

# Basic Concepts of Human Communication

## M.A.III<sup>rd</sup> Semester ,Paper-II Unit-I

Human communication, or Anthropos miotics, is the field dedicated to understanding how humans communicate. Human communication is grounded in cooperative and shared intentions.

Humans have communication abilities that other animals do not. Being able to communicate aspects like time and place as though they were solid objects are a few examples. It is said that humans communicate to request help, to inform others, and to share attitudes as a way of bonding.<sup>[1]</sup> Communication is a joint activity which largely depends on the ability to keep common attention, to share the relevant background knowledge and joint experience in order to get the content across and make sense in the exchanges.

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### Types

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Human communication can be subdivided into a variety of types:

- Intrapersonal communication (communication with oneself)
- Interpersonal communication (communication between two or more people)
  - Nonverbal communication
  - Speech
  - Conversation
  - Visual communication
  - Writing
  - Mail
  - Mass media
  - Telecommunication
- Organizational communication (communication within organizations)
- Mass communication
- Group dynamics (communication within groups)
- Cross-cultural communication (communication across cultures)

## **Concept of Communication:**

### **Communication might be defined as follows:**

Communication might be defined as the transfer of – facts, information, ideas, suggestions, orders, requests, grievances etc. from one person to another so as to impart a complete understanding of the subject matter of communication to the recipient thereof; the desired response from the recipient to such communication.

Some popular definitions of communication are given below:

(1) “Communication is a way that one organisation member shares meaning and understanding with another.” -Koontz and O’Donnell

(2) “Communication is the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another.” -Keith Davis

(3) “Communication is the sum of the things one person does when he wants to create understanding in the mind of another. It is a bridge of meaning. It involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening and understanding.” Louis A. Allen

### **Features of Communication:**

On the basis of the above definitions and the surrounding knowledge, we can gather the following salient features of the concept of communication:

(i) Communication is necessary and required in all managerial functions. However, it is an integral part of the directing process; and assumes greater significance at the directing stage.

(ii) Communication is a function of every manager. Hence, it is a pervasive managerial function. All managers would have to make necessary

communications to their subordinates, and get a feedback to their communications from the latter.

(iii) Communication is a continuous process, throughout the organisational life. It is the basis of organisational functioning. "No communication; no functioning of the organisation." thus goes an old managerial adage (proverb).

(iv) Communication is a complete and rational process; only when the recipient of the message has understanding of the subject matter of communication. Communication is, in fact, a transmission of understanding from the sender to the recipient of the message – something, which is an imperative requirement from the human relations perspective, of communication.

(v) Communication usually is and ought to be a two-way process. This emphasizes on the feedback aspect of communication i.e. the sender of the message must get the necessary response (or reaction) of the recipient to the communication made to him.

(vi) Communication is always done with a purpose i.e. with the objective of evoking the desired response out of the recipient, to the communication made. For example, if the communication is a work-order by the superior to some subordinate; the latter must comply with the order – undertaking the necessary actions for the implementation of the order

(vii) Communication process requires, at least, two parties' sender of message and the recipient of it. Naturally, one person would not make any communication to the self.

(viii) Communication is a circular process. Its process starts with the sender of the message and travelling through various stages completes with a feedback to communication from the recipient to the sender.

### **Process of Communication:**

**The process of communication consists of the following steps or stages:**

***(i) Message:***

This is the background step to the process of communication; which, by forming the subject matter of communication necessitates the start of a communication process. The message might be a factor an idea, or a request or a suggestion, or an order or a grievance.

***(ii) Sender:***

The actual process of communication is initiated at the hands of the sender; who takes steps to send the message to the recipient.

***(iii) Encoding:***

Encoding means giving a form and meaning to the message through expressing it into – words, symbol, gestures, graph, drawings etc.

***(iv) Medium:***

It refers to the method or channel, through which the message is to be conveyed to the recipient. For example, an oral communication might be made through a peon or over the telephone etc.; while a written communication might be routed through a letter or a notice displayed on the notice board etc.

***(v) Recipient (or the Receiver):***

Technically, a communication is complete, only when it comes to the knowledge of the intended person i.e. the recipient or the receiver.

