The Interpersonal Communication Book

SIXTEENTH EDITION

Joseph A. DeVito

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SIXTEENTH EDITION
GLOBAL EDITION

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Welcome to *The Interpersonal Communication Book*

SIXTEENTH EDITION

While working on this sixteenth edition (beginning in February 2020 up to the time of publication), two extraordinary world events were taking place: The COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movements. There is no aspect of life (and certainly no aspect of interpersonal communication) that has not been touched (perhaps uprooted is a better term) by these two events.

As I write this, the coronavirus pandemic has infected some 90 million people worldwide and killed close to 2 million people. Approximately 4000 people died from COVID everyday in January 2021. The world is wearing facial masks (mandated by many governments in different parts of the world), maintaining social distance, avoiding large gatherings, and washing their hands more often than ever imagined. People are asked to shelter in place and to quarantine themselves if they've been exposed to someone with the virus. Thousands of restaurants have closed permanently and those that remain open are required to have diners maintain social distance, serve outdoors, or only admit indoors a certain percentage of what would normally be a full house. Spectator sports like baseball, American football, and soccer are being played to empty stadiums and viewed only virtually. Many movie houses and theatres have closed permanently and those remaining open are required to limit their capacity so that the required social distance can be maintained. Similarly, barber shops, hair and nail salons, gyms, beaches, parks, and playgrounds have been closed with sporadic openings happening from time to time with greatly reduced numbers of people along with re-closings when the number of positive cases increased. In business and in families, face-to-face meetings were greatly reduced—even relatives who did not live together were advised to avoid social contact. All holidays, normally a time of family get-togethers, has been widely cancelled, hopefully postponed to a later time. Remote and virtual communication—with relatives, friends, and medical professionals, for example, became the norm along with millions of people working from home—a trend that is likely to continue even after this pandemic is history. A large number of students—from elementary through high school and college—are attending classes online. Those schools that are open to in-person learning have a greatly reduced student body, are monitored closely, and are closed when students, staff, or faculty are found to test positive.

Not unexpectedly, along with these changes has come vast unemployment; as of October 2020, some 12.6 million people in the United States were unemployed; unemployment now is lasting longer and more permanent than any time in history. Despite periodic moratoriums, a large number of people cannot afford to pay their rent and are being evicted from their homes, increasing the rate of homelessness to record levels. In addition, people do not have enough food to eat, parents say they cannot afford to feed their children, and long lines at food banks are common throughout the world. As you can appreciate, these developments have created a level of stress, uncertainty, anxiety, and fear unthinkable just a year earlier.

The Black Lives Matter movement—energized by the death of George Floyd, a Black man at the hands of a White police officer—spread throughout the United States, and in many other countries as well. People of all races and nationalities have been forced to recognize the disparities in power, in wealth, in access to health care—to name just a few—between Whites and Blacks, and joined in the protests and marches. At the same time, the history of racism has been brought to the front of the stage, and statues of confederate soldiers (Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, for example) have been torn down. Even renowned historical figures such as first president George Washington, author of the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson, and writer of *The Star-Spangled Banner* Francis Scott Key—all slave holders—were reevaluated and assigned by many to a drastically different place in American history.

At the same time that we are witnessing a new look at racial injustice—not only to Black people but to American Indian/Native American, Hispanic/Latinx, and Asian people as well—we are appreciating the injustice that our view of sex and gender as binary—as either male or female—imposes on the vast number of people who may be intersex or have gender identities that do not fit conveniently into either male or female and who may identify as both male and female or as neither. We are recognizing that gender identity is a spectrum, a continuum. And, in January 2021, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted rules to remove gendered language. In addition to terms like chairman being replaced by *chair, themself* is to replace *himself* or *herself* and familiar relationships (for example, *mother, son, daughter, nephew*) will be replaced by *parent, child*, and similar non-gendered terms.

These events have also helped to create a division among people rarely seen in recent history. People had drastically different interpretations of the coronavirus with some believing it was a hoax and that masks and restrictions on large gatherings were unnecessary and an infringement on individual freedom. Others took the virus seriously, wore masks, maintained social distancing, and avoided large gatherings. Fights were not uncommon between those who refused to wear masks and those who felt masks were an essential and vital part of controlling this pandemic. Similarly, deep divisions were seen in responses to the Black Lives Matter movement with some supporting the aims of the movement and others diametrically opposed. Some wanted the statues of confederate leaders to be torn down while others wanted them preserved, even enshrined. Some wanted a reduction in police while others wanted a greater police presence. One of the clearest divisions in the United States was seen in the tens of thousands of people who waited on long lines for food and who could not pay their rent and were faced with eviction and eventual homelessness, when on Wall Street the stock market was hitting all-time highs—making millions for investors. Still another division was seen in the January 2021 riots in Washington, D.C. between those who supported Donald Trump and called the election of Joe Biden a fraud and those who supported the election of Biden.

And, not surprisingly, deep divisions were seen in the sex/gender arena with some demanding greater acceptance and equal treatment under the law while others rejected such demands as violating their religious or cultural beliefs and freedoms.

We are clearly living in a world much different from the world in which the fifteenth edition was revised and published, and this book, and all books, needs to reflect these changes. I have tried to do this throughout this revised edition, noting these changes and their implications in the chapter narrative as well as in the various features and photos and, perhaps most noticeably, on the cover. At the time I'm writing this, vaccines are being distributed with shortages experienced throughout the world. But when and even if this virus will be totally eradicated remains a question. Similarly, no one knows where the BLM movement will take the world, or how the average person and the varied societies and cultures will deal

with gender fluidity and the division among people. We can only guess. But there is one thing we do know and that is that these differences need to be discussed directly and clearly and the conflicts confronted and managed effectively, and that is the role of interpersonal communication.

My major task in revising this edition, then, was to provide the theory, research, and skills that will prove helpful in this ever-changing world. Interpersonal communication has always been among the most important of all competencies people need to function effectively in personal relationships and in the world of work. Today, it's even more important. We need to learn how best to maintain contact and close relationships in the age of COVID-19 and how to deal effectively with social and racial inequalities and with gender identities very different from the simple male or female. And we need to deal with the vast differences now dividing the world. Interpersonal communication will not solve all the problems the world now faces, but it's an essential ingredient of the better world we all hope for.

In addition to the changes mentioned above, this sixteenth edition (which itself is a rare privilege) updates and fine tunes the presentation of interpersonal communication so that it is current—accurately reflecting the most up-to-date knowledge about the subject—and as clear, interesting, involving, and relevant to today's college students as it can be.

