



The Communication Process: Learning from Models

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This chapter introduces several communication models and discusses what we can learn about the everyday communication process from them. The chapter covers the models developed by Aristotle, Harold Lasswell, Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, Wilbur Schramm, Frank Dance, Dean Barlund, and Sherry Ferguson. The models fall into four categories: linear, interactive, transactional, and critical. Additionally, the chapter covers the factors that contribute to communication breakdown and ways to avoid such breakdowns in communication.

Aristotelian Model of Communication

This model, which dates back to the fourth century BCE, depicts the most basic of communication functions. According to the Aristotelian model, communication proceeds in a linear fashion and all communication has the ultimate aim of persuading an audience. In order to persuade, the communicator of this model relies on three kinds of appeals: appeals based on source credibility, appeals based on logical and reasoning, and appeals based on emotion.

Source credibility appeals are based on the personal attractiveness of a communicator to his/her audience. Factors such as trustworthiness, competency, status, dynamism, and sociability of the communicator influence his/her ability to persuade the audience.

This model also introduces the notion of logical appeals in trying to persuade others. Logical appeals are based on logic and reasoning, and communicators may use reasoning from example, reasoning from generalization, causal reasoning, reasoning from sign, or analogical reasoning in order to persuade others.

Emotional appeals are also represented in the Aristotelian model of communication. The model recognizes that communicators must also persuade based on the expected emotional responses of an audience. Appeals to emotions such as compassion, anger, fear, pride, empathy, guilty, and humility can help the communicator persuade the audience.

Laswell's Effects Model

In 1948, Harold Lasswell published what he termed a “transmission” model of communication. This model retained the linear Aristotelian elements of the communicator, message, and audience, but included two new components: channel and effects.

Laswell's identification of the channel—the medium used to transmit a message—and effects—the intended or unintended impact(s) of a message—was based in an analysis of war rhetoric, but his model can be applied to any communication situation.

Shannon-Weaver Mathematical Model

The original Shannon-Weaver model was developed as a one-way transmission model, but it moved in a later version to an interactive model. Initially, the model was developed to map the process of a telephone call. Through interpretation and adaptation, however, the Shannon-Weaver model became one of the most popular interpersonal communication models of the twentieth century.

Two of the most important notions to come from the Shannon-Weaver model were the concepts of noise and feedback. Noise, which can be external, internal, physiological, or psychological, interferes with the transmission or reception of signals. The addition of a feedback loop to the later model changed the model from linear to circular and the roles of source and receiver become interchangeable.

Schramm Model

In 1954, Wilbur Schramm developed his communication model, which placed increased emphasis on the encoding and decoding of messages. Encoding and decoding refer to how we create, interpret, and assign meaning to words and actions. Schramm added the idea of the field of experience—the totality of all we are at the moment of communication—to his model. Schramm claimed that we have overlapping fields of experience, and people who have more overlap in their fields of experience will have an easier time communicating with one another, while those with little or no overlap will have difficulty communicating. Schramm argued that our backgrounds have a large impact on our ability to communicate with others. In this model, background variables (for example, gender, sexual orientation, age, race, ethnicity, educational level, etc.) are seen to cause differences in our experiences and how we interpret them.

Dance Model

The Dance model, created in 1967, is a helical model of communication with no fixed beginning or ending. The model can be envisioned as a helix which is ongoing, unrepeatable, additive, and cumulative. The helix continues to loop back in a reflective way, allowing past events and circumstances to influence the present and the future. These visitations of the past can be either positive or negative.

Barnlund's Transactional Model

Dean Barnlund created a transactional model of communication in 1970 in an effort to address perceived weaknesses in the interactive models of communication. Barnlund saw communication as transactional, meaning that communication is a process where communicators are simultaneously senders and receivers. Barnlund introduced the importance of paralanguage (such as tone of voice, rate of speech, vocal sounds), facial expression, and body language into his communication model. Additionally, Barnlund argued that not all communication is intentional or conscious and that the relationship between communicators is very important because they are interdependent.

Ferguson's Critical Communication Model (CCM)

Developed in 2006, Sherry Ferguson's critical communication model focusses on effects, but it also considers the ethical and power dimensions of communication.

