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<u>Unit 4</u> Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Communication

This unit provides on overview of the various levels of communication. It focuses on both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, relating these to potential difficulties associated with conflict and misunderstood relationships.

<u>Learning Outcomes</u>: Students who complete Unit 4 will be able to:
- explain the various types of intra and interpersonal communication
- discuss the role of stereotypes in the communication process
- identify the role of communication conflict in intercultural relationships

<u>Key Concepts for Unit 4</u>
- Definition and conceptualization of *intrapersonal communication*
- Definition and conceptualization of *interpersonal communication* and overview of categories
- Definition and conceptualization of *stereotypes*
- Overview of conflict and communication

► **Levels of Communication**

Scholars categorize different levels and types of communication. These distinctions are somewhat artificial, since types of communication more realistically fit on a continuum rather than in separate categories. Nevertheless, to understand the various types of communication, it is helpful to consider various factors. The distinguishing characteristics include the following:

- Number of communicators (one through many).

- Physical proximity of the communicators in relation to each other (close or distant).

- Immediacy of the exchange, whether it is taking place either (1) live or in apparently real time or (2) on a delayed basis.

- Number of sensory channels (including visual, auditory, tactile and so on).

- The context of the communication (whether face-to-face or mediated).

Note that each level of communication may be formal or informal, personal or impersonal. Note also that the purposes of communication may vary and overlap, giving a communicator a potentially wide list of choices for communication channels.

Broadly speaking, the levels of communication can be categorized in a four-fold pattern as intrapersonal, direct interpersonal, mediated interpersonal, and mass.

► Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication takes place within a single person, often for the purpose of clarifying ideas or analyzing a situation. Other times, intrapersonal communication is undertaken in order to reflect upon or appreciate something. Three aspects of intrapersonal communication are self-concept, perception and expectation.

- Self-concept is the basis for intrapersonal communication, because it determines how a persona sees him/herself and is oriented toward others. Self-concept (also called self-awareness) involves three factors: beliefs, values and attitudes. Beliefs are basic personal orientation toward what is true or false, good or bad; beliefs can be descriptive or prescriptive. Values are deep-seated orientations and ideals, generally based on and consistent with beliefs, about right and wrong ideas and actions. Attitudes are learned predisposition toward or against a topic, ideals that stem from and generally are consistent with values. Attitudes often are global, typically emotional. Beliefs, values and attitudes all influence behavior, which can be either spoken opinion or physical action. Some psychologists include body image as an aspect of intrapersonal communication, in that body image is a way of perceiving ourselves, positively or negatively, according to the social standards of our culture. Other things that can affect self-concept are personal attributes, talents, social role, even birth order.

- Whereas self-concept focuses internally, perception looks outward. Perception of the outside world also is rooted in beliefs, values and attitudes. It is so closely intertwined with self-concept that one feeds off the other, creating a harmonious understanding of both oneself and one's world.

- Meanwhile, expectations are future-oriented messages dealing with long-term roles, sometimes called life scripts. These sometimes are projections of learned relationships within the family or society.

Intrapersonal communication may involve different levels of communication activity: internal discourse, solo vocal communication, and solo written communication.

- Internal discourse involves thinking, concentration and analysis. Psychologists include both daydreaming and nocturnal dreaming in this category. Prayer, contemplation and meditation also are part of this category, though from a theological point of view the argument may be made that this is not solely internal to one person. In Sufi tradition, this is similar to the concept of nafs, negotiating with the inner self. Example: Consciously appreciating the beauty of a sunset.

- Solo vocal communication includes speaking aloud to oneself. This may be done to clarify thinking, to rehearse a message intended for others, or simply to let off steam. Example: Talking to yourself as you complain about your boss.

- Solo written communication deals with writing not intended for others. Example: An entry in a diary or personal journal.

► Direct Interpersonal Communication

Direct interpersonal communication involves a direct face-to-face relationship between the sender and receiver of a message, who are in an interdependent relationship. Because of interpersonal communication's immediacy (it is taking place now) and primacy (it is taking place here), it is

characterized by a strong feedback component. Communication is enhanced when the relationship exists over a long period of time. Interpersonal communication involves not only the words used but also the various elements of nonverbal communication. The purposes of interpersonal communication are to influence, help and discover, as well as to share and play together.

Interpersonal communication can be categorized by the number of participants.