Like its predecessors, this sixteenth edition provides in-depth coverage of interpersonal communication, blending theory and research on the one hand and practical skills on the other. The book's philosophical foundation continues to be the concept of *choice*. Choice is central to interpersonal communication, as it is to life in general. As speaker and listener, you're regularly confronted with choice points at every stage of the communication process: What do you say? When do you say it? How do you say it? Through what channel should you say it? And so on. In large part, the choices you make will determine the effectiveness of your messages and your relationships. The role of *The Interpersonal Communication Book*, then, is threefold:

1. to identify and explain the choices you have in a vast array of interpersonal situations;
2. to explain the theory and research evidence that bears on these choices—enabling you to identify your available choices and to select more reasoned, more reasonable, and more effective communication choices; and
3. to provide you with the skills needed to communicate your choices effectively.

What's New in This Sixteenth Edition?

Major changes to all chapters include the following:

- New and updated research findings and references appear throughout the chapters.
- New Summary of Skills sections now appear at the ends of each chapter.
- Implications of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement are included in the chapter narrative and in the features and photos in most chapters.
- Binary pronouns have been eliminated and all sentences recast to reflect gender fluidity.
- The Understanding Interpersonal Skills boxes have been deleted with the important material integrated into the chapters.
- New photos and captions (Viewpoints) appear throughout the chapters.
- Cultural Maps have been reduced to seven, corresponding to the seven cultural dimensions discussed in Chapter 2.
- All Interpersonal Choice Points are new to this edition.

- All figures now have captions.
- All modules now contain an "In a Nutshell" table summarizing the major content of that section of the chapter.

Changes by chapter include the following:

- **Chapter 1, Foundations of Interpersonal Communication**, covers the benefits of studying interpersonal communication, the elements of interpersonal communication, and the principles of interpersonal communication. *Changes in this chapter include* a new preview diagram of the principles of interpersonal communication (Figure 1.2), a new nutshell table for the first A-head (all A-heads now have nutshell tables), brief explanations of the features—integrated exercises, nutshell tables, preview diagrams, choice points, ethics boxes, and viewpoints, deletion of the principles of symmetrical and complementary relationships, interdependent individuals, and the inherent relational nature of interpersonal communication.

- **Chapter 2, Culture and Interpersonal Communication**, covers the nature of culture, the major cultural differences that impact interpersonal communication, and principles for more effective intercultural communication. *Changes in this chapter include* a new diagram of the iceberg metaphor and the deletion of the seven metaphors table, references to the seven Cultural Maps in the remainder of the book, a new section on the social construction of race and ethnicity, a re-cast section on sex and gender, and a new viewpoint on cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation.

- **Chapter 3, Perception of the Self and Others**, covers the essential concepts of the self, the stages of perception, impression formation, and impression management. The Cultural Map in this chapter focuses on ambiguity tolerance. *Changes in this chapter include* a new preview diagram of the self.

- **Chapter 4, Verbal Messages**, covers the principles of verbal messages, confirmation and disconfirmation, and verbal message effectiveness. The Cultural Map in this chapter focuses on high and low context cultures. *Changes in this chapter include* a new preview diagram of the principles of verbal messages, a new abstraction ladder example, and a totally rewritten and updated section on cultural identifiers.

- **Chapter 5, Nonverbal Messages**, covers the principles of nonverbal communication, the ten major channels or codes, and nonverbal competence in encoding and decoding. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with long- and short-term orientation. *Changes in this chapter include* a revised preview diagram on the principles of nonverbal messages, a new preview diagram of the channels of nonverbal communication, the deletion of the table of the five types of body movements, additional research on eye communication, and an expansion of the cultural differences in colors.

- **Chapter 6, Listening**, covers the stages and styles of listening, as well as cultural and gender differences. *Changes in this chapter include* a new preview figure on barriers to listening; a reconfiguration of biases and racism, heterosexism, ageism, and sexism; and the deletion of the politeness Cultural Map.

- **Chapter 7, Emotional Messages**, covers the principles of emotional communication, some obstacles to communicating emotions, and emotional competence. The Cultural Map in this chapter focuses on indulgent and restraint cultures. *Changes in this chapter include* a new introduction to the chapter, a reduction in theories of emotion, the deletion of the diagrams of theories, a new figure on emotional contagion, a new preview figure on the obstacles to emotional expression, and the deletion of the brief discussion of dyssemia.

- **Chapter 8, Conversational Messages**, covers the principles of conversation, self-disclosure, and some everyday conversational encounters. *Changes in this chapter include* the deletion of the diagrams on the maxims of cooperation and the maxims of politeness, deletion of the apologies Cultural Map, and a new choice point on the backhanded compliment.

- **Chapter 9, Interpersonal Relationship Stages, Communication, and Theories**, covers the stages of relationships, the communication that takes place at these different stages, and some of the major theories that explain how relationships grow and deteriorate. *Changes in this chapter include* a simplification of the ethics box/exercise and the deletion of the Cultural Map on relationship length.

- **Chapter 10, Interpersonal Relationship Types**, covers friendship, love, family, and workplace relationships; and two of their dark sides: jealousy and violence. The Cultural Map in this chapter focuses on masculine and feminine cultural orientation. *Changes in this chapter include* the addition of online relationships and additional romantic relationships.

- **Chapter 11, Interpersonal Conflict and Conflict Management**, covers the nature and principles of conflict and the strategies of effective conflict management. The Cultural Map in this chapter focuses on individualist and collectivist cultural orientation. *Changes in this chapter include* a new preview diagram of the principles of conflict and the deletion of the Cultural Map on success.

- **Chapter 12, Interpersonal Power and Influence**, covers the principles of power and influence; power in the relationship, person, and message; and the misuses of power (sexual harassment, bullying, and power plays). The Cultural Map in this chapter focuses on high- and low-power distances. *Changes in this chapter include* new statistics on harassment and bullying and added material on prosocial communication; for example, the difference between altruism and prosocial communication.

Features

The Interpersonal Communication Book is a complete learning package that will provide students with the opportunity to learn about the theories and research in interpersonal communication, and to acquire and practice the skills necessary for effective interpersonal interaction.

Learning Objectives

Learning objectives are presented in the chapter opener, repeated in the chapter with each major head, and iterated again in the Summary of Concepts. This feature helps focus attention on the key concepts and principles discussed, and how this learning can be demonstrated.

