



iStockPhoto.com/golero

1

FOUNDATIONS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Copyright ©2022 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

JAKE AND RACHEL KANE

Most kids are deeply troubled by the illness of their only parent. And the Kane children were no different. The two—Jake and Rachel—were also obsessed about who was going to take care of their father once he returned home from rehab. Jake, 25, and Rachel, 18 knew that they'd have to grow up quickly after learning about their dad. The doctor and medical team told them that they would need help to make sure he's clean and fed, and that he takes his meds on a regular basis. Jake took a family medical leave from work and Rachel balanced her last year of high school with this new challenge. It wasn't easy for either of them—trying to juggle their responsibilities—but they felt they had no choice.

The Kane children already were “old souls,” with both sharing tasks while they were growing up with their single dad, making meals and even writing their dad's check out to pay the utilities! But, nothing could prepare them for what was about to unfold in less than 72 hours when their dad would return home:

Jake: I called Nana and she said she'd help us when she could.

Rachel: Like that's going to be a lot of help! She uses a walker, Jacob! I'm really afraid here. But I felt a little better after seeing a cool TikTok of kids helping their mom when she had a heart attack . . . they were smiling and laughing and to me, this sounds like nothing but hard work!

Jake: TikTok?! Ugh. This is not a joke. This is our reality. We have a lot more work to do to get this house ready for him. We have to tell your neighbors when they can bring food. We have talk to Auntie Sarah to find out what she did when Uncle Robby had his stroke. She'll help I know. We need to sign him up for a stroke victims support group. Hell, we need to sign ourselves up for this group! I mean, we can't just watch a video and . . .

Rachel: Okay. Okay. I just can't wrap my head around this whole thing.

Jake: It's really serious, Rach . . . (his sister interrupts)

Rachel: Okay, I get it. I know I never say this but thanks for being calm here. I know you've not been that close to him the past few years and I really appreciate you coming back home to help. I couldn't do this myself.

The two continued talking about how stressful it was going to be and how they were going to delegate various duties.

Jake: Please don't have that look on your face. We'll make it with the help of a lot of people. We're not the first family to ever go through this.

Rachel: I'm worried we're going to screw it up.

Jake: We won't. Promise. We have to just keep making decisions that will end up helping him. That's the best we can do. And remember what I told you: We're not alone in this!

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- 1.1 Define and interpret communication.
- 1.2 Explain the evolution and foundation of the communication field.
- 1.3 Describe the interpersonal communication process.
- 1.4 Compare and contrast three prevailing models of human communication.
- 1.5 Paraphrase the principles of interpersonal communication.
- 1.6 Outline the myths related to interpersonal communication.
- 1.7 Differentiate among three ethical systems of communication.
- 1.8 Discuss the “Communication Competency Equation” and how it functions in both face-to-face and computer-mediated communication.

Each day, billions of people around the globe wake up and begin one of the most basic and ancient of all human behavior: interpersonal communication. Think about it. Some people head off to school and greet people on the bus. Some leave their apartments for work and chat with colleagues in a carpool. Others drink coffee or tea in the morning at the kitchen table, needling their roommates about the overdue rent. Some Zoom their friends to see if they got home safely from a previous night. And still others rush to their laptops to see if they received any replies to their online dating profiles. Although each of these situations differ, they all underscore the pervasiveness of interpersonal communication in our personal and professional lives.

Human communication is clearly the essence of what it means to be alive. Looking back at our opening story of Jake and Rachel, it will be their communication practices that will help their father literally, to stay alive. They will have to talk to the doctor, the medical team, stroke support liaisons, their dad, and to other family members. And yes, we can also envision that in addition to these interpersonal encounters, the two of them will have a great deal of private reflections, too, as they struggle through every day. Clearly, most of us will never find ourselves in Jake and Rachel’s circumstance. But, we all can agree with the importance of interpersonal communication in circumstances such as these.

DEFINING AND INTERPRETING COMMUNICATION

Relevant to this book and course, we note that the word *communication* derives from two Latin words (“*communis*” and “*communicare*”), which mean “to share and to make common.” Interestingly, communication is a word that most people feel they understand. And, yet, when you ask a dozen people to define the term, you’re going to hear a dozen different interpretations of the term! That is not necessarily a good thing because we all want to make sure that we have a common foundation to draw upon in order to understand, and be understood by, others. For our purposes, then, and in order for us to establish this mutual foundation, we define **communication** as the cocreation and interpretation of meaning.

We are necessarily expansive in our view of the term because communication is quite layered. Throughout our discussions over the next 10 chapters, we will examine various types of relationships, namely those that represent a cross-section of our lives, including teachers, painters, physicians, wait staff, child care providers, attorneys, college students, human resource directors, teenagers, among many, many others. In order to capture such a diverse list, we embrace a foundational definition that can be applied to multiple relationship types that experience a myriad of interpersonal experiences.

Despite the fact that communication is central to the human experience, not everyone embraces the process equally. In fact, some people are quite nervous about communicating. This fear or anxiety that people exhibit in the communication process is called **communication apprehension (CA)**. This sort of fear, or stage fright, is a legitimate and a very personal experience that researchers believe negatively impacts communication effectiveness and inhibits meaning.¹ Some people with CA go to great lengths to avoid certain situations because communicating can prompt embarrassment, awkwardness, shyness, frustration, and tension. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld humorously points out the fear that people have in speaking before a group of people: “According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person that if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.”²

Communication apprehension is no laughing matter, however, to millions of people. It can be profound and consequential, resulting in poor relationship quality and low levels of satisfaction.³ Looking back at our opening story of the Kanes, we can envision that the two children—because of their inexperience communicating with physicians and the medical community—will each experience some degree of CA. Which particular topics do you see as being difficult for the siblings to communicate?

Even if we don’t experience or suffer from communication apprehension, we still may have some problem getting our message across to others. For instance, we may feel unskilled to argue with a supervisor for a raise, to let our apartment manager know that the hot water is not hot enough, or to tell our partner “I love you.” At times throughout the day, we may struggle with what to say, how to say something, or when to say something. We may also grapple with listening to certain messages because of their content or the manner in which they are presented. In some cases, for instance, the subtle insults, indignities, and denigrating messages delivered to others will often stump even the most articulate communicator. Such cultural challenges (several of which we detail in the next chapter) require knowledge and skills that many people lack.

This book is an important beginning in addressing, understanding, and working through a great deal of the examples and episodes we just described. In each chapter and on each page, one goal remains clear: *to inspire you to work on improving your communication skills with others*. Enhancing the practices and skills related to interpersonal communication will assist you in becoming more effective in your relationships with a variety of people, including those with whom you are close (e.g., family members, friends) and those with whom you interact less frequently (e.g., contractors, baristas).

In addition to emphasizing a practical and skill-centered approach, throughout this book, you will see how interpersonal communication research and theory help us to understand everyday encounters. Ultimately, we believe that both practical and theoretical applications of interpersonal communication are intertwined to the extent that we cannot ignore the mutual influence of one upon the other. After all, theories inform practice and practice grows out of theory.

Still, maintaining this scholarly thread is secondary to our commitment to a sensible framework of a grounded, hands-on conversation. We agree with other writers who believe that the communication discipline can influence and enhance people's lives only by being practical.⁴ So, we adhere to a pragmatic approach with this book in the hope that you will be able to use what you learn to make informed communication choices with others.

We spent a great deal providing you a backdrop to this vital topic in our lives. Now, our first task is to map out a general understanding of interpersonal communication. We begin this journey by providing a brief history of how interpersonal communication came about in the field of communication.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE COMMUNICATION FIELD

Let's look at a general overview of the communication discipline to give you a sense of its development. We do this because we feel that to understand where we are, we first must understand where we've been. In this section, we are focusing on providing you a general sense of history. For an expansive view of the communication field, we encourage you to look at additional sources that are more comprehensive.⁵

What we call *Communication Studies* today has its origins in ancient Greece and Rome, during the formation of what we now know as Western civilization. Being skilled at communication was expected of all Greek and Roman citizens. The ideals of democracy being cultivated at the time placed a premium on learning to communicate effectively as well as understanding the nature of persuasion. Indeed, citizens (that is to say, men, because women were considered second-class citizens in ancient Greece) needed to plead their own cases in court pertaining to such issues as land disputes, argue their political ideas publicly while running for office, and secure their own civil rights through communicating with others. Further, citizens were also asked to take part in society by doing such things as serving as jurors, traveling as state emissaries, and overseeing city boundaries.⁶

This sort of public communication was viewed primarily as a way to persuade other people, and influential philosophers such as Aristotle developed ways to improve a speaker's persuasive powers. In his book *Rhetoric*, Aristotle described a way of making speeches that encouraged speakers to incorporate logic, evidence, and emotions and to consider how the audience perceived the speaker's credibility and intelligence. Aristotle stressed the value of being an ethical communicator. Maintaining one's dignity and integrity while communicating with another was instrumental (we review the topic of ethics later in the chapter).

Aristotelian thinking dominated early approaches to communication for centuries. He was philosophical and theoretical and a great deal of what he wrote contributed to our current understanding of the communication process. Still, as time went on, interest grew in providing speakers with less theoretical and more practical ways to improve their communication skills in situations other than public persuasion. Being rational was essential in order to reach the broadest possible audience. And, today, much of this pragmatism permeates the study of communication and in particular, the essence of what it means to exist.

Aristotle and a host of other scholars were influential in providing both theoretical and practical considerations of communication. In fact, we can't escape the impact of their ideas on the environments in which communication takes place, a topic we now will unravel.

As you have experienced over your lifetime, we see the communication process in a number of situations that we identify below. Although the following is by no means exhaustive, it does show how the communication field has grown significantly from an early focus on speaking in

front of an audience. In fact, you may notice that many schools use the following categories as an effective way to structure their curriculum and course offerings.

The following communication settings build upon each other because they generally represent increasing numbers of people included in the process. In addition, keep in mind that although these communication categories differ from one another in some significant ways, they aren't mutually exclusive. With that in mind, let's take a closer look at the six types of communication that provide a framework for all of our relationships:

Each of these communication environments identified in Table 1.1 is affected by two pervasive, ongoing influences: culture and technology. As we move through the 21st century, acknowledging both of these is even more crucial to our understanding of interpersonal communication and human relationships. Let's briefly discuss the two areas.

First, it's nearly impossible to ignore the role that culture plays as we communicate with others. We can experience a distinct culture in one state, one community, and even one block! Over the past several decades, scores of immigrants have arrived in the United States, bringing with them various customs, values, and practices. As a result, we now live in a country where intercultural contact is both necessary and commonplace, making effective communication with others even more critical than it would be ordinarily. Despite the anxiety or communication apprehension that some may have, we're sure to see even more cultural diversity as the years continue.

