Chapter 2

Group Communication Theory

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

1. List the family and social groups you belong to and interact with on a regular basis—for example, within a 24-hour period or within a typical week. Please also consider forums, online communities, and websites where you follow threads of discussion or post regularly. Discuss your results with your classmates.
2. List the professional (i.e., work-related) groups you interact with in order of frequency. Please also consider informal as well as formal groups (e.g., the 10:30 coffee club and the colleagues you often share your commute with). Compare your results with those of your classmates.
3. Identify one group to which you no longer belong. List at least one reason why you no longer belong to this group. Compare your results with those of your classmates.

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

   - Andrew Carnegie

Getting Started

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As humans, we are social beings. We naturally form relationships with others. In fact, relationships are often noted as one of the most important aspects of a person's life, and they exist in many forms. Interpersonal communication occurs between two people, but group communication may involve two or more individuals. Groups are a primary context for interaction within the business community. Groups may have heroes and enemies, sages alongside new members. Groups overlap, and may share common goals, but may also engage in conflict. Groups can be supportive or coercive, and can exert powerful influences over individuals.

Within a group, individuals may behave in distinct ways, use unique or specialized terms, or display symbols that have meaning to that group. Those same terms or symbols may be confusing, meaningless, or even unacceptable to another group. An individual may belong to both groups, adapting his or her communication patterns to meet group normative expectations. Groups are increasingly important across social media venues, and there are many examples of successful business ventures on the web that value and promote group interaction.

Groups use words to exchange meaning, establish territory, and identify who is a stranger versus who is a trusted member. Are you familiar with the term "troll"? It is often used to identify someone who is not a member of an online group or community, who does not share the values and beliefs of the group, and who posts a message in an online discussion board to initiate flame wars, cause disruption, or otherwise challenge the group members. Members often use words to respond to the challenge that are not otherwise common in the discussions, and the less than flattering descriptions of the troll are a rallying point.

Groups have existed throughout human history, and continue to follow familiar patterns across emerging venues as we adapt to technology, computer-mediated interaction, suburban sprawl, and modern life. We need groups, and groups need us. Our relationship with groups warrants attention on this interdependence as we come to know ourselves, our communities, and our world.

2.1 What Is a Group?

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define groups and teams.
2. Discuss how primary and secondary groups meet our interpersonal needs.
3. Discuss how groups tend to limit their own size and create group norms.

Let's get into a time machine and travel way, way back to join early humans in prehistoric times. Their needs are like ours today: they cannot exist or thrive without air, food, and water—and a sense of belonging. How did they meet these needs? Through cooperation and competition. If food scarcity was an issue, who got more and who got less? This serves as our first introduction to roles, status and power, and hierarchy within a group. When food scarcity becomes an issue, who gets to keep their spoon? In some Latin American cultures, having a job or earning a living is referred to by the slang term "*cuchara*," which literally means "spoon" and figuratively implies food, safety, and security.

Now let's return to the present and enter a modern office. Cubicles define territories, and corner offices denote status. In times of economic recession or slumping sales for the company, there is a greater need for cooperation, and there is competition for scarce resources. The loss of a "spoon"—or of one's cubicle—may now come in the form of a pink slip of paper instead of no food around the fire, but it is no less devastating.

We form self-identities through our communication with others, and much of that interaction occurs in a group context. A group may be defined as three or more individuals who affiliate, interact or cooperate in a familial, social, or work context. **Group communication**[1] may be defined as the exchange of information with those who are alike culturally, linguistically, and/or geographically. Group members may be known by their symbols, such as patches and insignia on a military uniform. They may be known by their use of specialized language or jargon; for example, someone in information technology may use the term "server" in reference to the

1. The exchange of information with those who are alike culturally, linguistically, and/or geographically.

internet, whereas someone in the food service industry may use "server" to refer to the worker who takes customer orders in a restaurant. Group members may also be known by their proximity, as in gated communities. Regardless of how the group defines itself, and regardless of the extent to which its borders are porous or permeable, a group recognizes itself as a group. Humans naturally make groups a part of their context or environment.

Types of Groups in the Workplace

As a skilled communicator, learning more about groups, group dynamics, management, and leadership will serve you well. Mergers, forced sales, downsizing, and entering new markets all call upon individuals within a business or organization to become members of groups. In our second introductory exercise you were asked to list the professional (i.e., work-related) groups you interact with in order of frequency. What did your list include? Perhaps you noted your immediate co-workers, your supervisor and other leaders in your work situation, members of other departments with whom you communicate, and the colleagues who are also your personal friends during off-work times. Groups may be defined by function. They can also be defined, from a developmental viewpoint, by the relationships within them. Groups can also be discussed in terms of their relationship to the individual, and the degree to which they meet interpersonal needs.

Some groups may be assembled at work to solve problems, and once the challenge has been resolved, they dissolve into previous or yet to be determined groups. Functional groups like this may be immediately familiar to you. You take a class in sociology from a professor of sociology, who is a member of the discipline of sociology. To be a member of a discipline is to be a disciple, and adhere to a common framework to for viewing the world. Disciplines involve a common set of theories that explain the world around us, terms to explain those theories, and have grown to reflect the advance of human knowledge. Compared to your sociology instructor, your physics instructor may see the world from a completely different perspective. Still, both may be members of divisions or schools, dedicated to teaching or research, and come together under the large group heading we know as the university.

In business, we may have marketing experts who are members of the marketing department, who perceive their tasks differently from a member of the sales staff or someone in accounting. You may work in the mailroom, and the mailroom staff is a group in itself, both distinct from and interconnected with the larger organization.

Relationships are part of any group, and can be described in terms of status, power, control, as well as role, function, or viewpoint. Within a family, for example, the ties that bind you together may be common experiences, collaborative efforts, and even pain and suffering. The birth process may forge a relationship between mother and daughter, but it also may not. An adoption may transform a family. Relationships are formed through communication interaction across time, and often share a common history, values, and beliefs about the world around us.

Groups and teams are an important part of business communication.

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In business, an idea may bring professionals together, and they may even refer to the new product or service as their "baby," speaking in reverent tones about a project they have taken from the drawing board and "birthed" into the real world. As in family communication, work groups or teams may have challenges, rivalries, and even "birthing pains" as a product is adjusted, adapted, and transformed. Struggles are a part of relationships, both in families and business, and form a common history of shared challenged overcome through effort and hard work.

Through conversations and a shared sense that you and your co-workers belong together, you meet many of your basic human needs, such as the need to feel included, the need for affection, and the need for control.Schutz, W. (1966). *The Interpersonal Underworld*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books. In a work context, "affection" may sound odd, but we all experience affection at work in the form of friendly comments like "good morning," "have a nice weekend," and "good job!" Our professional lives also fulfill more basic needs such as air, food, and water, as well as safety. While your workgroup may be gathered together with common goals, such as to deliver the mail in a timely fashion to the corresponding departments and individuals, your daily interactions may well go beyond this functional perspective.