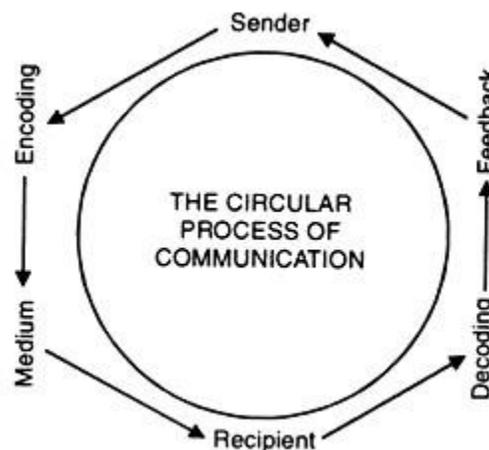
***(vi) Decoding:***

Decoding means the interpretation of the message by the recipient – with a view to getting the meaning of the message, as per the intentions of the sender. It is at this stage in the communication process, that communication is philosophically defined as, ‘the transmission of understanding.’

***(vii) Feedback:***

To complete the communication process, sending feedback to communication, by the recipient to the sender is imperative. ‘Feedback’ implies the reaction or response of the recipient to the message, comprised in the communication.

All told, communication is a circular process, as illustrated, by means of the following circular diagram:



**Principles of Communication:**

In order to be effective and meaningful, the managerial function of communication must be guided by the following principles:

***(i) Principle of Understanding:***

Communication must be such, as transmits understanding of the communication message to the recipient as per the intentions of the sender. A practical application of this principle requires that the message must be clearly expressed whether made orally or in writing.

Further, the message must be complete – leaving no scope for any doubts likely to confuse the recipient and compel him towards a misinterpretation of the message.

***(ii) Principle of Attention:***

Communication must be made in such a manner, that it invites the attention of the recipient to it. For a practical application of this principle, it is imperative that not only must the message be expressed in a pleasant and sound manner; but also the purpose of the sender in making communication, must be absolutely clarified.

***(iii) Principle of Brevity:***

The message to be communicated must be brief; as usually the recipient, specially an executive, would not have much time to devote to a single piece of communication. However, brevity of the message must not be sought at the cost of clarity or completeness of the message. The sender must strike a balance among these three factors -brevity, clarity and completeness.

***(iv) The Principle of Timeliness:***

The communication must be timely i.e. it must be made at the high time, when needed to be communicated to the recipient. An advance communication carries with it the danger of ‘forgetting’, on the part of the recipient; while a delayed communication loses its purpose and charm, and becomes meaningless, when the right time for action on it has expired.

***(v) The Principle of Appropriateness (Or Rationality):***

The communication must be appropriate or rational, in the context of the realization of organizational objectives. Communication must be neither

impracticable to act upon; nor irrational, making no contribution to common objectives.

***(vi) Principle of Feedback:***

Communication must be a two-way process. The feedback (or reaction or response) of the recipient to the message, must be as easily transferable to the sender, as the original communication made by the sender.

The idea behind emphasizing on the feedback aspect of communication is that it helps the sender to modify his subsequent communications in view of the reactions of the recipient – making for better and improved human relations.

***(vii) Principle of the Constructive and Strategic Use of Informal Groups:***

The management must not hesitate in making a constructive and strategic use of informal groups, for ensuring and facilitating speedier communication in emergency situations. Such a use of informal groups would also help develop good human relations by upgrading the status of informal groups and their leaders.

However, management must assure itself that rumors are not spread by informal groups and for this, a guard over the manner of functioning of informal groups, while transmitting a formal communication, is but imperative.

**Types of Communication – Formal and Informal:**

Communication, very broadly, is classified into the following two categories:

**(a) Formal communication**

**(b) Informal communication**

Formal communication is that, which takes place in an enterprise, in a formal manner via the scalar chain or the line of command.

This type of communication has the following variations:

**(1) Downward communication**

**(2) Upward communication**

**(3) Sideward (or horizontal) communication**

***(1) Downward Communication:***

Downward communication moves downwards in an organisation, from the top management to middle and lower level managements travelling via various links in the scalar chain. Such communication is imperative for organisational purposes.

Mostly it consists of communicating plans and policies of the enterprise to lower level managers; and in particular, issuing orders and instructions to subordinates, for initiating action according to these for execution of assigned jobs.

***(2) Upward Communication:***

This type of formal communication is really a feedback to downward communication. Upward communication proceeds upwards in an organisation from the lower level management to middle and upper levels of management, travelling via various links, in the scalar chain.

Upward communication, usually, takes the following forms:

(i) Reports by subordinates to superiors on work-performance

(ii) Grievances, problems or difficulties of subordinates forwarded to superiors, at appropriate levels.