TABLE 1.1 ■ Environments/Contexts of Communication

Environment	Definition	Example
Intrapersonal communication	Messages that are internal to communicators Communication with ourselves This is an internal dialogue of sorts, with or without the presence of another.	Debating with yourself, mentally listing the pros and cons of a decision, such as whether or not to lease a car or rent an apartment
Interpersonal communication	The strategic social process of message transaction between two people to create and sustain shared meaning	A conversation with a friend or colleague, sending an email, or texting with a partner
Small group and team communication	Communication between and among at least three people who meet for a common purpose or goal	Working with a project team in a classroom or workplace
Organizational communication	Communication within and among large, extended environments with a defined hierarchy	An HR director and supervisor discussing the firing of an employee
Public Communication	Communication in which one person presents a speech to a group of audience-listeners, also known as public speaking.	A young person persuading their town council to install a skate park in a part of the town
Mass/mediated communication	Communication to a large audience via some mediated channel, such as television, radio, the internet (email, social media, etc.), or newspapers	Using HER or Hinge to find a partner or posting your opinion of racism on Twitter

There is an ever-increasing presence of intercultural relationships, including, for example, those between international exchange students and their host families, U.S. parents and their adopted children from other countries, working side by side in an office with people from different countries, among many others. This upsurge in cultural association has prompted researchers to study the effects of these diverse communities on communication effectiveness.⁷ That is, when culture is added to an already complex relationship, challenges arise. One scholarly team succinctly noted the value of looking at culture's influence in our relationships by claiming that it's important that we "invite experience"⁸ as we research. (We delve much deeper into the topic of culture, community, and communication in Chapter 2.)



Technology continues both to facilitate and confound communication between and among people.

iStockPhoto.com/brazzo

A second primary influence upon the various communication types is technology. As you know from your own online experiences, for some, face-to-face (f2f) contact is no longer the default communication approach. Years ago, interpersonal communication was limited to talking with someone personally. But today, relationships are routinely initiated, maintained, and even terminated via technology, and people derive various perceptions of others through their online interactions.⁹ This behavior has stimulated quite a bit of research on technology, relationships, and interpersonal communication¹⁰ and research that we will be integrating throughout the remainder of this text.

Technology not only has influenced people's interpretation of interpersonal communication, but also the digital relationship has become the norm across a large number of generations. Depending upon which survey you're reviewing, 30% to 40% of respondents indicate that they've used a dating site or app¹¹ and 12% have either married or have been in a committed relationship with someone they met online.¹² Some of you may have already experienced Virtual Reality Dating (VRD) in which you create an avatar and "date" or "chat" while online in a 3-D gaming environment. Sometimes VRD results in finding out more about a new Facebook or Twitter friend, all undertaken safely and without any f2f communication. Researchers¹³ have embraced this development in interpersonal relationships by noting that many vulnerable communities—including the LGBT communities where meeting up in some countries is nearly impossible—can benefit. Or, consider the VRD possibilities for seniors with limited mobility, people in rural areas, and those seeking out social networks.

In addition to our relationships developing more efficiently, our conversations, too, have become abbreviated, such as when we look at our caller ID and answer the phone with "And when did you get home from vacation?" instead of "Hello?" We reveal private information about ourselves via Instagram, even though we haven't met all of our "followers." And, the notion of what it means to be a "friend" on Facebook has motivated social scientists to research the extent to which people reveal too much online. They wonder what qualities Facebookers use to define friendships, although researchers have explained that as users get older, their Facebook friends are less likely to share personal information with others.¹⁴

These various topics and many others are discussed in detail throughout this book. And, as with cultural diversity, in every chapter, we integrate technology's effect on the different topics related to interpersonal communication, providing you a chance to understand its influence in your relationships with others. We believe that the communication we employ to develop satisfying relationships, both f2f and online, remains pivotal to our social, psychological, physical, and emotional well-being.¹⁵

APPLY IT!

If you had the chance to have dinner with Aristotle to discuss the way the communication field has evolved, what three issues or themes would you introduce and why? Based on the fact that his focus was on public speaking over 2,500 years ago, what would you envision his reaction to be regarding the current developments in the field? You can either develop the specific dialogue or paraphrase the conversation.

DEFINING AND INTERPRETING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Earlier, we defined communication, providing you a framework to consider as you review the topics in this book. However, because this text focuses on interpersonal communication, we begin our discussion by interpreting it for you. We define **interpersonal communication** as the strategic social process of message transaction between two people to create and sustain shared meaning. Four critical components are embedded in this definition: strategy, process, message exchange, and shared meaning. Let's look at each in turn.

When we state that interpersonal communication is a strategy, we mean to suggest that you are deliberative in your interpersonal efforts. That is, we don't wish to have intimate communication with everyone with whom we interact; we are selective. In fact, it would be both exhausting and unacceptable to do so. Therefore, we retain an internal interpersonal barometer, exchanging personal messages with those whom we feel we need or want to communicate. A number of variables can affect our desire to exchange messages, including (a) whether or not we've had a prior relationship with the person, (b) the extent to which we find the other person worthy of our time, and (c) the topic of conversation. Thinking back to our opening story of Jake and Rachel, the two did not have had a prior relationship with their father's doctor. But, eventually, they will be deliberative and find the physician "worthy of their time" as they manage the medical challenges that are ahead for them.

Stating that interpersonal communication is a social **process** means that it is an ongoing, unending, vibrant activity that is always changing. When we enter into an interpersonal communication exchange, we are entering into an event with moments that continue to evolve. For example, consider the moments when you first meet and begin communicating with classmates during a small group activity in class. Chances are that for the first few minutes, everyone in the group feels a little awkward and uncertain. Yet, after you all introduce yourselves to one another, it's highly likely that you all feel more comfortable. This shift from feeling uncertain to feeling comfortable is the ongoing interpersonal communication process in action.

The notion of process also suggests that it is not only individuals who change, but also the cultures in which they live. For instance, today's U.S. society is very different than it was, say, in the 1960s. While there have been several important social movements taking place over the past several years (e.g., #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, #OscarsSoWhite), most who lived in the

1960s feel that the climate was quite different back then. In one Reddit survey,¹⁶ for example, respondents identified several differences that demonstrate the 1960s as a time of extreme tumult and clearly defined lines of authority-related demarcation. Among the conclusions noted by Redditors were the following:

- There was an open encouragement of violence against protesters.
- Racism was practiced openly and without much consequence.
- Social class was much deeper and more troubling.
- The Vietnam War ushered in serious divergent points of view on war.
- There was little “peace and prosperity” as there is today.
- Television only had three channels to report events.
- Men clearly were the decision makers—both in the family and in the workplace.

So, process is more than one short period in a conversation. Process can be expanded to include an entire cultural era as well.

The third element of our definition of interpersonal communication highlights **message exchange**. In this regard, we mean the transaction of verbal and nonverbal *messages*, or information being sent simultaneously between people. **Messages**, both verbal and nonverbal, are the vehicles we use to interact with others. But messages are not enough to establish interpersonal communication. For example, consider an English-speaking communicator stating the message “I need to find the post office. Can you direct me there?” to a Spanish-speaking communicator. Although the message was stated clearly in English, no shared meaning results if the Spanish speaker is not bilingual.

Meaning is central to our definition of interpersonal communication because meaning is what people extract from a message. As we will learn in Chapter 4, words alone have no meaning; people attribute meaning to words and meaning exists in and among people.

We (co)create the meaning of a message even as the message unfolds. Maybe it’s our history with someone who ends up helping us interpret a message. Perhaps a message is unclear to us and we ask questions for clarity. Or maybe the message has personal meaning to us and no one else understands the personal expressions used. Meaning directly affects our relational life. As one team of interpersonal communication researchers state, “We suspect that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ relational experiences are sometimes a matter of personal definition and personal meaning, but always intertwined, sometimes seamlessly, in the broader human enterprise of making sense of experience.”¹⁷ In other words, when we achieve meaning, we are also achieving sense-making in our relationships with others.

When we say that people work toward creating and sustaining meaning, we are suggesting that there must be some shared meaning for interpersonal communication to take place. Because meaning is affected by culture beyond language, we have to be careful and avoid thinking that our meaning will automatically be clear to others. For instance, note that in the United States, many people tend to ask others, “What do you do?” In the Netherlands, however, this overture can be viewed as offensive since the Dutch feel that this question is rooted in classism. Or, consider the ubiquitous “TGIF” (Thank God It’s Friday) in the United States. To most, this means the beginning of a weekend (of fun), and yet in Muslim countries, the first day of the week is Saturday, after Friday (the holy day). This translation, then, requires careful consideration if meaning is to be shared.

PROMINENT MODELS OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION

To further comprehend the interpersonal communication process and to provide more information about the evolution of the communication field, we draw upon what theorists call models of communication. **Communication models** are visual, simplified representations of complex relationships in the communication process. They help us to see how the communication field has evolved over the years and provide a foundation you can return to throughout the book as you work to understand the issues and themes we introduce. The three prevailing models we discuss will give you some insight into how we frame our definition of interpersonal communication. We close this section with a projection of how technology influences model development. Let's start with the oldest model so you can recognize how the interpersonal communication process developed.

Mechanistic Thinking and the Action (Linear) Model

More than 60 years ago, Claude E. Shannon, a Bell Telephone scientist, and Warren Weaver, a Sloan Cancer Research Foundation consultant, set out to understand radio and telephone technology by looking at how information passed through various channels.¹⁸ They viewed information transmission as a linear process, and their research resulted in the creation of the action, or **Linear Model of Communication**.

The linear approach frames communication as a one-way process that transmits a message to a destination. Think about when you were a child. You may have played “the telephone game,” which included punching a tiny hole in the bottoms of two plastic cups, and inserting kite string or thread through each hole. Using the cups to “talk into” and to “listen with” illustrates the one-way communication we're discussing with the Linear Model. You talk and someone hears you; that's the essence of the Linear Model. Many writers have succinctly presented the model with five questions:

Who?

Says what?

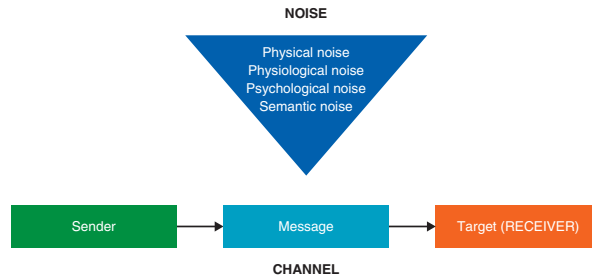
In what channel?

To whom?

With what effect?

Several components comprise the Linear Model of Communication (see Figure 1.1). The **sender** is the source of the message, which may be spoken, written, or unspoken (If American Sign Language is your primary form of interpersonal communication, your messages will necessarily be both linguistic and nonverbal). The sender passes the message to the receiver, the intended target of the message. The **receiver**, in turn, assigns meaning to the message. All of this communication takes place in a **channel**, which is a pathway to communication. Typically, channels represent our senses (visual/sight, tactile/touch, olfactory/smell, and auditory/hearing). For instance, you use the tactile channel to hug a parent, and you use the auditory channel to listen to your roommate complain about a midterm exam.