In the same way, your family may provide a place for you at the table and meet your basic needs, but they also may not meet other needs. If you grow to understand yourself and your place in a way that challenges group norms, you will be able to choose which parts of your life to share and to withhold in different groups, and to choose where to seek acceptance, affection, and control.

Primary and Secondary Groups

There are fundamentally two types of groups that can be observed in many contexts, from church, to school, from family to work: primary and secondary groups. The hierarchy denotes the degree to which the group(s) meet your interpersonal needs. **Primary groups**[2] meet most, if not all, of one's needs. Groups that meet some, but not all, needs are called **secondary groups**[3]. Secondary groups often include work groups, where the goal is to complete a task or solve a problem. If you are a member of the sales department, your purpose is to sell.

In terms of problem-solving, work groups can accomplish more than individuals. People, each of whom have specialized skills, talents, experience, or education come together in new combinations with new challenges, find new perspectives to create unique approaches that they themselves would not have formulated alone.

Secondary groups may meet your need for professional acceptance, and celebrate your success, but may not meet your need for understanding and sharing on a personal level. Family members may understand you in ways that your co-workers cannot, and vice versa.

If Two's Company and Three's a Crowd, What Is a Group?

This old cliché refers to the human tendency to form pairs. Pairing is the most basic form of relationship formation; it applies to childhood "best friends," college roommates, romantic couples, business partners, and many other dyads (two-person relationships). A **group**[4], by definition, includes at least three people. We can categorize groups in terms of their size and complexity.

When we discuss demographic groups as part of a market study, we may focus on large numbers of individuals that share common characteristics. If you are the producer of an ecologically innovative car such as the Smart ForTwo, and know your customers have an average of four members in their family, you may discuss developing a new model with additional seats. While the target audience is a group, car customers don't relate to each other as a unified whole. Even if they form car clubs and have regional gatherings, a newsletter, and competitions at their local race tracks each year, they still subdivide the overall community of car owners into smaller groups.

The larger the group grows, the more likely it is to subdivide. Analysis of these smaller, or microgroups, is increasingly a point of study as the internet allows individuals to join people of similar mind or habit to share across time and distance. A **microgroup**[5] is a small, independent group that has a link, affiliation, or

2. Groups that meet most, if not all, of one's needs.

3. Groups that meet some, but not all, of individuals' needs.

4. Three or more individuals who affiliate, interact or cooperate in a familial, social, or work context.

5. A small, independent group that has a link, affiliation, or association with a larger group.

association with a larger group. With each additional group member the number of possible interactions increases.Harris, T., & Sherblom, J. (1999). *Small Group and Team Communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.'McLean, S. (2003). *The Basics Of Speech Communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Table 2.1 Possible Interaction in Groups

Number of Group Members	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Number of Possible Interactions	2	9	28	75	186	441	1,056

Small groups normally contain between three and eight people. One person may involve intrapersonal communication, while two may constitute interpersonal communication, and both may be present within a group communication context. You may think to yourself before taking a speech turn or writing your next post, and you may turn to your neighbor or co-worker and have a side conversation, but a group relationship normally involves three to eight people.

In Table 2.1 "Possible Interaction in Groups", you can quickly see how the number of possible interactions grows according to how many people are in the group. At some point we all find the possible and actual interactions overwhelming, and subdivide into smaller groups. Forums may have hundreds or thousands of members, and you may have hundreds of friends on MySpace or FaceBook, but how many do you regularly communicate with? You may be tempted to provide a number well north of eight, but if you exclude the "all to one" messages, such as a general Twitter to everyone (but no one person in particular), you'll find the group norms will appear.

Group norms[6] are customs, standards, and behavioral expectations that emerge as a group forms. If you blog everyday on your FaceBook page, and your friends stop by to post on your wall and comment, and then stop for a week, you'll violate a group norm. They will wonder if you are sick or in the hospital where you can't access a computer to keep them updated. If, however, you only post once a week, the group will come to naturally expect your customary post. Norms involve expectations, self and group imposed, that often arise as groups form and develop.

If there are more than eight members, it becomes a challenge to have equal participation, where everyone has a chance to speak, be heard, listen, and respond. Some will dominate, others will recede, and smaller groups will form. Finding a natural balance within a group can also be a challenge. Small groups need to have enough members to generate a rich and stimulating exchange of ideas, information,

6. Customs, standards, and behavioral expectations that emerge as a group forms.

and interaction, but not so many people that what each brings cannot be shared.Galanes, G., Adams, K., & Brilhart, J. (2000). *Communication in Groups: Applications and Skills* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Forming groups fulfills many human needs, such as the need for affiliation, affection, and control; individuals also need to cooperate in groups to fulfill basic survival needs.

EXERCISES

1. Think of the online groups you participate in. Forums may have hundreds or thousands of members, and you may have hundreds of friends on MySpace or FaceBook, but how many do you regularly communicate with? Exclude the "all-to-one" messages, such as a general Twitter to everyone (but no one person in particular). Do you find that you gravitate toward the group norm of eight or fewer group members? Discuss your answer with your classmates.
2. What are some of the primary groups in your life? How do they compare with the secondary groups in your life? Write a 2–3 paragraph description of these groups and compare it with a classmate's description.
3. What group is most important to people? Create a survey with at least two questions, identify a target sample size, and conduct your survey. Report how you completed the activity and your findings. Compare the results with those of your classmates.
4. Are there times when it is better to work alone rather than in a group? Why or why not? Discuss your opinion with a classmate.

2.2 Group Life Cycles and Member Roles

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the typical stages in the life cycle of a group.
2. Describe different types of group members and group member roles.

Groups are dynamic systems, in constant change. Groups grow together and eventually come apart. People join groups and others leave. This dynamic changes and transforms the very nature of the group. **Group socialization**[7] involves how the group members interact with one another and form relationships. Just as you were once born, and changed your family, they changed you. You came to know a language and culture, a value system and set of beliefs that influences you to this day. You came to be **socialized**[8], to experience the process of learning to associate, communicate, or interact within a group. A group you belong to this year—perhaps a soccer team or the cast of a play—may not be part of your life next year. And those who are in leadership positions may ascend or descend the leadership hierarchy as the needs of the group, and other circumstances, change over time.