(iii) Suggestions and ideas of subordinates to upper management, for kind consideration and appropriate implementation.

(iv) Clarifications sought by subordinates from superiors as to the orders and instructions issued by the latter (i.e. superiors).

***(3) Sideward (Or Horizontal) Communication:***

This type of formal communication takes place among managers, placed at the same rank, in the organisation. It is necessary for achieving co-ordination of actions of individuals, doing the similar type of work, under managers of equal ranks.

For example, a communication between two assistant production managers is an instance of horizontal communication. Sideward communication, might take place through the 'gang-plank', as suggested by Fayol; or through the scalar chain, in a hierarchical manner.

**(b) Informal communication:**

Informal communication, also called grapevine communication, takes place through informal groups, existing inside or outside the formal organizational structure. This communication has no formal manner of routing. It might spread from any person to any person, in any manner and in any direction, like the structuring of a grapevine.

## Major Elements of Communication Process

Seven major elements of communication process are:

(1) sender

(2) ideas

(3) encoding

(4) communication channel

(5) receiver

(6) decoding and

(7) feedback.

### **(1) Sender:**

The person who intends to convey the message with the intention of passing information and ideas to others is known as sender or communicator.

### **(2) Ideas:**

This is the subject matter of the communication. This may be an opinion, attitude, feelings, views, orders, or suggestions.

### **(3) Encoding:**

Since the subject matter of communication is theoretical and intangible, its further passing requires use of certain symbols such as words, actions or

pictures etc. Conversion of subject matter into these symbols is the process of encoding.

***(4) Communication Channel:***

The person who is interested in communicating has to choose the channel for sending the required information, ideas etc. This information is transmitted to the receiver through certain channels which may be either formal or informal.

***5) Receiver:***

Receiver is the person who receives the message or for whom the message is meant for. It is the receiver who tries to understand the message in the best possible manner in achieving the desired objectives.

***(6) Decoding:***

The person who receives the message or symbol from the communicator tries to convert the same in such a way so that he may extract its meaning to his complete understanding.

Principles of Communication

Following principles of communication make it more effective:

***1. Principle of Clarity:***

The idea or message to be communicated should be clearly spelt out. It should be worded in such a way that the receiver understands the same thing which the sender wants to convey. There should be no ambiguity in the message. It should be kept in mind that the words do not speak themselves but the speaker gives them the meaning. A clear message will evoke the same response from the other party. It is also essential that the receiver is conversant with the language, inherent assumptions, and the mechanics of communication.

## ***2. Principle of Attention:***

In order to make communication effective, the receiver's attention should be drawn towards message. People are different in behaviour, attention, emotions etc. so they may respond differently to the message. Subordinates should act similarly as per the contents of the message. The acts of a superior also draw the attention of subordinates and they may follow what they observe. For example, if a superior is very punctual in coming to the office then subordinates will also develop such habits. It is said that 'actions speak louder than words.

## ***3. Principle of Feedback:***

The principle of feedback is very important to make the communication effective. There should be a feedback information from the recipient to know whether he has understood the message in the same sense in which the sender has meant it.

## ***4. Principle of Informality:***

Formal communication is generally used for transmitting messages and other information. Sometimes formal communication may not achieve the desired results, informal communication may prove effective in such situations. Management should use informal communication for assessing the reaction of employees towards various policies. Senior management may informally convey certain decisions to the employees for getting their feedback. So this principle states that informal communication is as important as formal communication.

## ***5. Principle of Consistency:***

This principle states that communication should always be consistent with the policies, plans, programmes and objectives of the organization and not in

conflict with them. If the messages and communications are in conflict with the policies and programmes then there will be confusion in the minds of subordinates and they may not implement them properly. Such a situation will be detrimental to the interests of the organization.

### ***6. Principle of Timeliness:***

This principle states that communication should be done at proper time so that it helps in implementing plans. Any delay in communication may not serve any purpose rather decisions become of historical importance only.

### ***7. Principle of Adequacy:***

The information communicated should be adequate and complete in all respects. Inadequate information may delay action and create confusion. Inadequate information also affects efficiency of the receiver. So adequate information is essential for taking proper decisions and making action plans.

Steps for Effective Communication: 10 Steps

Article shared by : **Venkatesh**

Effective communication is a good business and very essential for the success of an organization. Communication takes place when one person transfers information and understanding to another person. An effective communication is one which is followed by the receiver of the message and his reaction or response is known to the sender. It is a two-way process. It may not be possible to achieve perfect communication.