- Dyadic communication involves two people. Example: Two friends talking.

- Group communication involves three or more persons, though communication scholars are inconsistent as to the top end of the number scale. The smaller the number in the group, the more closely this mode resembles interpersonal communication. Often group communication is done for the purpose of problem solving or decision making. Example: University study group.

- Public communication involves a large group with a primarily one-way monologue style generating only minimal feedback. Information sharing, entertainment and persuasion are common purposes of public communication. Example: Lecture in university class.

Another way of categorizing interpersonal communication is on the function or setting of the communication.

- Organizational communication deals with communication within large organizations such as businesses. This is sometimes considered part of group communication, but communication scholars have built up a body of knowledge focused primarily on organizations. Example: Work-focused discussion between employer and employee.

- Family communication focuses on communication patterns within nuclear, extended and blended families. Like organizational communication, this too is sometimes seen as part of the general category of group communication, but much research has been focused specifically on communication within a family relationship. Family communication can be enhanced by the long-standing and close relationships among participants as well as the likelihood that families have shared heritage, similar values, and social rituals. Patterns differ in communication between spouses, between parent and child, among siblings, and within the wider family context. Example: Conversation during a holiday meal.

Additionally, some scholars identify a category of impersonal communication. This is a distinction between impersonal and interpersonal communication on the basis of the quality of the interaction. Impersonal communication is that which involves functional short-term exchanges such as might occur between a shopper and a salesman; the label of interpersonal is reserved for communication that functions in deeper and more meaningful relationships.

The process of interpersonal communication includes several stages over an extended life cycle. Communication scholar Mark Knapp has outlined one useful framework for understanding the coming-together process. Note that these stages can be applied to personal friendships, romantic relationships, business encounters, and many other types of interaction.

- The initial encounter offers a first impression that can be full of communication data. Likes or dislikes can be instantaneous, though many people have learned that first impressions may be misleading.

- Experimenting is the second step in interpersonal communication. In this step, information is exchanged on a variety of topics – general and "safe" at first, gradually becoming more personal and more self-revealing.

- Intensifying follows when the experimentation leads to positive mutual conclusions that the relationship is worth pursuing.

- The fourth step in interpersonal communication is integration, in which mutual decisions are made that the relationship is fulfilling. This is the stage of intense friendships, close business partnerships, romantic commitments, and so on.

- Bonding is the final stage, in which the relationship is sealed (often formally with contracts or written agreements) and generally is publicized (such as through announcements).

Knapp also outlined a similar reverse pattern for the unraveling of interpersonal relationships:

- Differentiating mirrors the initiating phase but focuses instead on the differences that people notice about each other.

- Communication likewise plays a central role in the circumscribing stage, during which time participants in the relationship begin to minimize their communication and confine it to mainly functional topics.

- Stagnating is the next stage, in which the relationship becomes flat and personally unfulfilling and is continued mainly for reasons beyond the relationship, such as religious or family obligation, contractual obligation, or social expectation.

- Overt unpleasantness is evident in the avoidance stage, in which the participants in interpersonal communication both avoid each other and express mutual annoyance when they encounter each other.

- Termination if the final stage of breakdown, at which time legal, religious or other formal contracts are abrogated and the demise of the relationship is announced to others.

► **Mediated Interpersonal Communication**

Mediated interpersonal communication involves technology that assists or links the sender and receiver of messages. This may involve immediacy (live, or so-called real time). It does not involve a primary context but instead uses technology to link the various parties in communication.

- Dyadic communication includes two people, with some of the elements of interpersonal, but the context is not face-to-face. Example: Two business colleagues using the telephone or e-mail.

- Group communication includes a small group of people. Example: Teleconference in a distance-learning class.

Mediated communication offers the advantage that it allows people to communicate over a distance or throughout a time span that would not be possible in direct communication. E-mail offers instantaneous global communication, and cell phones are highly mobile. Computer technology makes it possible for people to do their job without being physically present, allowing them to work from their home or from across the world.

Like direct communication, mediated communication may be formal or informal, personal or public. Feedback may be immediate or delayed. Machines even can assist in communication across language barriers (more on that in Unit 5 on intercultural communication).

Mediated communication has several inherent limitations, including the ability of telephone or Internet users to mask or disguise the source of the message, or the susceptibility of machines to various mechanical or technological noise sources.

