try to hold you back—even though they might not be conscious of doing so. For example, one spouse says to the other, “Why do you want to go to Europe? We haven’t seen all of the United States yet.”

Sometimes you are locked into roles that are uncomfortable for you. Many women feel trapped when their children are small; some people hate their jobs; some students hate school. Are you in a role that you have chosen for yourself, or has someone else chosen it for you? Has someone else defined how you should play this role? Can you play this role in a way that will make it more comfortable for you? Can you change the role so that you can be more like the person you want to be?

REALITY CHECK



We have defined self-concept as how you think and feel about yourself. Let's say—for the purposes of discussion here—that what you have discovered in coming to college is how smart all the other students are. It's as if you don't measure up, but you don't want it to be this way. Study the section, "Can You Improve Your Self-Concept?" What specific suggestions can you begin to apply in your life, right now, that will make a difference in your self-esteem? Do the suggestions given here make sense? Do they appear logical? Do the facts you know right now support the possibility of change? What implications might change in your self-esteem hold for you? How might positive changes in your self-esteem help you communicate

Are You Willing to Take Some Chances?

Colleges and universities offer great chances to take some risks. Take a course from a professor who is rumored to be hard but fair. Study a subject you know nothing about. Join a club that sounds interesting—even if you don't know any of its members. Many colleges and universities also offer opportunities to study abroad or to take an internship. Going abroad is especially helpful in building self-confidence.

What Would Be a Realistic Goal?

Too often, people decide they are going to change their behavior overnight. Students who habitually get poor grades will often announce that this semester they are going to get all A's. This is an unrealistic goal. If you are going to try to change your behavior, see if you can break down the problem into steps you can handle. Let's say that you are shy but would like to speak up more in class because you often know the answers. Why not set a goal to speak up once a week in one class? That is probably a goal you can manage. Once you feel comfortable with that, you might increase your goal to speaking up two or even three times a week. Joann Rodgers, again citing the work of Carol Dweck, says, "Shy people who are determined to develop their social skills can force themselves to interact despite the nervousness it provokes, and end up garnering great satisfaction from the effort even if the bashfulness remains. 'Our studies show others rate these people highly non-shy when they interact, despite their feeling of anxiety, says Dweck.'"¹⁵

Can You Discipline Yourself?

The old saying "Nothing succeeds like success" applies to a positive self-concept: As soon as you experience success, you start feeling better about yourself. Sometimes people think they are unsuccessful because they are not motivated enough. Typical thinking might be, "If only I could motivate myself, I would get better grades." People who think this way confuse motivation with discipline. There's no way to motivate yourself to take out the garbage, do the dishes, or study your class notes. These jobs can be done only through discipline: You say, "I am going to do this job for one hour—whether or not I want to do it is irrelevant." This sort of discipline is what leads to success, which, in turn, helps you feel better about yourself.

Are There People Who Will Support You?

Whenever we try to bring about a change in ourselves, we need to surround ourselves with people who will support us. As Annie Paul said in her review article on "Self-Help," "Surround yourself with people who think you're great, and tell you so."¹⁶ These are people who understand how difficult it is to change and who understand our desire to do so. Take the example of speaking up in class. If you are very apprehensive about doing this, you might consider discussing the problem with an instructor you like and trust. Tell him or her that you are occasionally going to try to say something, and ask for his or her support. Also tell a couple of friends in your class what you plan to do. Just having other people know what you are trying to accomplish often provides good moral support. Not all people will support you, and some may even consciously try to defeat you. For them, the possibility that you might change is too threatening.

When you have found some people to support you, it's important that you tell them what you want to do and give them some direction as to how they can help you.

Can You Be More You-Centered?

People who lack self-esteem often spend a lot of time looking inward at their miseries, while people who seem happy and content with themselves seem to spend their time interacting with others. If you look inward all the time, you are probably making yourself more miserable. For a few days, experiment with relating more to the people around you. Just asking someone “How was your day?” or “How is your semester (or quarter) going?” shows that you are interested.

If you have an opportunity to bestow some praise, do it. Look for situations around you in which you can praise people, and express your praise with genuine feeling. Tell your mother that her meatloaf tastes great, tell a professor that her class was really helpful on an internship, tell a friend that she looks wonderful in green. When you act positively toward others, they will act positively toward you, and this, in turn, will make you feel better about yourself.

The Map Is Not the Territory

It was the father of general semantics, Alford Korzybski, who stated, “A map is not the territory it represents, but if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness.” You have maps inside your head that describe the things outside your head. The maps inside your head represent the territory outside your head. The more accurate your maps are, the better equipped you are to function within society. The accuracy of your maps is a measure of your sanity. But, remember that nobody has completely accurate maps.

What this means for you is simply that your perception of reality is not reality itself, but it is your own version of it—your “maps.” In Figure 2-2, the person is bewildered because from the map being held there was no way to know that the mountains on the horizon even existed. Even a road map doesn’t accurately depict the territory it is supposed to represent. Your maps, likewise, are distorted because you jump to conclusions with little or no evidence, ignore parts of the territory, see only what you want to see,



Figure 2-2
The Map Is Not the Territory

see things as black and white rather than in shades of gray, and apply labels to people and situations and then refuse to see beyond the labels.

There are some important understandings that Korzybski's theory clarifies for both self-concept and perception. The first has to do with how your maps are created. There is so much information in the world that you can't take it all in, let alone make sense of it all. So what you do is create internal maps of reality that you can refer to as you navigate through life. Your maps contain countless beliefs, values, generalizations, decisions, and numerous other mental aspects about how you see yourself and your relationship to the world around you. Just like a road map, it is a scaled-down version of reality. And just like a road map, maps don't show everything. As you get more information, your maps change.

The second understanding is that you react to the maps inside your head, not the territory outside your head. You react to the maps and not to what the maps represent. For example, if your maps tell you that a certain piece of music is pleasant, you will listen to it. If your maps tell you that the same piece of music is unpleasant, you will not listen to it. It is not the music that you are drawn to, it is your maps of the music. The same occurs in elections. You look not to the candidates when you choose how to vote, you look instead to your maps of the candidates.

The third understanding is that no two people can have exactly the same maps. Problems in communication occur when you try to impose your maps upon another person—or other people. Empathizing with others requires learning to recognize the structure of others' maps—seeing the world through their eyes—thus being able to understand and relate to them respectfully and accurately. It helps to know that their maps are likely to be just as jaundiced by their own interpretations as yours are.

The fourth understanding is that to create personal change requires changing maps. There is a natural and understandable desire to protect old maps. That is because they become comfortable. You know how to navigate with these maps, and replacing them with new ones is a little like trying to find your way around a new supermarket. Not only are maps comfortable, they are habit forming. Even when they may not be as useful as they could be, you depend on them because they are what you have. You know where the bread, milk, and cereal are supposed to be in the supermarket. Letting maps go causes temporary chaos, but reconfiguring, reconstituting, or reorganizing maps at a higher level can result in relief from the problems and limitations of the old maps—new abilities to deal with what was previously stressful, perplexing, or overwhelming. You learn where things are located in the new supermarket, and your trips there become efficient, effective, and satisfying.

The fifth understanding is that your maps of reality are *not* who you are—the map is *not* the territory. Rather, your maps are simply a convenient tool you use to navigate through life. To understand that your maps are not who you are but simply a navigation tool will help you understand that maps need to go through the chaos and reorganization process for personal growth to occur. It will help you understand that map “changes” do not represent you in the process of falling apart. **The map is not the territory.** Trying to hold old maps together creates dysfunctional feelings and behaviors such as fear, depression, anger, anxiety, substance abuse, many physical diseases, and numerous other more serious mental problems.

Knowing that the map is not the territory will help you look forward to map changes. Why? Because new maps are likely to work better. New maps will allow you to be a happier, more peaceful person. New maps are likely to produce positive change. And because of the relationship between self-concept and perception, new maps will allow you to come at the world more accurately, see things with greater clarity, and understand events, others, and ideas with increased precision.



STRATEGIC

FLEXIBILITY

When you permit changes in your maps of reality, you increase your strategic flexibility because new maps are likely to work better than old maps.

The Internet, Self, and Communication

When engaged in conversations in chat rooms, posting messages on bulletin boards, or even in the construction of blogs or Web pages, Internet users have the option of presenting their real and authentic self to their Internet audience, or creating their own identity. It is impossible to determine how many Internet users choose one course over the other; however, in chat rooms, most participants—for the sake of anonymity (and often, safety)—select to use a pseudonym or clever descriptor to identify themselves.

Technology allows users to become invisible—at least, their perception of invisibility. Actually, Internet users leave cyberfootprints wherever they go, but despite this reality, the perception of invisibility persists. The fact that many people may be engaged in similar activities leads to this perception of invisibility because, the rationale is, any single person's actions are a mere “drop in the pond” and, thus, are unlikely to be detected.

How does this bear on the self-concept? When people are in the process of developing their self-concept and, at the same time, are active users of the Internet, they are obviously influenced by the lack of tangible feedback and perceptions of invisibility, and it isn't clear how this will affect their development and internalization processes. Joe Walther, professor at Cornell University, claims that Internet users adapt to this restricted medium. He bases his claim about restrictions on the fact that cues normally present in FtFC are eliminated in CMC. Walther argues “that given the opportunity for a sufficient exchange of social messages and subsequent relational growth, *as goes face-to-face communication, so goes CMC.*”¹⁷

Walther labels Internet relationships *hyperpersonal*. It means that Internet relationships “are more intimate than romances or friendships would be if partners were physically together.”¹⁸ One aspect of this hyperpersonal characteristic is the opportunity for users to make and sustain overwhelmingly positive impressions by writing about their most attractive traits, accomplishments, thoughts, and actions “without fear of contradiction from their physical appearance, their inconsistent actions, or the objectives of third parties who know their dark side.”¹⁹ There is little doubt that the “hyperpersonal self” can make a positive contribution to self-development, self-esteem, and self-confidence in the real world.

MySpace, Facebook, and Flickr allow users to create their own little online treehouses. Adding photos, videos, music, blogs, and IM capability provides all the tools for constructing a cyberself that is unique even to the point of approving or rejecting “be my friend” requests—which adds control and gives treehouse masters power over entry into their personal cyberdomains. These Web sites and others like them provide Internet users opportunities to express themselves, connect with others, and—most importantly here—create and extend their own horizons²⁰—opportunities that contribute to the development of the self-concept by helping to define it.

What is interesting about the social identities created on the Internet is that, according to some research, it depends on perceptions we have of the Internet. Because it is through our relationships with others that we discover ourselves, it may be that Internet communication, which enables a higher level of self-disclosure because of its relatively anonymous nature, promotes self-discovery for some, better than communication in real life.²¹ Some computer-mediated communication (CMC) partners engage in more intimate questions and deeper disclosures than those in ongoing face-to-face relationships.²²

When the Internet is perceived as a sociable medium, the disclosures in instant messaging tend to be open, personal, intimate, honest, and in great extent about negative

feelings and opinions. When people perceive the Internet as a personalized medium, disclosures will be more about themselves. And when the Internet is perceived as sensitive, warm, and active, the disclosures appear more private and intimate but the contents are more negative and undesirable.²³

There are two important conclusions regarding the Internet, self, and communication. First, people who have more positive self-evaluations have more positive self-disclosures in both the offline world and the cyberworld. To be more specific, the Internet simply provides another channel for the same kind of communication that occurs in the real world. People who gain satisfaction in communication have a more positive self-image and are more eager to disclose themselves on the Internet or in instant messaging.

Second, how people perceive the Internet determines how they use it. Those who perceive it as a warm medium are more likely to disclose private and intimate information including negative or undesirable things about themselves. Just as when trust is developed in a relationship, a warm and safe environment develops at the same time. Perceived as a sociable medium, disclosures are open, personal, intimate, and honest. Perceived as a personalized medium, disclosures are about themselves.