Group Life Cycle Patterns

Your life cycle is characterized with several steps, and while it doesn't follow a prescribed path, there are universal stages we can all recognize. You were born. You didn't choose your birth, your parents, your language or your culture, but you came to know them through communication. You came to know yourself, learned skills and discovered talents, and met other people. You worked, learned, lived, and loved, and as you aged, minor injuries took longer to heal. You competed in ever-increasing age groups in your favorite sport, and while your time for each performance may have increased as you aged, your experience allowed you to excel in other ways. Where you were once the novice, you have now learned something to share. You lived to see some of your friends pass before you, and the moment will arrive when you too must confront death.

7. Involves how the group members interact with one another and form relationships.

8. The process of learning to associate, communicate, or interact within a group.

In the same way, groups experience similar steps and stages and take on many of the characteristics we associate with life.Moreland, R., & Levine, J. (1982). Socialization in small groups: temporal changes in individual group relations. (L. Berkowitz, Ed.) *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 15*, 153. They grow, overcome illness and dysfunction, and transform across time. No group, just as no individual, lives forever.

Your first day on the job may be comparable to the first day you went to school. At home you may have learned some of the basics, like how to write with a pencil, but knowledge of that skill and its application are two different things. People spoke in different ways at school than at home, and you came to understand the importance of recess, of raising your hand to get the teacher's attention, and how to follow other school rules. At work, you may have trained for your profession, but the academic knowledge only serves as your foundation, much as your socialization at home served to guide you at school. On the job they use jargon terms, have schedules that may include coffee breaks (recess), have a supervisor (teacher), and have their own rules, explicit and understood. On the first day, it was all new, even if many of the elements were familiar.

In order to better understand group development and its life cycle, many researchers have described the universal stages and phases of groups. While there are modern interpretations of these stages, most draw from the model proposed by Tuckman.Tuckman, B. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin, 63*, 384–399. This model, shown in <u>Table 2.2 "Tuckman's Linear Model of Group Development"</u>, specifies the usual order of the phases of group development, and allows us to predict several stages we can anticipate as we join a new group.

Tuckman begins with the **forming stage**[9] as the initiation of group formation. This stage is also called the **orientation stage**[10] because individual group members come to know each other. Group members who are new to each other and can't predict each other's behavior can be expected to experience the stress of uncertainty. **Uncertainty theory**[11] states that we choose to know more about others with whom we have interactions in order to reduce or resolve the anxiety associated with the unknown.Berger, C., & Calabrese, R. (1975). Some explorations in initial interactions and beyond: toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research, 1*, 99–112.'Berger, C. (1986). Response uncertain outcome values in predicted relationships: uncertainty reduction theory then and now. *Human Communication Research, 13*, 34–38.'Gudykunst, W. (1995). Anxiety/ uncertainty management theory. In R. W. Wiseman (Ed.), *Intercultural Communication Theory* (pp. 8–58). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. The more we know about others, and become accustomed to how they communicate, the better we can predict how they will interact with us in future contexts. If you learn that Monday mornings are never a good time for your supervisor, you quickly learn to schedule meetings later

9. Initiation of group formation, in which individual group members come to know each other.

10. Initiation of group formation, in which individual group members come to know each other.

11. States that we choose to know more about others with whom we have interactions in order to reduce or resolve the anxiety associated with the unknown.

in the week. Individuals are initially tentative and display caution as they begin to learn about the group and its members.

If you don't someone very well, it is easy to offend. Each group member brings to the group a set of experiences, combined with education and a self-concept. You won't be able to read this information on a name tag, you will only come to know it through time and interaction. Since the possibility of overlapping and competing viewpoints and perspectives exists, the group will experience a **storming stage**[12], a time of struggles as the members themselves sort out their differences. There may be more than one way to solve the problem or task at hand, and some group members may prefer one strategy over another. Some members of the group may be senior to the organization in comparison to you, and members may treat them differently. Some group members may be as new as you are and just as uncertain about everyone's talents, skills, roles, and self-perceptions. The wise communicator will anticipate the storming stage and help facilitate opportunities for the members to resolve uncertainty before the work commences. There may be challenges for leadership, and conflicting viewpoints. The sociology professor sees the world differently than the physics professor. The sales agent sees things differently than someone from accounting. A manager who understands and anticipates this normal challenge in the group's life cycle can help the group become more productive.

A clear definition of the purpose and mission of the group can help the members focus their energies. Interaction prior to the first meeting can help reduce uncertainty. Coffee and calories can help bring a group together. Providing the group with what they need, and opportunities to know each other, prior to their task can increase efficiency.

Groups that make a successful transition from the storming stage will next experience the **norming stage**[13], where the group establishes norms, or informal rules, for behavior and interaction. Who speaks first? Who takes notes? Who is creative and visual, and who is detail-oriented? Sometimes our job titles and functions speak for themselves, but human beings are complex. We are not simply a list of job functions, and in the dynamic marketplace of today's business environment you will often find that people have talents and skills well beyond their "official" role or task. Drawing on these strengths can make the group more effective.

The norming stage is marked by less division and more collaboration. The level of anxiety associated with interaction is generally reduced, making for a more positive work climate that promotes listening. When people feel less threatened, and their needs are met, they are more likely to focus their complete attention on the purpose of the group. If they are still concerned with who does what, and whether

12. Time of struggles as group members themselves sort out their differences.

13. Time when the group establishes norms, or informal rules, for behavior and interaction.

they will speak in error, the interaction framework will stay in the storming stage. Tensions are reduced when the normative expectations are known, and the degree to which a manager can describe these at the outset can reduce the amount of time the group remains in uncertainty. Group members generally express more satisfaction with clear expectations and are more inclined to participate.

Ultimately, the purpose of a work group is performance, and the preceding stages lead us to the **performing stage**[14], in which the group accomplishes its mandate, fulfills its purpose, and reaches its goals. To facilitate performance, group members can't skip the initiation of getting to know each other, or the sorting out of roles and norms, but they can try to focus on performance with clear expectations from the moment the group is formed. Productivity is often how we measure success in business and industry, and the group has to produce. Outcome assessments may have been built into the system from the beginning, and would serve as a benchmark for success. Wise managers know to celebrate success, as it brings more success, social cohesion, group participation, and a sense of job satisfaction. Incremental gains toward a benchmark may also be cause for celebration and support, and failure to reach a goal should be regarded as an opportunity for clarification.

It is generally wiser to focus on the performance of the group rather than individual contributions. Managers and group members will want to offer assistance to underperformers as well as congratulating members for their contributions. If the goal is to create a community where competition pushes each member to perform, individual highlights may serve your needs, but if you want a group to solve a problem or address a challenge as a group, you have to promote group cohesion. Members need to feel a sense of belonging, and praise (or the lack thereof) can be a sword with two edges. One stimulates and motivates, while the other demoralizes and divides.