Preview Figures and Nutshell Summary Tables

Throughout the chapters, visuals preview the content of the sections, and "In a Nutshell" summary tables at the end of the sections help students review the content and fix it more firmly in memory.

Interpersonal Choice Points and Viewpoints

Interpersonal Choice Points—brief scenarios that require students to make an interpersonal communication choice—encourage students to apply the material in the chapter to varied specific interactions. They are designed to encourage the application of the research and theory discussed in the chapters to real-life situations.

Viewpoints appear as captions to all the interior photos and ask you to consider a wide variety of issues in interpersonal communication. These are designed to encourage students to explore significant communication issues discussed in the chapter from a more personal point of view.

Balance of Theory/Research and Skills

While a great deal of new research is integrated throughout the chapters, much of it from the past five years, *The Interpersonal Communication Book* recognizes the practical importance of skill development and so gives considerable attention to mastering

interpersonal skills. These skills have their foundation in interpersonal communication theory and research. In addition, a select list of skills is presented at the end of each chapter as a reminder of the skills embedded in the chapter narrative.

Culture and Interpersonal Communication

As our knowledge of culture and its relevance to interpersonal communication grows, so must culture's presence in an interpersonal communication course. *The Interpersonal Communication Book* stresses the importance of culture to all aspects of interpersonal communication.

An entire chapter devoted to culture (Chapter 2, Culture and Interpersonal Communication) is presented as one of the foundation concepts for understanding interpersonal communication. This chapter covers the relationship of culture and interpersonal communication, the ways in which cultures differ, and the strategies to make intercultural communication more effective. In addition to this separate chapter, here are some of the more important discussions that appear throughout the chapters:

- the cultural dimension of context (Chapter 1)
- the role of culture in the development of self-concept, in accurate perception, and in understanding the just world hypothesis (Chapter 3)
- the influence of culture on politeness; lying and culture; and culture's influence on assertiveness, ageism, and heterosexism; and cultural identifiers (Chapter 4)
- culture and gesture, facial expression, eye communication, color, touch, paralanguage, silence, and time (Chapter 5)
- the influences of culture and gender on listening (Chapter 6)
- the influence of culture on emotions, and cultural customs as an obstacle to the communication of emotions (Chapter 7)
- conversational maxims, culture, and gender; culture and expressiveness; and the influence of culture on self-disclosure (Chapter 8)
- the influence of culture on interpersonal relationships and the stages of relationships (Chapter 9)
- cultural differences in friendship and loving, and culture and the family (Chapter 10)
- cultural influences on conflict and conflict management (Chapter 11)
- the cultural dimension of power (Chapter 12)

The **Cultural Map** feature returns to the seven basic cultural differences discussed in Chapter 2 and connects these concepts with the content of the various chapters. These include *ambiguity tolerance* as related to perception (Chapter 3), *high- and low-context cultures* as related to verbal messages (Chapter 4), *long- and short-term orientation* as related to nonverbal/temporal communication (Chapter 5), *indulgent and restraint orientation* as related to emotional communication (Chapter 7), *masculine and feminine orientation* as related to interpersonal relationships (Chapter 10), *individualism and collectivism* as related to conflict management (Chapter 11), and *high- and low-power distance* as related to interpersonal power (Chapter 12).

People with disabilities may also be viewed from a cultural perspective, and in this edition three special tables offer suggestions for more effective communication between people with and without disabilities. These tables provide tips for communicating more effectively between people with and without visual impairments (Table 5.3 in Chapter 5), between people with and without hearing difficulties (Table 6.3 in Chapter 6), and between people with and without speech and language disorders (Table 8.1 in Chapter 8).

Politeness

Politeness in interpersonal communication is stressed throughout the chapters as one of the major features of effective interaction. Some of the major discussions include the following:

- politeness strategies for increasing attractiveness (Chapter 3)
- message politeness (Chapter 4)
- polite listening (Chapter 6)
- conversational politeness (Chapter 8)
- politeness theory of relationships (Chapter 9)
- politeness in conflict management (Chapter 11)

Social Media

The ways and means of social media are integrated throughout the chapters. For example, the principle of anonymity in interpersonal communication is included as a basic principle because of its increasing importance due to social media. The ubiquity of the cell phone and texting has changed interpersonal communication forever and is recognized throughout the chapters. Likewise, dating, keeping in touch with family and friends, making friends, and engaging in conflict—and much more—is viewed in a world dominated by (not simply a world that includes) social media.

Integrated Applications

The Interpersonal Communication Book includes a variety of features that encourage interaction and self-exploration:

- Integrated exercises appear throughout in every chapter. These exercises are part of the narrative but require you to interact with and respond to the material. Some of these are brand new, and some of them have been revised and reconfigured from material in the previous edition.
- Interpersonal Choice Points that appear in the margins encourage you to apply the principles and skills of the chapters to specific interpersonal situations. All Interpersonal Choice Points are new to this edition.
- Viewpoints captions encourage you to explore the implications of a variety of communication theories and research findings.
- Ethics in Interpersonal Communication boxes present ethical issues and ask what you would do in each of the presented scenarios.

End of Chapter

Each chapter has a three-part ending: (1) Summary of Concepts, a numbered propositional summary of the major concepts that are discussed in the chapter, organized by major topic headings and prefaced with the learning objective for that section; (2) Summary of Skills, a numbered list of some of the major skills discussed in the chapter; and (3) Key Terms, a list of key terms that are used in the chapter (and defined in the "Glossary of Interpersonal Communication Concepts").

Instructor and Student Resources

Key instructor resources include an Instructor's Manual (ISBN 1-292-43956-4), TestBank (ISBN 1-292-43961-0), and PowerPoint Presentation Package (ISBN 1-292-43958-0). These supplements are available at http://www.pearsonglobaleditions.com/.

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Foundations of Interpersonal Communication

Effective and satisfying interpersonal communication rests on a solid foundation of knowledge and skills. *Building a strong foundation for your own face-to-face and online communication in this course will serve you well both personally and professionally.*

Chapter Topics

The Benefits of Studying Interpersonal Communication

The Elements of Interpersonal Communication

The Principles of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

1.1 Identify the personal and professional benefits of studying interpersonal communication.

1.2 Define *interpersonal communication* and its essential elements including *source–receiver, messages, channels, noise, context, effects*, and *ethics*.

1.3 Paraphrase the principles of interpersonal communication.

This chapter introduces the study of interpersonal communication and explains why interpersonal communication is so important, examines the essential elements of this unique form of communication, and describes its major principles.