The point is simply that for those who find effectiveness and success in real-life communication, they are likely to find success and effectiveness in Internet communication in the same way—whether it be self-perception, self-development, or self-expression—or, perhaps, at some higher or more intense level. Much depends on their perception of the Internet; however, those with a positive self-concept are more likely to perceive it as just another channel of communication—an additional way to share knowledge, ideas, and information.

Perception

Perception, you will recall, is how you look at others and the world around you. Acts of perception are more than simply capturing incoming stimuli. These acts require a form of expectation, of knowing what is about to confront you and preparing for it. These expectations or predispositions to respond are a type of perceptual filter called **psychological sets**, and they have a profound effect on your perceptions. “Without expectations, or constructs through which you perceive your world,” writes John Ratey, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, “your surroundings would be what William James called a ‘booming, buzzing confusion,’ and each experience truly would be a new one, rapidly overwhelming you. You automatically and unconsciously fit your sensations into categories that you have learned, often distorting them in the process.”²⁴

For example, how you view a new instructor depends on your views of all the instructors you have had in the past. How you think about forming a new romantic relationship depends on the romantic relationships you have had in the past. Your knowledge, background, and experiences form the psychological sets and, thus, provide the matrix—that which gives shape or form to anything—into which any new idea or event is placed

The Perceptual Process

Your perceptions affect more than your direct interactions with people. They also influence your response to all the information around you. Whenever you encounter new information, whether it's from a television program, a newspaper, the Internet, or another person, you go through a three-step perceptual process: You select the information, you organize it, and you interpret it. These three steps of the perceptual process

repeat themselves in an ongoing and continual process—sometimes even overlapping one another—that directly influences communication behaviors.

We do not all perceive information in the same way. Even when several people have access to the same information, they are likely to select, organize, and interpret it in different ways. Let's say, for example, that three different people read the same newspaper: Omar is a Syrian who is studying in the United States; Caroline is an American who has been an exchange student in Syria; and Jim is an American who has never traveled.

When Omar reads the paper, he looks for (selects) news about Syria. In his mind he organizes the information on the basis of what he already knows. He may interpret it by asking the meaning of certain government actions or by thinking that the reporter has the wrong slant on the story. Caroline goes through a similar process. She has a high interest in stories about Syria because she has been there. She, too, organizes what she reads according to what she knows about the country. However, she may interpret the news stories differently because she doesn't have as much information as Omar. Also, her interpretation will probably be from an American point of view. When Jim reads the newspaper, he skips all the stories about Omar's country. He has never been there and has no immediate plans to go there. In fact, he skips all the news about the world and goes directly to the sports section. These three people are all exposed to the same information, but they all perceive it differently.

Deletions, Distortions, and Generalizations

Any perceptions you have are less than perfect because of deletions, distortions, and generalizations.²⁵ **Deletions**—blotting out, erasing, or canceling information—must occur first because your physical senses are limited. Your sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell are the means you use to get information, but those senses focus only on those aspects of the environment that are most important for your survival. Your senses are not capable of perceiving everything in your external environment. Deletions occur, too, because of your beliefs. If you believe something to be true, you have an almost infinite capacity to delete information that contradicts that belief. In addition, if you believe something to be true, you will go through your life searching for information that supports that belief and ignore information that does not.



Whenever you encounter new information you go through a three-step perceptual process: You select the information, you organize it, and you interpret it.

In addition to deleting information, you also distort much of the information from your environment. **Distortions** involve twisting or bending information out of shape. You distort information, first because you observe only a small part of your external environment. Since what you observe is such a small part of the whole, you must fill in the blanks—specifically add information—to make your information make sense. The other reason you distort information is so that it will support your existing beliefs and values—fit into your psychological sets.

In addition to deleting and distorting information, you draw generalizations based on little substantial information. **Generalizations** involve drawing principles or conclusions from particular evidence or facts. Once you have observed something a few times, you conclude that what has proven true in the past will prove true in the future as well. Generalizations are important to your survival. Getting burned by putting a hand on a hot stove will give you a conclusion about the consequences of putting your hand on a hot stove in the future. If you had several bad experiences with members of the opposite sex, of a different race, of a different culture, or of a particular organization, you might generalize that *all* members of the opposite sex, a different race, a different culture, or a particular organization are bad. Then, all future experiences are filtered through that belief, information that contradicts the belief is deleted, and you distort other information so it will support the belief.

Keep these three activities in mind as you read the next section on perceptual filters. Realize that even before perceptual filters come into play and certainly while they are operating as well, deletion, distortion, and generalization are also influencing the information.²⁶

Perceptual Filters

Deletions, distortions, and generalizations are important and affect your perceptions, but perceptual filters can be even more important. **Perceptual filters** are limitations that result from the narrowed lens through which you view the world. For example, your biologic makeup has a significant influence. If your biologic makeup differs from that of the predominant society—if you are obese, short, or unattractive, for example—you may have difficulty securing and maintaining a positive self-concept because of the distortions your senses cause. You automatically see things differently than members of the predominant society.

Other significant influences on your perceptions include your culture, values, and beliefs. You, like most people, find it easier to communicate with members of your own culture. Many of your customs (e.g., Halloween), values (e.g., everything should be clean), and beliefs (all humans are created equal)—as well as your manners, ceremonies, rituals, laws, language, religious beliefs, myths and legends, knowledge, ideals, accepted ways of behaving, and even your concept of self—are culturally determined.

There are numerous other influences, such as the ways you have for coping with and tolerance for stress as well as your conflict resolution strategies.²⁷ If through your upbringing you have developed inadequate coping patterns to adapt to stress or resolve conflict you narrow your lens, and your perceptions will be distorted. One major influence would be the familial patterns you observed between your parents and between your parents and you or other siblings. For example, some of the patterns you may have observed could include the excessive use of denial, projection of blame and responsibility, hypersensitivity to criticism, and rationalizing of failures. Destructive behaviors may have included overeating, excessive smoking or drinking, the overuse

of over-the-counter medications, or illicit drug use. Even high rates of illness as a result of high blood pressure, ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, frequent headaches or neck aches may also have been influential.

Other influences on your perceptions could include your previous experiences. Many failures rather than successes may create difficulty. If you attribute your successes to luck, chance, or the influence of powerful others rather than to your own personal behavior, this could be a factor. If you have suffered stressful life events such as financial difficulties, problems on a job, change or loss of a job, relationship concerns, sexuality concerns, divorce, or moving, particularly if they have been cumulative, your perceptions could be affected. Illnesses, traumas, and surgery, too, can create alterations in self-esteem, body image, and personal identity and can influence your perceptions. Even your current physiological state can influence your perceptions. Insufficient nutritional food, lack of sleep, or a serious night of drinking and the consequential hangover can be influential.

Our purpose here has not been to cast a negative light on the role of your perceptions in creating and maintaining your self-concept; rather, it is to show how many factors are likely to filter your perceptions. Any changes from the norm—the perceptions of those who make up your predominant society—will influence your perceptions in some manner. Because there are so many influences, and because these influences are likely to combine in unknown ways and even have some cumulative effect, there is no way to predict or know how much effect the influences on your perceptions have nor how your self-concept is altered. What is interesting is that even self-assessments are likely to be distorted, since the self doing the assessing is also subject to the distortions!

Adjusting to Perceptual Influences

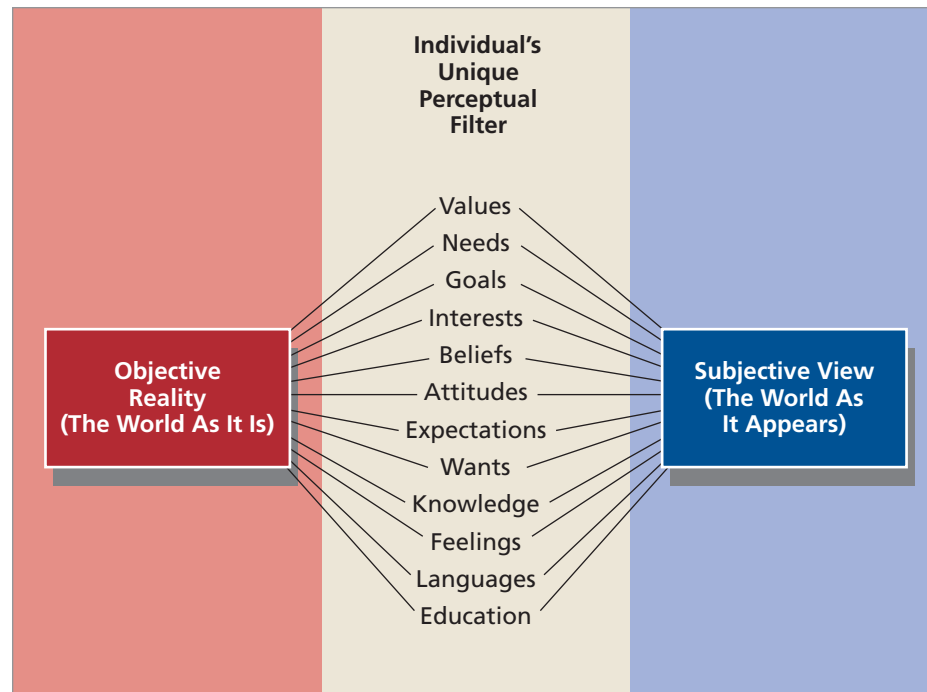
George A. Miller, the psychologist, said, “Most of our failures in understanding one another have less to do with what is heard than with what is intended and what is inferred.” It would be great to believe that there were no such thing as perceptual filters. It would be great to believe that you come at the world straight on and that objective reality is, indeed, your reality. It would be great to believe, because of the truthfulness and honesty with which you conduct your life, that any observation you make is accurate, precise, and correct—that the conclusions you draw conform exactly to truth or to the standard set by the norm of others in your culture. Unfortunately, this is *never* the case. The fact is, your perceptions and the conclusions you draw from them represent, as noted in Figure 2-3, your reality, your subjective view, or the world as it appears to you.

The difference between **objective reality**—the actual territory or external reality everyone experiences—and a **subjective view**—your personal mental maps of the world—is easy to demonstrate. It is the difference between an examination, or the actual written document that contains the questions (objective reality), and your maps of that examination (subjective reality), which are constructed from your beliefs about the need for examinations, your attitudes toward examinations, your expectations regarding this particular examination, your knowledge about what is likely to be on the examination, and your related thoughts regarding your preparation, as well as your feelings (anxiety or apprehension).

If you think about it, if you were affected by any one of the perceptual influences listed in the section on perceptual filters—lack of sleep, for example—you would experience some distortion from the norm. Whether or not you knew the distortion

Figure 2-3

Perception



was occurring might depend on the severity of the influence (three nights without sleep), the circumstances in which you found yourself (taking a final exam), or whether you had other comparisons to make; that is, you had a way to compare your sensory data (observations) with that of others. (Others thought the exam was fair; you thought it unfair.) You have drawn a conclusion that is true based on your perceptions.

Stay healthy, get rest, and exercise. Make every effort to come at the world as healthy, well rested, and sufficiently exercised as possible. Because perception depends on your senses, the better condition that your senses are in, the more likely they will respond in proper ways. It is more likely that you will be aware of and adjust to perceptual influences when you have a proper state of mind and body. For example, can you imagine getting physically and emotionally upset with an instructor because of an exam you felt was unfair after three days of no sleep, living on Mountain Dew, isolated in your room, and trying to study a semester's worth of notes in a day and a half?

Avoid hasty conclusions. If you feel it is necessary to publicly announce a conclusion, then state it tentatively rather than as a conclusion. For example, rather than stating that you know that flying saucers exist because you saw strange lights in the sky last night, why not offer your observations in a tentative way that will allow exploration and discussion: "You know, I saw strange lights in the sky last night. Did anyone else see any strange lights?"

Take more time. The third method for adjusting to perceptual influences follows from the last one. Take more time. When it is said patience is a virtue, nothing could be more succinct or accurate. Time has a number of benefits. It allows you to gather more facts. With more facts, it is likely your conclusions will change. Time also allows you to think about your observations and conclusions. For example, you might overhear another conversation about the strange lights in the sky, or read a newspaper article

about a meteor shower last night, or the glow from locally launched weather balloons. How often have you discovered that your first impressions were wrong—that, for example, you could not tell what a book was about by its cover alone?

