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The Interpersonal Communication Process

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter and studying the materials, you should be able to:

1. Describe the essential parts of an interpersonal communications model.
2. Identify the barriers to interpersonal communication.
3. Overcome the barriers to interpersonal communication.
4. Recognize the additional challenges present in international interpersonal communication.

2.1 Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objective # 1: What are the essential parts of an interpersonal communication model?

One-on-one contact continues to be the most crucial form of business and management communication. Interpersonal communication interactions take place between two or more people—co-workers, with customers, suppliers, and others in the marketing channel, with members of governmental agencies, between supervisors and employees, and with a wide variety of publics on a daily basis. Each represents the potential to build trust, loyalty, and other positive elements of a relationship but also to generate disharmony, distrust, and, at times, hostility. An effective communicator tries to maintain pleasant and positive relations with others, even when points of disagreement arise. Understanding how interpersonal communication works helps form the foundation for improving your social skills on the job and in everyday life.

Bill Marriott: Maintaining a Legacy of Management Communication Success

The Marriott International chain of hotel properties has undergone a series of dramatic success periods along with eras of change. Marriott International's "spirit to serve" culture is based on a business philosophy established more than 80 years ago by founders J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott, who often said, "Take care of the associates, and they'll take care of the guests." By 2010, approximately 300,000 Marriott associates were serving guests in Marriott-managed and franchised properties throughout the world.

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Bill Marriott's communication style is an integral part of the success of his company.

CEO Bill Marriot is responsible for much of the company's current success. An ABC News story about Marriott noted, "In the post-Enron era, when CEOs tend to generate publicity for cutting corners and questionable business practices, Marriott sets a different standard. His attention to detail is legendary, as is his devotion to his employees. He thinks both have been the key to the company's success" (ABC News Nightline, 2007).

Marriott has built and maintained a culture designed to enhance personal relationships with individual employees that transfers to quality service to customers. He drops in to personally inspect hundreds of hotels a year. His style is "hands on," literally, with plenty of pats on the back and even hugs from loyal workers. He insists on a first-name basis. Marriott is so popular that company employees treat him with nearly "rock star" status when he arrives at a property (ABC News Nightline, 2007).

Marriott learned much of his management communication style from his father. "I'd walk with him into a hotel, we'd be late for a meeting, and he'd take 20 minutes and sit down in the lobby and talk to the lobby maid. He wanted to know how her kids were, was she making enough money, does she have enough work hours, was her health care good" (ABC News Nightline, 2007). *(continued)*

Bill Marriott: Maintaining a Legacy of Management Communication Success
(continued)

Bill Marriott expects his managers to maintain high standards of quality, and he gives them a 159-page checklist to make sure they take care of every detail. An interactive blog, titled "Marriott on the Move" allows CEO Marriott to personally converse with the public and with employees. Any complaint receives a prompt response and action as needed.

Bill Marriott has received the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC, 2007) Leadership in Communication Award. The award stipulated that "Marriott International is also well known as a great place to work and for its commitment to diversity and community service. It has consistently been named to *Fortune*'s lists of most admired companies, best places to work and top companies for minorities."

The J.D. Power & Associates 2007 North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Study measured overall guest hotel satisfaction across six hotel segments. The Ritz-Carlton brand came in No. 1 in the luxury segment. The JW Marriott brand came in No. 2. *Business Traveler*, *Executive Travel*, and *Condé Nast Traveler* have also recognized the company (Marriott.com, 2011).

Superior customer service is built on the foundation provided by a quality management communication program. The Marriott International story serves as an example of the role that excellent interpersonal communication skills play in a successful company and a person's career.

Questions for Students

1. What does Bill Marriott's management style communicate to employees?
2. Should a CEO insist that company employees call him/her by a first name? Would the CEO's gender make a difference in your answer?
3. Would Bill Marriott's hands-on communication style succeed in every country?

A Simplified Interpersonal Communication Model

Over the years, several models of interpersonal communication have been created. The models portray the movement of information from one person to another or to a set of people. Figure 2.1 provides one of the most straightforward models.

Figure 2.1: A simplified interpersonal communications model

= Noise (Barriers to Communications)
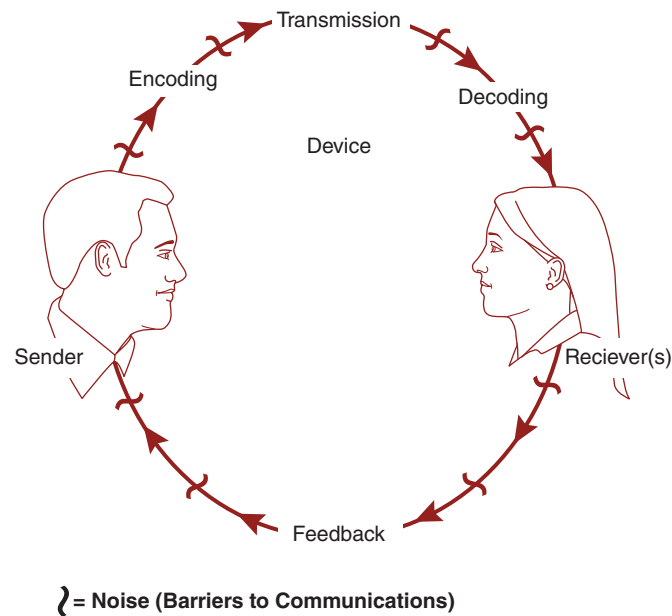
This model depicts a conversation between a manager and an employee, between co-workers, a presentation by a salesperson to a buyer or a buying committee, and numerous other interpersonal exchanges.

Source: Adapted from Guffrey, M. E., & Loewy, D. (2011). Business Communication: Process and Product. Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, pp. 13–14.

In the model, the **sender** is the person transmitting a message or an idea. In business settings, a conversation is initiated with a *communication goal* in mind. The goals are as simple as an office assistant reminding a supervisor about an upcoming meeting or as complex as a manager trying to convince a key employee to stay with the company instead of accepting a job offer from another firm. A salesperson who heads a team that is trying to win over a new client sends the message. That person may speak to a set of receivers, the purchasing team from the client company, and achieving the communication goal requires carefully chosen words, visual images on a PowerPoint display, inspiring music in the background, and handouts provided to each person in the client's buying group.

Encoding is the presentation of verbal and nonverbal cues. Encoding takes four forms: (1) verbal, oral cues, (2) verbal, written cues, (3) nonverbal cues, and (4) electronic transmissions that employ both verbal and nonverbal elements.

Verbal cues are words. They take the form of spoken language, printed matter, a text message, or even a drawing used to represent a concept. Verbal encoding includes the abbreviations and shortcuts that are part of tweets and text messages.

Nonverbal cues are all other forms of message-sending, including posture, eye contact, physical distance from the receiver, voice volume, gestures, and physical contact, such as touching someone on a shoulder or arm. Most messages contain both verbal and nonverbal elements.

Electronic transmissions go beyond text messages and emails. Technologies such as Skype allow for interpersonal meetings via televised images. The receiver encounters both verbal and nonverbal cues in those conversations.

The **transmission device** is anything that carries a message, including sound waves, light waves, pieces of paper, mobile-phone signals and screens, the Internet, computer monitors, billboards, radio and television signals, and an endless number of additional carriers. Modern management communication features a variety of new transmission devices that add to speed and efficiency but also create confusion and disruption for individuals trying to communicate on the job.

Decoding occurs as the receiver encounters the message. Every sensory device can be part of decoding, including hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, and tasting various cues. In a standard interpersonal interaction, sight and hearing are often used. Decoding involves interpretation of verbal and nonverbal cues, normally at the same time.

The **receiver** is the sender's intended audience. It can be a single person or a small group of people. Someone who passes by and hears a conversation is not considered a receiver, unless the sender suddenly adjusts the message to make sure the intruder receives part of the message. A manager who says, "We are going to be short-handed for a while," and just as the outsider passes by adds, "So everyone is going to have to pitch in," has expanded the audience to the second receiver.

Feedback returns to the sender in the form of evaluation of the message. The receiver transmits verbal and nonverbal cues that suggest, "I don't understand," "I disagree," "You're absolutely right," "This is frustrating," and other forms of reaction to the sender, including, "I'm not really listening." Then, most of the time, the conversation continues (Burgoon, Hunsaker, & Dawson, 2004; Shannon, 1948).

In an ideal world, the communication goal is met, the message travels without interruption, the receiver understands the idea correctly, and feedback is transmitted confirming the message got through. Unfortunately, the world is often not ideal. A variety of forces and factors can prevent messages from being sent correctly or accurately received. In Figure 2.1, the disruptions are shown as **noise**, or the barriers to communication.