Groups should be designed to produce and perform in ways and at levels that individuals cannot, or else you should consider compartmentalizing the tasks. The performing stage is where the productivity occurs, and it is necessary to make sure the group has what it needs to perform. Missing pieces, parts, or information can stall the group, and reset the cycle to storming all over again. Loss of performance is inefficiency, and that carries a cost. Managers will be measured by the group's productivity and performance, and their success reflects on the manager. Make sure the performing stage is one that is productive and healthy for its members.

14. Time when the group accomplishes its mandate, fulfills its purpose, and reaches its goals.

Imagine that you are the manager of a group that has produced an award-winning design for an ecologically innovative four-seat car. Their success is your success. Their celebrations are yours, even if you are not the focus of them. A manager

manages the process, while group members perform. If you were a member of the group, and you helped design the belt line, you made a fundamental contribution to the style of the car. Individual consumers may never consider the line from the front fender, across the doors, to the rear taillight as they make a purchase decision, but they will recognize beauty. You will know that you could not have achieved that fundamental part of car design without help from the engineers in the group, and if the number-crunching accountants had not seen the efficiency of the production process that produced it, it may never have survived the transition from prototype to production. The group came together and accomplished its goals with amazing results.

Now, as typically happens eventually with all groups, the time has come to move on to new assignments. In the **adjourning stage**[15], group members leave the group. The group may cease to exist, or it may be transformed with new members and a new set of goals. Your contributions may have caught the attention of management, and you may be assigned to the redesign of the flagship vehicle, the halo car of your marque or brand. It's quite a professional honor, and it's yours because of your successful work in a group. Others will be reassigned to tasks that require their talents and skills, and you may or may not collaborate with them in the future.

You may miss the interactions with the members, even the more cantankerous ones, and will experience both relief and a sense of loss. Like life, the group process is normal, and mixed emotions are to be expected. A wise manager anticipates this stage and facilitates the separation with skill and ease. We often close this process with a ritual marking its passing, though the ritual may be as formal as an award or as informal as a "thank you" or a verbal acknowledgement of a job well done over coffee and calories.

On a more sober note, it is important not to forget that groups can reach the adjourning stage without having achieved success. Some businesses go bankrupt, some departments are closed, and some individuals lose their positions after a group fails to perform. Adjournment can come suddenly and unexpectedly, or gradually and piece by piece. Either way, a skilled business communicator will be prepared and recognize it as part of the classic group life cycle.

Table 2.2 Tuckman's Linear Model of Group DevelopmentTuckman, B. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin, 63*, 384–399.

15. Time when group members leave the group.

Stages	Activities
Forming	Members come together, learn about each other, and determine the purpose of the group.

Stages	Activities
Storming	Members engage in more direct communication and get to know each other. Conflicts between group members will often arise during this stage.
Norming	Members establish spoken or unspoken rules about how they communicate and work. Status, rank and roles in the group are established.
Performing	Members fulfill their purpose and reach their goal.
Adjourning	Members leave the group.

The Life Cycle of Member Roles

Just as groups go through a life cycle when they form and eventually adjourn, so the members of groups fulfill different roles during this life cycle. These roles, proposed by Moreland and Levine,Moreland, R., & Levine, J. (1982). Socialization in small groups: temporal changes in individual group relations. (L. Berkowitz, Ed.) *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 15*, 153. are summarized in <u>Table 2.3 "The Life Cycle of Member Roles"</u>.

Suppose you are about to graduate from school, and you are in the midst of an employment search. You've gathered extensive information on a couple of local businesses and are aware that they will be participating in the university job fair. You've explored their websites, talked to people currently employed at each company, and learned what you can from the public information available. At this stage, you are considered a **potential member**[16]. You may have an electrical, chemical, or mechanical engineering degree soon, but you are not a member of an engineering team.

You show up at the job fair in professional attire and completely prepared. The representatives of each company are respectful, cordial, and give you contact information. One of them even calls a member of the organization on the spot and arranges an interview for you next week. You are excited at the prospect, and want to learn more. You are still a potential member.

The interview goes well the following week. The day after the meeting you receive a call for a follow-up interview, which leads to a committee interview. A few weeks later, the company calls you with a job offer. However, in the meantime you have also been interviewing with other potential employers, and you are waiting to hear back from two of them. You are still a potential member.

16. Individual who is qualified to join a group but has not yet joined.

After careful consideration, you decide to take the job offer and start the next week. The projects look interesting, you'll be gaining valuable experience, and the

commute to work is reasonable. Your first day on the job is positive, and they've assigned you a mentor. The conversations are positive, but at times you feel lost, as if they are speaking a language you can't quite grasp. As a **new group member**[17], your level of acceptance will increase as you begin learning the groups' rules, spoken and unspoken.Fisher, B. A. (1970). Decision emergence: phases in group decision making. *Speech Monographs, 37*, 56–66. You will gradually move from the potential member role to the role of new group member as you learn to fit into the group.

Over time and projects, you gradually increase your responsibilities. You are no longer looked at as the new person, and you can follow almost every conversation. You can't quite say "I remember when" because your tenure hasn't been that long, but you are a known quantity and know your way around. You are a full member of the group. **Full members**[18] enjoy knowing the rules and customs, and can even create new rules. New group members look to full members for leadership and guidance. Full group members can control the agenda and have considerable influence on the agenda and activities.

As a member of a new group, you will learn new customs and traditions.

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Full members of a group, however, can and do come into conflict. When you were a new member, you may have remained silent when you felt you had something to say, but now you state your case. There is more than one way to get the job done. You may suggest new ways that emphasize efficiency over existing methods. Co-workers who have been working in the department for several years may be unwilling to adapt and change, and tension may result. Expressing different views can cause conflict and may even interfere with communication.

When this type of tension arises, **divergent group members**[19] pull back, contribute less, and start to see themselves as separate from the group. Divergent group members have less eye contact, seek out each other's opinion less frequently, and listen defensively. In the beginning of the process, you felt a sense of belonging, but now you don't. **Marginal group members**[20] start to look outside the group for their interpersonal needs.

After several months of trying to cope with these adjustments, you decide that you never really investigated the other two companies; that your job search process was incomplete. Perhaps you should take a second look at the options. You will report to work on Monday, but will start the process of becoming an **ex-member**[21], one who no longer belongs. You may experience a sense of relief upon making this decision,

17. Individual who is still learning the group's norms and rules.

18. Individual who is a known quantity, is familiar with the group's norms, and feels free to express opinions.

19. Individuals who pull back, contribute less, and start to see themselves as separate from the group.

20. Individual who looks outside the group for fulfillment of personal needs.

21. Individual who no longer belongs to a group.

given that you haven't felt like you belonged to the group for awhile. When you line up your next job and submit your resignation, you make it official.

Table 2.3 The Life Cycle of Member RolesMoreland, R., & Levine, J. (1982). Socialization in small groups: temporal changes in individual group relations. (L. Berkowitz, Ed.) *Advances in Experimental Social Psycology, 15*, 153.