► Mass Communication

Mass communication is a more public form of communication between an entity and a large and diverse audience, mediated by some form of technology. This may be either real time or on a taped-delay basis, or it may be rooted in the usually recent past. Examples: Radio and television, newspapers and magazines. [Note: Mass communication will be dealt with in Unit 7.]

► Related Concepts in Interpersonal Communication

Conversation: Often considered informal and everyday speech, but more formally a finite element within an ongoing relationship based on interpersonal communication. Most conversations of a standard five-step process of opening, built-up, substance, feedback, and closing. Since a conversation is a two-way process, it involves various controls, many associated with conversational turns (the changing of the speaker and listener role). Conversations can exist in both direct and mediated settings.

Speech act: An intentional utterance made to achieve an intended goal. In an informal context, a speech act might be a promise made by a parent to his or her child. A more formal example of a speech act is an interview given by a government leader with hopes of persuading voters.

Communication competence: The ability to communicate in a socially acceptable way. For interpersonal relationships, this involves the speaker's interaction with others. For more public situations, this involves the audience perception of the speaker in terms of vocal presentation, message control, command of language, physical appearance, and so on.

Self-disclosure: Process of making internal revelations about oneself that others would be unlikely to know otherwise. While self-disclosure is an individual communication tactic, it invites reciprocity.

Gender differences: Communication scholars have researched the varying ways men and women communicate, which often varies further among different cultures. Some of the major differences are that men use report talk to share information or demonstrate knowledge, whereas women often use rapport talk to enhance relationships and share experiences. Psychologists have observed that men and women who are androgynous in their communication styles rather than those who rely heavily on stereotypically masculine or feminine style are more successful in their interactions with others.

Metacommunication: Communication about the act or process of communicating rather than focusing on the content of communication. For example, a couple that argues about how to spend their money is communicating. A couple that discusses how they argue is engaging in metacommunication.

Johari Window	Known to self	Unknown to self
Known to others	**Open Pane**	**Blind Pane**
Unknown to others	**Hidden Pane**	**Unknown Pane**

Johari Window: A diagram called the Johari Window (above) provides a useful way to graphically visualize the process of self-disclosure. The four quadrants of panes represents the different ways information can be seen and observed, both by oneself and by others. The *open pane* includes what everyone can see: your physical looks, occupation, economic and social situation, as well as what you say and write. The *hidden pane* includes information about yourself that you have not revealed to others: secrets, hopes, fantasies. The *blind pane* is what others see in you that you cannot see: shortcoming, talents, faults. Finally, the *unknown pan*e includes information that nobody yet knows: untapped potential, undiscovered interests.

► Stereotypes

A natural result of communication is the development of stereotypes, which are attitudes or judgments we make about people based not on personal experience but rather on what we have learned about them through communication. American journalist Walter Lippman (1884-1974) called them "pictures in our heads."

Through stereotypes, we categorize people, presume to understand their characteristics, and thus make sense of a complex world. Thus they can enhance communication and relationships. Stereotypes, which can be positive or negative, usually are associated with our attitudes about people and ideas, both our own and others'.

Communication researchers have identified three basic principles about stereotypes:

- Stereotypes contain ambivalent beliefs about relationships between groups.
- They heighten perceptions of negative and extreme behavior.
- They maintain divisions between in-groups ("us") and out-groups ("them").

The problem with stereotypes is that, particularly when they negatively prejudge others, they make it difficult to correctly interpret information we see and hear. Rather than accepting information at face value and interpreting the other in a favorable or neutral light, negative stereotypes lead us to presume the worst in others. This is an example of communication breakdown, a phenomenon in which the normal process of communication is thwarted because inappropriate and erroneous interpretations are given to incoming information.

We use stereotypes every day to make judgments about people. For example, in personal, family and social contexts, stereotypes play a role in parents' decisions about their children's playmates. In commercial settings, stereotypes affect both who business people work with and how they structure business relationships.

Stereotyping likewise plays a public role, such as diplomatic relationships between nations or the ethnic profiling that law-enforcement agencies use to identify who might be committing a crime.

One of the major international and intercultural problems is that many people let stereotypes determine how they will interact with and react to others.

► Group Communication

Much communication takes place in the context of small groups, which are defined as those of three or more participants. The various and overlapping types of small groups lead to various types of communication patterns.