In the Linear Model, communication also involves **noise**, which is anything that interferes with the message. Four types of noise can interrupt a message:

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Linear Model of Communication

- **Physical noise** (also called *external noise*) involves any stimuli outside of the sender or receiver that makes the message difficult to hear. For example, it may be difficult to hear a message from your professor if someone were mowing the lawn outside the classroom. Physical noise can also take the form of something a person is wearing, such as “loud jewelry” or mirrored sunglasses, which may cause a receiver to focus on the object rather than the message.
- **Physiological noise** refers to biological influences on message reception. Examples of this type of noise are articulation problems, hearing or visual impairments, and the physical well-being of a speaker (i.e., whether they are able to deliver a message).
- **Psychological noise** (or *internal noise*) refers to a communicator’s biases, prejudices, and feelings toward a person or a message. For example, you may have heard another person use derogatory language about homeless people while you reflect upon your volunteer time in a homeless shelter.
- **Semantic noise** occurs when senders and receivers apply different meanings to the same message. Semantic noise may take the form of jargon, technical language, and additional words and phrases that are familiar to the sender but that are not understood by the receiver. Think about the word *dope*. It has evolved from referring to a user of drugs to something that is viewed as cool, awesome, or great (recall how the communication process can change over time).

IPC VOICE: MISSY

I can think of different noises I experienced with my partner. One time, I had to bring her into the emergency room because she had severe abdominal pain. When we got there, the number of people talking, crying, and yelling made me and her nervous (*physical noise*). But when we saw that her blood pressure was diving, they wheeled her into the critical care room quickly. There, the doctor asked us whether we were partners and when I said “Yes,” they said “Well, that’s OK” (seriously, I was ready to yell but remained calm) (*psychological noise*). Then when they gave her the morphine to calm her down, I was told that there was some sort of “gastrointestinal stricture” and that eventually, my partner would have to be on a “low-res diet” (*semantic noise*).

Reflection: Think about the times when various types of noises negatively influenced your communication with another? Consider different environments, including school, work, home, or a place of worship. Did it make a difference who you were talking to?

The linear view has been studied with context and surrounding in mind. **Context** is an environment and can be physical, cultural, psychological, or historical. The **physical context** is the tangible environment in which communication occurs. Examples of physical contexts include the hotel van on the way to the airport, the dinner table, the apartment, or the church hall. Even environmental conditions such as temperature, lighting, and space are also part of the physical context. For example, consider trying to listen to your best friend talk about her financial problems in a noisy crowded Starbucks. The environment does not seem conducive to receiving her message clearly, accurately, or thoughtfully.

The **cultural context** refers to the rules, roles, norms, and patterns of communication that are unique to particular cultures. Culture continually influences the communication taking place between and among people, requiring us to look at the backgrounds of communicators. Think about the millions of refugees we've witnessed, over the years, who have fled their homelands, only to be confronted in other cultures with hate, fear, violence, and hunger. Compounding these challenges are the difficulties assimilating into a culture where the newcomer language is not the language of the host culture.¹⁹ Therefore, the cultural context in which new immigrants arrive is typically fraught with anxiety, despair, and frustration.

The **social-emotional context** indicates the nature of the relationship that affects a communication encounter. For example, are the communicators in a particular interaction friendly or unfriendly, supportive or unsupportive? Or do they fall somewhere in between? These factors help explain why, for instance, you might feel completely anxious in one employment interview but very comfortable in another. At times you and an interviewer may hit it off, while at other times you may feel intimidated or awkward. The social-emotional context helps explain the nature of the interaction taking place.

In the **historical context**, messages are understood in relationship to previously sent messages. Thus, when Oliver tells Willa that he missed her while they were separated over spring break, Willa hears that as a turning point in their relationship. Oliver has never said that before; in fact, he has often mentioned that he rarely misses anyone when he is apart from them. Therefore, his comment is influenced by their history together. If Oliver regularly told Willa that he missed her, she would interpret the message differently.

We will return to context often in this book. For now, keep in mind that context has a significant influence on our relationships with others. Furthermore, context involves people and their conversations and relationships. If we don't consider context in our interactions with others, we have no way to judge our interpersonal effectiveness.

Although the Linear Model was highly regarded when it was first conceptualized, it has been criticized because it presumes that communication has a definable beginning and ending.²⁰ In fact, Shannon and Weaver later emphasized this aspect of their model by claiming that people receive information in organized and discrete ways. Yet, we know that communication can be messy. We have all interrupted someone or had someone interrupt us, for instance. The Linear Model also presumes that listeners are passive and that communication occurs only when speaking. But we know that listeners often affect speakers and are not simply passive receivers of a speaker's message. With these criticisms in mind, researchers developed another way to represent the human communication process: the Interactional Model.

Feedback and the Interactional Model

To emphasize the two-way nature of communication between people, researchers conceptualized the **Interactional Model of Communication**.²¹ This model shows that communication goes

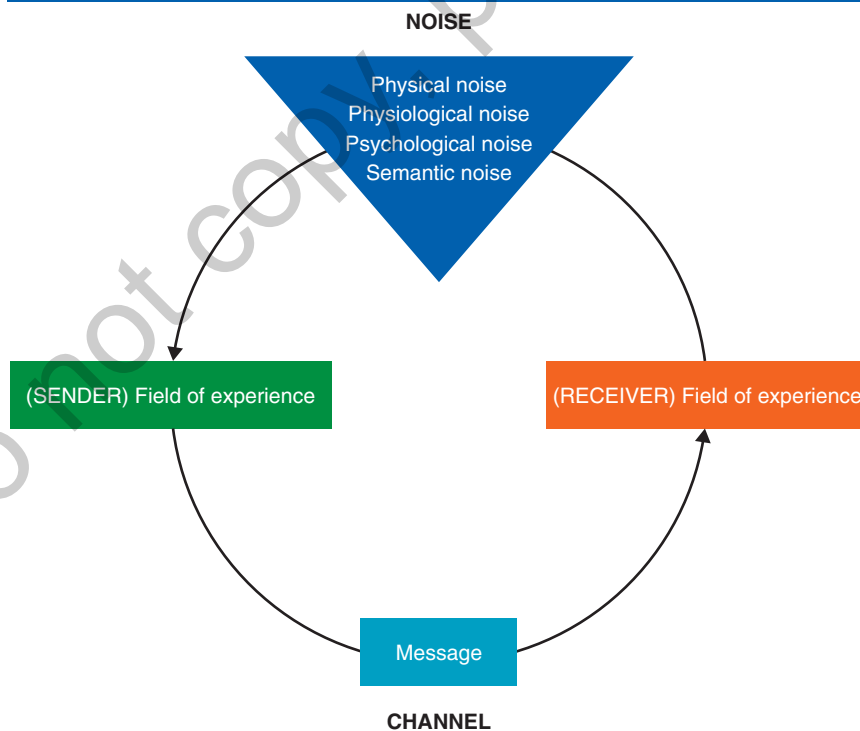
in two directions: from sender to receiver and from receiver to sender. This circular, or interactional, process suggests that communication is ongoing rather than linear. In the Interactional Model, an individual in a conversation can be both sender and receiver, but not both simultaneously (see Figure 1.2).

The interactional approach is characterized primarily by **feedback**, which can be defined as responses to people, their messages, or both. Feedback may be verbal (meaning found in words) or nonverbal (meaning found in smiles, crossed arms, etc.). Feedback may also be internal or external. **Internal feedback** occurs when you assess your own communication (e.g., by thinking, “I never should have said that”). **External feedback** is the feedback you receive from other people (e.g., “Why did you say that? That was dumb!”).

People can provide external feedback that results in important internal feedback for themselves. For example, let’s say that Alexandra gives Quinn the following advice about dealing with the death of Quinn’s partner: “You feel sad as long as you need to. Don’t even worry about what other people think. I’m sick of people telling others how they should feel about something. These are *your* feelings.” While providing Quinn this external feedback, Alexandra may realize that her advice can also be applied to her own recent breakup. Although she may intend to send Quinn a comforting message, she may also provide herself internal feedback as she deals with her relational circumstances.

Like the Linear Model, the Interactional Model has been criticized primarily for its view of senders and receivers—that is, one person sends a message to another person. Neither model takes into consideration what happens when nonverbal messages are sent at the same time as verbal messages. For example, when a father scolds his child and finds the child either looking the other way or staring directly into his eyes, the father may “read” the meaning of the child’s

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Interactional Model of Communication



nonverbal communication as inattentive or disobedient. What happens if the child doesn't say anything during the reprimand? The father may still make some meaning out of the child's silence ("Don't just stand there with that blank stare!"). The interactional view acknowledges that human communication involves both speaking and listening, but it asserts that speaking and listening are separate events and thus does little to address the effect of nonverbal communication as the message is sent. This criticism led to the development of a third model of communication: the Transactional Model.

Shared Meaning and the Transactional Model of Communication

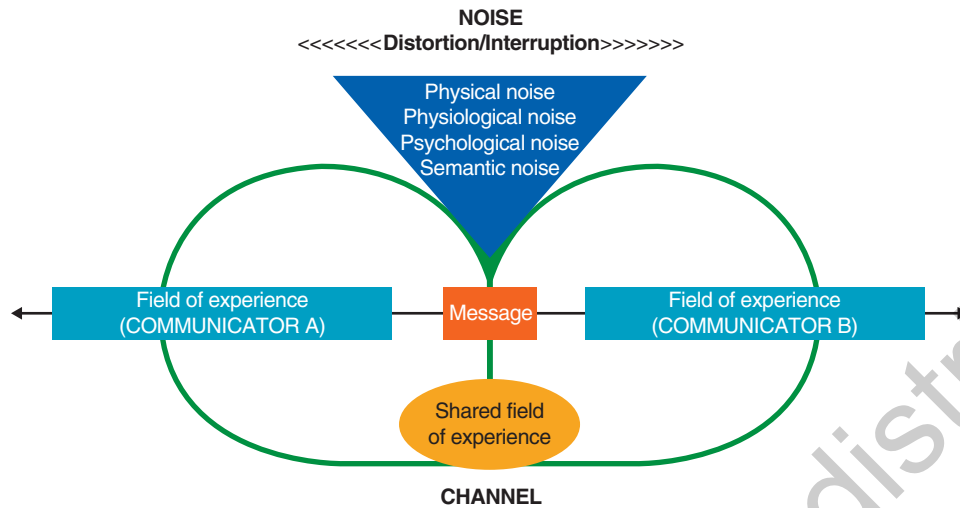
Whereas the Linear Model of Communication assumes that communication is an action that moves from sender to receiver, and the Interactional Model suggests that the presence of feedback makes communication an interaction between people, the **Transactional Model of Communication** incorporates a mix of many elements.²² In this model, sending and receiving messages are simultaneous and mutual. In fact, the word *transactional* indicates that the communication process is cooperative. In other words, communicators (senders and receivers) are both responsible for the effect and effectiveness of communication. In a transactional encounter, people do not simply send meaning from one to the other and then back again; rather, they build shared meaning. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words best underscore the philosophy behind the Transactional Model: "It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny."²³

A unique feature of the Transactional Model is its recognition that messages build upon each other, underscoring an exchange of sorts. Furthermore, both verbal and nonverbal behaviors are necessarily part of the transactional process. For example, consider Alan's conversation with his coworker Hurit. During a break, Hurit asks Alan about his family in Los Angeles. He begins to tell her that his three siblings all live in Los Angeles and that he has no idea when they will be able to "escape the prison" there. When he mentions "prison," Hurit looks confused. Seeing Hurit's puzzled facial expression, Alan clarifies that he hated Los Angeles because it was so hot, people lived too close to each other, and he felt that he was being watched all the time. In sum, he felt like he was in a prison.