Evaluation

The simplified model of communication displayed in Figure 2.1 offers a method to explain how a person seeks to transmit an idea or message to someone else or to a group of people. The concepts of encoding, transmission devices, and decoding help explain the movement of a message from a sender to a receiver. The model does not, however, accurately depict what transpires in an actual conversation or exchange of ideas. This led to the evolution of more intricate models, discussed next.
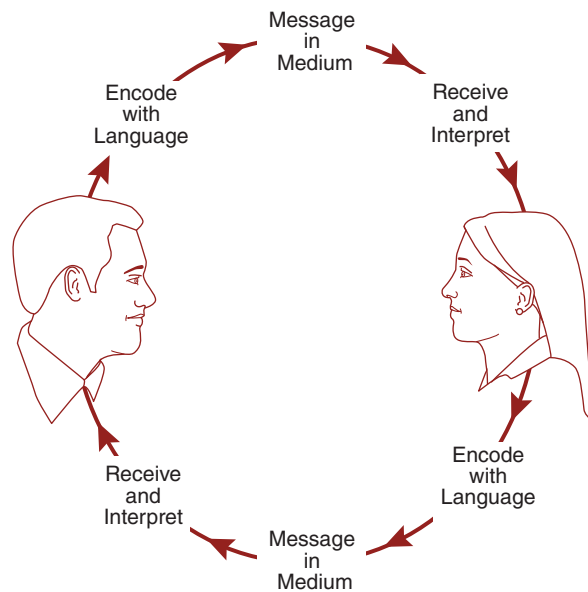

For Review

Name and describe each part of an interpersonal communication model.

An Interaction Model

In the 1960s, models were expanded to indicate the interaction of two people engaged in a dialog. Figure 2.2 illustrates how models were expanded. The interaction model remains "linear" in the sense that a message first goes one way (Person A to Person B) then the other (Person B back to Person A). Clearly, most conversations are not quite that stilted, leaving room for additional ideas about how interpersonal communication transpires.

Figure 2.2: An interaction model of communication

This model depicts mutual transmission, the reception of messages, and feedback. In essence, a mirror was added to show the more interactive nature of communication.

For Review

Describe the interaction model of interpersonal communication.

Transaction Model

More recent conceptualizations of the nature of communication propose a far more complex and sophisticated pattern of message generation and reception. Instead of viewing a conversation as essentially a ping-pong match, where one person sends and the other receives and then the process reverses, actual discussions take place nearly simultaneously.

In the transaction model (see Figure 2.3), a person speaking observes the intended audience as the message is being sent. The speaker may observe a "receiver" or second person with a scowl, a grin, or nodding in agreement before all of the words have been transmitted. In

essence, rather than a ping-pong match, conversations more closely resemble a dance in which both parties socially construct the interaction. Such a model accounts for interruptions, persons finishing each other's sentences, and incomplete transmissions, finishing with phrases such as, "You know what I'm talking about," or "You see what I'm saying" as the other person nods "yes," or "I know you think I'm wrong" as the person nods "no."

Further, the transaction approach models the movement from misunderstanding to understanding, from disagreement to agreement, as well as the escalation of a conversation into a conflict. In essence, not every dance goes well. At times, the partners move in perfect synch; at others, they stumble or step on each other's toes.

Each of the three models—the simplified version, the interaction model, and the transaction model—contains key elements of encoding, transmission, decoding, and feedback. More important, the models also indicate that conversations can go awry and that misunderstandings occur. The primary causes of these disruptions are called noise, or the barriers to interpersonal communication.

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The transaction model suggests that conversations more closely resemble a dance in which both parties socially construct the interaction.

Figure 2.3: A transaction model of communication
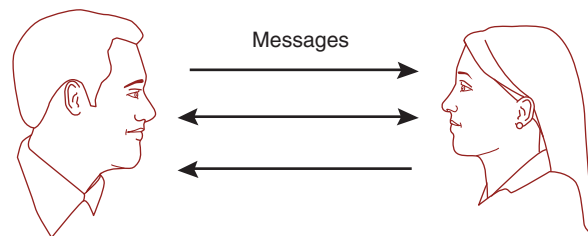
Messages

The transaction model of communication is similar to a dance between two partners in a conversation. The messages flow in both directions as each communicator sends and receives based on responding to the other communicator.

For Review

Describe the transaction model of interpersonal communication.

2.2 Barriers to Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objective # 2: What are the potential barriers to interpersonal communication?

Many times, a message will be sent but not correctly received. Three categories of barriers to individual communication explain this problem. Each of the items shown in Figure 2.4 can distort or disrupt a message at any point, as depicted in Figure 2.1. The first set of barriers—individual differences—is present simply because of the characteristics of the two people involved in the conversation. Effective communicators know about each of the potential barriers and find ways to overcome them.

Figure 2.4: Barriers to individual communication
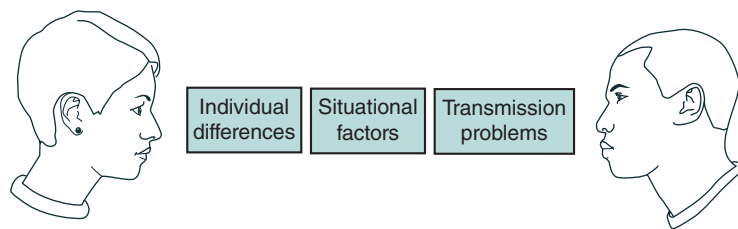
Numerous factors can disrupt quality communication between individuals.

Individual Differences

Any number of messages become lost because of a difference between the sender and receiver. Sometimes the barrier emerges due to natural circumstances, such as age or gender. Social events and the social construction of language generate others. Table 2.1 identifies the individual differences that can obstruct quality communication.

Table 2.1: Individual differences
Age
Gender
Exclusive language
Educational level
Organizational rank
Personalities

Age

Differences in age lead to varying frames of reference. A Baby Boomer would likely be familiar with a reference to Woodstock. Someone who was born in 1990 may not. A young employee probably knows quite a bit more about a current cultural icon, such as Lady Gaga, than an older worker does. Each generation shares markers, or mutually experienced events. The Greatest Generation (World War II) veterans vividly recall the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Almost all Baby Boomers remember the assassination of President

Kennedy and the first walk on the moon. Generation Xers have a first space shuttle disaster in common.

Age may become a barrier to management communication when an older worker offers constructive criticism to younger employee, especially when the older worker is not a direct supervisor. The more junior employee may respond ineffectively or defensively. Also, many younger supervisors report problems managing more senior employees. Age discrimination occurs in a variety of organizations. Sometimes it can be as subtle as a younger manager making the senior worker feel unwelcome, or by telling crude, age-based jokes about an older supervisor, thereby undermining the individual's authority and ability to communicate with younger employees.

Gender

Historically, management communication writers and others, including those in the popular press, have extensively explored differences in gender. One of the most noteworthy researchers, Deborah Tannen, presented many gender-based difficulties in her book *You Just Don't Understand* and in other works (Tannen, 1990). Subtle contrasts between genders sometimes influence male-female interactions. Tannen has pointed out as many as 105 key differences. Note that not every man or woman is inclined to exhibit these patterns. Even though some may be true of men *in general* or women *in general*, many individual men and women do not exhibit these patterns.

In general, then, women are more likely to employ more expressive and effusive language, to use a verbal hedge, such as "umm" when thinking something over, or "so" to add power to an expression ("She was *so* smart"), and are more likely to frame business requests as questions. A female supervisor may say, "Would you mind making copies of this report?" Women are less likely to directly criticize an employee, especially in public.

Males tend to use more direct language. Men are more likely to interrupt conversational partners, especially when speaking to women. Males also often use sports metaphors as part of everyday language, such as "She took one for the team"; "He gave a Hail Mary answer;" "This is our goal line stand"; and "That was a back door play." Men are more inclined to aggressively disagree with someone in public. They are also more prone to making declarative statements of fact (sometimes when they don't actually know the facts). Men are more likely to ignore comments that have been offered by another person, especially when that person disagrees with them. And finally, men tend to find ways to control conversations, especially by changing the subject when they feel they are "losing" an argument.

Women and men have different experiences and operate in different social contexts, which lead to differing genres of speech and skills for accomplishing things with words. Patterns of interaction in rural areas vary from those in urban areas; differences may be found in various regions of a country, and factors such as ethnicity also affect communication styles of both men and women. This, in turn, shapes the diversity found in male/female communication patterns (Maltz & Borker, 2007).