The following steps may be taken to minimize barriers to communication and making it more effective:

### *1. Clarity and Completeness:*

In order to communicate effectively, it is very essential to know the 'audience' for whom the message is meant. The message to be conveyed must be absolutely clear in the mind of the communicator because if you do not understand an idea, you can never express it to someone. The message should be adequate and appropriate to the purpose of communication. The purpose of communication, itself, should be clearly defined.

### *2. Proper Language:*

To avoid semantic barriers, the message should be expressed in simple, brief and clear language. The words or symbols selected for conveying the message must be appropriate to the reference and understanding of the receiver.

### *3. Sound Organization Structure:*

To make communication effective, the organizational structure must be sound and appropriate to the needs of the organization. Attempt must be made to shorten the distances to be travelled for conveying information.

### *4. Orientation of Employees:*

The employees should be oriented to understand the objectives, rules, policies, authority relationships and operations of enterprise. It will help to understand each other, minimize conflicts and distortion of messages.

### *5. Emphatic Listening and Avoid Premature Evaluation:*

To communicate effectively, one should be a good listener. Superiors should develop the habit of patient listening and avoid premature evaluation of communication from their subordinates. This will encourage free flow of upward communication.

#### *6. Motivation and Mutual Confidence:*

The message to be communicated should be so designed as to motivate the receiver to influence his behaviour to take the desired action. A sense of mutual trust and confidence must be generated to promote free flow of information.

#### *7. Consistent Behaviour:*

To avoid credibility gap, management must ensure that their actions and deeds are in accordance with their communication.

#### *8. Use of Grapevine:*

Grapevine or the informal channels of communication help to improve managerial decisions and make communication more effective. Thus, formal channels of communication must be supplemented with the use of grapevine.

#### *9. Feedback:*

Communication is not complete unless the response or reaction of the receiver of the message is obtained by the communicator. The effectiveness of communication can be judged from the feedback. Therefore, feedback must be encouraged and analyzed.

#### *10. Gestures and Tone:*

The way you say something is also very important along with the message for gestures such as a twinkle of an eye, a smile or a handshake, etc., convey sometimes more meaning than even words spoken or written. Thus, one should have appropriate facial expression, tone, gestures and mood, etc. to make communication effective.

## Communication accommodation theory

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Communication accommodation theory (CAT) is a theory of communication developed by Howard Giles. This theory concerns "(1) the behavioral changes that people make to attune their communication to their partner, (2) the extent to which people perceive their partner as appropriately attuning to them."<sup>[1]</sup> The basis of the theory lies in the idea that people adjust (or accommodate) their style of speech to one another. Doing this helps the message sender gain approval from the receiver, increases efficiency in communication between both parties, and helps the sender maintain a positive social identity. This theory is concerned with the links between language, context, and identity.<sup>[2][3]</sup> It focuses on both the intergroup and interpersonal factors that lead to accommodation, as well as the ways that power, macro and micro-context concerns affect communication behaviors.<sup>[3]</sup> Accommodation is usually considered to be between the message sender and the message receiver, but the communicator also often accommodates to a larger audience- either a group of people that are watching the interaction or society in general.

"Communication accommodation theorists focus on the patterns of convergence and divergence of communication behaviors, particularly as they relate to people's goals for social approval, communication efficiency, and identity".<sup>[4]</sup> "Convergence" refers to strategies through which individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviors to reduce these social differences.<sup>[5]</sup> Meanwhile, "divergence" refers to the instances in which individuals accentuate the speech and non-verbal differences between themselves and their interlocutors.<sup>[5]</sup> The speech accommodation theory was developed to demonstrate all of the value of social psychological concepts to understanding the dynamics of speech.<sup>[5]</sup> It sought to explain "... the motivations underlying certain shifts in people's speech styles during social encounters and some of the social consequences arising from them."<sup>[3]</sup> Particularly, it focused on the cognitive and affective processes underlying individuals' convergence and divergence through speech. The communication accommodation theory has broadened this theory to include not only speech but also the "non-verbal and discursive dimensions of social interaction".<sup>[5]</sup> CAT has also created a different perspective from other research in language and social interaction—and communication more

generally—that focuses on either interpersonal or intergroup communication.<sup>[4]</sup>