1	Potential Member	Curiosity and Interest
2	New Member	Joined the group but still an outsider, and unknown
3	Full Member	Knows the "rules" and is looked to for leadership
4	Divergent Member	Focuses on differences
5	Marginal Member	No longer involved
6	Ex-Member	No longer considered a member

This process has no set timetable. Some people overcome differences and stay in the group for years. Others get promoted and leave the group only when they get transferred to regional headquarters. As a skilled communicator, you will recognize the signs of divergence, just like you anticipate the storming stage, and do your best to facilitate success.

Positive and Negative Member Roles

If someone in your group always makes everyone laugh, that can be a distinct asset when the news is less than positive. At times when you have to get work done, however, the class clown may become a distraction. Notions of positive and negative will often depend on the context when discussing groups. Tables <u>Table 2.4 "Positive Roles"</u> and <u>Table 2.5 "Negative Roles"</u> list both positive and negative roles people sometimes play in a group setting.Beene, K., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. *Journal of Social Issues, 37*, 41–49.'McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Table 2.4 Positive RolesBeene, K., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. *Journal of Social Issues, 37*, 41–49.'McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics Of Interpersonal Communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Initiator-Coordinator	Suggests new ideas or new ways of looking at the problem
Elaborator	Builds on ideas and provides examples

Coordinator	Brings ideas, information, and suggestions together
Evaluator-Critic	Evaluates ideas and provides constructive criticism
Recorder	Records ideas, examples, suggestions, and critiques

Table 2.5 Negative RolesBeene, K., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. *Journal of Social Issues, 37*, 41–49.'McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Dominator	Dominates discussion, not allowing others to take their turn
Recognition Seeker	Relates discussion to their accomplishments, seeks attention
Special-Interest Pleader	Relates discussion to special interest or personal agenda
Blocker	Blocks attempts at consensus consistently
Joker or Clown	Seeks attention through humor and distracts group members

Now that we've examined a classical view of positive and negative group member roles, let's examine another perspective. While some personality traits and behaviors may negatively influence groups, some are positive or negative depending on the context.

Just as the class clown can have a positive effect in lifting spirits or a negative effect in distracting members, so a dominator may be exactly what is needed for quick action. An emergency physician doesn't have time to ask all the group members in the emergency unit how they feel about a course of action; instead, a self-directed approach based on training and experience may be necessary. In contrast, the pastor of a church may have ample opportunity to ask members of the congregation their opinions about a change in the format of Sunday services; in this situation, the role of coordinator or elaborator is more appropriate than that of dominator.

The group is together because they have a purpose or goal, and normally they are capable of more than any one individual member could be on their own, so it would be inefficient to hinder that progress. But a blocker, who cuts off collaboration, does just that. If a group member interrupts another and presents a viewpoint or information that suggests a different course of action, the point may be well taken and serve the collaborative process. If that same group member repeatedly engages in blocking behavior, then the behavior becomes a problem. A skilled communicator will learn to recognize the difference, even when positive and negative aren't completely clear.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Groups and their individual members come together and grow apart in predictable patterns.

EXERCISES

1. Is it possible for an outsider (a non-group member) to help a group move from the storming stage to the norming stage? Explain your answer and present it to the class.
2. Think of a group of which you are a member and identify some roles played by group members, including yourself. Have your roles, and those of others, changed over time? Are some roles more positive than others? Discuss your answers with your classmates.
3. In the course where you are using this book, think of yourself and your classmates as a group. At what stage of group formation are you currently? What stage will you be at when the school year ends?
4. Think of a group you no longer belong to. At what point did you become an ex-member? Were you ever a marginal group member or a full member? Write a 2–3 paragraph description of the group, how and why you became a member, and how and why you left. Share your description with a classmate.

2.3 Why Communicate in Groups?

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Understand the role of interpersonal needs in group communication.

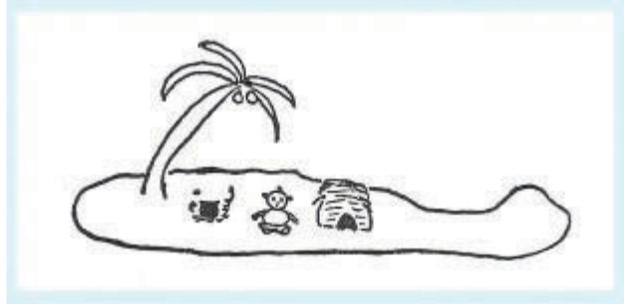"I love mankind. It's people I can't stand."

- Charles M. Schulz (through Charlie Brown)

"Communication is a continual balancing act, juggling the conflicting needs for intimacy and independence."

- Deborah Tannen

Munro Leaf wrote and illustrated a classic children's book in 1936 called *Manners Can Be Fun.* Here are the drawings and text from its first few pages:

If you lived all by yourself out on a desert island, others would not care whether you had good manners or not. It wouldn't bother them. But if someone else lived there with you, you would both have to learn to get along together pleasantly.

If you did not, you would probably quarrel and fight all the time, or—-

stay apart and be lonesome because you could not have a good time together. Neither would be much fun.

Although Leaf's drawings and text are simple and plain, they convey important truths about human beings: we need to get along with other people, and to get along we need to communicate in groups.

If we ask ourselves, then, "What's the point of communicating in groups instead of just sitting at home or in a workplace alone?" we'll conclude that our group interactions and relationships help us meet basic human needs. We may also recognize that not all our needs are met by any one person, job, experience, or context; instead, we need to diversify our communication interactions in order to meet our needs.[citation redacted per publisher request]

At first, you may be skeptical of the idea that we communicate to meet our basic needs. Let's consider two theories on the subject, however, and see how well they predict, describe, and anticipate our tendency to interact.

Abraham **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**[22], represented in <u>Figure 2.1</u> may be familiar to you.Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and Personality* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Row. We need the resources listed in level one (e.g., air, food, and water) to survive. If we have met those basic needs, we move to level two: safety. A job may represent this level of safety at its most basic level. Regardless of how much satisfaction you may receive from a job well done, a paycheck ultimately represents meeting basic needs for many.

If we feel safe and secure, we are more likely to seek the companionship of others. Human beings tend to form groups naturally, and if basic needs are met, love and belonging occur in level three. Perhaps you've been new to a class, or a club, or at work and didn't understand the first thing about what was going on. Conflict may have been part of that experience, but you were probably still eager to interact with the other people in the group rather than staying by yourself like the miserable stick figure in Leaf's final drawing of the desert island.

As you came to know what was what and who was who, you learned how to negotiate the landscape and avoid landmines. Your self-esteem (level four) improved as you perceived that you belonged as part of the group.