This example shows how much both Alan and Hurit are actively involved in this communication interaction. Hurit's nonverbal response to Alan prompted him to clarify his original message. As this exchange shows, the nonverbal message works in conjunction with the verbal message, and the transactional process requires ongoing negotiation of meaning.

Note that the Transactional Model in Figure 1.3 is characterized by a common field of experience between communicator A and communicator B. The **field of experience** refers to a person's culture, past experiences, personal history, and heredity, and how these elements influence the communication process. In the chapter opening, the fields of experience of the Kane children are both similar and different. Jake has already left the house and started his career while Rachel is still in high school and living at home. But, the two fields of experiences will overlap once they both begin the difficult journey of taking care of their dad.

People's fields of experience overlap at times, meaning that people share things in common. Where two people's fields of experience overlap, they can communicate more effectively than if overlap was not present. And as they communicate, they create more overlap in their experiences. This process explains why initial encounters often consist of questions and answers between communicators, such as "Where are you from?" "What's your major?" "Do you ski?" The answers to these questions help establish the overlap in the communicators' experiences:

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Transactional Model of Communication

“Oh, I was in Chicago over the holidays last year”; “Really, that’s my major, too”; “Yeah, I don’t ski, either.”

Fields of experience may change over time. For instance, in class, Alicia and Marcy have little in common and have little overlap in their fields of experience. They just met this term, have never taken a course together before, and Alicia is 18 years older than Marcy. It would appear, then, that their fields of experience would be limited to being women enrolled in the same course together. However, consider the difference if we discover that both Alicia and Marcy are single parents, have difficulty finding quality child care, and have received academic scholarships. The overlap in their fields of experience would be significantly greater. In addition, as the two continue in the class together, they will develop new common experiences, which, in turn, will increase the overlap in their fields of experience. This increased overlap may affect their interactions with each other in the future.

Interpersonal communication scholars have embraced the transactional process in their research, believing that human communication “is always tied to what came before and always anticipates what may come later.”²⁴ Many misunderstandings occur in relationships because people are either unaware of or don’t attend to the transactional communication process.

In summary, early communication models showed that communication is linear and that senders and receivers have separate roles and functions. The interactional approach expanded that thinking and suggested less linearity and more involvement of feedback between communicators. The Transactional Model refined our understanding by noting the importance of a communicator’s background, by demonstrating the simultaneous sending and receiving of messages, and by focusing on the communicators’ mutual involvement in creating meaning.

Social Information Processing and the _____ Model

Before we move on to the next discussion, let’s keep in mind that our conceptualizations of communication models are continually evolving. New technologies, for instance, necessarily influence the communication process between communicators, as noted earlier in the chapter. To

this end, the newest communication model that infuses technology has yet to be named nor fully examined by interpersonal communication researchers.

Consider a quick example here. Suppose you emailed a close relative asking to borrow money. Next, your relative decides to Facetime you on the phone to talk to you further about your request. After your conversation, you decide to text back and forth to make sure you both understand the final protocols related to the financial episode. You then both decide to meet face to face to talk about the situation or request. How does this infusion of technology affect the meaning? Is meaning improved because of multiple channels? Is meaning confounded because of the multiple channels?

The Transactional Model will soon become a scholarly footnote as technology boldly shapes how we view, and enact, the communication process. In fact, some research has already begun to disentangle the complexity of communication as it relates to the complexity of technology.

Theorists have begun to investigate the extent to which meeting someone online differs from a face-to-face meeting.²⁵ Scholars have called this **Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory**. This theory posits that information that is sent between communicators requires more time than traditional face to face (f2f). Because online communicators are motivated to develop favorable online impressions, we see a number of self-presentations that are carefully crafted on such platforms as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Rather than one impression as we have in a f2f encounter (“You can’t make a second first impression.”), SIP scholars contend that we accrue impressions from the information we review on line. And, they argue that online communicators generally think about what they post, how they post it, and for whom they are posting. According to SIP theorists, in f2f encounters, this preoccupation cannot be as thorough because we are inundated with so much stimuli surrounding us (e.g., people, noise, environmental conditions).²⁶

Let’s think of this theory this way: Let’s say you’re using WhatsApp or WeChat and you’re ready to text someone. Before sending the text, you generally reread the words and punctuation marks and may even insert emojis. You may also “auto check spelling” in your message. Before

texting, however, you decide to hold the text for any number of reasons. In our face-to-face communication, however, most of us don’t take the time to hold a message before delivering it, particularly if we’re asked for a response or if we find ourselves passionate about the subject. Consequently, we frequently stumble toward clarity and meaning, prompting all sorts of reactions.

Interpersonal communication scholars will continue to adjust or reconsider the Transactional Model as they take into account a number of important issues, namely technology, when they begin to rally around a new communication model. In the end, we need to recognize that the communication behaviors and roles described by the models are not



Our fields of experience are instrumental in the cocreation of meaning.

MoMo Productions/Digital Vision/Getty Images

absolute and can vary depending on the situation. With this foundation, let's now discuss the nature of interpersonal communication and describe what it is and what it is not.

The Interpersonal Communication Continuum

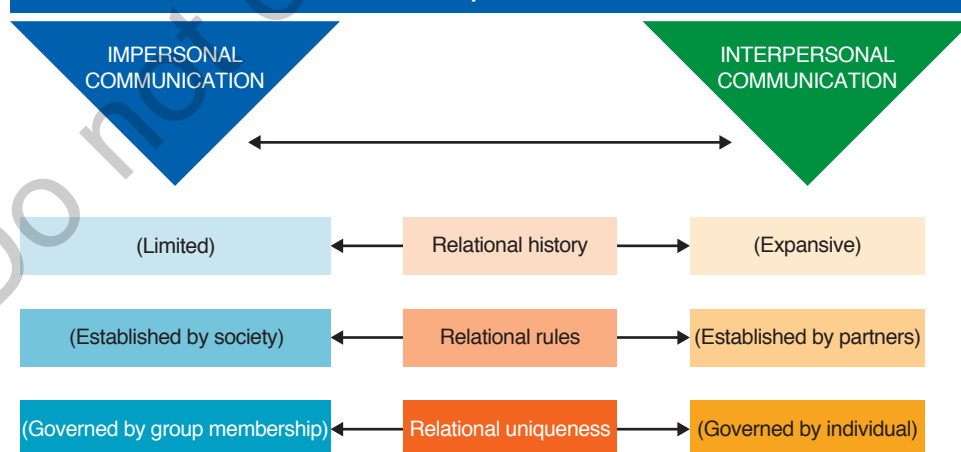
With these models in place, we need to address one additional area that will help you understand the interpersonal communication process. More than four decades ago, researchers proposed looking at communication along a continuum.²⁷ It was a unique view at the time and remains significant today. As we know, not all human communication is interpersonal (an issue we take up a bit later in this chapter). Our interactions with others can be placed on a continuum from impersonal to interpersonal (see Figure 1.4).

Think about the various conversations you have that could be considered impersonal or closer to the impersonal end of the continuum. You sit next to a person in the waiting room of your dentist and ask whether he watched *Fox News* the night before. You tell a woman hawking tickets to a sold-out basketball game that you're not interested. You tell the teenager sitting next to you at a wedding that you're a friend of the groom. Typically, these linear episodes remain on the impersonal end of the continuum because the conversations remain superficial. You do not acknowledge the people in these examples as unique individuals who are important in your life, despite the fact that they may be compelling in some ways.

Now, consider the many times you talk to people on a much deeper level. You share health-related confidences with a close friend over tea. You laugh with your grandfather about a treasured family story. You commiserate with a classmate who is disappointed about a grade. In these cases, your communication is not superficial. You share yourself and respond to the other person as a unique individual.

If you haven't already, one very real episode that you all (will) experience is the job interview. At first glance, you may be inclined to place this conversation on the impersonal end; indeed, many job interviews begin superficially, with questions related to your major, your hometown, or even your favorite hobby. Yet, most interviews dig much deeper, asking job candidates about their motivation for applying for a particular job, views on workplace ethics, and other matters that require a personal interpretation of the information. So, in a brief job interview, the interaction can evolve from impersonal to interpersonal in a matter of minutes.

FIGURE 1.4 ■ The Continuum of Interpersonal Communication



These two ends of the continuum—impersonal and interpersonal—are the extremes. But, we believe that most of our communication encounters with others aren't so binary. Rather, most fall in between or along various points on the continuum. Your talks with a professor, coworker, or car mechanic may not be particularly emotionally fulfilling, but likely have a personal dimension to them. Your professor sometimes delicately asks what personal challenges might have caused a failing grade on an exam. A coworker may share family stories. And a car mechanic may ask if you have enough money for a new transmission. Each of these interactions entails some degree of closeness, but not a lot of emotional depth.

What will determine the extent to which an encounter is impersonal, interpersonal, or in between? Three issues are particularly important: relational history, relational rules, and relational uniqueness.

First, **relational history** pertains to the prior relationship experiences that two people share. For example, after being closed because of the pandemic, Rolanda and Maria find themselves back in the same restaurant where they've worked for years. Their relational history is apparent when you consider the amount of time they have spent together. This history may include working the same hours, sharing with each other their personal feelings about their boss, talking about how they and their families dealt with the pandemic, or having social times with each other's friends. Their relational history, then, spans both their professional and personal lives. This rich history enables their conversations to be interpersonal rather than impersonal.

Relational rules indicate what the people in a relationship expect and allow when they talk to each other. Relational rules, often unstated, differ from social rules in that the two relational partners negotiate the rules themselves as opposed to having them set by an outside source. It is true that others may influence the interpersonal rules (e.g., a supervisor's rules may have an impact on workplace relationships). Nonetheless, most relational rules are constructed by the relational partners, and at times, the two may have to consider external influences on those rules. Rules help relational partners negotiate how information is managed and stored.²⁸ For example, one relational rule that Rolanda and Maria may share is the belief that all restaurant gossip should remain private. Another one of their relational rules may communicate the need to be professional while on the job and to avoid tasteless jokes about one another or other coworkers.