Despite these prevalent tendencies and differences, recent formulations of communication and gender issues add a more complex conceptualization of the relationship. Previously, male/female communication patterns were viewed in a binary manner in which "men are

likely to do this and women are likely to do this." Current conceptualizations suggest a wider diversity of gender identities and communication patterns (Cameron, 2005).

Exclusive Language

Exclusive language consists of terminology that is only understood by a distinct set of individuals. Those who are unfamiliar with the language are excluded from the conversation when it is used. In the workplace, numerous differences between individuals perpetrate exclusive language. For instance, those who graduate from a certain college can exclude others through continual conversations about campus events that took place years before or by referring to individuals known only to the group. Exclusive language accentuates the differences between employees and creates an eventual barrier, based largely on excluded employees feeling like they are not part of the "in-crowd" on the job. Exclusive language reflects racial differences, differences in status, and even differences in company departments. Sports metaphors used by men in the workplace can become a form of exclusive language. In each case, its deliberate use is designed to alienate or separate one group from another (Media Task Force, 2011).

For example, a sales manager approaches a group of information technology (IT) employees with a request to update the company's web-based purchasing system. The IT employees respond with their tech terminology, which excludes the salesperson. Another example involves an informal setting where a set of employees who graduated from the same high school might exclude someone who did not, simply by constantly talking about "old times" whenever a group gathers for lunch or in other social situations.

Stockbyte/Thinkstock

People who rely on sports metaphors at work create communication barriers as a form of exclusive language, because not everyone understands the meaning.

Educational Attainment

If nothing else, each year of education adds to your vocabulary. For most, studying in high school and college also improves a person's ability to think critically and to analyze situations using a greater set of decision-making concepts and models. Problems occur when someone who possesses these skills converses with someone who does not, and the educated person is unwilling or unable to shift gears. A supervisor seeking to intimidate employees might use fancy words and literary references that demonstrate his or her level of education. This type of approach can be counterproductive and is a common barrier to interpersonal communication.

Organizational Rank

Have you ever run into someone you idolize? For most, an encounter with a celebrity or idol results in a tongue-tied, stammering interaction. Any person with greater status, no matter the context, becomes accustomed to dealing with people who are somewhat awestruck or anxious. The same process takes place in organizational settings. For some employees, a chance meeting with the CEO or some high-ranking executive in the company leads to an awkward exchange of pleasantries or an uncomfortable silence. Many employees struggle to speak publicly, and the presence of a high-ranking member of the firm in the audience potentially worsens the problem. Further, some research indicates that people at different levels of status may interpret words differently (Hale & Delia, 1976).

Status also affects the ability to listen effectively. When a worker feels unsettled in front of people of higher rank, the employee may focus on trying to look good in front of them at the cost of not carefully monitoring the message they are transmitting. Others seek to ingratiate themselves or "kiss up" rather than to have a genuine conversation. They wait for an opening to pass along a compliment instead of hearing what the executive has to say.

Personalities

Some people just rub each other the wrong way. Various personality types do not combine for quality communication. A shy person may feel pressured, bullied, or intimidated by an outgoing or bombastic person. Those with strong egos may clash with one another, each thinking he or she is right about everything. An individual with an analytical and reserved personality may have difficulty communicating with someone who is more inclined to react instinctively to problems and circumstances.

Individual differences create a variety of circumstances under which communication does not take place as intended. As companies become more diverse, some of these problems become more complicated. Quality communication begins with awareness of these and other potential individual barriers.

For Review

What types of individual differences create barriers to interpersonal communication?

Situational Factors

At times, characteristics associated with senders and receivers are not the primary barrier to communication. Instead, situational circumstances are the cause of the problem. Table 2.2 lists three common situational factors that prevent a message from being received.

Table 2.2: Situational factors that disrupt communication
Emotions
Anger
Sadness
Envy and jealousy
Romantic feelings
Personal attitudes and values
Settings
Distractions

Emotions

It is impossible to work in any organization and remain unaffected by emotions. Some are positive and conducive to pleasant working relationships. Feelings of affection, loyalty, and trust help build and maintain quality interpersonal interactions.

Other emotions disrupt communication and interfere with a workplace process. Anger and sadness are two of the more commonly mentioned emotions that affect communication.

Simply stated, it is difficult to express yourself clearly when you are mad. Anger tends to disturb a person's concentration. Nearly everyone would have to admit to saying something, while annoyed in the heat of the moment, that they wish they could take back. The consequences of such outbursts play out both in the short term and in the long term. In the short term, the conversation quickly deteriorates and a meaningful resolution to a dispute becomes unlikely. In the long term, some people have powerful memories. These people may recall an insult or words of frustration in future interactions with the same individual.

In terms of sadness, a person's thinking becomes muddled when he or she is down in the dumps. It does not have to be clinical depression to be a barrier to communication. Someone sad or just in a bad mood may choose words less carefully or may be less willing to speak up.

Beyond these more obvious emotions, other factors influence managerial communication, including envy and jealousy, romantic intentions, and the emotions associated with personal attitudes and values.

Envy and jealousy evolve from a series of causes. An employee can become jealous when he or she is passed over for promotion. Another may be envious of the job assignment given to a peer. Envy and jealousy may result from seeing your supervisor giving extra attention to a co-worker while basically ignoring you. These feelings may impact future conversations. More caustic comments may be made, more guarded language may be used, or someone may be treated with a cold silence and not know why.

Romantic feelings and intentions result in one of the more complex communication problems. Many offices are aware of the possible complications that surface from office relationships. Some go so far as to prohibit employees from dating one another; others enforce clear policies that permit romantic relationships but create clear guidelines for their expression in the professional realm. When a supervisor expresses romantic intentions toward an employee, any overture can become grounds for sexual harassment complaints. Table 2.3 defines sexual harassment and identifies the two most common forms and their consequences. Still, at times, an employee is attracted to a co-worker, and, at times, the attraction becomes mutual. Before pursuing any romantic involvements at work, the employee(s) should make sure such actions do not violate company policies and practices, and consider all the possible consequences of pursuing a relationship.

Table 2.3: Sexual harassment and management communication	
Definition: Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is severe or pervasive, and affects working conditions or creates a hostile work environment.	
Forms	
1. "Quid pro quo": Sexual advances or sexual favors are exchanged for favorable treatment, including better job assignments, undeserved performance evaluation ratings, promotions, and pay raises.	
	What it communicates
	The way to move up in this organization is by giving in to sexual demands. All of the human resource activities are tainted. If you are unwilling to play the game, you cannot get ahead.
2. Hostile environment: Sexual innuendos in language, including jokes, sexual references, and inappropriate comments about appearance and dress; unwanted touching; signage (sexually referent calendars, cartoons); and conduct toward another person that suggests a discrepancy in how people are treated.	
	What it communicates
	The person is the object of disrespect and even contempt. This person will not receive equal treatment. If you don't "play along," you will be ostracized.

Source: Fitzgerald, L. F., Gelfand, M. J., & Dragow, F. (1995). Measuring sexual harassment: Theoretical and psychometric advances. Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 17(4), 425–445. Retrieved from http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr_2009/julqtr/29cfr1604.11.htm

An array of personal attitudes and values interrupt communication. Racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination result in derisive language designed to intimidate or insult others. Meaningful, constructive, and high-quality interpersonal communication cannot take place in these circumstances (Weitzer, 2002).

Settings

At times, the organizational setting itself creates communication problems. Many times these barriers result from unfortunate events. For example, when a manager announces that a popular employee has become terribly sick or has died, trying to effectively transmit

messages after that point will be problematic. The same is true after a company declares layoffs or relocation to a foreign country. In some instances, joyous occasions hinder communication, such as the announcement of the retirement of a manager or office parties celebrating holidays.

Distractions

Even the most chaotic workplace can be influenced by distractions. Outside weather events, including snowstorms or strong rains, tend to draw attention away from an interpersonal conversation or a presentation to a group. Any workplace that is near a construction site probably suffers from some inattention due to the noise outside.

More subtle cues also disrupt interpersonal interactions, such as when one person tries to hold a conversation with someone who is dressed inappropriately. On an even smaller scale, have you ever tried to talk to someone with something stuck in his teeth?

In summary, the situational factors of emotions, settings, and distractions tend to overlap as barriers to communication.

For Review

What situational factors disrupt interpersonal communication?

Describe the two main forms of sexual harassment and the message each sends.

Transmission Problems

In any conversation or message-sending situation, the number of transmission venues varies and involves a variety of words and symbols. One key to being an effective communicator is the ability to choose the right words and send them in the right manner. Table 2.4 lists a different set of barriers that prevent messages from arriving.