There is an important caution to be aware of as you search for information. As noted previously, when you believe something to be true, you will find information to support that belief. That statement introduces the caution. Your external environment contains ample evidence to support all beliefs about a subject.²⁸ If you believe that most people are bad and will lie, cheat, steal, and otherwise injure you, you can find plenty of evidence in the news and in your daily encounters with others to support that belief. If you believe that most people are good and will behave in honest, caring, and courageous ways, you can find plenty of evidence to support this belief as well. The point of gathering information is to seek evidence that might suggest your beliefs are in error or that other explanations exist for the conclusions you have reached.

Be available. A fourth method for adjusting to perceptual influences follows from the previous methods. Be available to see the other person's viewpoint. Availability, here, means both physical and psychological openness. How often in the heat of an argument could you not stop long enough to really listen to another person's side? Rather, you were so upset you were framing your own ideas, choosing your own words, defending yourself from attack, and trying to outdo, outmaneuver, and outwit the other person. The advantage of counting to 10 to allow your emotions to calm, or stepping back and taking more time, or just trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes helps you become more available. The question "Did anyone else see strange lights?" reveals availability and openness.

There are two other ways you have to adjust to perceptual influences.

Be committed. Commit yourself to seeking more information. Commit yourself to having additional information before making any judgment. Commit yourself to being as fully informed as you would expect others to be with you before sharing their conclusions. Buy a local paper, for example, and examine it for possible explanations of strange lights in the sky. Listen to a local newscast for information. Go ask or make a call to a local expert who might have an answer. It is this kind of climate—the kind of climate in which educated and informed conversation and dialogue can take place—that is likely to produce additional perspectives, alternatives, and conclusions.

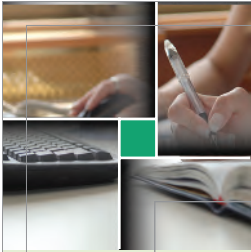
Be prepared to change. If everything has worked thus far, you are likely to get information, hear viewpoints, or gain perspectives, alternatives, or conclusions that you did not originally have. If this is true, you must be prepared to change accordingly. Whatever adjustments are necessary, you must be ready to make them. This is why it is important to avoid making hasty conclusions at the outset. In that way, changes at this point will be unnecessary. You simply adjust internally. If you expressed a hasty conclusion, now you must admit the error or openly reveal the adjustment necessary to accommodate the new information, viewpoint, perspective, alternative, or conclusion, and you can't save face, or protect yourself from embarrassment. Publicly admitting an error is difficult for anyone. As it turned out, the strange lights in the sky were a number of planes returning to the local airport at the same time, having all been at the same air show in another state. From the ground, at night, depending on your position or location, the planes lit up the night sky.

As you take steps to reduce the effect of perceptual influences on you, you will notice changes simply because the information you will get is likely to be more accurate and dependable. It will be better information for use in building a stronger self-concept.



STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY

When you anticipate, assess, evaluate, and select, be ready to change instantaneously and adjust accordingly because of new viewpoints, perspectives, alternatives, or conclusions.



ASSESS YOURSELF

What Do You Think of Your Self?

Please mark each statement in the following way: If the statement describes how you usually feel, put a check in the column *Like Me*. If the statement does not describe how you usually feel, put a check in the column *Unlike Me*. For this inventory, there are no right or wrong answers.

	Like Me	Unlike Me
1. I'm pretty sure of myself.	_____	_____
2. I often wish I were someone else.	_____	_____
3. I'm easy to like.	_____	_____
4. I never worry about anything.	_____	_____
5. I find it very hard to talk in front of a class.	_____	_____
6. There are lots of things about myself I'd change if I could.	_____	_____
7. I can make up my mind without too much trouble.	_____	_____
8. I'm a lot of fun to be with.	_____	_____
9. I always do the right thing.	_____	_____
10. I'm proud of the college work that I do.	_____	_____
11. Someone always has to tell me what to do.	_____	_____
12. It takes me a long time to get used to anything new.	_____	_____
13. I'm often sorry for the things I do.	_____	_____
14. I'm never unhappy.	_____	_____
15. I'm doing the best work that I can.	_____	_____
16. I give in very easily.	_____	_____
17. I'm pretty happy.	_____	_____
18. I like everyone I know.	_____	_____
19. I like to be called on in class.	_____	_____
20. I understand myself.	_____	_____
21. Things are all mixed up in my life.	_____	_____
22. I'm not doing as well in college as I'd like to.	_____	_____
23. I can make up my mind and stick to it.	_____	_____
24. I have a low opinion of myself.	_____	_____
25. I don't like to be with other people.	_____	_____
26. I'm never shy.	_____	_____
27. I often feel upset in college.	_____	_____
28. If I have something to say, I usually say it.	_____	_____
29. I always tell the truth.	_____	_____
30. Most people are better liked than I am.	_____	_____
31. I always know what to say to people.	_____	_____
32. I often get discouraged in college.	_____	_____
33. Things usually don't bother me.	_____	_____

Go to the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/hybels9 to see your results and learn how to evaluate your attitudes and feelings.

www.mhhe.com/hybels9 >

Source: In J.P. Robinson, P. R. Shaver, & L. S. Wrightsman, *Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Attitudes* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1991), pp. 127–31. Adapted from S. Coopersmith, *The Antecedents of Self-Esteem* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1967.) Used with permission.

Summary

Both self and perception are foundations for effective communication. Self-concept is how you think about and value yourself. Perception is how you look at others and the world around you. How you look at the world depends on what you think of yourself, and what you think of yourself will influence how you look at the world.

Self-concept comes from three sources: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perception. Scripts and self-fulfilling prophecies also influence your self-concept. If people are willing to give up some of their psychological safety and take some risks, their self-concepts will become more positive.

Although being accepted by others may be more important than it should be, is a fleeting and temporal circumstance, and is based on their viewpoint alone, the fundamental components start with accepting your self. It also means accepting who everyone else is and changing your attitude.

Improving your self-concept is not easy because a poor self-concept is part of many human problems. To start, you must silence your internal critic. Then, stop depending on others for your self-esteem, accentuate your strengths and assets, accept yourself, avoid your perfectionistic tendencies, avoid your overreactions to criticism, modify your negative traits, behave morally, become a high achiever, learn new skills, don't feel responsible for everything, and forgive and forget.

To focus on a single area for improving your self-concept, decide what you want to change, consider your circumstances, take some chances, set reasonable goals, use a program of self-discipline, find people who will support you, and act positively toward others.

Alford Korzybski's theory that the map is not the territory means that your perception of reality is not reality itself but only your version of it—your map. Problems in communication occur when you try to

impose your map upon another person. To create personal change requires changing your map. Map changes do not represent you in the process of falling apart; often, they work better, create greater happiness, produce positive change, and increase the accuracy and clarity of perceptions.

Those who find success in real-life communication will find success and effectiveness in Internet communication. For the adventurous, Internet users have the option of presenting their real and authentic selves. Those with a positive self-concept will perceive the Internet as just another channel of communication.

The perceptual process includes the steps of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. Perceptions are less than perfect because of deletions, distortions, and generalizations. Also, numerous perceptual filters will have an effect on your perceptions. Because there are so many influences, and because these influences are likely to combine in unknown ways and even have some cumulative effect, there is no way to predict or know the effect of the influences on your perceptions nor on how your self-concept is altered.

Adjusting to perceptual influences requires that you stay healthy, avoid hasty conclusions, take more time, be available and committed, and be prepared to change. Strategic flexibility—especially the steps of anticipating, assessing, evaluating, and selecting—requires a readiness to change instantaneously and adjust appropriately not just because of new viewpoints, perspectives, alternatives, and conclusions, but because people often come to wrong conclusions. Your interpretations of reality—your mental maps—need to be checked continually to see how accurately they represent the territory, and being prepared to change is part of that process.

Key Terms and Concepts

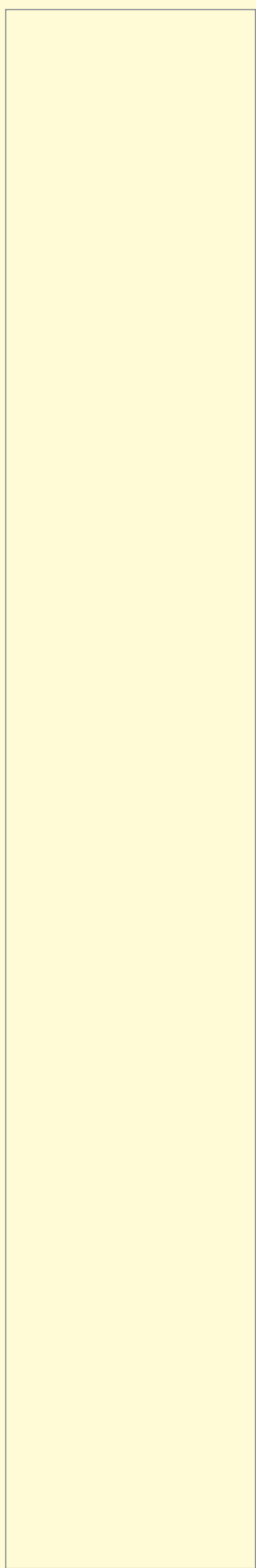
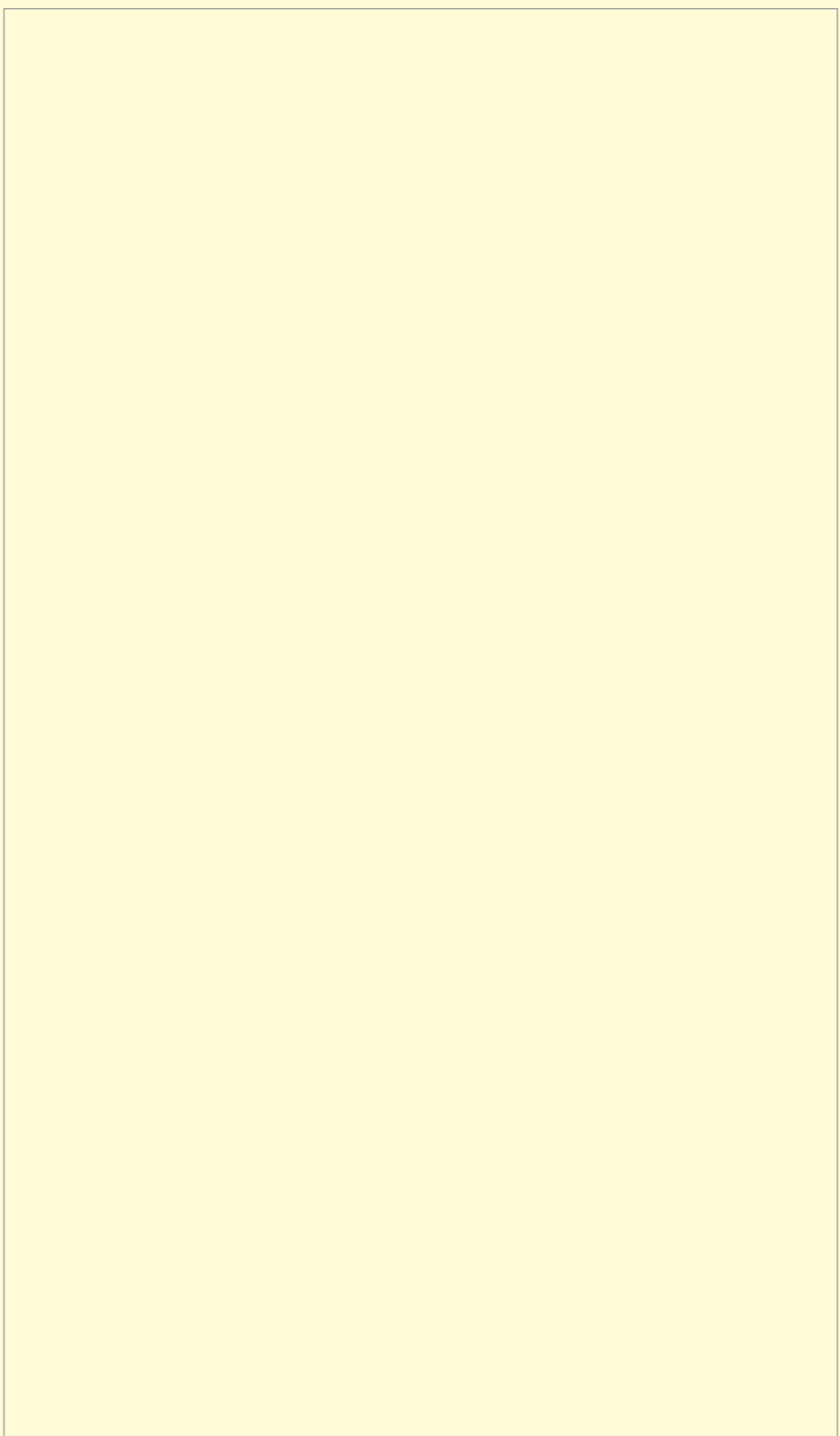
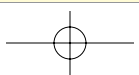
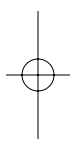
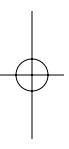
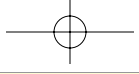
Use the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/hybels9 to further your understanding of the following terms.