A final influence on the relationship continuum is **relational uniqueness**, which pertains to how communicators frame their relationship and compare it to others. In other words, how is their relationship distinct? In the relationship between Rolanda and Maria, they know and treat each other as unique individuals, not as generic coworkers. Thus, Rolanda asks Maria for help in making a financial decision because she knows that Maria has a good head for business. And Maria refrains from teasing Rolanda when she drops a tray because she knows Rolanda is sensitive about being clumsy. Their relational history and rules help develop their sense of relational uniqueness.

Again, much of our communication isn't purely impersonal or interpersonal; rather, it falls somewhere between the two ends of the continuum. Moreover, the relationship you have with someone doesn't always indicate whether your communication is personal or not. At times, personal communication occurs in our impersonal relationships. For example, you may consider telling your dry cleaner about your divorce or confiding to a fellow passenger that you are deathly afraid of flying. At other times, we may have impersonal communication in our close relationships. For instance, a couple with five children may be too exhausted to worry about being sensitive, loving, and compassionate with each other. Feeding the kids, bathing them, preparing their lunches, and getting them to the bus present enough challenges.

Returning to our opening, Jake and Rachel's communication with their father's doctor will likely begin as impersonal with much medical information being exchanged. Yet, as time goes on, the two will inevitably experience quite a bit of emotional distress as the father's rehabilitation progresses. Soon, the medical jargon will be replaced with personal testimonies of joys and setbacks. This can all happen quickly or evolve over a longer period of time.

Thus far, we have provided you a foundation to consider as you think about your communication with others. In order to differentiate this type of communication from other types, we now turn to a discussion of the principles, or universals, of interpersonal communication in our lives.

IPC CAREERS

THE "PEOPLE-CENTERED" PROFESSIONS



iStockPhoto.com/jpfotograaf

Whether we want to call them jobs that require "social skills" or "people skills," they are in high demand. Each professional pursuit requires both knowledge and skill in interpersonal communication. Nearly any survey puts interpersonal communication skills as the #1 job skill in highest demand. There are so many professions that rely on our ability to connect with others and to cocreate meaning with others. Data from the U.S. Department of Labor, for instance, indicates some compelling information regarding professions that require skills in persuasion, mediation, negotiation, instruction and task management, and project coordination. In addition, managers will have to be skilled at interpersonal communication as they navigate a diverse workplace and work force. Although technical skills frequently become outdated, interpersonal communication skills will resonate for years to come.

Reflection: Can you think of any occupation that does not require adeptness at interpersonal communication? If so, which one(s)? In a our COVID world, try to forecast what kinds of job opportunities you believe will place an even greater emphasis on interpersonal communication skills.

THE PRINCIPLES OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

To better understand interpersonal communication, we now explore some major principles that shape it. As you review each, keep in mind that we address these themes within a Westernized context because most of the research has adopted this view. Yet, as we'll discuss in much more detail in the next chapter, we need to be culturally sensitive regarding being absolute in our conclusions. With this in mind, we believe that interpersonal communication is characterized by a number of principles, or universals, seven of which we explain below.

Principle #1: Interpersonal Communication Is Unavoidable

Interpersonal communication scholars repeatedly remind us that “one cannot *not* communicate.”²⁹ Read that phrase again. Whether online or offline, this means that as hard as we try, we cannot prevent someone else from extracting meaning out of our behavior—it is inevitable and unavoidable. No matter what stoic face we try to establish and no matter how we try to explain a text, we are still sending a message to others. Even our silence and avoidance of eye contact are communicative. In fact, think about when you send a text and you’re waiting for a response. Many of us wait for the “. . .” or “*typing*” to signify that the other is about to respond. These are the qualities that help make interpersonal communication transactional. Let’s take another example. Imagine that Eva and her wife, Chloe, are talking about the balance in their checking account. In this scenario, the two engage in a rather heated discussion because Eva has discovered that \$300 cannot be accounted for in the balance.

Eva: “So, hon, I can’t figure out where the 300 bucks went. I didn’t take it. We didn’t use it on bills. So, there’s really only you left.”

Chloe: (sits in silence, looking at her nails)

Eva: “Hmm. Well, let’s see. You’re saying nothing. You’re not looking at me. You’re even clearing your throat. I think we’ve figured out where that \$300 went!”

In this brief conversation, Chloe has said nothing and yet Eva drew conclusions from her behavior, behavior that did not include saying one word. In Chapter 5, we return to the impact that this sort of nonverbal communication has on creating meaning.

Principle #2: Interpersonal Communication Is Symbolic

The study of the use of symbols and their form and content is part of **Semiotics Theory**.³⁰ One important reason interpersonal communication occurs is because symbols are mutually agreed upon by the participants in the process. **Symbols** are arbitrary labels or representations for feelings, concepts, objects, or events. Words are symbols. For instance, the word *table* can represent a place to sit. Similarly, the word *hate* represents the idea of hate, which means strong negative feelings for someone or something.

Symbols may be somewhat abstract, and with this abstraction, comes the potential for miscommunication. For instance, consider how hard it would be for someone who has never attended college to understand the following words:

I have no idea what the prereqs are. I know that the midterm is pretty much objective. And the prof doesn’t follow the syllabus too much. I wish that stuff was in the undergrad catalog. I’m sure I’d rather do an independent study than take that class.

In the semiotic tradition, “communication is easiest when we share a common language, that words can mean different things to different people so miscommunication is a constant danger.”³¹ Ultimately, people are the interpreters of what constitutes meaning in language. In the previous example, it’d be quite difficult for someone without a college education to gain meaning from the words expressed (think, too, about the Latin etymology of the word, *communication*, which means “to make common”).

Principle #3: Interpersonal Communication Is Rule Governed

Consider the following examples of communication rules:

- As long as you live under my roof, you'll do what I say.
- Always tell the truth.
- Don't talk back.
- Always say "thank you" when someone gives you a present.
- Don't interrupt while someone is talking.

We're sure that you've probably heard at least one of these while growing up. We noted earlier that interpersonal rules are important ingredients in our relationships. They help guide and structure our interpersonal communication. **Rules** essentially say that individuals in a relationship agree that there are appropriate and agreed-upon ways to interact in their relationship. Like the rules in our childhood, most of the rules in our relationships today tell us what we can or can't do. We define a rule as "a followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts."³² As this definition implies, we can choose whether or not we wish to follow a rule. Ultimately, we must decide whether the rule must be adhered to or can be ignored in our interpersonal exchanges.

To understand this principle, consider the Chandler family—a family of three who finds itself homeless. The Chandlers live day to day in homeless shelters in a large city in the Southwest. The family members agree on a communication rule explicitly stating that they will not discuss their economic situation in public. This rule requires all family members to refrain from talking about what led to their homelessness. Each member of the family is obligated to keep this information private, an *intra*-family secret of sorts. Whether or not people outside the Chandler family agree on the usefulness of such a rule is not important.

Yet, one test of the rule's effectiveness is whether family members can refrain from discussing their circumstances with others. If the rule is not followed, what will the consequences be? Rules, therefore, imply choice, and participants in a relationship may choose to ignore a particular rule.

Principle #4: Interpersonal Communication Is Learned

People obviously believe that interpersonal communication is a learned process. Otherwise, why would we be writing this book, and why would you be taking this course? Yet, as we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, we often take for granted our ability to communicate interpersonally. Still, we all need to refine and cultivate our skills to communicate with a wide assortment of people. You must be able to make informed communication choices in changing times.

You're in this course to learn more about the role that communication plays in your relationships. Yet, you may not have realized that you've also been acquiring this information throughout your lifetime. We learn how to communicate with one another from the internet, our peer group, our partners. Recent evidence shows that we actually learn to fall in love with people we (think we) know from the media. For instance, some researchers believe that we develop crushes on celebrities and musical artists, "marry" our favorite anime character, and become romantically engaged to people we see on television.³³ Of course, these are all imaginary, but they serve a psychological function in that they may be foundational for how we learn about relationships.

Early in our lives, most of us learn from our family. Consider this dialogue between Amy Reid and her 11-year-old son, Henry, about his obsession with video games:

Henry: “So, mom, it’s way better that I’m playing these games. Why do I have to put it away?”

Amy: “Why? Because you’re playing video games almost three hours a day. And, because you’re not even 12. And because you have homework. And because I’m your mom. And because these games teach you nothing important. And because I’m your mom.”

Henry: “You already told me that you’re my mom two times.”

Amy: “And, I’ll keep saying it.”

Clearly, Amy is teaching her child a communication rule that she believes leads to interpersonal effectiveness. She tells her son that he should listen to adults. She is also reinforcing the fact that she is the authority and that as his mom, she’s entitled to establish her own rules. Whether or not Henry likes it, he is learning that he cannot make his own decisions and he’s learning that adults control his life.

Principle #5: Interpersonal Communication Has Both Content and Relational Meaning

Each message that you communicate to another contains information on two levels—content and relationship. The **content level** refers to the literal information contained in the message. The words you speak or write to another person constitute the content of the message. A message also contains a **relationship level**, which can be defined as how you want the receiver of a message to interpret your message. The relational dimension of a message gives us some idea how the speaker and the listener feel about each other. To illustrate the difference between the two, try saying “I’ve had enough” with different relationships (e.g., parent, boss, roommate, cyberbully) in mind.

Content and relationship levels work simultaneously in a message, and it is difficult to think about sending a message that doesn’t, in some way, comment on the relationship between the sender and receiver. In other words, we can’t really separate the two. We always express an idea or thought (content), but that thought is always presented within a relational framework. Consider the following example:

Father Felix is a Catholic priest who is the pastor of a large parish in the Rocky Mountains. Corrine Murphy is the parish administrative assistant. Both have been at the parish for more than 10 years and have been good friends throughout that time. One of the most stressful times in the church is during the Christmas season. The pastor is busy visiting homebound parishioners, while Corrine is busy overseeing the annual holiday pageant. With this stress comes a lot of shouting between the two. On one occasion, several parishioners hear Father Felix yell, “Corrine, you forgot to tell me about the Lopez family! When do they need me to visit? Where is your mind these days? Get it together!” Corrine shoots back, “I’ve got it under control. Just quit your nagging and focus on your work!” The parishioners listening to the two are taken aback by the way they yell at each other.

In this example, the parishioners who heard the conversation were simply attuned to the content dimension and failed to understand that the 10-year relationship between Father Felix and Corrine was unique to the two of them. Such direct interpersonal exchanges during stressful times were not out of the ordinary. Father Felix and Corrine frequently raised their voices to each

other, and neither gave it a second thought. In a case like this, the content should be understood with the relationship in mind.