Table 2.4: Transmission problems as barriers to communication
Language (semantics)
Slang
Technical terminology
Disabilities
• Sender
• Receiver
Nonverbal contradictions of verbal messages

Language and Semantics

Even in circumstances in which everyone speaks the same language, barriers to communication still arise. Semantics problems emerge when a word or phrase has more than one meaning, and the sender and receiver are using different versions. For instance, the word "justified" can be interpreted as "acceptable" or "necessary," which have different connotations. Many managers claim they have an "open-door policy." What this actually means varies widely. Some are suggesting that they willingly listen to complaints and suggestions. Others are saying that you can come in and ask for help, but nothing more.

Language becomes more complicated when various dialects are present. In the United States, linguists have argued that regional dialects are beginning to disappear; however, many still exist. These dialects affect the pronunciation of words as well as how terms are used. In the Northeast, the words "park" and "yard" sound significantly different than when spoken in the South. In the South, many restaurants serve sweet tea, which means cold tea that is already sweetened with sugar, while in the North iced tea typically comes unsweetened.

Slang

Nearly any language used widely around the world contains a great deal of slang. What becomes problematic, for purposes of managerial communication, is that slang evolves and changes fairly quickly. In the 1980s, the terms "rad" and "gnarly" were popular with teens. In the 1950s, the word "bitchin" was in vogue. Each generation develops its set of slang expressions, and even those change over time. The Baby Boom generation was fond of terms such as "bummer," "mellow," and "cool," in the 1960s. Two decades later, someone still using that terminology was thought to be something of a buffoon. The 1980s and 1990s films *Valley Girl* and *Clueless* spoofed girls who included the word "like" in every sentence. Such usage is now common, even among older adults.

Jupiterimages/Thinkstock

Social media have created an entire new generation of slang terminology.

Slang creates barriers to managerial communication in several ways. First, someone unfamiliar with a term may take offense. The concept of a woman being "phat" in the 1990s insulted some, who thought they were being called "fat" when they were really being told they were attractive. Second, slang at work often presents the image of being less polished, or less educated. Applicants who cannot get through an interview without using heavy doses of "ya know" and "like" may find themselves more quickly

screened out. The same holds true for those seeking to be promoted. Third, the use of slang when dealing with clients and customers may lead the contact to think the salesperson is either taking him or her for granted or is not acting in a professional manner.

A new form of slang has emerged in social media. Due to the 140-character limitation imposed by Twitter, many shortcuts have evolved. Table 2.5 contains some of the more frequently used abbreviations. Someone unfamiliar with tweet abbreviations encounters a major barrier to interpersonal communication, in an age where social media use has grown at a tremendous pace.

Table 2.5: Popular Twitter abbreviations and acronyms	
abt = about	njoy = enjoy
b/c = because	OMW = on my way
chk = check	PPL = people
deets = details	RU? = are you?
Eml = email	shld = should
FB = Facebook	TIA = thanks in advance
GR8 = great	Twaiting = Twittering while waiting
IC = I see	U = you
j/k = just kidding	V2V = voice to voice on the phone
LMK = let me know	w00t!= excitement
mil = million	YW = you're welcome

In the workplace, some common abbreviations used in email and instant messages include:

- BRB—Be right back
- CTRN—Can't talk right now
- IMO—In my opinion
- HTH—Hope this (or that) helps
- IAM—In a meeting
- WFM—Works for me
- BFO—Blinding flash of the obvious
- DHTB—Don't have the bandwidth
- SLAP—Sounds like a plan

Technical Terminology

The explosion of new technologies brings with it a vast amount of new terms. In the year 2000, the term "app" had no special meaning with regard to mobile phone devices. A "tweet" was something sung by a bird.

In business settings, each discipline (accounting, information technology, marketing) has its own language. When someone from one area speaks to another in a different department, the use of technical terms and acronyms may create confusion. While an accountant knows what DDB means, a marketer may not. A marketer may suggest that microtargeting will work for one product but not for another; someone from information technology might not know precisely what that means. Department-specialized terminology can create a form of exclusive language in the workplace.

Disabilities

Effective communication is difficult enough under ideal conditions. Disabilities can present additional challenges for both senders and receivers. Senders with speech impairments have greater difficulty framing messages. Someone who stutters or has a lisp may have trouble speaking, especially to groups of people. Part of the challenge may be the actual forming of words; the other part can emerge as the embarrassment or shyness that results. Table 2.6 identifies additional speech problems (Buzzle.com, 2011).

Table 2.6: Types of speech disabilities	
Articulation Disorder	Difficulty in producing a specific sound
Dysarthria	Slurred speech
Cluttering	Speaking too quickly or with too much repetition
Expressive Language Disorder	Difficulty in verbally expressing ideas

Source: http://www.buzzle.com (2011). Types of speech disorders

Receivers can experience problems in conversations as well. Two common challenges include visual and hearing impairments. A visually impaired person misses some or all of the nonverbal cues transmitted by the sender. In essence, the person only encounters part of the message. Hearing impairments range from a partial loss to total deafness. Hearing can be affected by tinnitus, or ringing of the ears, or muddled reception. In each instance, message reception becomes more difficult.

Nonverbal Contradictions of Verbal Messages

Far too often, what a person says verbally does not correspond with his or her body language and gestures. Some experts have suggested that nonverbal cues constitute the major part of a person-to-person message (Archer & Akert, 1977). Even if that is not the case, it is safe to conclude that nonverbal cues send powerful signals. Saying something is interesting while looking distracted or inattentive conveys two different messages. When someone crowds you, it is hard to avoid feeling uncomfortable or believing that the person is being aggressive, no matter what words are spoken. A person who tells you to "trust me" but cannot make eye contact sends two very different signals.

In job interviews, someone who arrives late, is dressed casually or inappropriately, gives a limp handshake, fails to make eye contact, and slumps down in a chair will likely be quickly removed from consideration. Tardiness can be interpreted as irresponsibility. Casual dress and slouching portray a lack of interest. Failing to make eye contact indicates you have something to hide. A weak handshake suggests you will not be assertive or that you lack confidence.

Some of the transmission problems relate to the actions of the sender. Poor choice of language, excessive use of slang, overuse of technical terminology, and sending contradictory nonverbal cues may be due to the poor communication skills of the sender. Under the proper circumstances, and with the proper training, these difficulties can be improved. Remedies for disabilities are also available. Hearing aids and signers assist those who are deaf. The visually impaired have access to resources to help them communicate with those who do not have visual impairments, including low vision aids, magnifiers, talking watches, and telephone signaling devices.

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Nonverbal gestures can interfere with the correct interpretation of a verbal message when the gestures and words spoken do not match.

For Review

What transmission problems can become barriers to interpersonal communication?

2.3 Overcoming Barriers to Communication

Learning Objective # 3: How can a sender and receiver overcome the barriers to interpersonal communication?

Excellent communication results from careful preparation and situation sensitivity by the sender and receiver in any context. Following a few simple steps helps a sender avoid misunderstandings and conflict, and improve a message's chances of being correctly understood. Both senders and receivers have a responsibility to overcome any barriers that are present. Table 2.7 summarizes these duties.

Table 2.7: Creating quality interpersonal communication	
Sender Duties	**Receiver Duties**
Be aware of barriers	Listen actively
Be empathetic	Seek clarification of the message
Pay careful attention to nonverbal cues	
Confirm understanding of the message	

Sender Responsibilities

Senders are charged with making sure they understand the barriers that might be present. To make sure a conversation begins on the right note, acknowledge the existence of the barrier. Many public speakers use humor to point out its presence, to help place the audience at ease. Table 2.8 provides advice about communicating when you are angry.

Table 2.8: What to do when you're angry	
1	Take a deep breath.
2	Consider postponing the conversation in a nonthreatening manner.
	("I'm sorry, but I really need to use the restroom right now." Or, "I want to talk about this, but I'm expecting a phone call.")
3	Consider the other person's perspective.
	(Did the person deliberately try to make you mad, or was it inadvertent?)
4	Be forthright, but try to diffuse at the same time.
	("I'm a little frustrated right now. Can we talk about this later?")
5	Bite your tongue.
	(Make sure you don't say something you will regret later.)
6	Avoid direct challenges, making generalities, and placing blame.
	("What's your problem?" "You always do this!" "This is all your fault.")
7	Use humor to release tension and diffuse the situation.
8	Try to identify solutions rather than focusing on the problem.