What We Learn from Communication Models

The chapter explains that all of the communication models discussed contribute to several accepted understandings about communication:

- Communication can be intentional or unintentional.
- Communication has a relational, as well as a content, dimension.
- Communication benefits from shared fields of experience.
- Communication is irreversible and unrepeatable.
- Sending and receiving occurs simultaneously, with both verbal and non-verbal elements.
- Communication is a dynamic, ongoing process.
- Environment affects communication.
- Noise affects communication.
- Communication has a power dimension.
- Communication has a strong ethical dimension.

Tips for Managing Communication Breakdown

Given all of the factors influencing communication, the chapter explains that communication failures or breakdowns can occur. Failures or breakdowns can occur for a number of reasons, including misunderstanding, lack of precision in language and differences in perception.

Factors that Contribute to Communication Breakdown

The text identifies the following factors as ones which may decrease our ability to communicate successfully:

- Speed
- Personality
- Linguistic differences
- The use of jargon
- Expectancy
- Redundant information
- Fear of pain
- Ambiguous or non-specific information

How to Avoid Communication Breakdown

In order to decrease the likelihood of communication breakdown, the text suggests that we improve our communication skills. Tips for improving communication skills include:

- Be flexible in communicating and interpreting communication from others.
- Be succinct and clear, and listen for unspoken messages.
- Wait until someone finishes before responding.
- Be specific.
- Use language that is accessible.

- Practise communicating with others.
- Develop a large repertoire of communication skills.
- Stick to more formal language patterns when working in a second language.
- Be aware of the meaning of nonverbal signals.
- Asks questions and give feedback.
- Find alternative ways of explaining a point and use repetition.
- Use analogies and comparisons to convey meaning.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter the student should learn to do the following:

1. Identify and discuss the most popular communication models
2. Become familiar with and use communication terminology
3. Identify what can be learned from the communication models
4. Apply the principles of communication to their everyday live
5. Understand the reasons for communication breakdowns
6. Learn how to communicate effectively

GLOSSARY TERMS

Channel: The medium used to transmit a message. (p. 7)

Coercive power: Power that comes from making threats or intimidations. (p. 24)

Competency: One's expertise in a given area. (p. 4)

Culture: The shared ideas, traditions, norms, symbols, and values that define a community. (p. 11)

Destination: Where the message ends up. (p. 8)

Dynamism: One's boldness, energy, and assertiveness. (p. 4)

Effects: The intended or unintended impact(s) of a message. (p. 7)

Emotional appeals: Appeals based on the expected emotional responses of an audience. (p. 6)

Expert or information power: Power that comes from knowledge or expertise. (p. 24)

External noise: Interference from an environmental source. (p. 9)

Feedback: Response to a message or activity. (p. 9)

Field of experience: The totality of all we are at the moment of communication. (p. 10)

Information source: Where the message is conceived. (p. 8)

Internal noise: Interference from an internal source. (p. 9)

Legitimate power: Power that comes from holding an office, title, or other legitimate position. (p. 24)

Logical appeals: Appeals based on logical and reasoning. (pp. 5–6)

Noise: Interference that occurs in the transmitting or receiving of signals. (p. 9)

Open access: Unrestricted and uncontrolled sharing of information on open platforms, accessible to everyone. (p. 25)

Paralanguage: Elements of speech that are not recognized as language. (p. 12)

Physiological noise: Interference from a biological condition or function. (p. 9)

Psychological noise: Interference from a mental state. (p. 9)

Receiver: Mechanism for decoding the message. (p. 8)

Referent power: Power that comes from personal attractiveness. (p. 24)

Reward power: Power that comes from offering benefits or gifts. (p. 24)

Signal: The message. (p. 8)

Simultaneous access: Unrestricted access to information flowing from mass media and reaching everyone at the same time. (p. 25)

Sociability: One's likeability. (p. 4)

Source credibility appeals: Appeals based on the personal attractiveness of a communicator to the audience. (p. 4)

Standpoint theory: Theory that holds that our background and experiences determine our perspective. (p. 24)

Status: One's standing in relationship to others. (p. 4)

Transactional theory: Theory that sees communication as a dynamic process, involving continuous changes in communicators and environments. (p. 12)

Transmitter: Mechanism for encoding the message. (p. 8)

Trickle-down access: Controlled and restricted access to information, flowing mostly downward. (p. 25)

Trustworthiness: One's character or integrity. (p. 4)