## **Social psychology and social identity theory[edit]**

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Like speech accommodation theory, communication accommodation theory continues to draw from social psychology, particularly from four main socio-psychology theories: similarity-attraction, social exchange, causal attribution and intergroup distinctiveness. These theories help to explain why speakers seek to converge or diverge from the language, dialect, accent and behavior of their interlocutors. CAT also relies heavily in social identity theory. This latter theory argues that a person's self-concept comprises a personal identity and a social identity, and that this social identity is based in comparisons people make between in-groups (groups they belong to) and out-groups (groups they do not belong to).<sup>[6]</sup> According to social identity theory, people strive to maintain a positive social identity by either joining groups where they feel more comfortable or making a more positive experience of belonging to the groups they already belong to. Since speech is a way to express group membership, people adopt convergence or divergence in communication to "signal a salient group distinctiveness, so as to reinforce a social identity".<sup>[3]</sup> Communication accommodation thus, becomes a tool to emphasize group distinctiveness in a positive way, and strengthen the individual's social identity. There are four main socio-psychological theories:

### **Similarity-attraction**

Similarity-attraction is one of the biggest contributors to the theory of Communication Accommodation. The similarity-attraction theory posits that "The more similar our attitudes and beliefs are to those of others, the more likely it is for them to be attracted to us."<sup>[7]</sup> Convergence through verbal and non-verbal communication is one of the mechanisms that we can use to become more similar to others, increasing their attraction towards us.<sup>[7]</sup> For this reason, it can be said that one of the factors that leads individuals to use convergence is a desire to obtain social approval from their interlocutor.<sup>[8]</sup> It could hence be concluded that "the greater one's need for social approval, the greater will be one's tendency to converge".<sup>[7]</sup> Natalé (1975), for instance, has found that speakers with high needs for approval converge more to another's vocal intensity and pause length than those with low needs for approval.<sup>[8]</sup> An individual on the receiving end of high level of accommodation is likely to develop a greater sense of self-esteem and satisfaction than being a receiver of low accommodation.

### **Social exchange process [edit]**

The social exchange process theory "... states that prior to acting, we attempt to assess the rewards and costs of alternate courses of action",<sup>[8]</sup> and that we tend to choose whatever course of action will bring greater rewards and less costs. The Social Exchange Theory is a theory that looks at how people evaluate their relationships. Throughout the process of evaluating relationships, individuals want to feel as if they are receiving more from the relationship than they are expending within the relationship. In other words, people like to be in relationships where the rewards outweigh the costs. Although most often convergence can bring forth rewards, there are some occasions when it can also bring forth costs such as "increased effort to converge, a loss of perceived integrity and personal (and sometimes group) identity".<sup>[7]</sup> Hence, when choosing whether or not to use convergence, people assess these costs and rewards.<sup>[7]</sup>

### **Causal attribution process[edit]**

The causal attribution theory "[s]uggests that we interpret other people's behavior, and evaluate the individual themselves, in terms of the motivations and intentions that we attribute as the cause of their behavior"<sup>[8]</sup> It applies to convergence in that convergence might be viewed positively or negatively depending on the causes we attribute to it: "Although interpersonal convergence is generally favorably received, and non-convergence generally unfavorably received, the extent to which this holds true will undoubtedly be influenced by the listeners attributions of the speaker's intent."<sup>[7]</sup> Giles and Smith provide the example of an experiment that they conducted amongst French and English speaking Canadians to illustrate this. In this experiment, when individuals believed that the person from the different group used language convergence to reduce cultural barriers, they evaluated it more positively than when they attributed it to the pressures of the situation. "When French Canadian listeners attributed an English Canadian's convergence to French as due to his desire to break down cultural barriers, the shift was viewed favorably. However, when this same behavior was attributed to pressures in the situation forcing the other to converge, positive feelings were not so strongly evoked."<sup>[8]</sup>

### **Intergroup distinctiveness[edit]**

The process of intergroup distinctiveness, as theorized by Tajfel argues, "... when members of different groups are in contact, they compare themselves on dimensions that are important to them, such as personal attributes,

abilities, material possessions and so forth."<sup>[8]</sup> In these "intergroup social comparisons" individuals seek to find ways to make themselves positively distinct from the out-group to enhance their social identity.<sup>[7]</sup> Because speech style and language is an important factor in defining social groups, divergence in speech style or language is often used to maintain intergroup distinctiveness and differentiate from the out-group, especially when group membership is a salient issue or the individual's identity and group membership is being threatened.<sup>[8]</sup>

## **Assumptions**

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Many of the principles and concepts from social identity theory are also applicable to communication accommodation theory. Under the influence of social psychology, especially social identity theory, communication accommodation theory are guided by mainly four assumptions.