Source: Adapted from Mayo Clinic (2011). Anger management tips: 10 ways to tame your temper. Retrieved from http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/anger-management/MH00102

Empathy begins with understanding yourself and how you interact with others. Employers, companies, or individual employees can use the Myers-Briggs personality inventory to assess how someone deals with others, along dimensions including extraversion/introversion, sensing or intuition, thinking or feeling, and judging or perceiving (Myers and Briggs Foundation, 2011). Next, being empathetic means attempting to understand the background and point of view of others. The adage of "walking a mile in the other

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Creating quality communication requires the efforts of the sender and the receiver.

person's shoes" applies to communication. In sales, the classic approach to dealing with an unhappy customer is to first acknowledge that you understand the person is upset, and to add something along the lines of, "I can relate to how you feel." The same approach has value in managerial communication when conversing with a disgruntled employee or member of the public. Many companies offer sensitivity training programs and ethnic awareness forums to help employees from different backgrounds understand and better communicate with one another.

Paying attention to nonverbal cues often takes practice. Doing so may make you feel awkward as you become aware of your gestures. It may help to have a close friend point out some of your tendencies, such as looking down while you talk or slouching. Some discover that their body language constantly signals aggression, making them less able to conduct a friendly discussion. Others portray a lack of confidence simply by their posture. The elements of nonverbal communication that can become communication skills include the items displayed in Table 2.9.

Table 2.9: Nonverbal communication skills	
Nonverbal Cues	**Communication Tactic**
Body movements	Hold still, don't shift weight, stillness exudes confidence
Gestures	Stay calm, no nervous movements, gestures for emphasis
Eye contact	Know when to look and when to look away so as to avoid appearing overly aggressive
Touch	Firm handshake; know when a pat on the back is acceptable
Facial expression	Smile
Physical distance	Avoid crowding a person, though do not move too far away, which appears as if you lack trust in the person
Tone of voice	Not too loud, not too soft, not too much inflection which makes you appear overly emotional

Source: Adapted from Helpguide.org (2011) Nonverbal communication: The power of nonverbal communication and body language. Retrieved from http://www.helpguide.org/mental/eq6_nonverbal_communication.htm

The question, "Do you understand?" summarizes confirmation of the message. Pay extra attention to make sure the message was received as intended. It's not unusual for a manager to ask an employee to restate a directive, only for the purposes of making sure the message was clearly understood.

Receiver Responsibilities

Receiver duties include listening carefully, known as *active listening*, and not allowing distractions to interfere with a conversation or presentation. The mind works far faster than the pace of a conversation. You can give partial attention, seeking to get the gist of what is being said, without focusing on the interaction. Doing so signals disinterest and can create a new communication barrier. Multitasking during phone calls is a bad idea. Listening carefully means clearing away distractions and not adding to them. Table 2.10 provides hints for effective active listening.

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Active listening involves ignoring distractions that interfere with conversations.

Table 2.10: Effective active listening
Express support through attention, eye contact, and a reassuring posture.
Interpret both the words and the expressions.
Note gestures, tone of voice, and the speaker's posture.
Ask exploratory questions that confirm accurate reception of the message.
Don't put words into the speaker's mouth.
Avoid passing immediate judgment.
Do not give false reassurance.

Source: Adapted from Cohen, A. R., & Fink, S. L. (1988). Effective behavior in organizations. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

To be an effective communicator, you must employ both sender and receiver tactics and behaviors at every point of the conversation. Remember that the transaction model of interpersonal communication suggests that a conversation simulates a dance between two persons. When a message is at all misunderstood the sender or the receiver must attempt to further clarify the message in the conversation. Getting clarification of a message means saying, for example, "I don't understand" at the appropriate times. Do not underestimate

the importance of active listening. A substantial amount of attention is devoted to the ability to listen effectively later in this text.

For Review

Explain the duties of the sender and receiver in overcoming the barriers to interpersonal communication.

2.4 International and Intercultural Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objective # 4: What additional challenges are present in international and intercultural interpersonal communication?

Conducting business in today's modern business environment presents exciting opportunities for businesses and individuals. Markets and sales expand as new social contacts are made and undiscovered cultures are explored, both within a nation's boundaries and with potential customers in other countries.

Many U.S. companies recognize the existence of two distinct potential advantages present due to cultural differences within the nation's borders. First, a rich pool of new employees with diverse perspectives and interests infuses energy into a company's operations. Second, many cultural groups, including Hispanics and Asian Americans, offer valuable target market segments that may be reached.

International business programs often begin with expansion into countries with many of the same cultural conditions, such as a Canadian firm selling products in the United States. Soon, however, an international program can move into countries with different languages and cultures. In both circumstances, effective business communication involves understanding of—and adaptation to—cultural nuances and differences.

Cultural Dimensions

To understand individual communication while accounting for cultural differences, take note of the primary types of cultural differences. For years, the most widely-cited dimensions of culture have been those proposed by Geert Hofstede, as displayed in Table 2.11. (More detail can be found at: http://www.geert-hofstede.com.)

Table 2.11: Hofstede's value dimensions of culture	
Power Distance	Distance between leaders and followers; authoritarian versus collaborative relationships
Individualism or Collectivism	Value of personal status versus loyalty to the group
Masculinity-Femininity	Male-dominated society versus more equal status between genders
Uncertainty Avoidance	Risk-taking versus risk-avoidance societies
Short- or Long-Term Orientation	Immediate versus long-term, strategic outcomes

Power distance affects communication patterns between individuals and in group settings. A culture exhibiting high power distance is one in which managers are far less approachable by low-ranking employees. In such a culture, rank affects patterns of collaboration. Use of formal language becomes more likely in higher power distance cultural settings. Conversely, in low power distance cultures, leaders are seen more as peers and patterns of collaboration are more affable and informal.

Individualism/collectivism affects communication in terms of how language is used as well as how it is transmitted. In individualistic cultures, personal pronouns (I, my) are more likely; collective cultures exhibit greater reference to "we," "us," and "our group/ organization." Individualistic cultures favor one-on-one interactions; collective cultures more likely feature groups, teams, and meetings.

Masculine cultures hold much in common with higher power distance circumstances. Males dominate family matters, business discussions, and other aspects of society. Women in those settings play submissive roles. Femininity associates with more caring, interpersonal connections among all members of society, which in turn is reflected in the ways people and employees communicate with one another.

Uncertainty avoidance affects word choice. Cultures with high levels of uncertainty avoidance exhibit words that indicate confidence in judgments regarding various outcomes. More disparaging language focuses on risky situations.

Short-/long-term orientation affects the types of communication messages sent as well as the content of those messages. A company in a longer-term orientation culture is most inclined to develop strategic plans with a farther-reaching time horizon. Inspirational language reflects the desire to build the long-term future of the organization. Short-term orientation results in more immediate planning processes, greater levels of contingency thinking and planning, and language focused on the here and now.

Hofstede's dimensions remain widely used in a number of contexts, including business communication, although increasing criticisms have emerged. Hofstede collected the data in the late 1960s and, while culture is normally slow to change, the numbers predate the

introduction of the personal computer, the Internet, the fall of communism, and many other significant global events (Rapp, Bernardi, & Bosco, 2011). At the same time, the dimensions do provide important considerations when examining the challenges associated with communicating with people from other cultures.

For Review

Name and define Hofstede's five main dimensions of culture.

Cultural Differences and Nuances That Affect Communication

Several key areas require consideration and adaptation when communicating in international settings as well as for interactions between people from different cultures in the same country (de Mooji, 2010). Hofstede's dimensions do not clearly spell out all of these. For example, older persons may be highly respected in one culture and disrespected in another. Even asking questions about a person's age can make the receiver uncomfortable in Western cultures.

Further, cultural gender equality and inequality strongly affects patterns of communication between males and females internationally. Percentages of a population that are well-educated vary widely across countries, thereby affecting status levels. Personalities are influenced by cultural surroundings as well. The most common areas in which communication in international and intercultural settings requires examination include:

- language and slang
- greetings
- directness of address
- speaking versus silence
- eye contact
- ethnocentrism
- stereotyping
- differences in the meanings of nonverbal cues
- personal space issues
- use of symbols and cultural icons
- cultural context

For Review

What communication issues are present in international and intercultural settings?

Language and Slang

Language and slang differ among cultures. In the United States, the most prominent language is, of course, English; however, residents speak a variety of additional languages. In

terms of business communication, many employers now list job openings in both English and Spanish, and training programs have been adapted to accommodate those whose primary language is Spanish. Company advertisements and other communication messages have been similarly modified.