The Benefits of Studying Interpersonal Communication

1.1   Identify the personal and professional benefits of studying interpersonal communication.

Fair questions to ask at the beginning of this course are "What will I get out of this?" and "Why should I study interpersonal communication?" One very clear answer is given by the importance of interpersonal communication: It's a major part of the human experience that every educated person needs to understand. Much as you need to understand history, science, geography, and mathematics, for example, you need to understand how people interact (how people communicate interpersonally) and how people form relationships—both face-to-face and online. On a more practical level, you'll learn the skills that will yield both personal and professional benefits. These skills seem to be acknowledged by everyone writing on the implications of the coronavirus as even more essential than in "normal" times (Vincent, 2020; Silverman, 2020).

Personal Benefits

Your personal success and happiness depend largely on your effectiveness as an interpersonal communicator. Close friendships and romantic relationships are developed, maintained, and sometimes destroyed largely through your interpersonal interactions. Likewise, the success of your family relationships depends heavily on the interpersonal communication among members. For example, in a survey of 1,001 people over 18 years of age, 53 percent felt that a lack of effective communication was the major cause of marriage failure—significantly greater than money (38 percent) and in-law interference (14 percent) (How Americans Communicate, 1999; Starch, 2008). Positive interpersonal communication increases your feelings of wellness and satisfaction (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Ohlin, 2020). And effective interpersonal communication can make your life happier and healthier (Treleaven, 2018). Likewise, your success in interacting with neighbors, acquaintances, and people you meet every day depends on your ability to engage in satisfying conversation—conversation that's comfortable and enjoyable.

Professional Benefits

The ability to communicate interpersonally is widely recognized as crucial to professional success (Morreale & Pearson, 2008; Satell, 2015; Morreale, Valenzano, & Bauer, 2016). From the initial interview at a college job fair to interning, to participating in and then leading meetings, your skills at interpersonal communication will largely determine your success.

Employers want graduates who can communicate orally and in writing (Berrett, 2013). This ability is even considered more important than job-specific skills, which employers feel could be learned on the job. For example, one study found that among the 23 attributes ranked as "very important" in hiring decisions, "communication and interpersonal skills," noted by 89 percent of the recruiters, was at the top of the list. This was a far higher percentage of recruiters than the percentage who noted "content of the core curriculum" (34 percent) or "overall value for the money invested in the recruiting effort" (33 percent) (Alsop, 2004). In the general workplace, interpersonal communication enhances teamwork, promotes the flow of ideas and thoughts, results in higher productivity, builds a culture of employee engagement, and helps resolves problems and retain qualified staff (Bhasin, 2019; Ahmed, 2019).

The importance of interpersonal communication skills extends over the entire spectrum of professions. For example, interpersonal skills offer an important advantage for persons in finance (Messmer, 1999), play a significant role in preventing workplace violence (Parker, 2004), reduce medical mishaps, and improve doctor–patient communication (Smith, 2004; Sutcliffe, Lewton, & Rosenthal, 2004). Interpersonal skills are also one of six areas that define the professional competence of physicians and trainees (Epstein & Hundert, 2002). They also contribute greatly to maintaining diversity in the workplace, team building, and employee morale (Johnson, 2017).

In a survey of employers who were asked what colleges should place more emphasis on, 89 percent identified "the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing" as the highest of any skill listed (Hart Research Associates, 2010). And in that same survey, the largest number of employers (84 percent), when asked what would prepare college students for success, identified "communication skills." In still another survey of women and leadership, the ability to communicate and to build relationships—the essentials of interpersonal communication—were noted among the competencies exemplified by top leaders (Goleman, 2013b). And, more recently, communication has been identified by LinkedIn as one of the six most important soft skills college graduates need to possess in order to compete effectively in the post-coronavirus job market (Poague, 2020). Not surprisingly, the remaining five skills—customer service, leadership, problem-solving, operations and project management, and marketing—have a strong communication component. Communication also makes *Forbes'* top ten list of soft skills needed in the future of work (Gaskell, 2019).

Personal and Professional Choices

Clearly, interpersonal skills are vital to both personal and professional success. Understanding the theory and research in interpersonal communication and mastering its skills go hand in hand (Greene & Burleson, 2003). The more you know about interpersonal communication, the more insight and knowledge you'll gain about what works and what doesn't work. The more skills you have within your arsenal of communication strategies, the greater your choices for communicating in any situation (DeVito, 2016a, 2016b, 2018). Put differently, the greater your knowledge and the greater the number of communication choices at your disposal, the greater the likelihood that you'll be successful in achieving your interpersonal goals. You might look at this text and this course as aiming to enlarge your interpersonal communication choices and give you a greater number of options for communicating effectively than you had before your exposure to the study of interpersonal communication.

Because of the importance of choice—after all, your interpersonal messages and relationships are the result of the choices you make in any given situation—you'll find boxes labeled *Interpersonal Choice Point* throughout the text. **Choice points** are simply moments when you need to make a choice, a decision, about your interpersonal communication—for example, about whom you communicate with, what you say, what you don't say, how you phrase what you want to say, the photos you want to post and those you don't, and so on. Some of the questions about choices will prove easy to answer, while others will prove to be more difficult. This variation in difficulty mirrors real-life interpersonal communication; getting your meanings and feelings across is easy sometimes and very difficult at others.

Throughout this text, you'll find integrated exercises that ask you to work actively with the concepts discussed in the text. These will help you personalize what you are reading.

Consider the following situations and rate them on a continuum from easy to difficult (use 1 for extremely easy and 5 for extremely difficult).

_____   **1.** Impressing a recruiter at a job fair.
_____   **2.** Asking a work supervisor to be friends on a social media site.

____ **3.** Breaking up a two-year romantic relationship because you've fallen out of love with your partner.

____ **4.** Responding to a compliment about the way you dress.

____ **5.** Reconnecting with a long-lost friend by phone.

____ **6.** Voicing an opinion about religion in class that is contrary to the opinions of all others in the class.

____ **7.** Crying at a movie you're attending with three or four same-sex friends.

____ **8.** Asking a relative to lie for you so you can get out of a family gathering.

____ **9.** Introducing yourself to a group of people who are culturally very different from you.

____ **10.** Asking an instructor for an extension on your term paper.

____ **11.** Making small talk with someone you don't know in an elevator.

____ **12.** Meeting someone face-to-face with whom you've interacted romantically online.

If you have the opportunity to compare your continuum with those of others, you'll probably find both similarities and differences. Reflecting on the easy-to-difficult interpersonal interactions will help you identify the skills you'd want to acquire or enhance as you make your varied interpersonal choices. Take a look at the first Interpersonal Choice Point, which also explains the feature's purpose and format.

