**Interpersonal Communication Principles for Group Members**

Summary of Chapter 3 of Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills, 5/e

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**Communication** = Process of creating, sending, receiving, and interpreting signals between people.

**6 Major Characteristics of Communication:**

1) **Communication is symbolic** = we use **signs** (any signal that indicates something else and closely matches that which it represents) and **signals** (and signal that arbitrarily stands for something else) for thinking and communicating
   - symbols can be words, numbers, pictographs, Morse code, gestures, and even emoticons in e-mails
   - symbols must be interpreted
   - NOTE: symbols are arbitrary, therefore can be misinterpreted, misused, and misunderstood. Therefore, it is important to monitor the communication process in groups, where misunderstanding and multiple interpretations are likely to occur

2) **Communication is a process, not a thing or state**
   - communication is not just nouns and verbs
   - communication is very complex: it involves the human sense, feelings, meanings, cultural experiences, etc.
   - communication involves the creating and interpreting of a message

3) **Communication is personal**
   - words do not have meanings themselves; meanings are in people
   - words can have different meanings to different people

4) **Face-to-face communicating is a transactional process**
   - specifically, communication is a simultaneous, multi-directional transactional process;
     this means communication involves more than a one-way process of a server sending a message to a receiver.
   - again, communication is very complex

5) **Human communication is both a sender and a receiver phenomenon**
   - both the sender and the receiver are responsible for the effectiveness of communication
   - there is no communication if there is only one sender …. or if there is only one receiver

6) **All messages involve content and relational dimensions**
   - content dimension of a message = the message’s idea or the *what* of the message
   - relational dimension of a message = *how* a message is expressed
   - often, the focus is on the content of a message, but the relational aspect is just as important

**Implications for Small Group Communication**

1) **Making group communication productive is the responsibility of every member.**
   - Because communication is both a sender and receiver phenomenon, clear sending and careful listening are both needed.

2) **Perfect understanding among group members is impossible.**
   - Since communication is symbolic and involves both content and relational components, perfect understanding can never occur, but group members can understand each other well enough to coordinate efforts toward a common goal.

3) **Disagreement and conflict are not necessarily signs of a breakdown in communication.**
   - Sometimes group members understand each other very well but differ in values, beliefs, and goals. Not all such conflicts can be resolved or ended.
**Listening: Receiving, Interpreting, and Responding to Messages from Other Group Members**

**Listening** = a four-step process that involves hearing a message, interpreting it, deciding what it means, and responding.

**Active Listening** = Listening first to understand another’s message before critically judging the message. (Example: paraphrasing)

**Focused Listening** = Listening that involves concentrating on relevant main ideas for later recall

→ BOTH active and focused listening should be practiced to improve communication skills.

**4 Different Listening Preferences**
- no preference is the best, but all (if used properly) can be used to communicate more effectively

1) **People-Oriented Listeners** = a listener who is concerned about how her or his listening behaviors affect relationships
   - **Advantages:** Focus on relationships; Show concern for others; Inclusive and nonjudgmental.
   - **Disadvantages:** Can become distracted by others’ moods.
   - **Example:** “Tell me more about how you would feel if we went ahead with that option.”

2) **Action-Oriented Listeners** = a listener who is concerned about how her or his listening behaviors affect the task at hand
   - **Advantages:** Focus on the job; Help the group stay on task; Help the group stay organized.
   - **Disadvantages:** May sacrifice relationships in favor of task.
   - **Example:** “I know you’re upset, but we have a lot of work to do so we’d better get down to business.”

3) **Content-Oriented Listeners** = a listener who prefers information from perceived credible sources and is drawn to analyzing the information she or he hears
   - **Advantages:** Help the group analyze information; Look at issues from many sides.
   - **Disadvantages:** Seem overly critical; Dismiss anecdotal or non-expert information.
   - **Example:** “We aren’t ready to decide yet because we haven’t really heard every side of the issue.”

4) **Time-Oriented Listeners** = a listener who values time and is focused on efficient discussion
   - **Advantages:** Help the group stick to schedule; Discourage rambling discussions.
   - **Disadvantages:** Impatience with spontaneous discussion may stifle creativity.
   - **Example:** “Let’s make up a schedule so we know we can get done by our deadline.”