The same holds true for international communication. An individual who only speaks Spanish is likely to experience difficulties when a business partner speaks only Russian, even when a translator is present. Some languages, such as Mandarin, are written using characters rather than letters, which add additional complications. Also, some printed languages are read from right to left; whereas English and others are read from left to right.

Slang within both languages can further complicate communication. The phrase "our business is red hot" serves as an example. Although it may seem strange, international buyers could misunderstand the meaning of this phrase and think that it literally means that the business is on fire. Always choose words carefully. In the Philippines, referring to a woman as a "hostess" translates into calling her a prostitute. A Filipino immigrant would likely feel insulted in a similar manner when engaged in a conversation in his or her new country.

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Greetings, gestures, and other methods of communication vary by culture.

In many business conversations, the person speaking has only partial knowledge of a language. This can lead to misspoken ideas or words or poor grammar, especially in areas such as singular/plural or noun-verb agreement. The person may appreciate a friendly correction, although normally at least some familiarity with the person is advisable before doing so.

The attempt to speak in a foreign language, even if only for the purposes of greeting a potential business partner, often builds rapport with that person.

Greetings

Knowing how to greet someone can be a valuable business asset. Cultures such as the United States often exhibit informal methods of greeting, including phrases such as "Hey," "Hi," or "Howdy." Many immigrants within U.S. borders quickly adapt to such differences; however, others may not. In business communication, a wise course of action is to be aware of potential differences in greetings when dealing with someone from a different culture but the same country. For example, many Muslim groups forbid handshakes between a man and a woman.

More dramatic differences appear in international business communication. For example, while it is common knowledge that, in Asia people bow and in Western cultures

individuals shake hands as a form of greeting, other key differences remain. In Korea, a person touches his elbow while shaking hands as a sign of respect. In Japan, a 90-degree bow often accompanies a handshake for the same reason. Women do not shake hands with each other in Pakistan. Greeting a business contact with a kiss on the cheek is a common gesture in certain European countries.

Care must be given to an initial contact. For example, in Germany if someone greets you as, "Good morning, Mr. Jones," it will probably be a bad idea to say, "Oh please, call me Jack." Germans prefer more formal relationships with business partners.

Further, following an initial introduction, in some countries, the partners immediately move on to the purpose of the meeting. In Finland, for example, a popular saying is *suoraan liiketoimintaa*, which means "straight to business." In other countries, doing so is considered rude. First, take time to establish a relationship with the new business partner. Businesspeople in China greatly value the concept of trust, and any Western businessperson seeking to conduct business in China must first work to establish relationships, not only between companies, but also between people. Company representatives must understand that the relationships begin before business deals are made and continue well after any specific transaction takes place (Baack, Harris, & Baack, 2012).

Even so, asking a personal question may be considered impolite. Asking about someone's family or children may be inappropriate in certain, more reserved cultures with higher levels of power distance.

Directness of Address

Directness of address is culturally based. Language and conversation can vary drastically from culture to culture. Such differences appear in the United States. Language and conversations are often more direct in the East and more conversational in the Deep South.

In Asia, someone's persona likely includes the concept of "face," which essentially refers to one's sense of honor, self-respect, respect from others, and standing in a social setting. In that context, language that avoids directly challenging a person or making that individual look bad, or seem disrespected (e.g., lose face) is common. Disagreement is expressed in the most modest terms possible. Instead of saying, "We can't meet your price," the vendor uses terminology such as "I am afraid that trying to meet your price will be very difficult for our company."

In nations such as Holland, the opposite is true. Unless the person uses strong, direct language, he or she may be viewed as weak or not reliable.

Speaking Versus Silence

In the United States, most view silence as uncomfortable. At the same time, some U.S. subcultures embrace greater degrees of silence. When asked a question, an employee might encourage a degree of silence when told, "Take your time," before answering.

Similar differences take place internationally. In Japan, executives take time to consider a proposal, believing it signals sincerity. Buyers in Sweden tend to be comfortable with pauses and silence during negotiations. Impatience at this time potentially displays a lack of respect or impoliteness. Many cultures have varying perspectives on the meaning of silence during a conversation or negotiation. At the opposite extreme, a noisy house in Taiwan indicates a happy, healthy environment.

Eye Contact

Eye contact may be closely related to directness of address. In some cultures, such as in the United States and Canada, the failure to make eye contact makes a person seem suspicious and untrustworthy. These patterns tend to run nationwide. In other countries, such as Japan, looking away displays deference and respect.

Gender plays a significant role in eye contact as well. In many Middle Eastern cultures, a male does not make eye contact with or comment on the color of a woman's eyes, unless she is a family member. This holds true whether the individual lives in Saudi Arabia or immigrates to San Francisco. While men make direct eye-to-eye contact, a man does not do so when conversing with a woman.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism, the belief that one's culture is inherently superior, may cause either the sender or receiver to convey a sense of feeling superior. It would not be surprising that misunderstandings, conflicts, and confrontations may emerge when someone expresses such a view.

Ethnocentrism often affects management communication. When a multinational company has a home-base country, it is not unusual for managers to believe their country's style of leadership is "best." Transmitting such an attitude to persons in other nations frequently meets with some resistance or resentment.

A variation of ethnocentrism takes place when a person from a culture within a country implies that his or her culture is superior to other cultural backgrounds from the same country. Some of the racial tension between African Americans and Caucasians in the United States indicates this type of belief in a culture's superiority (e.g., "acting white" as an insult or racially charged references by Caucasians), even though these ideas are not tied to international business.

For Review

Define ethnocentrism and explain how it creates a barrier to interpersonal communication.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping exists when a person assumes things about another based on that person's race, gender, or national heritage. Stereotyping occurs within national boundaries based on many cultural values and elements. In the United States, stereotyping of religions, political affiliations, and regional heritage affects communication as well. For example, assuming someone who looks Hispanic actually speaks Spanish is stereotyping, as is assuming all members of a religion, such as Islam, have common (and negative) characteristics.

In international settings, cultural stereotyping takes place between countries. Believing all Germans are rigid, structured, rational thinkers lumps them into a group that undoubtedly does not truly exist. Corresponding methods of speaking are affected by such an assumption. Many times women are the victims of stereotyping, even though the nature of the stereotyping differs in various cultures. Typically femininity has been associated with nurturing and support, where masculinity reflects aggression and dominance by males, even though these characteristics are not true of many men and women.

For Review

Define stereotyping and explain how it creates a barrier to interpersonal communication.

Nonverbal Cues

Nonverbal cues vary widely by culture. Nodding "yes" in one country means "no" in others. In many Middle Eastern nations, the act of crossing one's legs is a sign of disrespect and males holding hands as part of a business relationship indicates trust. Gestures also vary widely. What may have a benign meaning in one country may be an obscene gesture in another. Examples include the "V for victory" with two fingers sign and use of the middle finger to point. In Indonesia, pounding your fist into the palm of your hand may be considered an obscene gesture.

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Cultural views of personal space and physical contact vary widely.

Personal Space

Personal space is the distance between two persons in a conversation. Standing two to three feet away from another person may be the norm in one culture such as France, Spain, or the United States where greater personal space exists. That same distance may indicate shiftiness or distrust in Central Africa and the Middle East. As an extension of personal distance, in the culture of Japan a business partner might find a pat on the back to be disconcerting, as the Japanese tend to not make physical contact in business relationships, other than a handshake with a Western partner.

Symbols and Cultural Icons

Not long ago, Pepsi began to lose market share to Coke in Southeast Asia. The management team discovered that changing the outside color of vending machines from a dark regal blue to light blue was the problem. In that region, light blue is associated with death and mourning (Henderson, 2011).

Cultural symbols include religious items, superstitions, colors, objects, animals, and an endless variety of items. A white horse symbolizes death in some cultures; a black horse in others. Various flowers have different meanings, depending on the culture involved. Knowledge of the beliefs and associations of a culture help you avoid doing something that would make a person uncomfortable or that has a different meaning to the other person than it does to you.

The left hand has meaning in many cultures. Malaysians consider the left hand unclean. In India, the left hand is considered less important, and dignitaries perform actions with the right hand for ceremonies such as a ribbon-cutting, even if the person is left-handed.

Higher- and Lower-Context Cultures

Different cultures place varying levels of emphasis on the actual words involved in communication. The terms higher- and lower-context are applied to these cultural differences in language usage.

Lower-context cultures are characterized by explicit verbal messages where members value and have positive attitudes about words. The meaning of a message is mainly contained in the words themselves. Much of the Western world is historically rich with rhetoric. This, in turn, continues to emphasize the importance of verbal messages. Germany, Switzerland, and the United States are examples of lower-context cultures.