Table 1.1 IN A NUTSHELL The Benefits of Studying Interpersonal Communication

At the end of each module, you'll find an "In a Nutshell" table that briefly summarizes the content of the section. Use these as convenient reviews, not as substitutes for reading the section.

Benefits	Applications
Personal	Friendships and romantic and family relationships depend heavily on your interpersonal communication competence to be successful.
Professional	Success in the workplace requires skillful use of verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as listening.
Personal and Professional Choices	The more you know about interpersonal communication, the larger your arsenal of skills will be from which reasonable and productive choices can be made.

The Elements of Interpersonal Communication

1.2 Define *interpersonal communication* and its essential elements including *source–receiver*, *messages*, *channels*, *noise*, *context*, *effects*, and *ethics*.

Although *this entire text* is, in a sense, a definition of interpersonal communication, a working definition is useful at the start. **Interpersonal communication** is *the verbal and nonverbal interaction between two (or sometimes more than two) interdependent people*. This relatively simple definition implies a variety of elements, which we discuss in this section. But first, let's look at some of the myths about interpersonal communication that can get in the way of a meaningful understanding and mastery of this area.

Examine your beliefs about interpersonal communication by responding to the following questions with T if you believe the statement is usually true or F if you believe the statement is usually false.

____ **1.** Good communicators are born, not made.

____ **2.** The more you communicate, the better you will be at it.

____ **3.** In your interpersonal communication, a good guide to follow is to be as open, empathic, and supportive as you can be.

____ **4.** When communicating with people from other cultures, it's best to ignore the differences and treat the other person just as you'd treat members of your own culture.

____   **5.** Fear of meeting new people is detrimental and must be eliminated.

____   **6.** When there is conflict, your relationship is in trouble.

As you probably figured out, all six statements are generally false. As you read, you'll discover not only why these beliefs are false but also the trouble you can get into when you assume they're true. For now, and in brief, here are some of the reasons each of the statements is generally false:

1. Effective communication is a learned skill; although some people are born brighter or more extroverted, everyone can improve their abilities and become more effective communicators.

2. It's not the amount of communication people engage in but the quality that matters; if you practice bad habits, you're more likely to grow less effective than more effective, so it's important to learn and follow the principles of effectiveness (Greene, 2003; Greene & Burleson, 2003).

3. Each interpersonal situation is unique, and therefore the type of communication appropriate in one situation may not be appropriate in another.

4. This assumption will probably get you into considerable trouble because people from different cultures often attribute different meanings to a message; members of different cultures also follow different rules for what is and is not appropriate in interpersonal communication.

5. Many people are nervous meeting new people, especially if these are people in authority; managing, not eliminating, the fear will enable you to become effective regardless of your current level of fear.

6. All meaningful relationships experience conflict; relationships are not in trouble when there is conflict, though dealing with conflict ineffectively can often damage the relationship.

The model presented in Figure 1.1 is designed to reflect the circular nature of interpersonal communication; both persons send messages simultaneously rather than in a linear sequence, where communication goes from Person 1 to Person 2 to Person 1 to Person 2 and on and on.

Each of the concepts identified in the model and discussed here may be thought of as a universal of interpersonal communication in that it is present in all interpersonal interactions: (1) source–receiver (including competence, encoding–decoding, and code-switching), (2) messages (and the metamessages of feedback and feedforward),
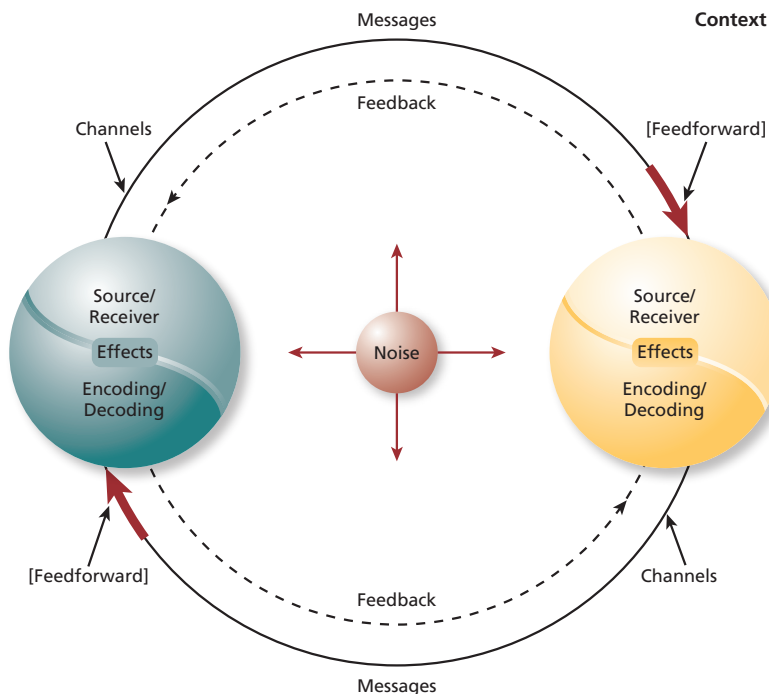
Figure 1.1 A Model of Interpersonal Communication

After you read the section on the elements of interpersonal communication, you may wish to construct your own model of the process. In constructing this model, be careful that you don't fall into the trap of visualizing interpersonal communication as a linear or simple left-to-right, static process. Remember that all elements are interrelated and interdependent. *After completing your model, consider, for example: (1) Could your model also serve as a model of intrapersonal communication (communication with oneself)? Is the model applicable to both face-to-face and online communication? (2) What elements or concepts other than those noted here might be added to the model?*

VIEWPOINTS

Interpersonal Metaphors

Each of the interior photos has a caption labeled Viewpoints, which relates the photo to the chapter material and asks for your own viewpoint. This feature asks for your active participation and should help to further personalize the chapter discussions.

Metaphors—figures of speech in which two unlike things are compared—are useful for providing different perspectives on interpersonal communication; they help you to look at interpersonal communication from different vantage points and help highlight different aspects of the interpersonal process. *How would you explain interpersonal communication in terms of metaphors such as a seesaw, a ball game, a television sitcom, a recliner, the weather, an opera, a good book, or a tug of war?*

(3) channels, (4) noise, (5) contexts, (6) effects, and (7) ethics (though not indicated in the diagram, ethics is an overriding consideration in all interpersonal communication).