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- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Deletions •• | Perception •• | Self-concept •• |
| Distortions •• | Perceptual filters •• | Self-fulfilling prophecies •• |
| Generalizations •• | Psychological sets •• | Self-perception •• |
| Map is not the territory •• | Reflected appraisals •• | Social comparisons •• |
| Objective reality •• | Scripts •• | Subjective view •• |

Questions to Review

1. What is the role of self and perception in communication?
 2. How is the self-concept formed?
 3. What are the differences among reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perception? Which one is likely to have the most influence on self-formation?
 4. In what specific ways can you make your self-perception more positive?
 5. What are the fundamental components of being accepted?
 6. What are the ways you can improve a weak or poor self-concept?
 7. What is the value of Alford Korzybski's theory (The map is not the territory), and how does it contribute to strategic flexibility?
 8. What are the influences of the Internet on self and communication?
 9. What are the three steps of the perceptual process?
 10. What role do deletions, distortions, and generalizations play in perception? Can you give an example of each?
 11. What are some of the perceptual filters that narrow the lens through which you view the world?
 12. What is the difference between objective reality and a subjective view, and why is this important in communication?
 13. What are some of the ways you can adjust to perceptual influences, and which aspect of adjustment contributes most to strategic flexibility?
- Go to the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/hybels9 to test your knowledge of the chapter concepts.



CHAPTER THREE

Intercultural Communication

Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define and explain the importance of intercultural communication.
- Describe the role intercultural communication plays in communicating effectively.
- Define culture and co-culture and what it means to possess a cultural identity.
- Explain the six dimensions or frameworks for studying cultural differences.
- Distinguish among assimilation, accommodation, and separation strategies and their purpose.





MY NAME IS STANLEY MARTINEZ, AND I WAS INTRODUCED TO gangs, drugs, and violence at an early age. My uncle, a burly man covered in tattoos who was just released from the state penitentiary, taught me the rules of our neighborhood, and those rules, along with drugs and alcohol, served as my school of survival. I grew up fast, and the inner strength gained from my uncle's advice, my ability to watch and listen, and my common sense caused the homeboys I ran with to make me their gang leader. Their trust in me not only gave me courage and comfort but it also empowered me. They also broadened my perspective.

All through my life it was as if I were outside myself looking in, and when I lost gang members because of useless deaths on the street, addictions to drugs, and unwanted pregnancies, I realized I had a higher purpose. A member of the Chicano Youth Center (CYC) helped me secure a job, and my employer put me in contact with the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), which helped me enroll in college. In ethnic studies classes I learned of my heritage, and I didn't just begin to appreciate my culture, I began to proudly share it with others.

For my first speech in my speech communication class, I dressed as a gang member and talked about my life story. Halfway through the speech I took off a layer of clothing to reveal a shirt and tie, and I talked about the biases and prejudices of mainstream society that push down members of our ethnic cultures. It was in my speech communication class that I made a commitment to dedicate my life to breaking down the barriers that prevent homeboys and homegirls from entering college.

In this chapter we first look at the role of intercultural communication in communicating effectively and in strategic flexibility. Then we look at the word culture and the importance of understanding your role as a cultural being. In the next section, we discuss the importance of intercultural communication. Then we relate this topic to the model of communication discussed in Chapter 1. We present six dimensions or frameworks for studying cultural differences. There are four barriers to intercultural communication, and we examine how to deal with the barriers—which includes a discussion of dominant and nondominant cultures. We look at ways for improving intercultural communication, and, finally, we discuss the influence of the Internet.

The Role of Intercultural Communication in Communicating Effectively and Strategic Flexibility

In Communicating Effectively

What does intercultural communication have to do with communicating effectively? First, we must all agree that it is communication skills—both sending and receiving abilities—that determine how well individuals, organizations, industries, and nations do in both acquiring and applying knowledge. The better the communication, the greater likelihood of success. Second, we must all agree that because of globalization and the importance of information, there is a rising new category in the world known as the **knowledge class**. It is a class supported solely by its participation in the new information industries with little, if any, reliance upon traditional manufacturing, production, or agriculture. The ability of

members of this knowledge class to effectively negotiate the inherent cultural issues in communication will give them a competitive edge in a global world.

Closer to where you live, perhaps, the relevance of intercultural communication is no less important. What if it were your job to coordinate international student services and exchange programs on your college campus? What if you were the manager in a biotech company, responsible for leading a diverse team of scientists doing innovative research?

The world today is characterized by an ever-growing number of communications between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is likely that you will make such contacts because they occur in the areas of business, military cooperation, science, education, mass media, entertainment, and tourism, and because of immigration brought about by labor shortages and political conflicts—as well as informally in Internet chat rooms and on Internet bulletin boards. Just a quick example will make this point. The U.S. Department of Education found that close to 40 percent of public school students were minorities in 2000, (41percent in 2007, according to the U.S. Census Bureau¹), up from close to 30 percent in 1986. Also, the number of students who spoke a language other than English at home rose by 46 percent from 1979 to 1999. Many teachers are faced with teaching a diverse student population.² The communication throughout all these contacts needs to be as constructive as possible to avoid misunderstandings and breakdowns.

In Strategic Flexibility

Intercultural communication has a direct and noticeable effect on each step of strategic flexibility. In the first step (anticipate), you will have a new slant or angle from which to think about potential communication situations. The needs and requirements will be different than without this new knowledge, and forecasting may require the introduction of new or different skills and abilities.

In the second step (assess), the factors, elements, and conditions of situations in which you find yourself will be different. Becoming alert to the introduction of these new ingredients will become easier as your experience broadens. In the third step (evaluate), you will more accurately be able to determine the value and worth of the factors, elements, and conditions and how they bear on your own skills and abilities. Because you will have developed more skills and abilities, in the fourth step (select) you will find it easier to select those most likely to affect the situation.

In the fifth step (apply), you will take greater care and concern and give greater attention to the factors that are likely to be affected. You will understand how to judge their relevance with greater accuracy, and when you reassess and reevaluate your actions you will have increased sensitivity to the intercultural demands of communication situations and how you can enhance, nourish, and encourage further communication efforts.

What Is Culture?

Culture is not a box but a fluid concept that is an ever-changing, living part of you, reflecting your learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles. The following is a useful definition. As you read it, recognize that there are no hard edges; rather, there are phenomena that tend to overlap and mingle. **Culture** is:

The ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors

The words you choose reflect your culture because that is where you learned them, and that is where they originated.



(which can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion).³

The word **worldview** means an all-encompassing set of moral, ethical, and philosophical principles and beliefs that govern the way people live their lives and interact with others. Your worldview governs the way you think, feel, and behave, whether you realize it or not, and affects in a major way how you view every aspect of life—physical, spiritual, emotional, moral, sociological, and mental.

Culture is significant in your life because it is part of you. It includes your patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.⁴ Thus, it is not only maintained but often expressed through your communication. When

Jonathan left a prominent position at a prestigious company, his best friend, Adam, explained his departure this way: “Voicing concern and choked with emotion, Jonathan was no longer able to step up his efforts, as his American dream turned into a nightmare, his emotional roller coaster came to a full stop. Sending shock waves through family and friends, he said his final good-byes, and called it quits.” Not only was Adam’s communication full of cliches, but each one—eight in two sentences—was uniquely American. Where do the words you choose come from? They reflect your culture because that is where you learned them, that is where they originated, and they are likely to be all you know!

Because it is part of you, culture not only influences your perception of your self and your perception of others (discussed in the last chapter) but your perception of everything in life with which you have contact. Think about what might be considered true American values and freedom: things like democracy, individualism, property, equality, freedom, community, and justice. The degree to which you accept these as your own values is also the degree to which you measure your sense of self on those same values. For example, you would feel better about yourself if you were actively involved in your democracy (being informed of the positions of political candidates and voting), expressing your individualism (being assertive and sticking up for your rights), and owning property (having a nice car).

You Are a Cultural Being

One desired outcome from reading about *culture* is that you will recognize and accept *yourself* as a cultural being. **Cultural identity**, composed of ethnicity, culture, gender, age, life stage, beliefs, values, and assumptions, is the degree to which you identify with your culture, and it is determined by the values you support. If you were born and raised in the United States, your cultural identity involves the degree to which you identify with being American. But it doesn't stop there. You have a number of cultural identities—being a member of the student body, a particular race, a specific age group, a religion, and so on. The word **co-culture** represents nonwhites, women, people with disabilities, homosexuals, and those in the lower social classes who have specific patterns of behavior that set them off from other groups within a culture.⁵ Which cultural identity is prominent depends on the situation, the people you are with, and the conversational topics.

Stanley Martinez in our earlier example was clearly a member of a gang co-culture. Although that co-culture was distinguished by members who followed the rules of the neighborhood and were often characterized by the use of drugs, alcohol, and violence, he was a member of two other cultures as well. First, he was a Latino American, a large co-cultural group where he lived. He grew up speaking Spanish, living in overcrowded conditions, and suffering extreme social discrimination—having been called lazy, shiftless, lawless, and violent, all unfortunate, negative stereotypes that had a direct effect on his self-concept. Second, he identified with being an American. Born and raised in the United States, his cultural identity involved a very clear identification with the beliefs, values, and assumptions of the dominant culture. The co-cultures of Martinez and their relationship to the dominant culture are depicted in Figure 3-1.

There are three things that you need to understand about possessing a cultural identity. First, cultural identities are learned. You learn the ways of thinking, acting, and feeling from your family first, then from your friends and communities. Second, cultural identities vary in strength. Morgan, for example, had all the speech and language patterns, all the actions and reactions of a typical American student. All were so deeply embedded within her that she wasn't even aware of it until she visited Australia with her debate team.