Higher-context cultures rely more on symbols and language with less explicit or spelled-out codes. The meanings of these messages are mainly contained in the nonverbal components of the message. This includes facial expressions, body language, the person presenting the message, and the context in which the message is transmitted. Higher-context communication moves quickly and efficiently. Unfortunately, often the verbal messages are less complete, and for those not familiar with the symbols in a given area,

the information becomes difficult to accurately decipher. Higher-context societies are less accessible to outsiders. Many Asian cultures are higher-context.

Cultural context may be viewed as a continuum. The highest-context cultures exhibit the greatest reliance on symbols and visual elements. Others lean toward a high context, yet words are more frequently used and valued. The same holds true for lower-context cultures; degrees of word valuation may be found. Misunderstanding these differing elements may lead to problematic conversations (Hall, 1994).

Time and Cultural Context

Beyond the role nonverbal communication plays in higher-context regions, business partners in these countries tend to be more lenient with issues such as the timeliness of meetings. In India or China, for example, it may not appear to be rude to be a few minutes late to a sales meeting.

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Time, timeliness, and tardiness have different meanings in various cultures.

In the United States or England, tardiness is frowned upon. A salesperson might lose a sale due to being late for a meeting in a lower-context region, although within some sub-cultures in the United States tardiness is more accepted.

Being unaware of time presents an obvious problem for someone who is not well accustomed to these differences. When a sales lead is late for a meeting, the salesperson might wonder if it means that the lead does not care about the meeting, or whether it is a matter of the home culture. The salesperson needs to know this prior to the meeting (Baack, Harris, & Baack, 2012).

For Review

Explain the difference between lower- and higher-context cultures.

Responding to Intercultural Differences

Effective communicators operate effectively in domestic and international settings, adapting to cultural differences. Within the United States, many firms offer cultural sensitivity training to assist in developing employees and managers with heightened communication skills. Cultural sensitivity programs normally focus on:

- awareness of one's own cultural world view
- knowledge about cultural practices
- analysis of one's reaction to cultural differences
- refining and building cross-cultural skills

Many of the same skill sets are useful in international business as well.

When conducting international business, translators and cultural assimilators are key individuals who help you overcome intercultural communication barriers. Translators must speak the native language of the host country. Many times the best choice for a translator is someone who lives in the host country, and uses its language as a first language.

Cultural assimilators are employees who examine messages and prepare individuals for interactions with members of other countries. They can help a person avoid any uncomfortable lapses in manners as well as explain how to show friendliness and respect in a host country.

Selection processes should be designed to identify those who are most adaptable to new situations. Those who exhibit ethnocentrism or stereotyping should quickly be screened out. Employees will often identify themselves as being excited about taking on international assignments. Any international assignment requires cultural training. Company leaders should prepare workers for the possibility of culture shock when entering a new nation. **Expatriate employees**, or those sent to work in other countries, need time to assimilate to new circumstances.

Interpersonal communication skills are valuable when dealing with diversity issues within a country as well as with business people in other countries. Operating effectively with those from other cultures requires several communication skills. Employees can effectively adapt to cultural nuances through an understanding of the various differences explored in this section.

In domestic settings, cultural awareness and sensitivity help you become a more effective communicator on behalf of a company. Many U.S. companies have discovered the value of a diverse work force and the lucrative nature of reaching market segments based on cultural differences.

In international settings, cultural differences should be carefully understood. Even the simple act of giving a business card can generate an uncomfortable moment when they are not. Someone who takes the card and stuffs it in his pocket insults his Korean host, because the action treats that individual as being insignificant. Eye contact, directness of address, gestures, and other nonverbal cues require attention prior to any business meeting.

Would you know what to do if someone gave you a gift at the beginning of a business meeting in Taiwan? The answer would be to thank the giver and then set the gift aside without opening it. You will embarrass and insult the giver if you take a look and are disappointed by what you find. A cultural assimilator helps employees and managers discover these and other customs. If one is not available, effective business communicators take the time to learn these nuances and differences independently prior to traveling to another country.

For Review

What are the duties of a cultural assimilator?

2.5 Chapter Review

Interpersonal communication interactions take place between two or more people—co-workers, with customers, suppliers, and others in the marketing channel, with members of governmental agencies, between supervisors and employees, and with a wide variety of publics on a daily basis. A simplified interpersonal communications model includes a sender, encoding, a transmission device, decoding, a receiver, and feedback.

An interaction model of communication depicts the mutual transmission, the reception of messages, and feedback. In essence, a mirror was added to show the more interactive nature of communication.

In the transaction model of communication, a person speaking observes the intended audience as the message is being sent. The speaker may observe reactions before all of the words have been transmitted. Conversations resemble a dance in which both parties socially construct the interaction. Such a model accounts for interruptions, persons finishing each other's sentences as well as incomplete transmissions. Further, the transaction model tracks the movement from misunderstanding to understanding, from disagreement to agreement, as well as the escalation of a conversation into a conflict.

Three categories of barriers to communication include individual differences, situational factors, and transmission problems. Individual differences such as age, gender, exclusive language, educational level, organizational rank, and personalities can inhibit conversations. Situational factors consist of the emotions of anger, sadness, envy, jealousy, romantic feelings, and personal attitudes and values. Also settings and distractions create disruptive situational factors. Transmission problems that inhibit communication include language (semantics), slang, technical terminology, disabilities in the sender or receiver, and nonverbal contradictions of verbal messages.

Two sets of responsibilities are associated with successful interpersonal communications. First, senders should be aware of potential barriers, be empathetic, pay careful attention to nonverbal cues, and confirm understanding of the message. Second, receiver responsibilities are to engage in active listening and seek clarification of unclear messages.

International and intercultural barriers to communication magnify problems. They include differences in language and slang, greetings, directness of address, speaking versus silence, use of eye contact, and other factors such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, differences in the meanings of nonverbal cues, personal space issues, the use of symbols and cultural icons, and other elements of cultural context.

In domestic settings, many organizations offer cultural sensitivity training sessions. In international settings, translators and cultural assimilators are key individuals who help you overcome intercultural communication barriers. Translators should speak the native language of the host country. Cultural assimilators are employees who examine messages and prepare individuals for interactions with members of other countries.

In any interpersonal interaction, two roles are played: sender and receiver. A successful career in business requires skills in playing both roles.

Key Terms

cultural assimilators Employees who examine messages and prepare individuals for interactions with members of other countries.

decoding What occurs as the receiver encounters a message.

encoding The presentation of verbal and nonverbal cues.

ethnocentrism The belief that one's culture is inherently superior.

exclusive language Terminology that is only understood by a distinct set of individuals.

expatriate employees Employees sent to work in other countries.

feedback What returns to the sender in the form of evaluation of the message.

higher-context cultures Cultures that rely more on symbols and language with less explicit or spelled-out codes.

lower-context cultures Cultures that strongly value and have positive attitudes regarding words.

noise The barriers to communication that distort or disrupt messages.

receiver A sender's intended audience.

sender The person transmitting a message or idea.

stereotyping What happens when a person assumes things about another based on that person's race, gender, national heritage, or more.

transmission device Anything that carries a message.

For Review With Possible Responses

1. Name and describe each part of an interpersonal communication model.
    The sender is the person transmitting a message or an idea. Encoding is the presentation of verbal and nonverbal cues. The transmission device is anything that carries a message. Decoding occurs as the receiver encounters the message. The receiver is the sender's intended audience. Feedback returns to the sender in the form of evaluation of the message.

2. Describe the interaction model of interpersonal communication.
   The interaction model applies to two people engaged in a dialog. The interaction model remains "linear" in the sense that a message first goes one way (Person A to Person B) then the other (Person B back to Person A).

3. Describe the transaction model of interpersonal communication.
   In the transaction model, instead of viewing a conversation as essentially a ping-pong match, where one person sends and the other receives and then the process reverses, actual discussions take place nearly simultaneously.

4. What types of individual differences create barriers to interpersonal communication?
   Age, gender, exclusive language, educational level, organizational rank, and personalities.

5. What situational factors disrupt interpersonal communication?
   The emotions of anger, sadness, envy, jealousy, romantic feelings, personal attitudes and values, as well as settings and distractions.

6. Describe the two main forms of sexual harassment and the message each sends to employees.
   Quid pro quo, or something for something, suggests that the way to get ahead is by giving in to sexual demands and that the system is not fair. Hostile environment communicates that people are the objects of disrespect and even contempt and that employees do not receive equal treatment.