Over time, you may have learned your job tasks and the strategies for succeeding in your class, your club, or your job. Perhaps you even came to be known as a reliable resource for others, as someone who would know how to respond helpfully if someone came to you with a problem. People may eventually have looked up to you within your role and have been impressed with your ability to make a difference. Maslow called this "self-actualization" (level five) and discussed how people come to perceive a sense of control or empowerment over their context and environment.

22. A model characterizing human needs from the most basic (physical) to the most complex (aesthetic appreciation).

Beyond self-actualization, Maslow recognized our innate need to know (level six) that drives us to grow and learn, explore our environment, or engage in new experiences. We come to appreciate a sense of self that extends beyond our immediate experiences, beyond the function, and into the community and the representational. We can take in beauty for its own sake, and value aesthetics (level seven) that we previously ignored or had little time to consider.

Figure 2.1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's theory is individualistic, focusing primarily on how one person at a time may meet his or her basic needs. The theory has been criticized in light of the fact that many cultures are not centered on the individual. It's also been pointed out that even people whose physical resources are severely limited can enjoy rich interpersonal relationships and experience cultural, intellectual, and social treasures. Nevertheless, Maslow's hierarchy serves as a good place from which to begin our discussion about group communication.

What do we need from our environment? Why do we communicate in groups? The answers to both questions are often related.

William Schutz's Interpersonal Needs offered an alternate version of human interaction.Schutz, W. (1966). *The Interpersonal Underworld*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books. Like Maslow, he considered the universal aspects of our needs, but he contended that they operate within a range or continuum for each person.[citation redacted per publisher request] According to Schutz, the need for affection, or appreciation, is basic to all humans. We all need to be recognized and feel like we belong, but some people need more interaction with groups than others. Schutz describes **underpersonals**[23] as people who seek limited interaction. On the opposite end of the spectrum, you may know people in school or at work who continually seek attention and affirmation. Schutz refers to these people as **overpersonals**[24]. The individual who strikes a healthy balance between meeting needs through solitary action and group interaction is referred to as a personal individual.

Humans also have a need for control, or the ability to influence people and events. But that need may vary according to the context, environment, and sense of security. If you act primarily autonomously to plan and organize your affairs as part of a group, Schutz would describe your efforts to control your situation as **autocratic**[25], or self-directed. **Abdicrats**[26], on the other hand, are people who according to Schutz shift the burden of responsibility from themselves to others and rely upon others for a sense of control. **Democrats**[27], finally, balance individual and group and are apt to gather and share information on the road to group progress.

Finally, Schutz echoed Maslow in his assertion that belonging is a basic interpersonal need, but he noted that it exists within a range or continuum and that some people need more and others less. **Undersocials**[28] may be less likely to seek interaction, may prefer smaller groups, and will generally not be found on center stage. **Oversocials**[29], by contrast, crave attention and are highly motivated to seek belonging. A **social**[30] person is one who strikes a healthy balance between being withdrawn and being the constant center of attention.

Schutz described these three **interpersonal needs**[31] of affection, control, and belonging as interdependent and variable. In one context, an individual may have a high need for control, while in others he or she may not perceive the same level of motivation or compulsion to meet that need. Maslow and Schutz offer us two related versions of interpersonal needs that begin to address the central question: why communicate in groups?

23. According to William Schutz, someone who prefers limited interaction with others.

24. According to William Schutz, someone who continually seeks attention and affirmation.

25. According to William Schutz, an individual who acts autonomously to plan and organize his or her affairs as part of a group.

26. According to William Schutz, an individual who relinquishes personal responsibility and instead relies on others for a sense of control.

27. According to William Schutz, an individual who gathers and shares information in a balanced fashion to acquire a sense of control as part of a group.

28. According to William Schutz, an individual who avoids taking a central role or engaging in major interactions within a group.

29. According to William Schutz, an individual who craves attention and is intensely motivated to seek belonging as part of a group.

30. According to William Schutz, an individual who seeks a sense of belonging in a group by striking a balance between involvement and withdrawal.

31. Another model characterizing human needs, including affection, control, and belonging.

We communicate with each other to meet our needs, regardless of how we define those needs. From the time you are a newborn infant crying for food or the time you are a toddler learning to say "please" when requesting a cup of milk, to the time you are an adult learning the rituals of a college classroom or a job interview, you learn to communicate in groups to gain a sense of self within the group or community, meeting your basic needs as you grow and learn.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Human beings communicate in groups in order to meet some of their most important basic needs.

EXERCISES

1. Review the types of individuals from Schutz's theory described in this section. Which types do you think fit you? Which types fit some of your coworkers or classmates? Why? Share your opinions with your classmates and compare your self-assessment with the types they believe describe you.
2. Think of two or more different situations and how you might express your personal needs differently from one situation to the other. Have you observed similar variations in personal needs in other people from one situation to another? Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.

2.4 What Is a Theory?

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define "theory."
2. Identify the functions of theories.
3. Evaluate the practicality of using theories.

"There is nothing so practical as a good theory."

- Kurt Lewin

"Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away."

- Philip K. Dick

"Can I make it through that intersection before the light turns red?" "Will I have enough money left at the end of the month to take my honey out to dinner at a nice restaurant?" "Can I trust my office mate to keep a secret?" Every day we apply conceptions of how the world works to make decisions and answer questions like these.

Many of these conceptions are based on our own past experiences, what other people have told us, what we've read or viewed on line, and so on. Sometimes the conceptions are clearly present in our minds as we act; other times they lie beneath our awareness. In reality, the conceptions may represent a hodge-podge of fact, fiction, hunches, conjectures, wishes, and assumptions. And they may change over time for reasons we may or may not even be able to identify.

We may informally refer to these kinds of conceptions as "theories." For instance, we might say, "He made a big mistake when he did that. My theory is that he was under a lot of stress because of getting laid off from his job." In studying

communication, however, we make use of a more refined definition of the term "theory" which is anything but a hodge-podge.

Defining "Theory"

HooverHoover, K. R. (1984). *The Elements of Social Scientific Thinking* (3rd ed.). New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 38. straightforwardly defined a **theory**[32] as "a set of inter-related propositions that suggest why events occur in the manner that they do." According to the National Academy of Sciences,Boss, J. (2010). *Think; Critical Thinking for Everyday Life.* New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 379. a scientific theory is "a well-substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural world that can incorporate facts, laws, inferences, and tested hypotheses." Similar definitions have been put forth by other authorities. All the definitions, however, describe theories as the product of intellectual activity and as a source of insight into interpreting phenomena.

Some theories are solid and universally accepted. Examples include the heliocentric theory and germ theory. It's assumed that these theories require no further testing or evidence to continue to be accepted.