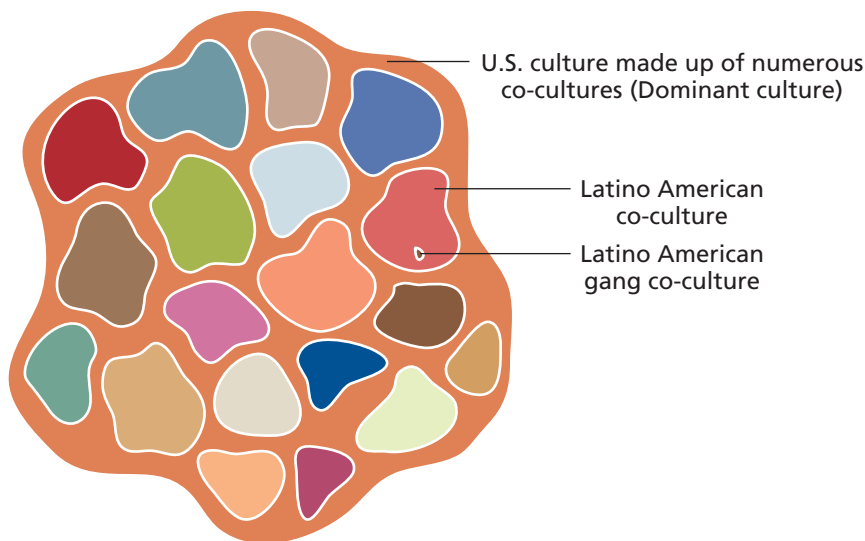


Figure 3-1
Relationship of Co-cultures to Dominant Culture

Third, cultural identities vary in their content. For example, not everyone would define what it means to be an American in the same way, just as students have different ways of defining what it means to be a student. The importance of this point becomes evident when you begin to generalize about cultures. To what extent do you value freedom, pleasure, social recognition, and independence? These are values often ascribed to members of the U.S. culture. What if you were a Japanese American and you held cultural identities for both these cultures? The Japanese culture values self-sacrifice, harmony, and accepting traditions—values that, in part, directly contradict those of the U.S. culture.

When you realize all the cultural identities people possess, you also can see the perplexities associated with the *intersection* of issues of race and ethnicity, language, religion, gender and sexual orientation, generation and age, and so forth, as they operate within individuals. These factors interact and come out differently in different people. Understanding cultural identities offers insights into how individuals relate to the many groups to which they belong, but not only that, to understand others, and yourself, you need to realize the variety of groups that create their (and your) cultural identity.⁶

Cultural identity can be a complex issue. For example, a second-generation girl, living in a minority area, whose parents are Korean immigrants, whose friends are Spanish-speaking co-workers, identifies herself as Korean American, a woman, or an American depending on the **context**.

Cultural identity can be a simple issue, too. Some groups create their own co-cultures to isolate themselves from others. In many cities the immigrants still seem to live and work in isolation and resolve to protect their heritage by maintaining all vestiges of their culture and not assimilating. Regarding your perception of others, you might perceive them based on the same set of values—those that you hold dear.

“Culture is a mental set of windows through which all of life is viewed.”⁷ It is more than an environment or geographical location in which you live, and it is more than any single component of your personality or background, including your race, ethnicity, nationality, language, gender, religion, ability or disability, or socioeconomic status. These components—and certainly the way they combine and interact—affect your social and educational status as well as your family, community, and professional interactions. Culture is the way you make sense of your life.⁸

From this brief discussion of culture it is easier to understand intercultural communication. When a message is created by a member of one culture, and this message needs to be processed by a member of another culture, **intercultural communication** takes place.⁹

The Importance of Studying Intercultural Communication

The chances for contacts with people from other cultures have increased dramatically with changes in the workplace; U.S. businesses expanding into world markets in a process of globalization; people now connected—via answering machines, faxes, e-mail, electronic bulletin boards, and the Internet—to other people whom they have never met face-to-face; the ever-increasing mobility of U.S. families; and the changing demographics within the United States and changing immigration patterns as well.¹⁰ It is precisely this increased contact that makes studying intercultural communication so important. (See Figure 3-2.)

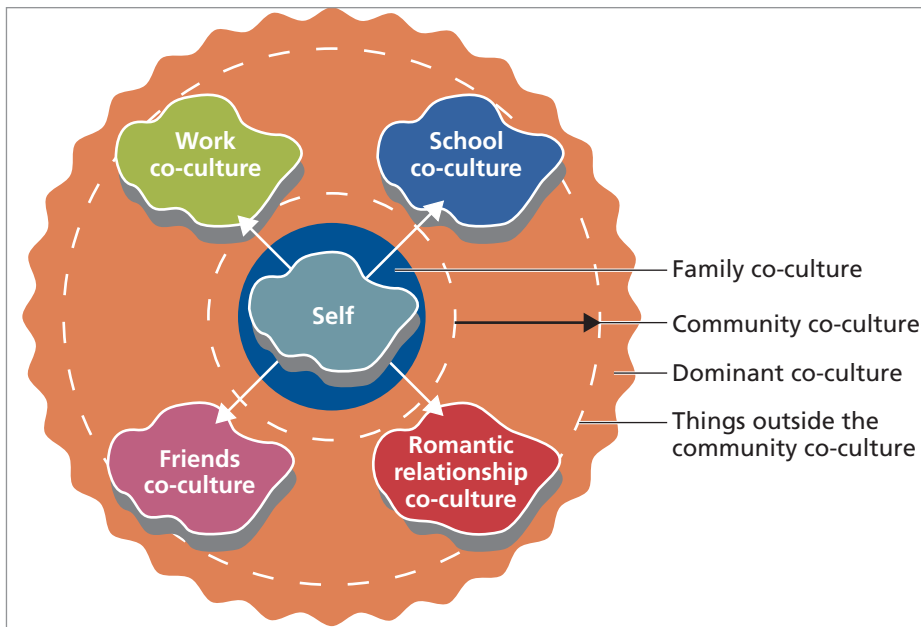


Figure 3-2
The Multicultural Self
The community co-culture may include work, school, friends, and romantic relationships, but these may occur outside the community as well.

Understanding Your Own Identity

The first reason for studying intercultural communication is to develop a sensitivity to various cultural heritages and backgrounds to better understand your own identity. In her book *Torn Between Two Cultures*, Maryam Qudrat Aseel says, “It was through the experience of living and being raised in the United States that I came to truly appreciate and understand my own religion, heritage, culture, and language.”¹¹ Your decisions about the values you want to adopt or continue holding, the lifestyles or orientations you wish to pursue, and even the friends you want to have—not to mention the major, occupation, or profession you desire—are affected by racial, cultural, gender, and social-class factors that affect your personal identity, who you are and who you want to be.¹²

Enhancing Personal and Social Interactions

The broader your outlook, the more tolerant and accommodating you become. The chances of having close, personal, interactions with those different from you—whether in age, physical ability, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, race, or nationality—are increasing daily. Such relationships help you learn about the world, break stereotypes, and acquire new skills.¹³

Solving Misunderstandings, Miscommunications, and Mistrust

Until recently our nation has not learned, nor has it needed to learn, to be multiculturally competent.¹⁴ The study of intercultural communication will not just unlock doors closed for generations; it will open those doors and, thus, resolve misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mistrust through honest, open, positive, healthy



STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY

Strategic flexibility requires learning about the world, breaking down stereotypes, and acquiring new skills. Greater tolerance and accommodation will expand your available skills and behaviors as you anticipate, assess, evaluate, and select from your repertoire. In addition, you will reveal greater care, concern, and attention as you apply those skills.



WORKING TOGETHER

The word *multicultural* means different things to different people. The commonly held view suggests that being multicultural means being tolerant of racial and ethnic minorities, mainly of their dress, language, food, religious beliefs, and other cultural manifestations.

For this activity, allow each member of your group to express his or her ideas and feelings on each of the following questions:

1. Multiculturalism seeks to preserve distinctly different ethnic, racial, and cultural communities (co-cultures) without melting them into a common culture. Is this definition of U.S. society an acceptable one?
2. Can diversity be preserved while also establishing a unifying set of cultural symbols—symbols like language? Should teachers in the United States, despite their background or current geographic location, teach students in English alone?
3. Should the word *multicultural* include—in addition to ethnic, racial, and co-cultures—struggles against sexism, heterosexism, classism, linguicism, and ableism?
4. Does multiculturalism encourage racial and ethnic harmony as well as cross-cultural understanding?

communication. People not only fear, but they also distrust the unknown. Trust is gained through knowledge and understanding.

Enhancing and Enriching the Quality of Civilization

Recognizing and respecting ethnic and cultural diversity are important steps on the road to valuing the ways in which diversity enhances and enriches the quality of our civilization. According to Carlos Cortes, “many multiculturalists today seem unwilling to deal with the growing factor of intermarriage. Too much of multi-cultural education is frozen into a kind of group purity paradigm, when in fact, intermarriage is one of the enormous changes that is taking place in America. For example, one-third of all Latinos born in the United States now marry someone who is not Latino. . . . What will these cultural blends be like?”¹⁵ In 2002 there were 1,674,000 interracial marriages, close to a 40 percent increase in 22 years.¹⁶ When you consider the potential for the new perspectives, cultural insights, and unique wisdom that intermarriages can produce, there is no doubt about the corresponding increase in the quality of our civilization.

Becoming Effective Citizens of Our National Communities

National communities are co-cultural groupings within the country. National communities were established from the beginning as “our forefathers acquired the lands of Native Americans, 34 percent of the territory of Mexico in 1848, and the island of Puerto Rico in 1898.”¹⁷ Prior to the 1960s, most of the immigrants to the United States came from Europe, but of the million or so immigrants who now enter the United States every year, 90 percent are from Latin America and Asia. A study by the Population Reference Bureau suggests that by 2050 the United States will be a global society in which nearly half of all citizens will be from today’s racial and ethnic minorities.¹⁸

Intercultural Communication and the Communication Model

Using our broad definition of *culture*, and with the clear understanding that much of communication is intercultural, you can also see how much influence intercultural communication has had on the model of communication in Chapter 1.

It Influences Senders and Receivers

If my values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview are different from yours, given the same subject to respond to and with everything else in the assignment the same, I will compose a significantly different response. As the differences among communicators become greater, the results in thoughts, feelings, and messages become more divergent as well.

It Influences Messages and Feedback

When my parents taught in Pakistan, they were told that raising a question in the classroom is considered an affront to a respected and esteemed authority: the teacher. Instead of interpreting the lack of student response as indifference or lack of understanding, my parents encouraged students to respond among themselves with the teacher as overseer, guide, and outside resource. Jun Liu, in his book *Asian Students' Classroom Communication Patterns in U.S. Universities*, attributes silence in Asian cultures to politeness, the pace of the discussion in U.S. classrooms, fear of wasting class time, and face saving with other international students or with the professor.¹⁹

Both verbal and nonverbal messages are affected by intercultural communication. Most Americans pay attention and show respect in the classroom by maintaining eye contact with teachers. But Navajo students in the classroom show respect by avoiding eye contact.

It Influences the Setting

Setting can refer to the way communication fits into history: past, present, and future. It also describes how communication fits into a relational setting, such as the influences of power and distance, individualism versus collectivism, or femininity versus masculinity. It can refer to gender, ethnicity, or nationality.

Setting, too, can relate to your own position within a speech community. If you are the only person with a physical disability in an otherwise abled environment, or the only gay man or lesbian in a heterosexual environment, you may face specific expectations or have people project their motivations on your communication.²⁰

Studying Cultural Differences

There are a number of ways to contrast a group of cultures to another group of cultures.²¹ Geert Hofstede examined cultural distinctions based on deeply rooted values and derived five dimensions—power distance, individualism versus collectivism, femininity versus masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation.²² A sixth dimension, Edward T. Hall's high context versus low context, follows our discussion of Hofstede's five dimensions.²³

Cultural differences are manifest in the cultural identities of the people, as the examples within each category will reveal. Cultural identity influences behavior including choices of symbols, heroes and heroines, rituals, and even the values one chooses.

The dimensions discussed here are general tendencies only. They are not always true of a culture, nor true of everyone in a culture. Jackie Low is a good example. Raised in Ohio, she has never been to China, never spoken a word of Chinese, and did not know much about China. Anyone who assumed from her looks that Jackie was Chinese would have been incorrect.

Iris Chang, in her book *The Chinese in America*, verifies Jackie Low's experience when she says about the ethnic Chinese in America: "None can truly get past the distinction of race or entirely shake the perception of being seen as foreigners in their own land."²⁴

Power Distance

Power distance is a way of contrasting a group of cultures to another group of cultures by measuring social inequality in each. You will notice power differences in family customs, the relationships between students and teachers, the young and the elderly, language systems, and organizational practices. When Lennie observed Tupac—who was from Africa, a high-power-distance country—he noticed he always did as he was told by their boss, who Lennie thought was authoritarian, dictatorial, and unfair, and Lennie wasn't afraid to say so. When Lennie talked to Tupac, he realized most people from Africa consider their boss a benevolent dictator and do as they are told.

