

*the handbook of*  
**COMMUNICATION  
SKILLS**

FOURTH EDITION

*Edited by* **OWEN HARGIE**

ROUTLEDGE  


# The Handbook of Communication Skills

*The Handbook of Communication Skills* is recognised as one of the core texts in the field of communication, offering a state-of-the-art overview of this rapidly evolving field of study. This comprehensively revised and updated fourth edition arrives at a time when the realm of interpersonal communication has attracted immense attention. Recent research showing the potency of communication skills for success in many walks of life has stimulated considerable interest in this area, both from academic researchers and from practitioners whose day-to-day work is so dependent on effective social skills.

Covering topics such as non-verbal behaviour, listening, negotiation and persuasion, the book situates communication in a range of different contexts, from interacting in groups to the counselling interview. Based on the core tenet that interpersonal communication can be conceptualised as a form of skilled activity, and including new chapters on cognitive behavioural therapy and coaching and mentoring, this new edition also places communication in context with advances in digital technology.

*The Handbook of Communication Skills* represents the most significant single contribution to the literature in this domain. Providing a rich mine of information for the neophyte and practising professional, it is perfect for use in a variety of contexts, from theoretical mainstream communication modules on degree programmes to vocational courses in health, business and education. With contributions from an internationally renowned range of scholars, this is the definitive text for students, researchers and professionals alike.

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# **The Handbook of Communication Skills**

**Fourth Edition**

**Edited by Owen Hargie**

**ROUTLEDGE**

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Fourth edition published 2019  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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First edition published by Psychology Press 1986  
Third edition published by Routledge 2006

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-138-21912-0 (hbk)  
ISBN: 978-1-138-21913-7 (pbk)  
ISBN: 978-1-315-43613-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Century Old Style  
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

For my wife, Patricia



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## Editorial introduction

**F**EW AREAS OF ACADEMIC study have attracted so much attention as that of interpersonal communication. In recent years there has been a deluge of research studies in this domain. The reasons for this were aptly summarised by Wiemann (2003, p. ix):

Our ability to create and sustain our social world depends in large measure on how well we communicate. People's social skills are crucial to their well-being – individually and collectively. The importance of understanding skilled behavior in all its complexities cannot be overstated.

Competence in communication is vital for our health, our relationships, and indeed for all of the activities in which we engage as functioning humans (Hannawa & Spitzberg, 2015). Studies have shown a clear and positive relationship between effective interpersonal skills and a range of benefits such as greater happiness in life, resilience to stress and psychosocial problems, and enhanced academic and professional achievements (Müller, Peter, Cieza, et al., 2015; Hargie, 2017). Indeed, in examining the question as to why we should study this area, the answer given by Stewart, Zediker, and Witteborn (2005) was that we study it because there is a direct relationship between the quality of our communication and the quality of our lives.

In relation to the professional sphere, as society develops and becomes more complex, there has evolved the need for a greater number of what Ellis (1980) termed 'interpersonal professionals', who spend a large part of their working lives in face–face interaction with others. Such professionals include doctors, teachers, speech therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers, psychologists, nurses,

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

career advisers, counsellors, and business executives, to name but a few. Historically, the training of many of these professionals focused almost entirely upon the acquisition of specialised knowledge. More recently, however, the centrality of interpersonal communication in their work has been recognised and catered for in training. As noted by Greene and Burleson (2003, p. xiii): 'In light of the importance of communication skills, it is hardly surprising that they have been a continuing object of study by scholars and researchers from numerous disciplines.'

Competence in most types of profession involves the effective implementation of three main sets of skills.

- 1 *Cognitive skills.* This relates to the knowledge base of the profession, that which characterises it and sets it apart from others. Barristers must have knowledge of existing legal structures, doctors need to understand human anatomy, and so on.
- 2 *Technical skills.* These are the specialised practical and manipulative techniques essential to the profession. Thus, a surgeon must be able to utilise a scalpel skilfully, a nurse has to be able to dress a wound, and a surveyor needs to know how to use a theodolite.
- 3 *Communication skills.* Here, the professional must have the ability to interact effectively with clients and other professionals.