Principle #6: Interpersonal Communication Can Lead to Self-Actualization

Learning about interpersonal communication can improve your life in that it can help you gain information about yourself, a process called **self-actualization**, and a behavior we return to throughout the book. When we are self-actualized, we become the best person we can be. We are tapping our full potential in terms of our creativity, our spontaneity, and our talents. When we self-actualize, we try to cultivate our strengths and reduce our shortcomings.

At times, others help us to self-actualize. For instance, in the movie *As Good As It Gets*, Melvin suffers from an obsessive-compulsive disorder. His love interest, Carol, has her own family problems but tries to help Melvin overcome some of his idiosyncrasies. In a poignant exchange that occurs during their first date, Carol becomes distressed and pleads, “Pay me a compliment, Melvin. I need one quick.” Melvin responds by saying, “You make me want to be a better man.” Although Melvin clearly frames the compliment from his vantage point, he still, nonetheless, manages to help Carol see her value through his eyes.

Principle #7: Interpersonal Communication Involves Ethical Choices

Although we expand upon this topic in the next section of the chapter, it’s important to highlight that ethics is instrumental in all of your interpersonal communication. **Ethics** is the perceived rightness or wrongness of an action or behavior. Researchers have identified ethics as a type of moral decision-making, determined in large part by society.³⁴

In our conversations with those with whom we have a close relationship, nearly every encounter is guided by ethics. What you say, how you say it, the expectations you have of others’ communication abilities, the conversational topic, among others, can all function prominently in our interpersonal communication with others. If we apply a technological lens, the ethical effects do not diminish. For instance, if you’re in a chat room, what consequences exist for the communicator who chooses to use inflammatory language to insult you? Do you jump into the thread or do you choose to move on? Ethical choices confront all of us in a number of important and different ways.

In this chapter so far, we have explored the definition of interpersonal communication in some detail and have described several principles associated with interpersonal communication. Now that you know what interpersonal communication is, in order to prevent misinterpreting or being misinterpreted, let’s make you aware of some of the misconceptions regarding interpersonal communication.



Nearly all of our conversations are guided by a code of ethics.

iStockPhoto.com/aydinyrn

DISPELLING MYTHS ABOUT INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Dr. Phil's advice. The internet. Old tales that never were proven true. Whatever the source, for one reason or another, people operate under several misconceptions about interpersonal communication. These five myths impede our understanding and enactment of effective interpersonal communication.

Myth #1: Interpersonal Communication Solves All Problems

We can't stress enough that simply being skilled in interpersonal communication does not mean that you're prepared to work out all of your relational challenges and problems. Surely, as we noted earlier, communication will not work sometimes. You may communicate clearly about a problem but not necessarily be able to solve it. Also, keep in mind that communication involves both speaking and listening. In advising appointments, for instance, many students have revealed to us that they try to "talk out a problem" with their roommates. Although this may seem to be a great strategy, we hope that this talking is accompanied by listening. We're confident that you will leave this course with an understanding of how to communicate thoughtfully and skillfully with others in a variety of relationships. We also hope you realize that simply because you are talking to someone does not mean that you will solve all of your relationship problems.

Myth #2: Interpersonal Communication Is Always a Good Thing

National best-selling self-help books and famous motivational gurus have made huge amounts of money promoting the idea that communication is the magic potion for all of life's ailments. Most often, communication is a good thing in our relationships with others. We wouldn't be writing this book if we didn't think that! Yet, there are times when communication results in less-than-satisfying relationship experiences. To this end, researchers have investigated a more provocative, yet important, area of research in interpersonal communication that was originally called "the dark side."³⁵ More contemporary thinking now references the term as "destructive" communication.

Destructive interpersonal communication generally refers to negative communication exchanges between people (think about our earlier example of microaggressions as destructive). People can communicate in ways that are manipulative, deceitful, exploitive, homophobic, transphobic, racist, and emotionally abusive. In other words, we need to be aware that communication can be downright nasty at times and that interpersonal communication is not always satisfying and rewarding. Although most people approach interpersonal communication thoughtfully and with an open mind, others are less sincere. To contrast destructive communication, we also discuss *constructive* (or, the "bright side") interpersonal communication, which focuses on the altruistic, supportive, and affirming reasons that people communicate with others. Look for discussions of destructive and constructive interpersonal communication throughout the chapters of this book.

Myth #3: Interpersonal Communication Is Common Sense

Consider the following question: If interpersonal communication is just a matter of common sense, why do we have so many problems communicating with others? We need to abandon the notion that communication is simply intuitive. Interpersonal communication is not "common" by any means and it clearly doesn't make "sense" to adopt this belief.

It's true that we should be sure to use whatever common sense we have in our personal interactions, but this strategy will get us only so far. In some cases, a skilled interpersonal communicator may effectively rely on their common sense, but there are many situations where our common sense simply fails to “kick in” (think, for example, of those heated arguments about money, the euphoria we feel when we first start dating someone, and other highly emotional moments). In these and other cases, we need to make use of an extensive repertoire of skills to make informed choices in our relationships.

One problem with believing that interpersonal communication is merely common sense relates to the diversity of our population. As we discuss in Chapter 2, cultural variation continues to characterize places around the globe. Making the assumption that all people intuitively know how to communicate with everyone ignores the significant cultural differences in communication norms. Even members of one generation tend to look at the same event differently. To rid ourselves of the myth of common sense, take into account the complexity of culture.

Myth #4: Interpersonal Communication Is Always Face to Face

Although much of our discussion has centered on face-to-face encounters between people, we know that this is an outdated view. While it's true that f2f communication remains the primary way to cultivate interpersonal skills with another, we also have noted that technology usually influences that process. Massive numbers of people utilize social media in their communication with others and people are finding life partners online. This mediated interpersonal communication requires us to expand our discussion of interpersonal communication beyond personal encounters. Discussing the intersection of technology and interpersonal communication is necessary to capture the complexity of our various relationships. Throughout this book, we have made a visible and strategic effort to apply a technological lens to conclusions that may have their roots in face-to-face encounters. Failing to do so renders much of our information rather impractical.

Myth #5: More Interpersonal Communication Is Better

Everyone claims to be an expert in communication. In fact, a survey sponsored by the National Communication Association notes that over 90% of people believe that their communication skills are “above average.”³⁶ Is it any wonder, then, that when disagreements occur or when people don't know what to say, the “experts” advise to *communicate!*

And yet, more interpersonal communication is not always the best strategy. In fact, determining when to talk and when to remain quiet is fast becoming commonplace in several professions. For example, some doctors and medical teams at various hospitals are beginning to employ “the Pause,” which is a 15- to 30-second period of silence to respect the death of a patient. This silence is intended to honor the life and efforts of both the human life and the effort of the team.³⁷ It's not the *amount* of interpersonal communication that matters. Rather, it's learning how to be judicious, an experience that requires ongoing attention throughout our lifetimes. Communicating silence, at times, may be quite valuable and useful. In fact, it's likely that Jake and Rachel will be undergoing many moments where simply being silent will be more valuable than talking.

We're sure that based on your relational experiences, you can also point to a few other misconceptions related to interpersonal communication. Yet, this book is all about choice; the choices you make in changing times. And, the choices we make in our relationships are rooted in our ability to determine what is right and wrong. This carries even more importance as we think

about those relationships that can have lasting consequences for us, whether they relate to our closest friend or our worst adversary. One framework should always guide us as we make our difficult decision. Therefore, let's embark upon a topic that is not easily taught and is often difficult to appreciate in our relationships with others: ethics.

APPLY IT!

Look again at the conversation between Henry and his mother, Amy. This implied learning about interpersonal communication takes place in many ways across many environments. Focusing on a classmate, a close friend, and a family member, consider how each relationship type assisted you in learning more about interpersonal communication and relationship life. What similarities and differences exist among each in this covert learning?

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ETHICS

Communication ethicists have concluded that “ethical issues may arise in human behavior whenever that behavior could have significant impact on other persons, when the behavior involves conscious choice of means and ends, and when the behavior can be judged by standards of right and wrong.”³⁸ In other words, ethics is the cornerstone of interpersonal communication.

Earlier, we noted that interpersonal communication involves ethical choices. And, a primary goal of ethics is to (re)gain constraints on our own behavior. Ethical decisions involve value judgments, and not everyone will agree with those values. For instance, do you tell racist jokes in front of others and think that they are harmless ways to make people laugh? What sort of value judgment is part of the decision to tell or not to tell a joke? In interpersonal communication, acting ethically is critical. When we act ethically, we are respecting the dignity of another, embracing their individuality, working to avoid hurtful messages, and treating others in ways we wish to be treated. Overall, being ethical means shouldering responsibility for an interaction and approaching every personal relationship with an ethical compass. The following section explains these ethical behaviors more thoroughly.

Ethics is necessarily part of not only our personal relationships, but our work relationships as well (see IPC Around Us). To get a sense of the interplay between ethics and various jobs, consider Table 1.2, which shows what the U.S. public views as being the most and least ethical

TABLE 1.2 ■ Ethics on the Job: Views of the Most Ethical Occupations³⁹

	2019	2018	2017	2016
	%	%	%	%
Nurses	85	84	82	84
Engineers	66	--	--	65
Medical doctors	65	67	65	65
Pharmacists	64	66	62	67
Dentists	61	--	--	59

(Continued)

TABLE 1.2 ■ Ethics on the Job: Views of the Most Ethical Occupations (*Continued*)

	2019	2018	2017	2016
	%	%	%	%
Police officers	54	54	56	58
College teachers	49	--	--	47
Psychiatrists	43	--	--	38
Chiropractors	41	--	--	38
Clergy	40	37	42	44
Journalists	28	33	--	23
Bankers	28	27	25	24
Labor union leaders	24	21	--	--
Lawyers	22	19	18	18
Business executives	20	--	--	18
State governors	20	17	16	17
Stockbrokers	14	14	--	12
Advertising practitioners	13	13	12	11
Insurance salespeople	13	--	--	12
Senators	13	--	--	11
Members of Congress	12	8	11	8
Car salespeople	9	8	10	9

Source: Reinhart, R. (2020). *Gallup*, "Nurses Keep Healthy Lead as Most Honest, Ethical Profession." Adapted from https://news.gallup.com/poll/274673/nurses-continue-rate-highest-honesty-ethics.aspx#rated_Very_High/High

occupations. Although many occupations change from year to year, even the most recent Gallup surveys show that nurses, medical doctors, and pharmacists continue their reign in the Top Four most ethical professions. See if you agree with how the United States views ethical occupations and if your career choice is found among those listed. Try challenging others with their impressions of this list. What or who do you think influences someone's view of an ethical career?

We make value judgments in interpersonal communication in many ways. Researchers have discussed a number of different ethical systems of communication relevant to our interpersonal encounters. Here, we discuss three popular ones. In addition, because the field of communication has agreed on a code of ethical behavior, we have provided you ethical values as they relate to communicating with others (see Table 1.3). As we briefly overview each system, keep in mind that these systems attempt to let us know what it means to act morally.