- Social groups are units such as families, friends living as roommates, and voluntary recreational groups such as soccer teams.

- Families also form primary groups, which are defined as those in which people share living and financial arrangements.

- Families also are an example of reference groups, through which participants gain a sense of identity and an awareness of expected behavior.

- Work groups are another pattern of relationships. These are built by people who are drawn together by a common task, such as students working together on a project or company employees assigned to a common job activity.

- Decision-making groups are brought together for the purpose of dealing with a question or policy.

- Similarly though distinctly, problem-solving groups focus on resolving a problem.

The working of groups has been the subject of much study, particularly from the framework of organizational communication. Leadership styles of small groups have been identified – generally in a three-part continuum ranging from high control (authoritarian leaders) through moderate control (democratic leaders) to low control (laissez-faire leaders). A fourth type, called abdacratic, involves the total collapse of leadership over uncontrolled group dynamics.

Psychologists and communication scholars have observed a pattern of group development, usually presented in a four-fold model

- The process begins with an orientation phase in which participants get to know each other and learn what is expected of them as a group.

- In the conflict phase, they deal with sources of conflict, usually in an effort to avoid conflict within the group. Too much conflict can prevent the group from functioning. However, some conflict is useful to avoid the pressure toward conformity known as groupthink.

- This norm emergence phase centers on compromise, the convergence of ideas, generation of alternative solutions, and eventually consensus. A technique often used to enhance the early part of this phase is brainstorming, in which unrestrained possible solutions and options are generated with no self-censorship or initial group evaluation. The purpose of brainstorming is to generate as many ideas as possible. Only after the ideas have been generated will they be evaluated, keeping the two steps separate and thus allowing the group to consider all possible options.

- The closure phase completes the process by concluding the group's work.

► Conflict and Communication

Because much of the motivation for communication deals with the solving of problems, significant scholarly attention has been given to concepts such as problems, conflict, and consensus.

Conflict can be considered in various contexts, but much of the formal study of conflict has been at the interpersonal level. Principles and lessons from that level can be extended to the public and intercultural levels of communication, and the manner in which conflict is approached varies greatly from one culture to another. Even the resolution of conflict varies, from the seeking of clear winners or losers, saving of face (or inflicting shame), short-term gain versus the setting of precedence and long-term implications, and so on. Here are some issues associated with conflict. [Unit 5 will deal more with the intercultural applications of conflict.]

Here are some principles associated with the study of conflict and the role conflict plays in interpersonal and other levels of communication.

- Consensus building is the creation of a mutually acceptable agreement, achieved through negotiation, built on dialogue, and resulting in the outcome of a commonly agreed-upon conclusion that at least partially accommodates the needs and interests of all parties.

- Conflict management is the process within an organization or social unit that anticipates, researches, identifies potential solutions, and acts to address the problem. Conflict management focuses primarily on changing conditions within the organization without addressing the internal or external cause of the conflict.

- Conflict styles are the types of strategies and tactics for conflict management that are employed by persons or groups in communicating in a conflict situation. Five styles of been identified. Two focus on solving the conflict: an integrating style of conflict management involves a high level of concern for both oneself and others; a compromising style involves a moderate level of concern for both. One management styles is less focused on problem solving and more on control; a dominating style reflects a high concern for oneself and a low concern for the other. Two styles seek to steer clear of confrontation: the obliging style stems from a low concern for oneself and a high concern for the other; the avoiding style involves a low concern for both oneself and the other.

- Conflict resolution is permanent resolution of a problem or dispute achieved through dialogue and without physical or verbal violence. Conflict is inevitable. It is negative when it leads to violence, disrupts the communication relationship between the parties involved in the conflict, motivates people to become uncooperative, or prevents the parties from addressing real issues or problems. However, conflict can be a positive creative force when it increases communication, releases stored feelings, leads to the solution of problems, results in the growth of the relationship between the parties in conflict, or improves performance. Conflict is sometimes categorized either as expressive conflict rooted in a desire to release tension or as instrumental conflict that stems from a difference in goals or practices.

- Win-win strategies are positive approaches to resolving conflict in which each side gains something, though perhaps not everything sought.