Traditionally, the education and training of most professional groups placed emphasis upon the former two sets of skills at the expense of interpersonal skills. This is somewhat surprising, given that it has long been recognised that the ability to communicate effectively is essential for success in many walks of life (McCroskey, 1984). The oldest extant essay, written circa 3000 BC, consisted of advice to Kagemni, the eldest son of Pharaoh Huni, on how to speak effectively in public. Likewise, the oldest book, the *Precepts* written in Egypt by Ptah-Hotep about 2675 BC, is a treatise on effective communication. It can thus be argued that scholarship in the field of communication has been ongoing for some 5,000 years.

In recent years, communication as a social science discipline has developed at a very rapid pace. There has been a huge growth in communication research and theory, as evidenced by the number of journals and books now devoted to this discipline. This has been paralleled by a concomitant large increase in the number of students undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in communication. A significant proportion of this work has been at the interpersonal level, including the study of professional interaction. Given the importance of effective communication, it is reasonable to expect that professionals should have knowledge of, and expertise in, interpersonal skills. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the study of such skills is mandatory in most professions.

Increasing attention has also been devoted to the entire spectrum of socially skilled interaction. The fairly obvious observation that some individuals are more socially skilled than others has led to carefully formulated and systematic investigations into the nature and functions of social skills. There are three discrete contexts within which such investigations have taken place.

- 1 *Developmental.* Here the concern is with the development of skilled behaviour in children; with how, and at what stages, children acquire, refine and extend their repertoire of social skills.

- 2 *Remedial*. In this context, the focus of attention is upon those individuals who, for whatever reason, fail to develop an adequate repertoire of social skills. Investigators are interested in attempting to determine the nature and causes of social inadequacy, and in ascertaining to what extent deficits can be remediated.
- 3 *Specialised*. This relates to the study of interpersonal skills in professional encounters. Most professions necessitate interaction of a specialised nature either with clients or with other professionals. Therefore, it is important to chart the types of communication skills that are effective in specific professional situations.

It is with the latter context that this book is concerned. Research into specialised social skills has developed rapidly, and the period since the publication of the third edition of this Handbook has witnessed a vast amount of investigation. This text now brings together much of this research to provide a comprehensive study of those communication skill areas central to effective interpersonal functioning in a range of professional settings.

Although it is difficult to sectionalise communication, for the purpose of analysis the book is divided into four main sections. Part I sets the book in context by providing a theoretical framework for the study of communication as a form of skilled activity. The concept of communication as skilled performance is examined (Chapter 1), and an operational model of interpersonal communication as skill is fully delineated (Chapter 2). Part II then focuses upon eight core communication skills, namely, nonverbal communication, questioning, reinforcement, explaining, self-disclosure, listening, humour and laughter, and persuasion. These are included as 'core' skills as they occur to a greater or lesser degree in most interactions. While these skills are not entirely mutually exclusive (for example, aspects of nonverbal communication are relevant to all of the other chapters), each chapter deals with a discrete and important component of communication.

In Part III, the focus moves to an analysis of interpersonal communication in five specialised and widely researched milieus. These are broader areas of communication, involving a combination of the skills included in Part II. This section incorporates an examination of central dimensions inherent in situations where assertion and confrontation is required (Chapter 12), a synopsis of factors that impinge upon the individual working in a task group (Chapter 13), negotiating encounters (Chapter 14), situations where coaching or mentoring is required (Chapter 15), and pivotal elements inherent in the development, maintenance, and dissolution of relationships (Chapter 16).

Part IV is then devoted to the study of five interviewing contexts. The importance of interviewing was succinctly summarised by Millar, Crute, and Hargie (1992, p 183) who pointed out that:

The interview is a ubiquitous activity. Everyone will have had the experience of being interviewed at one time or another, and an increasing number of people are required to play the role of interviewer in a professional capacity. For this latter group, a knowledge of the nature of interviewing can make an important contribution to effective practice.

This is an apt justification for the inclusion of this section. While it is beyond the scope of the present text to include chapters on all types of interview, the main forms



## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

of interview relevant to most professionals are included, namely the employment interview (Chapter 16), the cognitive interview (Chapter 17), the therapeutic interview (Chapter 18), the cognitive behavioural interview (Chapter 19), and issues pertaining to the appraisal interview (Chapter 20). The final chapter then provides an overview bringing together the main issues arising from the study of communication skills and relates these to the context of training (Chapter 21).