Continents with high power distance include Africa, Latin America, and Near Eastern countries. Low-power-distance countries include the United States, Germany, China, and Great Britain.

Individualism versus Collectivism

The degree of integration and orientation of individuals within groups is referred to as **individualism versus collectivism**. When Elaine worked with the Peace Corps in Argentina, she learned about collectivist cultures. Working hand in hand with Eduardo

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View "Culture and Self" to further understand the value of examining cultural differences.

Our way to contrast a group of cultures to another group of cultures is to use the dimension of power distance—social inequality. The picture reveals potential power distances between students and teacher as well as between the younger and the elderly.



Puerta, a native Argentinian, she realized he had never worked side-by-side with a female and needed to be in control and maintain face. In their discussions, she also came to understand his devotion to his family and preference for government control over the economy and press. Knowing about collectivist cultures helped Elaine not just understand Eduardo, but learn from and respect him as well.

You will notice that people in individualistic cultures such as Great Britain, the United States, Canada, France, and Germany value self-expression, view speaking out as a way to solve problems, and use confrontational strategies to deal with interpersonal problems. In collectivist cultures such as many Arab, African, Asian, and Latin American countries, people have unquestioning loyalty to the group, and when in conflict they use avoidance, intermediaries, and other face-saving techniques.

Femininity versus Masculinity

A way of contrasting a group of cultures to another group of cultures that looks at the division of rules between men and women is called **femininity versus masculinity**.

High-feminine cultures believe women should be nurturant, concerned for the quality of life, and reveal sympathy for the unfortunate. In general, feminine cultures allow cross-gender behaviors. High-masculine cultures believe men should be concerned about wealth, achievement, challenge, ambition, promotion, and that they should be assertive, competitive, tough, and recognize achievements. Masculine cultures are more likely to maintain strictly defined gender roles and, thus, have distinct expectations of male and female roles in society. High-feminine cultures include Africa and the Nordic countries of Europe. High-masculine cultures include Latin America, Great Britain, Japan, and the United States.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance compares tolerance for the unknown when contrasting a group of cultures to another group of cultures. When Amelia entered her math classroom on the first day, she was startled to realize her teaching assistant was from Japan. Because Amelia knew Japan was a low-uncertainty-avoidance country, she was able to put into perspective much of what she learned from Junji Akimoto. Junji behaved quietly without showing aggression or strong emotions. Easy-going and relaxed, he ran an open-ended class.

Cultures that feel threatened by ambiguous and uncertain situations and try to avoid them prefer formal rules to control social behaviors. The best example is China. Low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures need few rules and accept and encourage dissenting views and risk taking. Countries with low uncertainty avoidance include Latin America, Africa, and Japan. The United States is considered “medium” on this dimension—neither high nor low.

Long-Term Orientation

Long-term orientation measures the trade-off between long-term and short-term gratification of needs. This dimension was added by Hofstede as a result of his work with Michael Bond.²⁵ Bond labeled it Confucian dynamism. Elisha’s roommate, Mei Li, explained by example that virtuous behavior in China means acquiring skills and education, working hard, and being frugal, patient, and persevering. Knowing what long-term orientation meant helped Elisha bond with Mei Li and appreciate her industriousness.



CONSIDER THIS

China is experiencing rapid growth, has a voracious appetite for investment, technology, commodities, goods, and services, and is marching steadily into global markets. As Ted Plafker, author of *Doing Business in China* (Warner Business Books, 2007), claims on his very first page, “Any company, whatever its size and whatever its business, *simply must get into China*” (italics his). In his chapter “Cultural Differences and Etiquette,” he summarizes his cultural observations in a box entitled, “The Big Stuff, the Small Stuff, and the Little Things”:

In matters of Chinese etiquette, watch out for the Big Stuff—issues and missteps that can really cost you. These include slighting a senior official, ignoring considerations of face, embarrassing a counterpart, losing your temper, and raising delicate political topics at the wrong time and place. Mistakes like these can cause you lasting harm.

Be aware of the Small Stuff—but don’t worry too much about it. You can score some valuable points by mastering certain forms of etiquette in banquet situations, gift giving, and the handling of name cards. But

a clumsy performance is not likely to cause you much grief.

And don’t ignore the Little Things! These are issues that may seem trivial to you but can be very important to your Chinese counterparts. Be on time for meetings, don’t ask people to skip meals, and be aware of holidays on the Chinese calendar.

Source: T. Plafker, *Doing Business in China: How to Profit in the World’s Fastest Growing Market* (New York: Warner Business Books, 2007).

Questions

1. Do you think all cultures have similar things—big things, small things, and little things—that people unfamiliar with the culture must be concerned about?
2. Do you think that because you are an obvious foreigner, any problems you encountered because of these items—even those Plafker labels as Big Stuff—would be excused simply because the Chinese would recognize you as a foreigner?
3. How much study do you think would be required if you were asked to go to China as your company’s representative to negotiate an important business deal?

Those at one extreme on this dimension—having long-term orientation—admire persistence, ordering relationships by status, thriftiness, and having a sense of shame that emphasizes care for others and being loyal and trustworthy. China, Japan, and other Asian countries have an extraordinary long-term orientation toward life. At the other extreme—with short-term orientation—are countries like Finland, France, Germany, and the United States where people value personal steadiness and stability but do not have as much respect for tradition because it prevents innovation, nor for saving face, which can hinder the flow of business. These countries, too, favor reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts as related to social rituals.

High Context versus Low Context

High context versus low context contrasts how much information is carried in the **context** (high) and how much in the code or message (low).²⁶ In high-context communication most of the information is already in the person; very little information is in the coded, explicit, intentionally transmitted part of the message. For example, in the Japanese, African, Mexican, Asian, and Latin American cultures most of the meaning of a message is either implied by the physical setting or is presumed to be part of the individual’s beliefs, values, and norms. Often, in long-term relationships communication is high context because the slightest gesture, quickest

glance, or briefest comment can be interpreted without explicit statements or extended explanations.

Why? Because most of the information has already been experienced. Few explicit statements or extended explanations are necessary unless new areas of experience or discussion occur. Some people who date a lot tire of it simply because of the time it takes to move from low context to high context—often the preferred mode of communication because it is easier and doesn't require as many explanations and clarifications.

Most Western cultures prefer low-context messages in which the majority of the information is in the communication itself—not in the context. Computer instructions are low context because they require that every space, period, letter, and number be precisely in the right location; there are no exceptions. All the information is in the instruction, or the instruction does not work.

These six dimensions are basic frames of reference to help you appreciate differences. No culture is better than another; no culture is strange; no culture is unusual or foreign. Using these tools will help reduce misunderstandings by encouraging empathy, tolerance, respect, and perhaps, a more accurate interpretation of messages from people of another culture group.

Barriers to Intercultural Communication

Some people do not know about other cultures, and some do not want to know. There is no doubt that both ignorance (lack of knowledge) and naivete (lack of sophistication) can be important barriers to intercultural communication.

In this section, we will briefly consider ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. These are barriers because each is constructed around a judgment made before any communication takes place that then biases the communication that follows. All communication has a past, present, and future; barriers are part of the past that influence the communication that takes place now and affect all that follows in the future.

Ethnocentrism

When I lectured in Australia, I was told never to show arrogance or in any way to reveal condescension or become patronizing. It was wise advice. My hosts had warned me not to be ethnocentric: a common occurrence, they said, when Americans spoke to Australians.

Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own cultural group's behaviors, norms, ways of thinking, and ways of being are superior to all other cultural groups. Ethnocentrism is not to be confused with *patriotism*, which is devotion to one's country. Ethnocentrism carries devotion to the extreme point where you cannot believe that another culture's behaviors, norms, ways of thinking, and ways of being are as good or as worthy as your own. It becomes a barrier in intercultural communication when it prevents you from even trying to see another's point of view—that is, when it hampers all attempts at empathy.

Stereotyping

Stereotypes are oversimplified or distorted views of another race, another ethnic group, or even another culture. They are simply ways to categorize and generalize from the overwhelming amount of information we receive daily.

The problem with stereotypes is that whether they are positive or negative, once they are established, it is difficult to remove them. Sometimes they exist in our subconscious; these are even more difficult to discard because we are less aware of them. We tend to pick up information from our environment that supports the stereotypes rather than

denies them. This simply embeds them more deeply. To remove them, we must first recognize them, then we must obtain individual information that will counteract them.

Prejudice

Prejudice is a negative attitude toward a cultural group based on little or no experience.²⁷ The difference between stereotypes and prejudice should become clear in this example: When Chris was young, his parents told him never to go into the city because Mexican gangs ruled the city streets at night. Chris, of course, then had the preconceived notion that all Mexicans were bad people. From this stereotype Chris formed a prejudice against Mexicans. The stereotype told him what a group (Mexicans) was like; the prejudice told him how to feel about the group. All this changed when Chris worked for the city to help pay his way through college, and almost all his co-workers were Mexicans. Their attitude toward Chris as well as their behavior quickly changed the stereotype and altered his prejudice.

Discrimination

Discrimination is the overt actions one takes to exclude, avoid, or distance oneself from other groups.²⁸ Discrimination takes stereotypes and prejudice one step further—to action, whether overt or covert. You can discriminate against someone subtly by slightly turning away your body when in a conversation, or by avoiding eye contact with them. You can discriminate against people by hurling verbal insults at them. You can discriminate, too, by using physical violence, systematically eliminating the group from which the individual comes, or even in extreme cases by using genocide, as when autocratic tyrants exterminate racial or national groups. Yet another form of discrimination occurs when you exclude others from jobs or from other economic opportunities.

Obviously, discrimination can be interpersonal when you do it against another person, collective (when a number of individuals or a group perform the discrimination), or institutional (when a business or industry chooses not to serve a particular group of people).

Dealing with Barriers to Intercultural Communication

For accurate communication to occur, sender-receivers must be operating from the same perceptual point of view. This is usually not a problem when we are interacting with people from our own race or culture; however, when we communicate with someone from a different race or background, we must realize that this person will be operating from an entirely different point of view.

Communication between Nondominant- and Dominant-Group Members

Much of the literature about communication is written from the point of view of the dominant, or majority, culture. In the United States **dominant culture** includes white people from a European background, while **nondominant culture** includes people of color; women; gays, lesbians, and bisexuals; and those whose socioeconomic background is lower than middle class.

Table 3-1 Assimilation

Nonassertive	Assertive	Aggressive
Emphasizing what the dominant and nondominant groups have in common	Carefully preparing for meeting dominant-group members	Disassociating from one's own group
Acting positive	Manipulating stereotypes	Copying dominant-group behavior
Censoring remarks that might offend the dominant group	Bargaining	Avoiding interaction with other co-cultural groups
Avoiding controversy		Ridiculing oneself

When people are not part of a dominant culture, how do they communicate with people who are? In a tantalizing piece of research, Orbe looked at how people from nondominant groups (people of color; women; gays, lesbians, and bisexuals; and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) communicated with people from the dominant group.²⁹ He found that nondominant members adopted one of three basic strategies when they wanted to confront oppressive dominant structures and achieve success: assimilation, accommodation, and separation.

Assimilation Strategies

When nondominants use **assimilation**, they drop cultural differences and distinctive characteristics that would identify them with the nondominant group. As you can see in Table 3-1, there are three types of **assimilation strategies**.