- Win-lose strategies are negative approaches to conflict in which one side emerges as a clear winner and the other as a clear loser. These negative tactics usually are highly manipulative and are unlikely to lead to a long-term successful resolution of the conflict. Specific negative tactics associated with conflict and communication include steamrolling (hammering away at one's

point of view until the other party gives in), <u>force</u> (physical or emotional coercion), <u>blame</u> (focusing on the cause of the problem instead of its resolution), <u>silencing</u> (prevention of the other side from engaging in communication), <u>rejection</u> (withholding love or affection, even acknowledgment of the other's existence), and <u>escalation</u> (taking the conflict to a higher level by causing even more serious actual or potential harm).

► Intercultural Differences in Conflict Management

Sociologists and other scholars have researched how people of various racial and ethnic background handle conflict. Their findings suggest that, like many other aspects of intercultural communication, conflict management show some cultural patterns.

Many of the studies conducted in the United States have involved American <u>co-cultures</u> or <u>microcultures</u> (terms replacing the older concept of <u>sub-culture).</u> For example, European Americans show a preference for solution-oriented styles that, in Arab and Muslim countries, sometimes is interpreted as indifferent or lacking emotion. African Americans lean toward a controlling style. Arab Americans, Latino Americans and Asian Americans often make cooperative choices in handling conflict. The style of conflict management also relates to communication styles. For example, people often use emotional language and heated arguments as part of a dominating style of conflict management, whereas an unemotional discussion mode of communicating often is part of a conflict management style that focuses on problem solving.

The dominant culture in the United States (based on the European American model) favors direct, frank and open discussion, whereas the Latin American model features more diplomacy and tact, and the Asian American model includes social deference and respect.

Another significant aspects of conflict management across cultures is the notion of <u>face</u>, the deference or respect that a person claims or is given, based on relative social position. In many Asian cultures, both sides in a conflict strive for a solution that will save face; that is, that will allow both sides to avoid being embarrassed or disgraced. Whereas a strong focus on problem solving might lead to a full airing of the conflict, a face-management approach might suggest that no conflict exists. However, both styles would aim at resolving the issue and preventing its recurrence. Europeans and European Americans tend toward self-face concerns, whereas Latin culture emphasizes face-saving toward social and professional superiors.

APPENDIX TO UNIT 4

► Relevant Web Sites

www.pertinent.com/articles/communication/index.asp – Articles about interpersonal communication

www.lib.ohio-state.edu/gateway/bib/interpersonal.html – Online resources about interpersonal communication

www.uiowa.edu/~commstud/resources/interpersonal.html – Iowa University online resources about interpersonal communication

► Relevant Books

Brown, R., & Gaertner, S. (eds.). 2001). *Intergroup processes.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Knapp, M.L. (1984). *Interpersonal communication and human relationships.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Operrario, D., & Fiske, S. (2001). *Stereotypes: Content, structures, processes, and context.* In R. Brown & S. Gaertner (eds). *Intergroup processes.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Trenhold, S., & Jensen, A. (2000). *Interpersonal communication* (4th ed.). Belmont CA: Wadsworth.

Tubbs, S. (1992). *A systems approach to small group interaction.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

► Unit Quiz

Define <u>metacommunication</u>.

Define <u>speech act</u>.

Define <u>internal discourse</u>.

Define <u>dyadic</u>.

Give an example of <u>impersonal communication</u>.

Define <u>stereotype</u>.

► Freewrite and Discussion

Using the concept of communication competence, sketch out an example of an <u>incompetent communicator</u>.

Give an example of the same concept as a <u>belief</u>, <u>value</u> and <u>attitude</u>.

Explain the difference between <u>immediacy</u> and <u>primacy</u> in a communication context.

Explain the relationship between <u>group communication</u> and <u>direct interpersonal communication</u>.

Discuss the role of <u>self-disclosure</u> as part of interpersonal communication.

► **Exercises**

Ask students to closely observe communication styles within the families or friendship groups. Note particularly gender differences. Then discuss this in class.

Assess stereotypes in your relationship with others.
First, identify several groups of people: a foreign nation with a positive relationship with your country; a foreign nation with a negative relationship with your country; members of the opposite sex; members of a different religion; members of a different age group; members of a different occupation or social standing.
Second, note your feelings about them in several key areas: honesty, friendliness, aggression, compassion, intelligence, competitiveness, ambition, sincerity, deceitfulness, liberalism, conservatism.
Third, note how they might judge your group on the same characteristics.
Fourth, discuss the basis of the stereotypes, their validity, and their social or political usefulness.