TABLE 1.3 ■ Ethical Systems of Interpersonal Communication

Ethical System	Responsibility	Action
Categorical imperative	To adhere to a moral absolute	Tell the truth
Golden mean	To achieve rationality and balance	Create harmony and balance for the community and the individual
Ethic of care	To establish connection	Establish caring relationships

Categorical Imperative

The first ethical system, the categorical imperative, is based on the work of philosopher Immanuel Kant.⁴⁰ Kant's **categorical imperative** refers to individuals following moral absolutes. This ethical system suggests that we should act as though we are an example to others. According to this system, the key question when making a moral decision is "What would happen if everyone did this?" Thus, you should not do something that you wouldn't feel is fine for everyone to do all the time. Kant also believed that the consequences of actions are not important; what matters is the ethical principle behind those actions.

IPC AROUND US



Bloomberg/Contributor/Getty Images

To illustrate the relationship between communication ethics and corporate social responsibility, *Forbes* magazine published the insights of Don Knauss, former CEO of Clorox, on the role of ethics in business–customer relationships. Knauss clearly embraces ethical business practices as he concludes: "We know that in order to build and maintain trust with our customers we have to first develop a company-wide reputation for integrity." To accomplish this, Knauss claims that all employees must take part in an online training course on ethics

as well as enroll in “refresher” courses that cover different ethical practices. Furthermore, Clorox employees, vendors, and subsidiaries must also abide by a company code of conduct that covers a variety of subjects—from human rights to labor and safety. Knauss contends that when a company models ethical behavior, business relationships improve, allowing for, of course, an improvement in the “bottom line.”

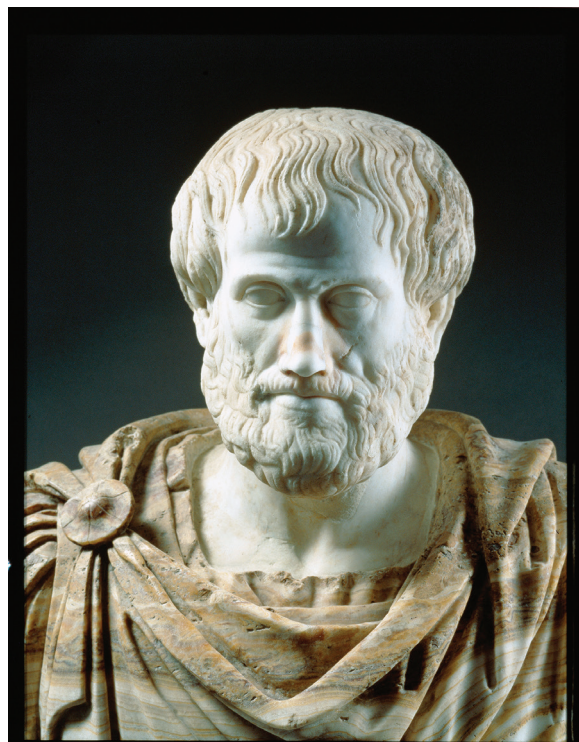
Reflection: Comment on why you believe so many corporate cultures are both fearful and resistant to establishing a climate of ethical decision-making and trust. Explore the economic and demographic consequences when a company decides to dedicate itself to an ethical approach, as articulated by Clorox.

For example, suppose that Mark confides to Bev, a coworker, that he has the early stages of leukemia. Although the company has health benefits and although the type of leukemia is treatable, Bev, despite her own beliefs, decides to tell no one else. Sylvia, the supervisor, asks Bev if she knows what’s happening with Mark because he misses work and is always tired. The categorical imperative suggests that Bev tell her boss the truth, despite the fact that telling the truth may affect Mark’s job, his future with the company, and his relationship with Bev. The categorical imperative requires us to tell the truth because Kant believed that enforcing the principle of truth-telling is more rational than worrying about the short-term consequences of being honest. That is, the implications of “rightness or wrongness” of telling Sylvia is not as important as is the duty to fulfill the obligation of being a moral communicator.

The Golden Mean

The **golden mean**, a second ethical system, proposes that we should aim for harmony and balance in our lives.⁴¹ This principle, articulated more than 2,500 years ago by Aristotle, suggests that a person’s moral virtue stands between two vices, with the middle, or the mean, being the foundation for a rational society. The application of the golden mean to communication is rooted in the ability to find a “middle ground” so that communicators are less inclined to honor the extremes of a discussion. Aristotle, as you’ve already learned in this chapter, was preoccupied in helping communicators become more effective. He felt that thoughts or behaviors—when taken to excess—are neither productive nor especially valuable.

Let’s say that Cora, Jackie, and Lester are three employees who work for a small social media company. During a break one afternoon, someone asks what kind of childhood each had. Cora goes into specific detail, talking about her abusive father: “He really let me have it, and it all started when I was five,” she begins before launching into a long description. In contrast, Jackie only says, “My childhood was okay.” Lester tells the group that his was a pretty rough childhood: “It was tough financially. We didn’t have a lot of money. But we really all got along well.” In this example, Cora was on one



As a Western philosopher–teacher, Aristotle was extraordinarily influential in our ethical choices.

Imagno/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

extreme, revealing too much information. Jackie was at the other extreme, revealing very little, if anything. Lester's decision to reveal a reasonable amount of information about his childhood was an ethical one; he practiced the golden mean by providing a sufficient amount of information, but not too much. In other words, he presented a rational and balanced perspective.

In this case, note that revealing too much and revealing too little may make another awkward or uncomfortable. Finding the "balance" in revealing information about yourself is especially difficult—a topic we discuss in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Ethic of Care

An **ethic of care**, a third ethical system, means being concerned with connection.⁴² When this ethical system was first conceptualized, it centered on looking at women's ways of moral decision-making. It was assumed that because men have been the dominant voices in society, women's commitment toward connection has gone unnoticed. Initially, an ethic of care was a result of how women were raised. Yet, the ethical premise applies to men as well. And, perhaps interesting to some of you, men may adopt the ethic and women may not adopt the ethic. In contrast to the categorical imperative, the ethic of care is concerned with consequences of decisions. Let's use an example of this system with a cultural example.

Ben and Anthony are having a conversation about whether it's right to go behind a person's back and disclose that another guy is gay. Ben makes an argument that it's a shame that guys won't own up to being gay; they are who they are. If someone hides their sexuality, Ben believes that it's fine to "out" that person. Anthony, expressing an ethic of care, tells his friend that no one should reveal another person's sexual identity. That information should remain private unless an individual wishes to reveal it. Anthony explains that outing someone could have serious negative repercussions for the relationships of the person being outed and as a result, shouldn't be done. In this example, Anthony exemplifies a symbolic connection to those who don't want to discuss their sexual identity with others.

Understanding Ethics and Our Own Values

Ethics permeates interpersonal communication. We make ongoing ethical decisions in all of our interpersonal encounters, and these ethical choices are especially important in our very close relationships. Questions of ethics are all around us: Should someone's past sexual experiences be completely revealed to a partner? Does it make a difference whether that is done online or f2f? Why or why not? How do you treat an ex-friend or ex-partner in future encounters? Is it ever okay to lie to protect your friend? These kinds of questions challenge millions of relationships.

As we look back to our opening challenges facing Jake and Rachel Kane, all sorts of ethical circumstances arise. How do they find the "balance" between their roles as child and responsible guardian? What do they do if one or both become emotionally and physically incapable of maintaining their caregiver roles? How do they negotiate between getting help from others in the family and neighborhood and accepting the charge of being overseers of their father? A host of other ethical quandaries exist and similar ethical issues face families across the world every day.

When ethical issues confront us, we need to keep in mind that society's various traditions are rooted in culture, religion, literature, philosophy, among others. Values have emerged from and are deeply enmeshed in these traditions and they often teach important lessons about life's challenging moments, the types of moments that the Kane family will experience.

The three ethical systems can prompt you to develop strategies for making ethical decisions. However, making sense of the world and of our personal relationships requires us to understand our own values. And, these values are apparent not only in our face-to-face conversations, but in our online conversations as well. Ethical behavior is particularly essential when we communicate with people whom we don't see or with whom we have no shared physical space. We return to this topic throughout the book as we discuss the various themes and skills related to interpersonal communication. Being aware of and sensitive to our decisions and their consequences will help us make the right choices.

APPLY IT!

Pick one of the ethical systems explained above and relate each of them to various social media platforms (Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.). What primary ethical concerns are there between and among the networking sites?

THE “COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY” EQUATION

We have made an effort, both in this chapter and throughout the book, to provide you clear and succinct ways to make you more aware of your own interpersonal communication and how it functions in the many relationships in which you find yourself. At the heart of this discussion is being a competent communicator. Like many terms you're about to encounter, competency is a communication behavior that is multifaceted; there are assumptions that need to be unpacked. Indeed, we propose a “Communication Competency Equation” that you should keep in mind not only as you read the information in the book, but as you interact with significant others in your life. Our equation is as follows:

$$\text{Adaptability} + \text{Flexibility} + \text{Resiliency} = \text{Communication Competency.}$$

In some ways, you each have already practiced some communication competency in your relationships. Yet, you may be unfamiliar with the different behaviors embedded in this important behavior. We describe each component of the equation below.

Adaptability

An important part of being communicatively competent is being able to adapt. The notion of **adaptability** in interpersonal communication refers to leveraging past experience to anticipate expectations, primarily those in a relationship you're in. When you are adaptable, you have determined that not all relationships deserve the same communication response. You are practicing adaptability when you admit that change is necessary as is your need to be open to new ways of looking at old issues. You are adaptable if you are willing to change or be changed as a result of the many interactions with others. You may, for instance, alter your tone and words based on the variety of receivers you encounter each day. You may also be inclined to offer advice based on the relative success of how you handled that same advice in your past. Or, you may have edited a personal social media post prior to posting it.

Adaptability is a skill necessary to becoming a competent communicator and it can be employed with a host of different people—from your close friend to a difficult person to a new acquaintance. The skill is especially necessary for those who find themselves in uncharted relationship territory with new people and new ways of communication. Think about the Kane children from our chapter opening. The two will have to be particularly adaptable as they talk

with their dad's medical team, their neighbors, and close friends. Although they don't have a lot of life experience to leverage in their conversations, what they do possess is the ability to modify and accommodate their communication patterns. The two will be developing skills their new roles require them to have.

Adapting requires knowledge, skills, attitude, and resources. Online, this adaptable spirit is also important. If someone whom you've been chatting with on a dating app suddenly reveals that they don't think college is important, how difficult would it be to become adaptable to this person? After all, you obviously have contrary feelings about the topic and surely college life will be a conversation theme if the two of you continue to communicate.

