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Communication Skills: Spoken Language, and Interpersonal

Communication Channel

- Medium through which a message passes
- Bridge that connects a source and a receiver
- Often multiple channels used simultaneously
- Type of channel imposes restrictions on message construction
- Obstructions to channels, e.g. gate keeping or physiological conditions

Messages

- Signals that serve as stimuli for the receiver (decoder)
- Verbal and non-verbal
- Intentional vs. unintentional

Noise

Anything that distorts a message or prevents the receiver from receiving a message

- Physical noise
- Physiological
- Psychological
- Semantic

The Practical Side of Communication

We need to develop communication skills.

These are:

- Self-awareness skills
- Listening skills
- Assertion or expressiveness skills
- We need to be able to distinguish between process [how it is being said] and content [what is being said]

Developing Communication Skills

- Developing any skill takes practice
- Watch other people communicate
- Watch yourself communicate with others
- How much does your communication change as you interact with different people
- Power differentials between us and others influence communication

Summing Up Characteristics of Communication

Wiemann and Giles (1988) emphasize two characteristics.

- Some level of consciousness and, therefore, some degree intentionality
- It is a process, so it concerns interactions with another

What are the Components of Communication?

We talk about communication as divided between:

- Verbal – the language, and
- Non-verbal – everything else

The two work together as a package.

Functional Approach to Communication

1. Control
 - Our level of influence over others, dominance
2. Affiliation
 - Our level but it is also includes the amount of positive or negative feeling we show towards others

Eye Contact, Distance and Affiliation

The amount of eye contact in any one conversation is a product of a variety of approach and avoidance forces. You are more likely to make eye contact when you:

- Like or love your partner
- Are discussing easy impersonal topics
- Are interested in your partner's reactions
- Are from a culture that emphasizes eye contact
- Have a need to affiliate or be included
- Are listening

You are less likely to make eye contact when you:

- Do not like your partner
- Are physically near your partner
- Are discussing difficult, intimate topics
- Are from a culture that de-emphasizes eye contact
- Have a low need to affiliate or be included
- Are talking rather than listening

From Knapp & Hall, 1997.

Approach – Avoidance Equilibrium

- We try to produce a “*desirable*” level of intimacy.
- Each context will have its own equilibrium level
- E.g. If we stand up close to someone, we will reduce our eye gaze (depends on how well we know the other person and his/her status (and cultural context too))

We strive to retain equilibrium

- So we strive for an equilibrium with the people we interact with – much of this is unconscious.
- We are uncomfortable if approach and avoidance levels are not within a desirable range.