

Chapter 6

Facing the Challenges of a New Communication Era

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal deception, issue acceptance, privacy and control of information, and relationship building are key challenges people face each day in their quests to communicate effectively. Conquering these challenges is important in achieving shared understanding and making interactions flow smoothly and contain feedback and communication adjustments. Uncertainty is a risk to effective communication, so this chapter offers methods to adjust behaviors, solve problems, and build trust to create and nurture communicative relationships. The literature addresses the various ways that communicators have attempted to achieve success over the years. This is followed by an explanation of the key challenges and how to address them. A flexible, full-cycle examination indicates ways to energize effective communication in both face-to-face and online interactions.

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INTRODUCTION

Any successful communication activity begins and ends with shared understanding. If all parties agree on the end state, communication should flow smoothly, feedback should flow freely, and there should be energizing interactions for all concerned. But the world today challenges us. To be effective communicators in the “noise” of today, we must alleviate the uncertainty we face in interactions by aiding others during the session. Pivotal to this process is garnering meaning from interactional, nonverbal behaviors -- such as kinesics, proxemics, and paralanguage -- as part of a systems theory approach to communication (Schefflen, 1972) (Schefflen, 1973). In short, interpreting nonverbal cues and behaviors is equally critical to alleviating communication roadblocks as is deriving meaning from conversation.

We must solve problems, whether online or digitally, to be effective communicators. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) leads communicators in verbal and non-verbal interactions to assess the needs of the session and minimize or emphasize differences between the parties. According to the theory, success can be achieved through flexibility of approach, active listening, changing communication styles, or ongoing self-assessment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter addresses four key challenges – interpersonal issues, issue acceptance, privacy and control of information, and relationship building. We face these challenges during interactions as we seek ways to communicate effectively.

We will focus first on an examination of the types of communication and comprehension, which continue to evolve. Taking advantage of full-process communication that is available in face-to-face interactions can suggest ways to improve digital interactions.

Full-process communication requires sender, message, receiver, *and* feedback. On the other hand, evaluating ongoing changes in the way people communicate digitally can lead to solutions that alleviate the current misperceptions and conflicts in face-to-face communication. However, the most effective communication strategy delivers the potential for success whether it is used in a face-to-face or online conversation.

One way to address communication is to master electronic technology. But electronic technology is “impoverished in social cues and shared experience” (Sproull and Kiesler, 1991). No one believes that technology can fully replace the human moment created by face-to-face interaction. Electronic communication is not the best method for building long-term trust among strangers, or a true team out of people who have never met (Olson and Olson, 2000). Experts believe it is important that

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