Other more provisional theories, such as string theory in physics or self-efficacy theory in psychology, require continual exploration and testing in order to be supported and retained. Theories are never to be regarded as factual, but rather as models which conform to facts as closely as possible.

Functions of Theory

So—what can theories do for us? Their main function is to help us make sense of phenomena, including human behavior. They help us answer "why" and "how" questions about the world. More specifically, they can fulfill three major functions.

The first function is explanation. Theories can help us understand why entities—physical objects, processes, or people—behave the way they do, individually or in interactions with each other.

32. A set of inter-related propositions that suggest why events occur in the manner that they do.

33. Interpretation of specific past phenomena that accounts for why they would be expected to happen as they did.

The second function is "**postdiction**[33]." Theories can help us interpret specific past incidents and events and account for why they would be expected to happen as they did. Thus, they give us assurance that order exists in at least part of the world.

The final function is prediction, whereby theories help us gain confidence in describing what is likely to take place in the future. Many physical phenomena

occur with a degree of stability and consistency over time. Although human beings often surprise each other, psychologists have contended that someone's past behavior is the best predictor of that person's future behavior. Thus, if our theories have properly and accurately postdicted the way someone has acted, they should lead us to a clear picture of what future behavior that person will exhibit.

Before they had reasonable theories regarding physical science, our ancestors found events like eclipses and earthquakes to be inexplicable. They responded to such phenomena with dread or superstitious speculation. The same was true with respect to complex bodily functions and the spread of disease. Having theories about our natural world and our place in it gives us as human beings a comfortable, reliable foundation upon which to strengthen and enlarge our knowledge. Theories, in short, free us to spread our mental wings and fly into new territory.

Three other characteristics are associated with good theories. First, they exhibit **parsimony**[34]; that is, they are as simple as possible. Second, they should be consistent with previous theories. Third, they also need to be deniable.

Deniability[35] means that those who hold a theory should be able to describe evidence which would cause them to abandon it. If this weren't the case, choosing among competing theories would be a matter only of who spoke loudest or fought hardest on behalf of their opinions.

What Theories Are Not

Many ingredients make up human inquiry. We've established that theories rank among the most important. Several others, however, are part of the landscape and need to be differentiated from theories.

First of all, theories are not **laws**[36]. Laws specify uniform cause-and-effect relationships which hold true under limited, defined circumstances. Unlike theories, which are broader, they do not claim to explain why the relationships exist. Consider Newton's First Law of Motion, for instance: "Every object in a state of uniform motion tends to remain in that state of motion unless an external force is applied to it." The theory of gravity, in contrast, more broadly states that any two or more objects exert a force of attraction on one another.

Second, theories are not claims. Claims are contentions based on belief or opinion. They do not necessarily rely on empirical evidence—i.e., evidence acquired through conventional sense perceptions and assessed through scientific processes. Individuals and groups may continue to maintain their claims without regard to

34. Simplicity, as in a theory which contains no superfluous elements.

35. The capacity of a theory to be disproven in light of evidence.

36. A description of phenomena which specifies uniform cause-and-effect relationships which hold true under limited, defined circumstances.

investigations and discoveries which counter their beliefs. Theories, in contrast, are developed—and modified, if contrary evidence arises—by careful, systematic observation and testing among members of a community.

Finally, theories are not arguments. In everyday language, an argument is simply a reason someone offers for accepting or stating a particular claim. More formally, a logician would say that an argument comprises a premise and a conclusion. A premise might be "We all know that gray clouds sometimes produce rain. I see gray clouds in the sky." This would be followed with a conclusion, such as "There's a possibility that it's going to rain." A theory about weather, beyond its relevance to specific conditions in the sky at a particular time, encompasses all sorts of meteorological phenomena and is meant to apply universally.

Are Theories Practical?

There may be more than meets the eye to Kurt Lewin's statement at the beginning of this section concerning theory and practice. Obviously, not all theories will be equally practical. Some can be applied with more assurance to broader domains than others, some occupy a tenuous place among many other competing theories, and some are simply bad. Whether theories successfully guide action depends on whether they're properly developed, whether they correspond well to reality, and whether they're sufficiently flexible to evolve as circumstances change and new information becomes available.

Furthermore, it's been pointed outSandelands, L.E. (1990). "*What Is So Practical about Theory? Lewin Revisited.*" *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 20 (3): 235–262. that knowing theories does not necessarily mean that we will act according to them. And other forms of communication can sometimes be as provocative and valuable to us as theory. Good poetry, essays, and fiction all may inspire us and help instill the kind of confidence we need to make decisions and cover new intellectual ground.

Still, it's clear that theory can serve as an important contextual factor as individuals and groups refine and elaborate upon the practices they follow. As we'll see in the next section, group communication theory constitutes just such a valuable contextual factor for us.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A good theory can help us explain and predict phenomena.

EXERCISES

1. The theory of gravity tells us that all objects, in all situations and at all times, exert an attractive force upon each other. Can you think of any statements about human interaction which applies in all situations and at all times? What makes you confident of your answer?
2. What are one or two major assumptions you make about people in groups which guide your own behavior as part of those groups?

2.5 Group Communication Theory

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
1. Identify ways in which group communication theory can help groups. 2. Understand how theories are properly developed. 3. Identify prominent theoretical paradigms regarding communication.

"[C]reating a new theory is not like destroying an old barn and erecting a skyscraper in its place. It is rather like climbing a mountain, gaining new and wider views, discovering unexpected connections between our starting point and its rich environment. But the point from which we started out still exists, and can be seen, although it appears smaller and forms a tiny part of our broad view gained by the mastery of the obstacles on our adventurous way up."

  - Albert Einstein

"In making theories, always keep a window open so that you can throw one out if necessary."Einstein, A., & Infeld, L. (1938). *The Evolution of Physics*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

  - Béla Schick

Functions of Group Communication Theory

Theory helps us to bear our ignorance of facts.

  - George Santayana in The Sense of Beauty

What can theories about group communication do for us? Like all theories, they can help us explain, postdict, and predict behavior. Specifically, theory can help us deal

with group communicationHahn, L.K., Lipper, L., & Paynton, S.T. (2011). *Survey of Communication Study*. http://bit.ly/ImokVO. in four ways.

First, these theories can help us interpret and understand what happens when we communicate in groups. For example, a person from a culture such as Japan's may be taken by surprise when someone from mainstream US culture expresses anger openly in a formal meeting. If we're familiar with a theory which describes and identifies "high" versus "low-context" cultures, we can make better sense of interactions like this with people from cultures other than our own.

Second, the theories can help us choose what elements of our experience in groups to pay attention to. As Einstein wrote, "It is theory that decides what can be observed." If we know that cultures can be "high-" or "low-context," then when we interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds we'll watch for behaviors which we believe are associated with each of those categories. For example, if people are from high-context cultures they may tend to avoid explicit explanations and questions.