- There are speech and behavioral similarities and dissimilarities in all conversations.
- The way we perceive the speech and behaviors of another determines our evaluation of the conversation.
- Language and behaviors have the ability to communicate social status and group belonging between people in a conversation.
- Norms guide the accommodation process, which varies in its degree of appropriateness.<sup>[6]</sup>

The first assumption indicates that people bring their past experience to conversations. Therefore, communication is influenced by situational conditions and initial reactions but also the "social-historical context in which the interaction is embedded".<sup>[9]</sup> People's attitudes and beliefs, derived from those factors, determine the extent to which they are willing to accommodate in a conversation. The more similarities that they share with each other, the more likely for them to accommodate.

The second assumption is concerned with how people perceive and evaluate a conversation. Perception is "the process of attending to and interpreting a message",<sup>[6]</sup> and evaluation is the "process of judging a conversation".<sup>[6]</sup> Someone who enters a conversation usually first observes what takes place and then decides whether he should adjust to fit in. However, the decision about accommodation is not always necessary. If two strangers meet, they may have a random small talk and simply say goodbye. Then,

neither of them is likely to evaluate the conversation since they have little chance of meeting again.

The importance of language and behavior is illustrated in the third assumption since they are indicators of social status and group belongings. When two people who speak different languages try to have a conversation, the language used is more likely to be the one used by the higher status person. That idea of "salient social membership"<sup>[9]</sup> negotiation is illustrated well during an interview as the interviewee usually makes all efforts to identify with the interviewer by accommodating the way that is spoken and behaved to raise the chance of getting the job.

The last assumption puts emphasis on social appropriateness and norms. Here, norms are defined as " expectations of behaviors that individuals feel should or should not occur in a conversation".<sup>[6]</sup> Those expectations give guidance to people's behaviors, helping them to figure out the appropriate way to accommodate. Most of the time, the accommodation made according to those norms are perceived socially appropriate. For instance, when a young person talks to the seniors in the family, he should avoid using jargons among his generation to show respect and to communicate more smoothly. If the communicator is not careful, this can result in stereotyping if the communicator is not sure about the norms the other person considers to be socially appropriate. Making incorrect assumptions can be more harmful for the relationship than helpful.

## **Convergence and divergence**

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### Convergence

Convergence refers to the process through which an individual shifts speech patterns in interaction so that they more closely resemble the speech patterns of speech partners.<sup>[7]</sup> People can converge through many features of communication such as their use of language, their "pronunciation, pause and utterance lengths, vocal intensities, non verbal behaviors, and intimacy of self disclosures"(Giles and Smith, 1979, 46), but they do not necessarily have to converge simultaneously at all of these levels. In fact, people can both converge at some levels and diverge through others at the same time.<sup>[5]</sup> People use convergence based on their perceptions of others, as well as what they are able to infer about them and their backgrounds. Attraction (likability, charisma, credibility), also triggers convergence. As Turner and West note, "When communicators are attracted to others they will converge in their conversations."<sup>[6]</sup> On the other hand, as the similarity attraction theory

highlights, when people have similar beliefs, personality and behaviors they tend to be more attracted towards each other. To achieve a "desired social distance"(Pardo, 2016), people use language to converge more towards a conversational partner they are attracted to.<sup>[10]</sup> The desire to make social interaction flow subsequently results in convergence. Many people tend to converge with one another because they want to feel a sense of fitting in and experience social approval to the people around them. Thus, when one individual shifts speech and non-verbal behaviors in order to assimilate to the other it can result in a more favorable appraisal of him, that is: when convergence is perceived positively it is likely to enhance both the conversation and the attraction between the listener and the speaker. For this reason it could be said that convergence reflects "an individual's desire for social approval"<sup>[5]</sup> from his interlocutor, and that the greater the individual's need for social approval, the more likely he or she is to converge. Besides attraction, other factors that "influence the intensity of this" need of approval and hence the level of convergence "include the probability of future interactions, the social status of the addressee, and interpersonal variability for need of social approval".<sup>[5]</sup> Other factors that determine whether and to what extent individuals converge in interaction are their relational history, social norms and power variables.<sup>[6]</sup> Because individuals are more likely to converge to the individual with the higher status it is likely that the speech in a conversation will reflect the speech of the individual with the higher status.<sup>[6]</sup> Converging also increases the effectiveness of communication, which in turn lowers uncertainty, interpersonal anxiety, and increases mutual understanding. This is another factor that motivates people to converge. People adapt their communication behaviors to establish common ground with another individual. This includes vocal tone/volume, word choice, etc. Social distance is the extent to which two people that are communicating with each other are similar or different. Discourse management is the selection of topics in communication that lead to successful exchanges and minimizing social distance.