7. What transmission problems can become barriers to interpersonal communication?
   Language (semantics), slang, technical terminology, disabilities in the sender or receiver, and nonverbal contradiction of the verbal message.

8. Explain the duties of the sender and receiver in overcoming the barriers to interpersonal communication.
   Senders should be aware of potential barriers, exhibit empathy, pay careful attention to nonverbal cues, and seek confirmation of the message. Receivers should engage in active listening and seek clarification of unclear messages.

9. What communication issues are present in international and intercultural settings?
   Issues include language and slang, greetings, directness of address, speaking versus silence, eye contact, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, differences in the meanings of nonverbal cues, personal space issues, use of symbols and cultural icons, and cultural context.

10. Name and define Hofstede's five main dimension of culture.
    Power distance is the distance between leaders and followers and authoritarian versus collaborative relationships. Individualism or collectivism is the value of personal status versus loyalty to the group. Masculinity/femininity reflects whether a male-dominated society exists or if there is more equal status between genders. Uncertainty avoidance explains risk-taking versus risk-avoidance societies. Short- or long-term orientation identifies differences in immediate versus long-term, strategic outcomes.

11. Define ethnocentrism and explain how it creates a barrier to interpersonal communication.
    Ethnocentrism, the belief that one's culture is inherently superior, may cause either the sender or receiver to convey a sense of feeling superior. The misunderstanding that results and the conflict or confrontation that might emerge would not be surprising.

12. Define stereotyping and explain how it creates a barrier to interpersonal communication.
    Stereotyping exists when a person assumes things about another based on that person's race, gender, or national heritage. It can disrupt conversations between people of different cultures within a country or with those from another country.

13. Explain the difference between lower- and higher-context cultures.
    Lower-context cultures are characterized by explicit verbal messages and members value and have positive attitudes about words. The meaning of a message is mainly contained in the words themselves. Higher-context cultures rely more on symbols and language with less explicit or spelled-out codes. The meanings of these messages are mainly contained in the nonverbal components of the message.

14. What are the duties of a cultural assimilator?
    Cultural assimilators are employees who examine messages and prepare individuals for interactions with members of other countries.

Analytical Exercises

1. Describe the gesture that would best accompany the following verbal messages:
   a. "I trust you."
   b. "I disagree with you."
   c. "You have just insulted me."
   d. "I'm sorry."

2. Ask five people about their feelings regarding office romances. What issues do they raise? Do their answers vary by gender? What potential communication problems result from office romances?

3. Watch an episode of "Glee" or some other television program aimed at teenagers. Compare that slang to the terms that were used in your teenage years. Could you overcome the use of slang if managing people younger than yourself? If so, what specific tactics would you use?

4. Impression management is one key tactic some employees use to gain power. It means creating the impression that the person is in charge and holds authority, even when he or she does not. Identify the communication tactics a person could use to accomplish this, both in terms of verbal and nonverbal cues.

5. Using the Internet, examine some of the cultural characteristics of the following countries and explain how you would adapt to them if assigned a visit.
   a. United Kingdom
   b. India
   c. South Africa
   d. Brazil
   e. Sweden

6. Find out what is wrong with the following actions by examining the cultural nuances of each situation.
   a. In France, you put your hands in your lap during a meal, having seen it done in England the night before.
   b. In Russia, you see two colleagues greet by hugging and assume you should do the same.
   c. In Thailand, you begin discussions of a business proposal before lunch is served.
   d. In India, you curl your finger to signal "come here" to a local associate.

7. Explain how you would set up a sales pitch for a financial service to company leaders in a higher-context country. How would you change the same pitch to work well in a lower-context country? Explain how you would set up a sales pitch for a line of refrigerators to be sold by a retail chain in a higher-context country. How would you change the same pitch to work well in a lower-context country?

2.6 Case Studies

Case Study 1: The Chemist

Suzette Holmes attended college with the intention of completing a degree in chemistry. She graduated with honors and began seeking work. Her journey quickly took some complicated turns. A major pharmaceutical company hired her to oversee the distribution and sale of a series of drugs, the most prominent of which was a sexual dysfunction pill for men. The company's leaders wanted someone who could explain the chemical properties of the medications and also make a case that the firm's version of the product was the best treatment.

While she was able to easily handle other medications, including those for acne and stomach problems, Holmes noticed that the sexual dysfunction product seemed to create odd behaviors in both male and female members of the sales force. She was uncertain how to handle all of the joking and ironic names for male erectile dysfunction and all of the proposed nicknames for the product. On the one hand, she didn't want to appear as if she couldn't take a joke. On the other, it was clear that some of her salespeople wanted the product to be handled in the same professional manner as all of the other drugs. Still, she also heard jokes and comments about acne and a few of the other ailments her list of medicines addressed.

Her most interesting challenge came on a trip to Japan. Holmes had been assigned to the task of selling the sexual dysfunction product to a major distributor. She spent several hours going over the cultural nuances of Japan, including the appropriate bow, gift, presentation of a business card, manner of negotiation, eye contact, and even dining manners.

Holmes summoned her best assistant, Jeff, to accompany her on the trip to take care of any details and correspondence. Upon arriving, she was quickly taken by surprise. Her Japanese hosts immediately assumed that Jeff was the senior salesperson and that Suzette was his assistant. They spoke directly to him and did not seem particularly interested in having her engaged in the conversation.

Seeing an advantage, she waited for several minutes before correcting their misperception. It became clear that her hosts were mortified by their mistake. They apologized profusely and often during the remainder of the initial meeting. Holmes was convinced she would be able to turn their *faux pas* into a major sale with very favorable terms.

Review Questions

1. Which individual interpersonal communication issues described in this chapter apply to Suzette Holmes' situation?
2. Should Holmes play along with all the joking about the sexual dysfunction product or discourage it? Should she react differently if the person telling the jokes was female? Male?
3. Could Holmes have done anything to prevent the misperception of the Japanese hosts? If so, what?
4. Was Holmes acting fairly to take advantage of her hosts' loss of face in negotiations?

Case Study 2: The Law Office

Doug Dickenson knew it was time to pick up the pieces, and it was a mess he had made due to his quick temper. After opening a law practice six months ago, he had finally begun to develop a decent client list, with a few strong cases. His one employee Angela Romano was a legal secretary who was vice president of the local professional legal secretary's association.

Angela was 24 years old, a single mother, and a recent graduate of the nearby junior college. She believed her training would make it possible to stay steadily employed. Her grades had been nearly perfect through the entire two-year process.

Angela was somewhat intimidated by Doug, who was a top graduate in his law school class. Doug had worked in a corporate law office for 10 years before launching his own practice. He had won several major cases that provided the funding for the new venture. Doug was tall and had a powerful voice that served him well in the courtroom, but could inadvertently frighten someone who was a little shy, such as Angela.

The incident started on a Friday afternoon. Angela had been suffering with a toothache that had gone from being only somewhat annoying to terribly painful. She was afraid to ask for the afternoon off, because she had only been on the job for six months. So she suffered through the day, doing her best to complete her assignments. Unfortunately, the pain distracted her to the point where she simply forgot to file some key legal documents with the court, and Friday was the final deadline. Angela managed to find a sympathetic dentist to resolve her problem right after she got off work.

The following Monday she returned to the office. It was at that point she discovered her oversight. She timidly approached Doug and told him about the situation.

Doug quickly became worried about word getting around that his office was unreliable, as this was a major client and a big case. He was prone to being somewhat bombastic, and this time he clearly crossed over a line.

"What are you, retarded?" he bellowed. "You just cost these guys a whole bunch of money! I just can't afford mistakes like this. Go on, get out of here," he finished.

Angela left the room crying. She wasn't sure if she had been fired or was simply supposed to leave him alone. To make matters worse, her sister was mentally challenged, and Angela was particularly sensitive to insulting language about her condition. She was angry and hurt at the same time.

Doug stewed in his office for about 10 minutes. When he calmed down, he figured out a way to call in a favor with the local court clerk. She would make it appear as if the document had arrived but was left in the incoming mailbox. Although this was unethical, he figured it would never happen again.

Doug approached Angela and apologized for his remarks. She meekly told him about the toothache, but not about her sister. Both knew that it would take time to get past his tirade.

Review Questions

1. Describe the barriers to communication present in this story.
2. Should Angela tell Doug about her sister's condition? If so, how should she approach the subject?
3. What would you recommend to Doug to help mend the relationship that he had damaged, especially since he valued Angela's skills and thought she was an excellent employee?
4. What communication training should Doug receive?
5. What communication training should Angela receive?