Nonassertive Assimilation. In this type of assimilation, minority members want to belong to the majority group, but they do not want to use aggression to get there. In order to achieve acceptance, they emphasize what they have in common with the dominant group and sometimes censor themselves to fit in. However, it often comes at a terrible cost, as you can see in the following passage:

I spent the fifties essentially either going to graduate school or beginning my career as a teacher who was very much in the closet—and very much attempting to hide the fact that I was a lesbian. And that meant putting down and holding down a whole part of myself that was really vital to my being. I have these visions of faculty parties or church parties or picnics to which I would oftentimes go with a gay man friend of mine, and we would put on an incredibly good show.³⁰

Assertive Assimilation. In assertive assimilation, people are likely to take a stronger approach to fitting in. They will often carefully prepare for an encounter with the dominant group. They may overcompensate by trying to be twice as smart, twice as witty, and so forth.

African American writer Patricia Raybon, in her book *My First White Friend*, describes her assertive assimilation stage, which occurred when she was a child living in a predominantly white culture:

I was reared to smile, to be polite, to say please and thank you and not to act ugly. I was reared to be the cleanest, nicest, smartest, kindest black child I could possibly be. That would make people like me. White people especially.³¹

Table 3-2 Accommodation

Nonassertive	Assertive	Aggressive
Increasing visibility	Letting DG members know who they really are	Confronting members of the DG when they violate the rights of others
Avoiding stereotypes	Identifying and working with DG members who have similar goals Identifying members of the DG who can support, guide, and assist Educating others	Referring to DG oppression of NG

Note: DG = Dominant Group; NG = Nondominant Group.

Aggressive Assimilation. In this type of assimilation, minority-group members want to fit into the dominant group at any cost. They will imply that there are no differences between the two groups and will be careful to not do or say anything that would indicate their difference, such as speaking in a dialect or making reference to their own group's behavior. They are so eager to be part of the dominant group that they might ridicule the group they belong to.

Accommodation Strategies

The next main category consists of accommodation strategies. **Accommodation** works toward getting the dominant group to reinvent, or at least change, the rules so that they incorporate the life experiences of the nondominant group. The three types of **accommodation strategies** are summarized in Table 3-2.

Nonassertive Accommodation. In nonassertive accommodation, the person does not act in any way that would cause dominant-group members to be defensive or cautious but tries to make people more aware of the group she or he belongs to and tries to change stereotypes they might have. For example, Anna, who is Mexican, often talks to her co-workers about her friends who are professionals, trying to break the stereotype of Mexicans as manual laborers.

Assertive Accommodation. Those who use this strategy try to achieve a balance between their own group and the dominant group. They try to get their own group's members to know the dominant group by sharing something about their lives; they also attempt to educate others about their group's members. Often they will choose a member of the dominant group as a mentor who can guide, support, and assist them.

They also try to educate the dominant group about their group's culture. Maria, for example, persuades some dominant-group members to go to a Mexican restaurant and guides them through the menu.

Aggressive Accommodation. The strategy in this approach is to get into a dominant group and try to change it, although nondominant-group members may confront dominant-group members to gain an advantage. For example, a woman on a committee that brings international scholars to the university may point out that no women have been chosen. Persons using aggressive accommodation may also warn dominant-group members of their history of oppression.

Table 3-3 Separation

Nonassertive	Assertive	Aggressive
Maintaining barriers between themselves and the DG Keeping away from places where DG members are found	Asserting their voice regardless of the consequences Making references to DG oppression with the goal of gaining advantage	Making direct attacks on DG members Undermining the DG by not letting its members take advantage of their privileged position
Note DG = Dominant Group; NG = Nondominant Group.		

Separation Strategies

In the third category of strategies, nondominant-group members have given up. In **separation**, nondominants do not want to form a common bond with the dominant culture, so they separate into a group that includes only members like themselves. During the 1960s and 1970s, many African Americans and women, unhappy that power structures were not changing quickly enough, formed separate groups that excluded members of the dominant group as well as nondominant-group members who did not share their views (Black Muslims exclude other blacks as well as whites). Some of these groups still exist today. Table 3-3 outlines the three types of **separation strategies**.

Nonassertive Separation. In this type of separation, the nondominant person avoids the dominant group whenever possible. Although the nondominant person may work with dominant-group members, he or she won't go out to lunch with them or socialize after work. Through verbal and nonverbal cues, the dominant group senses that this person wants to be left alone. For example, when Tom, who is gay, is asked whether he is going to the office Christmas party, he answers no because he knows that the man he lives with would not be welcome.

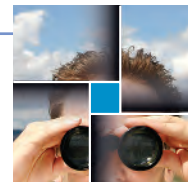
Some nondominant groups make no attempt to become part of the dominant group. An example is the Hmong people who immigrated to the United States because they were no longer safe in Laos. Anne Fadiman describes them after they had lived for 17 years in the United States:

Seventeen years later, Foua and Nao Kao use American appliances but they still speak only Hmong, celebrate only Hmong holidays, practice only Hmong religion, cook only Hmong dishes, sing only Hmong songs, play only Hmong musical instruments, tell only Hmong stories, and know far more about the current political events in Laos and Thailand than about those in the United States. . . . It would be hard to imagine anything further from the vaunted American ideal of assimilation, in which immigrants are expected to submerge their cultural differences in order to embrace a shared national identity.³²

Assertive Separation. Persons practicing assertive separation work to form organizations where they can be separate from the dominant group. While in these groups, they work against any dominant-group messages that imply the dominant group is superior and they are inferior. One communication strategy they use is reminding the dominant group of their oppression. Patricia Raybon, whose passage we quoted in the assimilation discussion, describes some of the feelings that led to her assertive separation stage:

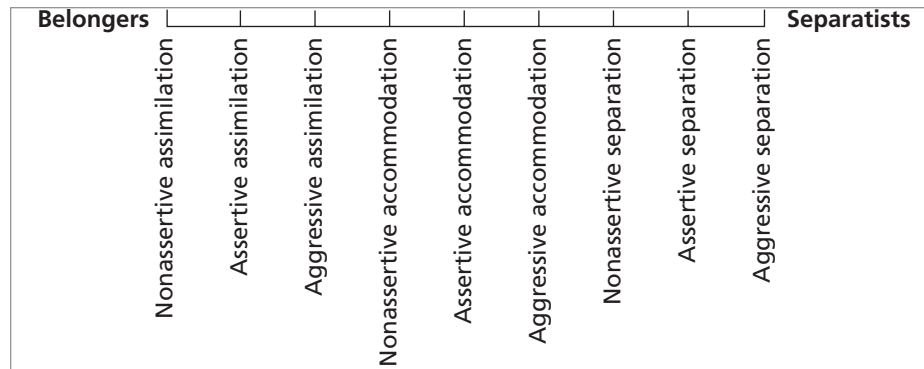
White people—that relentless, heavy presence. Never benign. Never innocent. “White people” as a category embodied in my view a clear and certain evil—an arrogant

REALITY CHECK



You may not have experience with some (or any) of the international cultures that are used throughout this chapter for examples, but if you have experience with Americans with Latino, African, or European heritages, the same comments apply. Using specific examples from your own experience, cite instances of assimilation, accommodation, or separation strategies in action. Do the descriptions in this textbook make sense to you? Do the descriptions seem logical? If you were a member of the nondominant culture, which strategy would you be likely to use? Why? How might your strategy be implemented? How would its implementation influence how effectively you communicated?

Figure 3-3
Nondominant
Persons'
Communication to
Dominant Groups



*malevolence—that had done unspeakable things that I couldn’t ignore because I knew the facts of these things. Names and dates and numbers. And the facts haunted me and the numbers justified my hate for all of the evil that I believed white people had done.*³³

Aggressive Separation. In aggressive separation, people separate from the dominant group and expect their fellow nondominant-group members to do so too. They are very critical of those who practice assimilation or accommodation. It is not uncommon for groups fighting against oppression to separate from the dominant group.

If members of these groups have to have interaction with the dominant group (for example, at work), they will try to undermine the dominants by not letting them take advantage of their privileged positions. For example, an employee would bring legal action against his or her boss for discrimination.

The Consequences of Nondominant- and Dominant-Group Communication

Orbe’s research does not lead to a very optimistic picture of American society. If we depict his results on a continuum, as in Figure 3-3, on one end are people who want to belong so much that they are willing to give up or suppress their own cultures, while on the opposite end are people who have decided that they cannot live in the dominant culture of the United States and have gone off on their own. In a country that prides itself on being a place where people from all cultures can live in harmony, nothing on the continuum is acceptable to our vision of what democracy should be.

Improving Intercultural Communication

Sometimes in an intercultural-communication situation with a person different from us, we may interpret the other person as *abnormal*, *weird*, or simply *different*. It is important to learn to control the human tendency to translate “different from me” into “less than me.”³⁴ Rather, we need to raise questions. Are there effective ways of dealing with different kinds of people? Can I develop a repertoire of five or six approaches that will help me reach others in real and meaningful ways?³⁵

Engage in mindfulness. Mindfulness means paying attention to what is going on in the present moment without judgment.³⁶ To do this, you must trust your direct and immediate experience. Second, you must show patience—a willingness to observe and describe (perhaps *intrapersonally* only) what is happening without bias. You simply

throw yourself into the present moment and glean wisdom through the trial and error of learning by direct experience. Third, you must accept “what is, as is,” in other words, accept whatever it is that the universe serves up. It means accepting life on life’s own terms, regardless of *your* feelings about it and (using SF) discovering effective strategies to cope with and eventually appreciate whatever is happening.

Few people live mindfully. They don’t meet each moment of life as it presents itself, with full awareness, and allow their judgments to fall away. Not only do they churn out judgments about themselves and others, but they do a number of things at the same time (multitasking); get caught up in feelings about the past or future; avoid any uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or situations; and disconnect from what is happening right in front of them. If this description fits the way they live, it is easy to see why mindfulness is seldom practiced and is so important. Its value is that because it is an instant of pure awareness *before* they conceptualize, identify, focus their eyes or mind on, objectify, clamp down on it mentally, segregate it from the rest of existence, or think about it in any way, it reminds them of what they should be doing, helps them see things as they really are, and assists them in seeing the deep nature of what it is they are about to examine.

Pay attention to your words and actions. It is only through your thoughtful communication with others that you become aware of your own thinking patterns, assumptions, perceptions, prejudices, and biases.³⁷ When students come to Cruz-Janzen’s classes expecting to learn how to communicate with nonwhites, she tells them they are first going to study themselves, their gender, racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and physical (ability, disability, and appearance) socialization. Cruz-Janzen has a very clear motive in this: “As long as whites continue expecting others to explain themselves, whites are setting themselves as the norm, the normal ones, against whom all others must be judged and measured.”³⁸

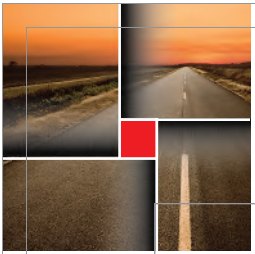
Control your assumptions. An **assumption** is a taking for granted or supposition that something is a fact. You can learn from generalizations about other cultures, but those generalizations turn sour when you use them to stereotype or oversimplify.³⁹

- Don’t assume that there is one right way (yours) to communicate. Question your assumptions about the “right way” to communicate.
- Don’t assume that breakdowns in communication occur because others are on the wrong track. The point isn’t “who is to blame for the breakdown?” it is “who can make the communication work?”⁴⁰ Remember, ineffective communication can occur for a variety of reasons:
 - You may not have transmitted your message in a way that can be understood.
 - Others may misinterpret what you say.⁴¹
- Don’t assume that the preferred rules of interpersonal relationships you have learned in your culture apply universally across all cultures. They do not.
- Don’t assume that your cultural definitions and successful criteria of conflict management apply universally across all cultures. They do not.⁴²
- Don’t assume because another’s values and beliefs differ from your own that you are being challenged.
- Don’t assume that you can learn about intercultural communication by staying in your comfort zone. Even if it is awkward at first, you need to expose yourself to different cultures.⁴³
- Don’t assume you know what is best for someone else.



STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY

To apply the steps of strategic flexibility may require that you ask questions that help you more accurately anticipate, assess, evaluate, select, and apply your abilities and skills. Questions can also help you demonstrate the care, concern, and attention that may reveal true sensitivity— opening the doors to effective intercultural communication.



ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

In her speech, "Success Requires Imagination, the Right Business Plan and the Right Environment," Patricia Russo, chief executive officer of Alcatel-Lucent, claims that despite all the technical developments, successful innovation in business is only 1 percent technical and 99 percent human. Regarding intercultural communication, Russo writes:

Think about it. The Internet has enabled the small pottery maker in Tuscany to do business directly with the restaurateur in San Francisco. But while the technology can bridge the miles, only people can bridge cultures. As such, global competitiveness requires cross-cultural partnerships with a diverse set of customers, governments, regulators, universities and research institutes around the world. (p. 225)

Questions

1. Russo says, "But while the technology can bridge the miles, only people can bridge cultures." What does she mean by this comment? Do you think her statistic that "truly successful innovation is only 1 percent technical and 99 percent human" (p. 224) is accurate?
2. If it is true that "only people can bridge cultures," what kind of burden does this place on the shoulders of those who plan to go into business and industry following college?

Source: P. Russo, "Success Requires Imagination, the Right Business Plan and the Right Environment: Building on the Telephony Network's Traditional Strengths," *Vital Speeches of the Day* LXXIII, no. 5 (May, 2007): 223–226.

Engage in transpection. Instead of assuming—a process most people begin quickly, naturally, and often subconsciously—take a moment to relax and reflect. **Transpection** is the process of empathizing across cultures.⁴⁴ "Achieving transpection, trying to see the world exactly as the other person sees it, is a difficult process. It often involves trying to learn foreign beliefs, foreign assumptions, foreign perspectives, and foreign feelings in a foreign context. Transpection, then, can only be achieved by practice and requires structured experience and self-reflection."⁴⁵

Striving *toward* transpection can help you avoid assumptions and move you closer to tolerance, sensitivity, respect, empathic listening, and effective communication responses. Listen carefully to others, understand their feelings, be interested in what they have to say and sensitive to their needs, and try to understand their points of view.⁴⁶

Gain knowledge. The greater your cultural and linguistic knowledge, and the more your beliefs overlap with those from other cultures, the less likelihood for misunderstandings.⁴⁷ You need to read, observe, ask questions, and visit places where there are people from different races and ethnic backgrounds.

When Madison found out her new roommate was from Saudi Arabia, she immediately worried because of what she'd heard in the media about Saudi terrorists. She went online to find out more about the country—customs, traditions, religion, and anything else she could discover. The words *Saudi Arabia* produced over 11 million Web sites. Using online resources such as The World Factbook, Saudi Arabia Information Resource, Saudi newspapers, and the Lonely Planet World Guide, Madison strove toward transpection to help herself avoid assumptions.

Gain experience. You cannot learn how to be a good communicator just by reading, observing, asking questions, or doing research on the Internet. But gaining experience doesn't require making actual visits to foreign countries or foreign cultures. Find an individual of another culture, and ask if the two of you could have a conversation about intercultural communication. With that as your focus, ask some pointed, specific questions designed to help you better understand him or her and

others of the same culture. The following 10 questions are designed to get your conversation started:

- How do you, or other members of your culture, cope with and adapt to unfamiliar cultural environments?
- How can members of other cultures begin to communicate with members of your culture?
- What factors can increase our effectiveness in communicating?
- If we had a conflict, what strategies would be successful for managing it?
- What important factors contribute to the development of interpersonal relationships with you or with members of your culture?
- What changes have you noticed in yourself as a consequence of your experiences in a new culture?
- How can I become more *intercultural* as a result of our contact and communication with members of your culture?
- Can we develop community with members of your culture?⁴⁸
- What are some of the worst offenses people outside your culture make in communicating with you or with members of your culture?
- What do you feel are some of the worst offenses you have made as you have become acclimated into this culture?

There are other ways to gain experience in intercultural communication—to obtain a broader worldview. Frequent ethnic restaurants, watch world news in addition to local news, read books written by authors from other countries, learn another language, and when countries with which you are unfamiliar are mentioned, find them on a map. Listen to world music, rent foreign films, and travel—whether in person or through videos. Your local library has dozens of videos on foreign countries. But don't just observe. Converse with people of other cultures. Take part in cultural celebrations that differ from your own. Volunteer to serve on committees, teams, or groups in which members of other cultures will be serving. Listen, engage, and keep asking questions. Take time to understand what people believe about childrearing, educational opportunities, world politics, and life in general.

How you learn about intercultural communication will depend on your willingness to find it out. You will see that the knowledge and understanding you gain is well worth any effort you put forth.

The Internet and Intercultural Communication

One of the most important influences on intercultural communication is the Internet. We are increasingly linked together across the globe, and we can connect with people on the other side of the world as quickly as we do with friends and family at home.

Zaid Sabah, writer of an article entitled, "Parents disapprove, but Internet romance a big hit,"⁴⁹ offers a glimpse of how the Internet is viewed in a conservative society such as Iraq. "Layla Ahmad, retired teacher and mother of three," Sabah begins his essay, "considers the Internet among the most dangerous post-invasion developments in Iraq. . . . We don't accept that our daughters meet boys through the Internet.

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It's dangerous, and you can't observe your children and what they are talking about."⁵⁰ This is an understandable point of view when you consider Iraq is a country where arranged marriages are common, premarital relations of any sort are frowned on, and the Internet represents a threat to the established order—Iraqi traditions. Perhaps it is just this point of view that makes it so popular: It gives young Iraqis a way to meet members of the opposite sex in a society that offers few such opportunities and to set up real dates. Arranging dates online is fine, but finding places to physically meet is difficult because most single Iraqis live with their parents, and it is dangerous to go out at night. University students can meet on campus where it is relatively safe and often walk around or sit together.

For students in the United States, the Internet serves as a vehicle not only for searching for common values and understanding, but also for hearing and seeing in real-time events that take place thousands of miles away. It can bridge the culture gap among nations of the world. For example, it has helped worldwide organizations function by bringing together people from different physical locations with common interests and goals.

Knowing about the Internet and having read about intercultural communication, you can see that the relationship between communication technologies and intercultural communication raises some interesting questions. In an article for *American Communication Journal*,⁵¹ Randy Kluver poses some of them regarding the effect of the Internet when it comes to the distinction between high- and low-context cultures, discussed previously in this chapter. Can persons from high-context backgrounds rely on the same subtle nonverbal cues and situational variables when using the Internet? In what ways are messages from those in high-context cultures transformed when there is an absence of nonverbal cues, environment and situational variables, and imprecise indications of status and hierarchy? Does high-context communication become low context considering these circumstances? Is communication across cultures via the Internet easier when nonverbal cues are removed? Do new nonverbal cues arise in electronic communication? What constitutes communication competence in the Internet-intercultural context? Knowing about both the Internet and intercultural communication allows you to generate legitimate questions regarding both means to and ends of effective Internet intercultural communication.



ASSESS YOURSELF

Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Form

For each statement circle the numerical score that best represents your performance, skill, or ability using the following scale: 7 = Outstanding; 6 = Excellent; 5 = Very good; 4 = Average (good); 3 = Fair; 2 = Poor; 1 = Minimal ability; 0 = No ability demonstrated.

- | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I listen to people from other cultures when they tell me how my culture affects them. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2. I realize that people from other cultures have fresh ideas and different points of view to bring to my life and to the workplace. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3. I give people from other cultures advice on how to succeed in my culture. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4. I give people my support even when they are rejected by other members of my culture. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 5. I realize that people outside my culture could be offended by my behavior. I've asked people if I have offended them by things I have done or said and have apologized whenever necessary. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 6. I realize that when I am stressed I am likely to make my culture right and another myself and culture wrong. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 7. I respect my superiors (boss, teacher, supervisor, group leader, etc.) regardless of where they are from. I do not go over their heads to talk to someone from my culture to try to get my way. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 8. When I am in mixed company, I mix with everyone. I don't just stay with people from my culture, or only with people from the dominant culture. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 9. I go out of my way to work with, recruit, select, train, and promote people from outside the dominant culture. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 10. When people in my culture make jokes or talk negatively about other cultural groups, I let them know that I don't like it. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

TOTAL POINTS: _____

Go to the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/hybels9 to see your results and learn how to evaluate your attitudes and feelings.

www.mhhe.com/hybels9 >

Source: Adapted from *Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Form 3*, I CANS (Integrated Curriculum for Achieving Necessary Skills), Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Washington State Employment Security, Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, Adult Basic and Literacy Educators, P.O. Box 42496, 711 Capitol Blvd., Olympia, WA 98504. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://www.literacynet.org/icans/chapter05/cultural3.html>

Summary

Intercultural understanding increases both sending and receiving abilities, making communication between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as constructive as possible. With broader experience, the care and concern you demonstrate will not just nourish intercultural communication but will encourage further communication efforts as well.

Culture is the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors (which can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, or religion).

To accept yourself as a cultural being means embracing a cultural identity composed of ethnicity, culture, gender, age, life stage, beliefs, values, and assumptions. A cultural identity is learned, varies in its strength, and varies in its content as well.

Five reasons for studying intercultural communication include (1) better understanding your own identity, (2) enhancing your personal and social interactions, (3) helping solve cultural misunderstandings, miscommunication, and mistrusts, (4) valuing the ways it enriches the quality of our civilization, and (5) becoming effective citizens of our national communities.

Intercultural communication influences the communication model first by its effect on the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview of senders and receivers; second, by its

effect on verbal and nonverbal messages; and, third, by the influences it has on the historical setting, relational setting, and a person's position within a speech community.

Power distance relates to social inequality. Individualism versus collectivism relates to the degree of integration and orientation of individuals. Femininity versus masculinity pertains to the division of roles between women and men. Uncertainty avoidance describes the degree of tolerance for the unknown. Long-term orientation relates to trade-offs between long-term and short-term gratification of needs. Finally, high versus low context refers to the amount of information already contained in the person or context versus the amount in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.


The four barriers to intercultural communication include ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. To deal with barriers, nondominant-group members use one or more of three main strategies to get what they want from dominant-group members: assimilation, accommodation, or separation.

Five ways to improve intercultural communication are: (1) pay attention to your own words and actions; (2) control your assumptions; (3) engage in transpection—the process of empathizing across cultures; (4) gain knowledge; and (5) gain experience.

The Internet offers a vehicle for searching for common values, understandings, and approaches to managing a world of different cultures.

Key Terms and Concepts

Use the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/hybels9 to further your understanding of the following terms.

 www.mhhe.com/hybels9

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|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Accommodation •• | Dominant culture •• | National communities •• |
| Accommodation strategies •• | Ethnocentrism •• | Nondominant culture •• |
| Assimilation •• | Femininity versus masculinity •• | Power distance •• |
| Assimilation strategies •• | High context versus low context •• | Prejudice •• |
| Assumption •• | Individualism versus collectivism •• | Separation •• |
| Co-culture •• | Intercultural communication •• | Separation strategies •• |
| Context •• | Knowledge class •• | Stereotypes •• |
| Cultural identity •• | Long-term orientation •• | Transpection •• |
| Culture •• | | Uncertainty avoidance •• |
| Discrimination •• | | Worldview •• |

Questions to Review

1. What is the role intercultural communication plays in communicating effectively and in strategic flexibility?
 2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the definition of *culture* offered in this textbook?
 3. What does it mean to possess a cultural identity?
 4. Can you make a case for the study of intercultural communication?
 5. What are the likely components of a multicultural self?
 6. How does intercultural communication relate to the model of communication?
 7. What are the six dimensions that can be used as a framework for studying cultural differences?
 8. What are four barriers to intercultural communication, and how do they work? Why are they considered barriers?
 9. What are the three ways members of a non-dominant group work to get what they want from dominant-group members?
 10. What are some ways for improving intercultural communication?
 11. What is the process of transpection, and why is it important?
 12. What is the influence of the Internet on intercultural communication?
- Go to the self-quizzes on the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/hybels9 to test your knowledge of the chapter concepts.