There is, however, the chance of the message sender displaying overconvergence (or overaccommodation). This is when the communicator adjusts to a style that they have little or no experience in, which can often be the result of stereotyping. It is "an attempt to overdo efforts in regulating, modifying or responding to others. It has the effect of making the target feel worse." <sup>[11]</sup> Some examples may be speaking to an elderly person in "baby talk" regardless of their mental or psychological state, shouting or exaggerating other behaviors when speaking to a blind person, or speaking

very slowly or simply when communicating with someone who is not fluent in our language. Though the message sender often has good intentions when overaccommodating, it can actually further alienate them from the receiver.

## **Divergence**

Divergence is a linguistic strategy whereby a member of a speech community accentuates the linguistic differences between themselves and their interlocutor.<sup>[5]</sup> "Given that communication features are often core dimensions of what it is to be a member of a group, divergence can be regarded as a very important tactic of displaying a valued distinctiveness from the other."<sup>[9]</sup> This helps to sustain a positive image of one's in-group and hence to strengthen one's social identity. Divergence is commonly used to establish dominance or power in an interaction. For example, if a recent college graduate becomes a professor, they might be teaching students who are around the same age as them. Therefore, it is important for the professor to communicate in a way that the students are aware the professor has more authority than them. Another case where there is a need for divergence are when professionals are with clients. In a 2001 study, doctors and patients discussed musculoskeletal disorders and it was observed that there were miscommunications that occurred because the participants chose to converge during the communication rather than to accentuate their position differences. Patients in the study felt more comfortable discussing their problems because they felt "positive about their doctor's capacity to understand them".<sup>[12]</sup> Communicating in a fashion to make speech different can also be interpreted as a sign of dislike towards a person or group.<sup>[4]</sup> For example, "when you run into a disliked classmate from high school, your vocal pattern becomes more different from that classmate's."<sup>[13]</sup> This represents the act of divergence because you are purposely changing your speech to not sound like that person.

## **Components**

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Further research conducted by Gallois et al. in 1995 has expanded the theory to include 17 propositions that influence these processes of convergence and divergence. They are categorized into four main components: the *sociohistorical context*, the *communicators' accommodative orientation*, the *immediate situation* and *evaluation and future intentions*.<sup>[14]</sup> These components are essential to Communication accommodation Theory and affect the course and outcome of intercultural conversations.

## Sociohistorical context[edit]

The sociohistorical context refers to ways that past interactions between groups the communicators belong to influence the communication behaviors of the communicators. It includes "the relations between the groups having contact and the social norms regarding contact".<sup>[14]</sup> These relations between the different groups the communicators belong to influence the communicators' behavior. Socio-historical factors that influence communicators include political or historical relations between nations, and different religious or ideological views of the two groups participating in the conversation.

### **Accommodative orientation**

Accommodative orientation refers to the communicator's "... tendencies to perceive encounters with out group members in interpersonal terms, intergroup terms, or a combination of the two".<sup>[14]</sup> There are three factors that are crucial to accommodative orientations: (1) "intrapersonal factors" (e.g. personality of the speakers), (2) "intergroup factors" (e.g. communicators' feelings toward outgroups), and (3) "initial orientations" (e.g., perceived potential for conflict).<sup>[14]</sup> Issues that influence this last factor include: collectivistic culture context or whether the culture is collectivistic or individualistic; distressing history of interaction, the possible tensions that exist between groups due to past interactions; stereotypes; norms for treatment of groups; and high group solidarity/ high group dependence, how dependent the person's self-worth is in the group.<sup>[15]</sup>

### **Immediate situation**

The immediate situation refers to the moment when the actual communication takes place. It is shaped by five interrelated aspects: (1) *sociopsychological states*, (2) *goals and addressee focus* (e.g., motivations and goals for the encounter), (3) *sociolinguistic strategies* (e.g., convergence or divergence), (4) *behavior and tactics* (e.g., topic, accent) and (5) *labeling and attributions*.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **Evaluation and future intentions**