**Habits of Poor Listeners**
- for effective group discussion: recognize the listening preferences of your group and understand some common poor listening habits

1) **Pseudolistening** = Pretending to listen while thinking about something else or while daydreaming.
2) **Silent arguing** = Failing to understand what a speaker is saying, then mentally rehearsing objections to the misunderstood notion of the speaker’s idea.
3) **Assuming meaning** = Interpreting the speaker’s behavior by using the cultural rules appropriate for the listener.
4) **Mind raping** = Insistence by poor listeners that they understand better than the speaker what the speaker meant, even though the speaker protests.
5) **Focusing on irrelevancies** = Becoming distracted from a speaker’s message by unimportant details such as dress, accent, physical appearance, or environmental distractions.
6) **Sidetracking** = Changing the topic because you weren’t paying attention to the speaker; not connecting remarks to statements of the previous speaker.
7) **Defensive responding** = Failing to listen or failing to try to understand what a speaker is saying because poor listeners feel psychologically threatened by something the speaker said or did; responding with “chips on their shoulders.”
What to Avoid when Communicating in Groups:
(http://www.hms.harvard.edu/ombuds/techniques/index.html)

Jumping to conclusions.
Rushing to judgments.
Speaking those judgments.
Giving unwanted advice.
Moving prematurely to problem solving.
Changing the subject.
Talking about your self.
Talking about other similar cases.
Chapter Quiz

(http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/0072483881/student_view0/chapter3/chapter_quiz.html)

1  Which one of the following is an example of a sign?
   ☐ A) A group member's stomach growling during a late-morning meeting
   ☐ B) A group member saying, "I'm hungry! Let's order a pizza."
   ☐ C) An email from another group member about a lunch meeting
   ☐ D) The word "lunch"
   ☐ E) Group members eating a pizza together

2  Symbols:
   ☐ A) closely match that which they signify.
   ☐ B) have an inherent and direct relationship to what they represent.
   ☐ C) have a finite number.
   ☐ D) are inconvenient for thinking and communicating with others.
   ☐ E) allow people to communicate across time and space.

3  One problem associated with the use of symbols is:
   ☐ A) they are more difficult to manipulate than signs.
   ☐ B) there is little variety in the forms symbols take.
   ☐ C) misunderstandings can occur.
   ☐ D) each symbol can have only one interpretation.
   ☐ E) what the symbol represents must be present for communicators to understand the symbol.

4  Because _____, different individuals have different meanings for words.
   ☐ A) face-to-face communicating is a transactional process
   ☐ B) communication is both a sender and a receiver phenomenon
   ☐ C) communication is personal
   ☐ D) all messages involve content and relational dimensions
   ☐ E) communication is a process
5. Because _____, all participants are responsible for an interaction's effectiveness.
   - A) face-to-face communicating is a transactional process
   - B) communication is both a sender and a receiver phenomenon
   - C) communication is personal
   - D) all messages involve content and relational dimensions
   - E) communication is a process

6. Because _____, how a message is expressed can be as important as what is said.
   - A) face-to-face communicating is a transactional process
   - B) communication is both a sender and a receiver phenomenon
   - C) communication is personal
   - D) all messages involve content and relational dimensions
   - E) communication is a process

7. Because _____, all group members are simultaneously sending signals that other members may receive and interpret.
   - A) face-to-face communicating is a transactional process
   - B) communication is both a sender and a receiver phenomenon
   - C) communication is personal
   - D) all messages involve content and relational dimensions
   - E) communication is a process

8. Because _____, there is no clearly marked beginning and end.
   - A) face-to-face communicating is a transactional process
   - B) communication is both a sender and a receiver phenomenon
   - C) communication is personal
   - D) all messages involve content and relational dimensions
   - E) communication is a process

9. In small group communication, the concept transactional suggests:
A) meanings are received intact from each person.
B) communication is a one-way process.
C) effective small group members should focus all their attention on the speaker.
D) group members define themselves and others in their interactions.
E) group communication should proceed in a linear fashion, moving from one transaction to the next.

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___ is an example of asynchronous communication.

- A) Talking with a group member on the telephone
- B) A face-to-face group meeting
- C) Group members presenting speeches to their class
- D) Emailing a group member
- E) Talking with group members in the hallway before class

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One implication of the communication principles discussed in the text for small group communication is:

- A) The group should strive for perfect understanding among group members.
- B) Disagreements are a sign of communication breakdowns in the group.
- C) Productive communication is every group member's responsibility.
- D) Conflict within small groups should be avoided at all costs.
- E) The group should not rely on computer-mediated communication for small group interactions.

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A national survey of 1000 personnel managers found that ____ was considered the second most important skill when deciding to hire a job applicant.

- A) small group experience
- B) listening
- C) writing
- D) public speaking
- E) reading

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A(n) ____-oriented listener discourages wordy discussions.

- A) action
- B) time
14. A(n) ____-oriented listener helps the group stay on task by focusing on the group's goal and how to achieve it.
   - A) action
   - B) time
   - C) people
   - D) relationship
   - E) content

15. A(n) ____-oriented listener enjoys analyzing and dissecting information.
   - A) action
   - B) time
   - C) people
   - D) relationship
   - E) content

16. All signs are symbols.
   - A) True
   - B) False

17. Communication is a simple signal-response event.
   - A) True
   - B) False

18. Small group members usually focus more explicitly on the relational dimension of message than on the content dimension.
   - A) True
   - B) False
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Meanings are in people, not in the words themselves.

☐ A) True
☐ B) False

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Listening and hearing are synonymous.

☐ A) True
☐ B) False