Source–Receiver

Interpersonal communication involves at least two people; each is a **source–receiver**. Each individual performs source functions (formulates and sends messages) and also performs receiver functions (perceives and comprehends messages). The term source–receiver emphasizes that both functions are performed by each individual in interpersonal communication. This, of course, does not mean that people serve these functions equally. As you've no doubt witnessed, some people are (primarily) talkers and some people are (primarily) listeners. And some people talk largely about themselves, and others participate more in the give and take of communication. In an interesting analysis of Twitter messages, two major types of users were identified (Bersin, 2013; Dean, 2010a):

- *Informers* were those who shared information and also replied to others; these made up about 20 percent.
- *Meformers* were those who mainly gave out information about themselves; these made up about 80 percent.

Who you are, what you know, what you believe, what you value, what you want, what you have been told, and what your attitudes are all influence what you say, how you say it, what messages you receive, and how you receive them. Likewise, the person you're speaking to and the knowledge that you think that person has greatly influences your interpersonal messages (Lau, Chiu, & Hong, 2001). Each person is unique; each person's communications are unique.

To complicate matters just a bit, we need to recognize that although interpersonal communication may take place between two close friends, for example, there is generally what might be called a **remote audience**. For example, you tweet, post a Tik-Tok, or update your status on Facebook for your friends to see. This is your intended audience and the audience to whom you're directing your message. But, it's likely (even probable) that your prospective employers will also see this, as will others who may receive it from a member of your intended audience. These are your remote audiences. The important practical implication is to be aware of both your audiences and know that the dividing line between your intended and your remote audiences is getting thinner every day.

Interpersonal Competence   Your ability to communicate effectively (as source and receiver) is your interpersonal **competence** (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989; Wilson & Sabee, 2003). Your competence includes, for example, the knowledge that, in certain contexts and with certain listeners, one topic is appropriate and another isn't. Your knowledge about the rules of nonverbal behavior—for example, the appropriateness of touching, vocal volume, and physical closeness—is also part of your competence. In short, interpersonal competence includes knowing how to adjust your communication according to the context of the interaction, the person with whom you're interacting, and a host of other factors discussed throughout the chapters.

You learn communication competence much as you learn to eat with a knife and fork—by observing others, by explicit instruction, and by trial and error. Some individuals learn better than others, though, and these are generally the people with whom you find it interesting and comfortable to talk. They seem to know what to say and how and when to say it.

A positive relationship exists between interpersonal competence on the one hand and success in college and job satisfaction on the other (Rubin & Graham, 1988; Wertz, Sorenson, & Heeren, 1988). So much of college and professional life depends on interpersonal competence—meeting and interacting with other students, teachers, or colleagues; asking and answering questions; presenting information or argument—that you should not find this connection surprising. Interpersonal competence also enables you to develop and maintain meaningful relationships in friendship, love, family, and work. Such relationships, in turn, contribute to the lower levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness observed in interpersonally competent people (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989).

On-Screen Competence

Characters in television sitcoms or dramas are often excellent models to study for their effective or ineffective communication. *What characters in television sitcoms or dramas do you think demonstrate superior interpersonal competence? What characters demonstrate obvious interpersonal incompetence? What specifically do they say or do—or don't say or don't do—that leads you to judge them as being or not being interpersonally competent?*

Encoding–Decoding   **Encoding** refers to the act of producing messages—for example, speaking or writing. **Decoding** is the reverse and refers to the act of understanding messages—for example, listening or reading. By sending your ideas via sound waves (in the case of speech) or light waves (in the case of writing), you're putting these ideas into a code, hence *en*coding. By translating sound or light waves into ideas, you're taking them out of a code, hence *de*coding. Thus, speakers and writers are called encoders, and listeners and readers are called decoders. The term *encoding–decoding* is used to emphasize that the two activities are performed in combination by each participant. For interpersonal communication to occur, messages must be encoded and decoded. For example, when a parent talks to a child whose eyes are closed and whose ears are covered by stereo headphones, interpersonal communication does not occur, because the messages sent are not being received.

Code-Switching   Technically, code-switching refers to using more than one language in a conversation, often in the same sentence (Bullock & Toribio, 2012; Thompson, 2013; Esen, 2016). And so, a native Spanish speaker might speak most of a sentence in English and then insert a Spanish term or phrase. More popularly, however, **code-switching** refers to using different language styles depending on the situation (Nordquist, 2019). For example, you probably talk differently to a child than to an adult—in the topics you talk about and in the language you use. Similarly, when you text or tweet, you use a specialized language consisting of lots of abbreviations and acronyms that you discard when you write a college term paper or when you're interviewing for a job.

The ability to code-switch serves at least two very important purposes. First, it identifies you as one of the group; you are not an outsider. It's a way of bonding with the group. Second, it often helps in terms of making your meaning clearer; some things seem better expressed in one language or code than in another.

Code-switching can create problems, however. When used to ingratiate yourself or make yourself seem one of the group when you really aren't—and that attempt is obvious to the group members—code-switching is likely to work against you.

The Interpersonal Choice Point feature is designed to help you apply the chapter criteria to real-life situations by first considering your available choices and then making a communication decision. For each choice point, try to identify, as specifically as possible, the advantages and disadvantages of your available choices. All choices involve both positives and negatives. Your task is to examine as many choices as you can and select the one that you feel is likely to work best for you. Note that the choices presented in these choice points are not exhaustive; there are always "other" choices that are possible and that you might want to consider.

You're starting a new interpersonal communication course online, with in-person classes to come later. *You want to appear likeable and approachable online; what might you do to communicate this?*

a. Keep your webcam on and be alert.

b. Engage directly in breakout discussions with other students.

c. Only communicate via texts in impeccably polite formal English.

d. Make jokes about your lecturer during the class.

e. Other

You risk being seen as an interloper, as one who tries to gain entrance to a group to which you really don't belong. The other case where code-switching creates problems is when you use the code appropriate to one type of communication to one where it really doesn't belong; for example, when you use your social media grammar during a job interview. Communication competence, then, involves the ability to code-switch when it's appropriate—when it makes your message clearer and when it's genuine.