Third, the theories can enlarge our understanding. Theories strengthen as they're examined and tested in the light of people's experience. Students, scholars, and citizens can all broaden their knowledge by discussing and explaining theories. Reflecting on questions and other reactions they receive in response can also refine theories and make them more useful.

Fourth, the theories may impel us to challenge prevailing cultural, social, and political practices. Most of the ways that people behave in groups are products of habit, custom, and learning. They aren't, in other words, innate. By applying theoretical perspectives to how groups operate, we may be able to identify fairer and more just approaches.

Where Group Communication Theories Come From

"It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data."

  - Arthur Conan Doyle (via Sherlock Holmes in "A Scandal in Bohemia," 1891)

To develop group communication theories, people generally follow a three-step process which parallels what Western science calls "the scientific method."Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2005). *Theories of Human Communication* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

1. Ask important questions. What stages should most groups expect to pass through as they form and adopt goals? How does the size of a group affect its ability to pursue its goals? What methods of group decision-making work best with which kinds of people? Which blend of individual personalities contributes most to the satisfaction of a group? All these questions are meaningful and significant to groups, and all of them have served as the foundation of theories about group communication.

2. Observe people's behavior in groups. To be productive, this observation should proceed on the basis of well-defined terms and within clear boundaries. To find out which blend of individual personalities contributes most to group satisfaction, for instance, it's necessary first to define "personality" and "satisfaction." It is also important to decide which kinds of groups to observe under which circumstances.

3. Analyze the results of the observation process and base new theories upon them. The theories should fit the results of the observations as closely as possible.

You may want to go on line and look at a journal devoted to group communication topics, such as "Small Group Research." If you do, you'll see that the titles of its articles refer often to existing theories and that the articles themselves describe experiments with groups which have tested and elaborated upon those theories.

Theoretical Paradigms for Group Communication

Groups of theories may compose **theoretical paradigms**[37], which are collections of concepts, values, assumptions, and practices that constitute a way of viewing reality for a community that shares them.Hahn, L.K., Lipper, L., & Paynton, S.T. (2011). *Survey of Communication Study*. http://bit.ly/ImokVO Group communication theories tend to cluster around the following five paradigms:

- The **systems theory paradigm**[38]. Systems theory examines the inputs, processes, and outputs of systems as those systems strive toward balance, or **homeostasis**[39]. This paradigm for group communication emphasizes that processes and relationships among components of a group are interdependent and goal-oriented. Thus, the adage that "it is impossible to do just one thing" is taken to be true by systems theorists. Focus is placed more on developing a complete picture of groups than upon examining their parts in isolation.
- The **rhetorical theories paradigm**[40]. The field of rhetoric originated with the Greeks and Romans and is the study of how symbols affect human beings. For example, Aristotle's three elements of

37. A collection of concepts, values, assumptions, and practices that constitute a way of viewing reality.

38. A set of theories which examines inputs, processes, and outputs in systems which strive toward homeostasis.

39. A state of balance or equilibrium within a system or group.

40. A set of theories which focuses on how symbols affect people.

persuasion—ethos (credibility), logos (logic), and pathos (appeal to emotion)—are still used today to describe and categorize people's statements. Rhetorical analysis of group communication lays greatest emphasis on describing messages, exploring their functions, and evaluating their effectiveness.

- The **empirical laws paradigm**[41]. This paradigm, also known as the positivist approach, bases investigation of group communication on the assumption that universal laws govern human interaction in much the same way that gravity or magnetism act upon all physical objects. "If X, then Y" statements may be used to characterize communication behavior in this paradigm. For instance, you might claim that "If people in a group sit in a circle, a larger proportion of them will share in a conversation than if they are arranged in rows facing one direction." The effects of empirical laws governing group communication are usually held to be highly likely rather than absolute.

- The **human rules paradigm**[42]. Instead of contending that behavior by people in groups conforms to absolute and reliable laws, this paradigm holds that people construct and then follow rules for their interactions. Because these rules are subjective and arise out of social circumstances and cultural environments which may change, they can't be pinned down the way that laws describing the physical world can be and are apt to evolve over time.

- The **critical theories paradigm**[43]. Should we simply analyze and describe the ways in which groups communicate, or should we challenge those ways and propose others? The critical theories paradigm proposes that we should strive to understand how communication may be used to exert power and oppress people.Foss, K. A., & Foss, S. K. (1989). Incorporating the feminist perspective in communication scholarship: A research commentary. In C. Spitzack & K. Carter (Eds.), *Doing Research on Women's Communication: Alternative Perspectives in Theory and Method* (pp. 64–94). Norwood, NJ: Ablex. When we have determined how this oppression takes place, we should seek to remedy it. This combination of theory and action is defined as praxis.

41. A set of theories based on the conviction that universal laws govern human interaction.

42. A set of theories based on the idea that human beings purposefully construct and then follow rules for their interactions.

43. A set of theories which seeks to identify how oppression is exerted through communication and then to alter that process for the good of those oppressed.

No single theoretical paradigm is accepted by everyone who studies group communication. Whether a description or prediction concerning people's behavior in groups is found to be accurate or not will depend on which viewpoint we come from and which kinds of groups we observe.

KEY TAKEAWAY

If they are properly developed, theories of group communication can help group members understand and influence group processes.

EXERCISES

1. Identify a group that you've been part of at school or in the workplace. What aspects of its behavior do you feel you might have better understood if you'd had a grasp of group communication theory?
2. Think of another significant experience you've had recently as part of a group. Of the theoretical paradigms for group communication described in this section, which would you feel most comfortable in applying to the experience? Which paradigm, if any, do you feel it would be inappropriate to apply? Why?

Additional Resources

Read about groups and teams on the business website 1000 Ventures. http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/crosscuttings/team_main.html

Learn more about Tuckman's Linear Model. http://www.infed.org/thinkers/tuckman.htm

Learn more about Dewey's sequence of group problem solving on this site from Manatee Community College in Florida. http://faculty.mccfl.edu/frithl/SPC1600/handouts/Dewey.htm

Read a hands-on article about how to conduct productive meetings. http://www.articlesnatch.com/Article/How-To-Conduct-Productive-Meetings-/132050

Visit this WikiHow site to learn how to use VOIP. http://www.wikihow.com/Use-VoIP

Watch a YouTube video on cloud computing. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PNuQHUiV3Q

Read about groups and teams, and contribute to a wiki about them, on Wikibooks. http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Managing_Groups_and_Teams

How did Twitter get started? Find out. http://twitter.com/about

Take a (nonscientific) quiz to identify your leadership style. http://psychologyabout.com/library/quiz/bl-leadershipquiz.htm

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