One situation in which adaptability remains critical is in your career trajectory. And it's likely that no other time in modern U.S. history was the job market so challenging as it was during the height of the COVID pandemic in 2019–2021. There can be no doubt that the careers of many were ground to a halt because of the virus.⁴³ Physical offices were literally abandoned and virtual offices were “set up” overnight. Travel was almost nonexistent and for those graduating from college, the normally tough job market got tougher because both the highly experienced and the novice were applying for the same job. Clearly, if there was a time to be adaptable to the unpredictable, it was during this time.

Let's think a bit further about challenging job interviews and adaptability. A competent communicator must be willing to shift quickly as questions are posted and work ethic is interrogated. Simultaneously, the job candidate must work to enhance their impression upon the hiring team, further requiring both intuition and strategy. Ultimately, being adaptable in the job interview will necessitate showing how your past has prepared you for the future at a particular company. This adaptability will also require you to ask and answer questions that show you're able to work in (adapt to) different challenging environments. In these examples, it's important to remind you that while we view adaptability as authentic and sincere, there are those who adapt for political gains. Those individuals are part of the “destructive communication process” that we outlined earlier.

Flexibility

A second ingredient necessary to becoming a competent communicator is your ability to be flexible. Sometimes called “emotional yoga,”⁴⁴ flexibility within a competency framework means you are able to handle unexpected circumstances in a relationship. You are able to do things with a partner, for instance, that while temporarily uncomfortable, may result in a more satisfying relationship. In fact, communication **flexibility** is concerned with a person's ability to change their communication behavior and to effectively handle the constraints of a situation.⁴⁵ That is, we are flexible when we respond to another, recognizing the limitations of both the situation and the communicators.

Flexibility plays a very significant role in the communication competence equation. In designing a communication flexibility scale to measure how flexible someone is in a personal relationship, researchers acknowledged⁴⁶ that one central behavior prevailed: **social desirability**, or a desire to engage in behaviors that will be viewed as favorable to others. Becoming socially desirable is more than seeking approval. It's modifying your behavior to ensure that others will view the communication episode as an acceptable, even valuable episode. In your online relationships, social desirability is quite prominent, but it's quite difficult to discern. We may want to post the most favorable picture of ourselves (taken 10 years ago!) and boast about the large number of our Instagram followers (that were paid for to a private service). Therefore, social desirability is much trickier online than in f2f encounters.

That said, don't be misled and think that a social desirability bias is inherently problematic as you engage in flexible behaviors. Being socially desirable in the **communication competency equation** suggests that you are aware of the relational environment in which communication is taking place and try to mitigate potential difficulties in that environment. Suppose, for instance, that you discover that your roommate didn't do well on their Graduate Record Exam and they really wanted to go to graduate school. Being flexible in this case necessarily would entail being socially desirable. You are going to offer your assistance insofar as you may inform them that they can take it again and that you'd be willing to help in the preparation for the exam. Here you are creating a socially desirable effect. The exam scores were not good, but instead of responding negatively, you were retooling the circumstance to make it more appealing to them.

In our relationships, we may be tempted to be more assertive at times or to step back a bit. We may be enticed to offer our uncensored opinion or to be more discreet. We may want to interrupt a conversation that annoys us or we may simply choose to be an active listener. Each of these are representative of the thinking that takes place as we practice our flexibility and build our communication competence.

Resiliency

Although the COVID-19 virus led the medical headlines over several years, other crucial disruptions to the human condition continued. For instance, tens of millions of asylum seekers left their homelands over the past decades because of poverty, gang violence, political upheaval, natural disasters, among other reasons. In 2022, in particular, one of the most egregious and consequential global decisions by Russia to invade its neighbor, Ukraine, resulted in over a million refugees journeying to Poland, Hungary, and other countries to avoid the unknowns related to war. Closer to home, people of color in the United States continue to be randomly stopped, pulled out of their cars, and beaten for no reason. Meanwhile, climate change has gotten worse, child trafficking is at an all-time high, and a former U.S. president was indicted by a congressional task force for inciting violence at the Capitol.

Reading these and thinking about other devastating events would easily make us rather sad and exhausted . . . and they do. Yet, for some reason, the human spirit endures. Our front-line medical workers and pharmaceutical companies facilitated an unprecedented COVID vaccination process. Anti-cancer therapies are showing tremendous promise. Paralyzed individuals can now "write" with brain signals. Kids have been reading more and boosting their moods. Meanwhile, a homeless 10-year-old Nigerian boy became a U.S. chess champion.

Resiliency is the focus of the third component in our "Communication Competence Equation." All sorts of interpretations exist of the term, but we define **resiliency** as the ability to tolerate, survive, and/or recover from unexpected difficult situations. Resiliency is maintaining composure despite adversity. When we are resilient, we recognize that stressful times will happen in our relationships and our surrounding world. But, we persevere because we feel that creating and maintaining intimate relationships have value in our lives. And, we practice resiliency because we feel the goals inherent in these relationships merit our support.

How does resiliency specifically contribute to us becoming competent communicators? First, we are not born resilient. We acquire much of it from the many interpersonal dialogues and relationships we find ourselves in throughout our lives. Secondly and in a related way, resiliency is determined by the interplay among our genetic, sociological, biological, and psychological factors.⁴⁷ What this all means is that when we are resilient, we are able to assist others in how they manage their struggles and how they celebrate their successes. When someone we care for seeks us out for input during an emotional time, our capacity to demonstrate strength can be

enlightening and useful. And, only because we've experienced the stressors of life can we engage the life stressors of our significant others.

Think, for a moment, about the extent to which we have to be resilient while communicating with a new romantic interest we met online. Researchers have noted that “one of the major challenges of relationship life is to be able to absorb the impact of relatively minor slights and prevent them from shaking one's core sense of relationship security.”⁴⁸ Rising to the challenge of online threats, bullying, and other uninvited aggressive behavior will help shape your digital resilience, even from a new “friend” you've met via social media.

Imagine, the resiliency that Jake and Rachel will have to manifest in front of their father. Without knowing a lot about their backgrounds, we can easily see that they will have to demonstrate strength during the rehabilitation times. And, this strength that they show in front of their dad will only have been possible because they, too, are experiencing personal tests of endurance and resiliency.

CHAPTER WRAP-UP

We began our conversation about interpersonal communication by providing you an important foundation. In this opening chapter, we presented a brief snapshot of the evolution of the communication field, including an overview of the various contexts in which communication occurs. We also included a definition of interpersonal communication and employed a model approach by identifying three prevailing models and a fourth that is yet to be determined. The chapter also explained why interpersonal communication matters, the primary principles related to interpersonal communication, and various myths related to the interpersonal communication process. We closed the chapter by identifying three ethical systems to consider when communicating with others and also proposed the “Communication Competency Equation” and its three components—adaptability, flexibility, and resiliency—for you to consider in your relational lives.

Now, more than ever, and especially because of the integration of technology in our lives, we live in uncertain times. Communication skills that were once viewed as appropriate now have to be revisited. Adapting to the cultures and individuals around us is paramount in a country where race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual identity, economic status, spirituality, and belief systems pervade contemporary conversations. As you learned earlier in this chapter, interacting effectively with others is a complex and unpredictable process, but one that is essential if we are to acquire the meaning we seek in our lives.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION COMFORT

Throughout this book, we make no assumptions about the extent to which you're comfortable communicating with another person. In fact, as we note at the outset of this chapter, people can vary tremendously in their interpersonal communication comfort levels, depending upon a number of issues. Complete the following 10 statements honestly and without self-judgment. Use more than one or two words to complete the thought. Be prepared to return to these questions and responses as you move through the book to assess the extent to which your comfort level has changed.

1. When someone I've never met starts to communicate with me, I _____.
2. When a romantic partner asks me to borrow money, I _____.

3. Emotionally charged interpersonal situations make me _____.
4. If I'm confused by the words of another in a conversation, I _____.
5. If I'm introduced to topics that are touchy or controversial in a conversation, I _____.
6. If I'm having a dialogue with someone who is not clear or often confusing, I find myself _____.
7. If someone confronts me because they disagree with my views, I will _____.
8. People from cultural backgrounds other than my own make me _____.
9. If I had a choice to communicate with a close friend either through social media or face-to-face, I choose _____.
10. Among the many personal challenges I have communicating with another person are _____.

KEY TERMS

Adaptability (p. 31)	Messages (p. 9)
Categorical imperative (p. 28)	Noise (p. 10)
Channel (p. 10)	Physical context (p. 12)
Communication (p. 3)	Physical noise (p. 11)
Communication apprehension (CA) (p. 4)	Physiological noise (p. 11)
Communication competency equation (p. 33)	Process (p. 8)
Communication models (p. 10)	Psychological noise (p. 11)
Content level (p. 22)	Receiver (p. 10)
Context (p. 12)	Relational history (p. 18)
Cultural context (p. 12)	Relational rules (p. 18)
Ethic of care (p. 30)	Relational uniqueness (p. 18)
Ethics (p. 23)	Relationship level (p. 22)
External feedback (p. 13)	Resiliency (p. 33)
Feedback (p. 13)	Rules (p. 21)
Field of experience (p. 14)	Self-actualization (p. 23)
Flexibility (p. 32)	Semantic noise (p. 11)
Golden mean (p. 29)	Semiotics Theory (p. 20)
Historical context (p. 12)	Sender (p. 10)
Interactional Model of Communication (p. 12)	Social desirability (p. 32)
Internal feedback (p. 13)	Social-emotional context (p. 12)
Interpersonal communication (p. 8)	Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory (p. 16)
Linear Model of Communication (p. 10)	Symbols (p. 20)
Meaning (p. 9)	Transactional Model of
Message exchange (p. 9)	Communication (p. 14)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Now that you know...* Look back at the opening of Jake and Rachel Kane. Based on the content and the skills you've learned in this chapter, what advice would you give the two as they begin their medical journey with their father and others?
2. We have introduced three models of communication and proposed that social media and technology in general will influence the evolution of a fourth. Illustrate and describe a fourth model that demonstrates the role of technology in the (interpersonal) communication process.
3. Make a list of the primary relationships in your life and why you define them as primary. Now make a list of those relationships that are secondary; these are not as paramount as the first list. Compare and contrast each list and see what similarities and differences exist.
4. Develop a 10-question survey that asks your peers or classmates their impressions of communication via Instagram, Twitter, or Snap. Be sure to offer both multiple choice and open-ended questions. Follow up this survey by analyzing the responses and finding common themes. Then ask a few of your respondents to talk further about their replies and the common themes you found. What sorts of perceptions did you uncover?
5. Construct two brief dialogues about persuading a friend to attend college even though they don't wish to. The first dialogue should be one that shows little to no concern for the ethics of the conversation nor the individual involved. The second dialogue, however, should demonstrate any elements of the "Communication Competency Equation" discussed in the chapter. Once you're completed, what did you learn from showing the two different dialogues?