Messages

Messages are signals that serve as stimuli for a receiver and are received by one of our senses—auditory (hearing), visual (seeing), tactile (touching), olfactory (smelling), gustatory (tasting), or any combination of these senses. You communicate interpersonally by gesture and touch as well as by words and sentences. The clothes you wear communicate to others and, in fact, to yourself as well. The way you walk communicates, as does the way you shake hands, tilt your head, comb your hair, sit, smile, or frown. Similarly, the colors and types of cell phones, the wallpaper and screen savers on your computer, and even the type and power of your computer communicate messages about you. The photo and background theme you choose for your Twitter page reveals something about yourself beyond what your actual tweets reveal. Tweeters with the generic white bird photo and standard background communicate something quite different from the Tweeters who customize their pages with clever photos, original backgrounds, and sidebars. The same is true of Facebook pages. All of these signals are your interpersonal communication messages.

Interpersonal communication can take place by phone, through prison cell walls, through webcams, or face-to-face. Increasingly, it's taking place through computers, through the various social media sites. Some of these messages are exchanged in real time. This is **synchronous communication**; the messages are sent and received at the same time, as in face-to-face and phone messages. Other messages do not take place in real time. This is **asynchronous communication**; the messages are sent at one time and received at another and perhaps responded to at still another time. For example, you might comment on someone's post today, but that person may not see it until tomorrow and may not poke you back until the next day. Similarly, you might find a tweet or a blog post today that was actually written weeks or even years ago.

Messages may be intentional or unintentional. They may result from the most carefully planned strategy as well as from the unintentional slip of the tongue, lingering body odor, or nervous twitch. Messages may refer to the world, people, and events, as well as to other messages (DeVito, 2003a).

Messages that are about other messages are called **metamessages** and represent many of your everyday communications; they include, for example, "Do you understand?," "Did I say that right?," "What did you say?," "Is it fair to say that . . . ?," "I want to be honest," "That's not logical." Two particularly important types of metamessages are feedback and feedforward.

Feedback Messages   Throughout the interpersonal communication process, you exchange feedback—messages sent back to the speaker concerning reactions to what is said (Sutton, Hornsey, & Douglas, 2012). **Feedback** tells the speakers what effect they are having on listeners. On the basis of this feedback, the speaker may adjust, modify, strengthen, deemphasize, or change the content or form of the messages.

Feedback may come from yourself or from others. When you send a message—say, in speaking to another person—you also hear yourself. That is, you get feedback from your own messages: You hear what you say, you feel the way you move, you see what you write. In addition to this self-feedback, you get feedback from others. This feedback can take many forms. A frown or a smile, a yea or a nay, a pat on the back, or a punch in the mouth are all types of feedback.

Feedback, of course, has significant effects on the receiver. For example, in one study, positive feedback on social networking sites—complimenting, say, the photo or profile—enhanced self-esteem and the sense of well-being, whereas negative feedback (criticism, for example) resulted in a decrease in self-esteem and well-being (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006).

Feedforward Messages   **Feedforward** is information you provide before sending your primary message (Richards, 1968). Feedforward reveals something about the message to come. Examples of feedforward include the preface or table of contents of a book, the opening paragraph of a chapter or post, movie previews, magazine covers, e-mail subject headings, and introductions in public speeches.

Feedforward may serve a variety of functions. For example, you might use feedforward to express your wish to chat a bit, saying something like "Hey, I haven't seen you the entire week; what's been going on?" Or you might give a brief preview of your main message by saying something like "You'd better sit down for this; you're going to be shocked." Or you might ask others to hear you out before they judge you.

Channel

The communication **channel** is the medium through which messages pass. It's a kind of bridge connecting source and receiver. Communication rarely takes place over only one channel; two, three, or four channels are often used simultaneously. For example, in face-to-face interaction, you speak and listen (vocal–auditory channel), but you also gesture and receive signals visually (gestural–visual channel), and you emit odors and smell those of others (chemical–olfactory channel). Often, you communicate through touch (cutaneous–tactile channel). When you communicate online, you often send photo, audio, or video files in the same message or links to additional files and sites. In most situations, a variety of channels are involved.

Another way to think about channels is to consider them as the means of communication: for example, face-to-face contact, telephone, e-mail and snail mail, Twitter, instant messaging, news postings, Facebook, film, television, radio, smoke signals, or fax—to name only some.

Note that the channel imposes different restrictions on your message construction. For example, in e-mail you can pause to think of the right word or phrase, you can go on for as short or as long a time as you want without any threat of interruption or

contradiction, and you can edit your message with ease. In face-to-face communication, your pauses need to be relatively short. You don't have the time to select just the right word or to edit, though we do edit a bit when we review what we said and put it in different words.

In *The Interpersonal Communication Book*, face-to-face communication and online/social media communication are integrated for a number of important reasons:

1. **It's the way we communicate today.** We interact face-to-face and online. Some interactions are likely exclusively face-to-face, while others are exclusively online. Increasingly, our interactions are with people with whom we communicate both online and offline. And during the coronavirus pandemic, the reliance on online communication became even more important and more widespread—with virtual business meetings, virtual medical exams, and virtual visits with friends and relatives.

2. **Online and offline communication are related.** The research and theory discussed here on face-to-face and on online communication inform each other. Most of the interpersonal theories discussed here were developed for face-to-face interaction but have much to say about online relationships as well.

3. **Employers expect employees to have both offline and online communication skill sets.** The ability to communicate orally and in writing (both online and offline) is consistently ranked among the most important qualities employers are looking for in new employees. For example, your employability will depend in great part on how effectively you communicate in your e-mails, in your phone conferences, in your Skype interviews, and in your in-person interviews.

4. **Both forms of communication are vital to current-day communication.** We increasingly develop and maintain relationships online with many of them, moving to face-to-face interactions if the online interaction proves satisfying. And increasingly, relationships are dissolved through e-mail and Facebook and Twitter posts.

Throughout the chapters, face-to-face and online communication are discussed, compared, and contrasted. Table 1.2 presents a brief summary of some communication concepts and some of the ways in which these two forms of communication are similar and different.

Noise

Technically, **noise** is anything that distorts a message—anything that prevents the receiver from receiving the message as the sender sent it. At one extreme, noise may prevent a message from getting from source to receiver. A roaring noise or line static can easily prevent entire messages from getting through to your receiver. At the other extreme, with virtually no noise interference, the message of the source and the message received are almost identical. Most often, however, noise distorts some portion of the message a source sends as it travels to a receiver. Four types of noise (**physical noise**, **physiological noise**, **psychological noise**, and **semantic noise**) are especially relevant and will help you identify sources of noise you'd want to lessen.

- **Physical noise** is interference that impedes the physical transmission of the signal or message. Examples include the screeching of passing cars, the hum of a computer, sunglasses, extraneous messages, illegible handwriting, blurred type or fonts that are too small or difficult to read, misspellings and poor grammar, and pop-up ads. A recent addition to this list is, of course, the facial mask that muffles and distorts the sounds and at the same time prevents the nonverbal signals normally communicated by facial expressions from being seen—much like sunglasses hide eye movements.