This aspect deals with how communicators perceive their conversational partners' behavior and its effects on future encounters between the two groups. Positively rated conversations will most likely lead to further communication between the interlocutors and other members of their respective groups.<sup>[14]</sup>

## **In action**

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In 1991, Giles, Coupland, and Coupland expressed the belief that a "more qualitative perspective" would be necessary to get more diverse and clarifying explanations of the behaviors presented within varying contexts. They referred to this as "the applied perspective" that showed accommodation theory as a vital part of day-to-day activity as opposed to solely being a theoretical construct. They sought to "demonstrate how the core concepts and relationships invoked by accommodation theory are available for addressing altogether pragmatic concerns".<sup>[5]</sup> For Giles, Coupland, and Coupland, these "pragmatic concerns" were extremely varied in nature.

One of these "pragmatic concerns" included understanding the relational issues that present themselves in the medical and clinical fields, such as the relational "alternatives, development, difficulties, and outcomes" that affected the patients' contentment with their medical interactions—and whether or not, through these interactions, they agreed with and implemented said health care regimens. Another of these situations involved the potential options in a legal arena. The way that the judges, plaintiffs, and defendants accommodated themselves to both the situation and the jury could manipulate the jury's acceptance or rejection of the defendant, and could, thus, control the outcome of the case.

Communication accommodation theory was also found to have a place in media. In regards to radio broadcasting, the alliance of the audience with the broadcaster played an important part in both the ratings that the shows would receive and whether the show progressed or was cancelled.

In the area of jobs and employment, accommodation theory was believed to influence the satisfaction one has with his or her job and the productivity that that person possesses in said job through convergence with or divergence from the co-workers and their work environment.

Accommodation theory also possessed practical applications in the development of learning a second language. This was seen when the student's education of and proficiency in said language was either assisted or hindered by accommodative measures. Giles, Coupland, and Coupland (1991) also addressed the part that accommodation theory plays in a situation they called *language switching*, when bilingual individuals must decide which language they should speak when they are in an organizational environment with other bilingual individuals. This can be an incredibly important choice to make, especially in a business setting, because an incorrect judgment in this

area of communication could unwittingly promote negative reactions between the two or more parties involved. In addition, accommodation theory was strongly intertwined with the way an immigrant accepts and is accepted by their host country. An instance of over-accommodation from the immigrating individual can unintentionally damage that person's sense of individuality while a strong divergence from the immigrating individual from their host culture can prompt the natives of the host country to react negatively to them because of the immigrating individual's use of divergence.

The final area of practical application, as presented by Giles, Coupland, and Coupland (1991), was that of accommodation theory's effect on the lives of people with disabilities. Accommodation theory was thought to either aid them by promoting them to "fulfill their communicative and life potentials", or by hindering them from reaching their full potential by focusing on the disability that made them different rather than the other characteristics that made them similar to their peers.

Despite the fact that communication accommodation theory is theoretical, it has shown itself to be viable by its numerous practical applications.<sup>[5]</sup>

### **Criticisms**

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The Communication Accommodation Theory has obtained scholarly criticism by the three scholars Judee Burgoon, Leesa Dillman, and Lesa Stern. These scholars question the "convergence-divergence frame... [and] they believe that conversations are too complex to be reduced simply to the processes of the Communication Accommodation theory. They also challenge the notion that people's accommodation can be explained by just the practice of [convergence-divergence]".<sup>[16]</sup> Questions asked by the scholars were: "what occurs if people both converge and diverge in conversations, are there consequences to the speaker, the listener, is there an influence if race or ethnicity is played in the process?".<sup>[16]</sup> It causes conflicts between communicators because the theory relies too heavily on a rational way of communicating. Sometimes we as people do not have a rational way of thinking and this becomes a problem when communicating.

### **Application**

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The Communication Accommodation theory focuses "on the role of conversations in our lives".<sup>[16]</sup> It has been incorporated into "the mass media (Bell, 1991), with families (Fox, 1999), with Chinese students (Hornsey and Gallois, 1998), with elderly (Harwood, 2002), on the job (McCroskey and

Richmond, 2000), in interviews (Willemyns, Gallois, Callan, and Pittam, 1997), and even with messages left on telephone answering machines (Buzzanell, Burrell, Stafford, and Berkowitz, 1996)".<sup>[16]</sup> The theory tends to be heuristic because it is "expansive enough to be complete, and has been supported by research from diverse authors". "The theory's core processes of convergence and divergence make it relatively easy to understand, underscoring the simplicity of the theory".<sup>[16]</sup>

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