Table 1.2 Face-to-Face and Online Communication

	Face-to-Face Communication	Online Communication
Sender		
• Presentation of self and impression management	• Personal characteristics (sex, approximate age, race, etc.) are open to visual inspection; receiver controls the order of what is attended to; disguise is difficult.	• Personal characteristics are hidden and are revealed when you want to reveal them; anonymity is easy.
• Speaking turn	• You compete for the speaker's turn and time with the other person(s); you can be interrupted.	• It's always your turn; speaker time is unlimited; you can't be interrupted.
Receiver		
• Number	• One or a few who are in your visual field.	• Virtually unlimited.
• Opportunity for interaction	• Limited to those who have the opportunity to meet; often difficult to find people who share your interests.	• Unlimited.
• Third parties	• Messages can be overheard by or repeated to third parties but not with complete accuracy.	• Messages can be retrieved by others or forwarded verbatim to a third party or to thousands.
• Impression formation	• Impressions are based on the verbal and nonverbal cues the receiver perceives.	• Impressions are based on text messages and posted photos and videos.
Context		
• Physical	• Essentially the same physical space.	• Can be in the next cubicle or separated by miles.
• Temporal	• Communication is synchronous; messages are exchanged at the same (real) time.	• Communication may be synchronous (as in chat rooms) or asynchronous (where messages are exchanged at different times, as in e-mail).
Channel		
	• All senses participate in sending and receiving messages.	• Visual (for text, photos, and videos) and auditory.
Message		
• Verbal and nonverbal	• Words, gestures, eye contact, accent, vocal cues, spatial relationships, touching, clothing, hair, etc.	• Words, photos, videos, and audio messages.
• Permanence	• Temporary unless recorded; speech signals fade rapidly.	• Messages are relatively permanent.

Still another type of physical noise is extraneous information that makes what you want to find more difficult; for example, spam or too many photos on Facebook.

- **Physiological noise** is created by barriers within the sender or receiver, such as visual impairments, hearing loss, articulation problems, and memory loss.
- **Psychological noise** is mental interference in the speaker or listener and includes preconceived ideas, wandering thoughts, biases and prejudices, closed-mindedness, and extreme emotionalism. You're likely to run into psychological noise when you talk with someone who is closed-minded or who refuses to listen to anything they don't already believe.
- **Semantic noise** is interference that occurs when the speaker and listener have different meaning systems; examples include language or dialectical differences, the use of jargon or overly complex terms, and ambiguous or overly abstract terms whose meanings can be easily misinterpreted. You see this type of noise regularly in the medical doctor who uses "medicalese" without explanation or in the insurance salesperson who speaks in the jargon of the insurance industry.

A useful concept in understanding noise and its importance in communication, which comes from electrical engineering, is **signal-to-noise ratio** (Altunian, 2019). **Signal** refers to information that you find useful; *noise* refers to information that is useless (to you). For example, a blog post that contains lots of useful information would be high on signal and low on noise. Messages that contain lots of useless information are high on noise and low on signal; spam, pop-ups, and advertisements for products you're not interested in are good examples. When you do an online search for information, the advertisements and the irrelevant sites are noise; the information you're looking for is the signal.

All communications contain noise. Noise cannot be totally eliminated, but its effects can be reduced. Making your language more precise, sharpening your skills for sending and receiving nonverbal messages, and improving your listening and feedback skills are some ways to combat the influence of noise.

Signal and Noise Online

Social media users are advised to be brief in their profiles and even in responding (Conniff & Nicks, 2014). Similarly, recruiters find that too much information on, say, Facebook, detracts from the candidate's résumé (Doyle, 2019). *How would you explain this in terms of* signal *and* noise?

Context

Communication always takes place in a **context** or environment that influences the form and content of your messages. At times this context isn't obvious or intrusive; it seems so natural that it's ignored—like background music. At other times the context dominates, and the ways in which it restricts or stimulates your messages are obvious. Compare, for example, the differences among communicating in a funeral home, football stadium, formal restaurant, and a rock concert. The context of communication has at least four dimensions, all of which interact with and influence each other.

Physical Dimension   The *physical dimension* is the tangible or concrete environment in which communication takes place—the room, hallway, or park; the boardroom; or the family dinner table. The size of the space, its temperature, and the number of people present in the physical space are also part of the physical dimension. In print media, such as magazines or newspapers, context includes the positioning of stories and news articles; an article on page 37 is identified as less important than an article on page 1 or 2. Twitter's restriction of messages to 280 characters or fewer is an especially good example of the physical dimension influencing the message; Twitter requires you to abbreviate your message, while having coffee at Starbucks seems to encourage the opposite. The physical dimension also includes the distance between or among communicators; the six-feet social distancing people were advised to maintain so as not to spread the coronavirus versus the closeness of communicators in normal times make for very different interactions.

Temporal Dimension   The *temporal dimension* has to do not only with the time of day and moment in history but also with where a particular message fits into the sequence of communication events. For example, a joke about illness told immediately after the disclosure of a friend's sickness will be received differently than the same joke told in response to a series of similar jokes. Also, some channels (for example, face-to-face, chat rooms, and instant messaging) allow for synchronous communication in which messages are sent and received simultaneously. Other channels (for example, letter writing, e-mail, and social networking postings) are asynchronous; messages are sent and received at different times.

Social–Psychological Dimension   The *social–psychological dimension* includes, for example, status relationships among the participants; roles and games that people play; norms of the society or group; and the friendliness, formality, or gravity of the situation. Social networks such as Facebook are informal and largely for fun communication; LinkedIn and Plaxo, on the other hand, are primarily for serious, business-oriented communication.

Cultural Dimension   The *cultural context* includes the cultural beliefs and customs of the people communicating. When you interact with people from different cultures, you may each follow different rules of communication. This can result in confusion, unintentional insult, inaccurate judgments, and a host of other miscommunications. Similarly, communication strategies or techniques that prove satisfying to members of one culture may prove disturbing or offensive to members of another. In fact, research shows that you lose more information in an intercultural situation (approximately 50 percent) than in an intracultural situation (approximately 25 percent) (Li, 1999).

Effects

Interpersonal communication always has some **effect** on one or more persons involved in the communication act. For every interpersonal interaction, there is some consequence, some effect. Generally, three types of effects are distinguished.