The information about interpersonal communication provided in this book should be regarded as providing resource material. How these resources are applied will depend upon the personality of the reader and the situation in which any interaction occurs. It is impossible to legislate in advance for every possible social encounter, and decisions about what approach could best be employed can only be made in the light of all the available background information. As such, this book certainly does not provide a preordained set of responses for given situations. Rather, it offers a selection of communication perspectives, which facilitate the interactive process. In this way, it proffers valuable information that can be used to reflect upon, refine, and extend one's own personal style and pattern of interaction.

Thus, this text provides reviews of research, theory, and practice pertaining to a range of key skills and dimensions of communication. The chapters are authored by international experts in each particular field. The coverage of interpersonal skills is not intended to be exhaustive, since there are specialised skills relevant to particular contexts (e.g. 'breaking bad news' by medical practitioners), which could not be covered in a text of this nature. Furthermore, research in social interaction is progressing rapidly, and it is anticipated that other general skills will be identified as our knowledge of this area increases. Finally, although the aspects contained in this book are presented separately, in practice they overlap, are interdependent, and often complement one another. However, for the purposes of analysis and evaluation it is valuable to identify separately those elements of communication that seem to 'hang together', and thereby gain important insights into what is a complex area of study.

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**Part I**

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**Communication  
skill in theory  
and practice**

**Part I**



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# **Skill in theory: Communication as skilled performance**

*Owen Hargie*

## **INTRODUCTION**

**A**NY ANALYSIS OF INTERPERSONAL communication is inevitably fraught with difficulties. The interpersonal process is complex, ever-changing, and directly affected by a large number of intermeshing factors. This means that in order to make sense of, and systematically investigate, social encounters, some form of interpretive framework is usually employed. In fact, numerous alternative frameworks have been developed for this purpose. For example, interpersonal encounters have been conceptualised, *inter alia*, as:

- a form of joint economic activity or social exchange in which both sides seek rewards and try to minimise costs, which may be in the form of money, services, goods, status, esteem, or affection (Mitchell, Cropanzano, & Quisenberry, 2012);
- transactional episodes during which interlocutors play roles akin to acting as either parent, adult, or child, and respond at one of these three levels (Bright, 2015);
- a type of dramatic performance composed of major scenes, in which everyone has a role to play and lines to deliver, some have more prominent roles than others, the actors behave differently front-stage as opposed to back-stage, there are props in the form of furniture and fittings, there is an underlying storyline, and all of this changes from one production to the next (Edgley, 2013).

These are just three of the approaches that have been developed as templates for the interpretation of interpersonal communication. In this

chapter and in Chapter 2 another such approach will be presented, namely the perspective that social behaviour can be conceptualised as skilled performance, and that it is meaningful to compare socially skilled behaviour (such as interviewing or negotiating) with motor skill behaviour (such as playing tennis or operating a machine). Further pursuing this analogy, it is argued that the models and methods successfully employed in the study of motor skill can usefully be applied to interpersonal skill. The validity of this comparison, and the accompanying implications for the study of social behaviour, will be investigated.

In order to evaluate this perspective, it is necessary to relate the history of the study of interpersonal skill directly to the study of motor skill, since it was from the latter source that the concept of communication as skill eventually emerged. The extent to which this analogy can be pursued is then discussed, together with an analysis of the nature of social skill *per se*. Overall, this chapter provides a reference point for the entire book, by delineating the nature, and defining features, of interpersonal skill.

## MOTOR SKILLS

The study of perceptual-motor skill has a long and rich tradition within psychology. Such skills, which involve co-ordinated physical movements of the body, are widely employed in human performance and include, for example, eating, dressing, walking, writing, riding a bicycle, or playing golf. Welford (1968) traced the scientific study of motor skill back to 1820, when the astronomer Bessel examined differences between individuals on a task that involved the recording of star-transit times. Direct psychological interest in the nature of motor skill really began with explorations by Bryan and Harter (1897) into the learning of Morse code, followed by studies on movement by Woodworth (1899), and investigations by Book (1908) into the learning of typewriting skills. Since this early research, the literature on perceptual-motor skill has become voluminous, and this area remains an important focus of study (Schmidt & Lee, 2014; van Andel, Cole, & Pepping, 2017). Numerous definitions of motor skill have been put forward. These emphasise a range of features of skilled performance.

First, motor skill is defined as behaviour that is goal-directed and intentional, rather than chance or unintentional (Whiting, 1975). It is regarded as the movement of parts of the body in order to accomplish particular objectives (Marteniuk, 1976). Thus, Magill and Anderson (2014, p. 3) iterated that motor skills are 'activities or tasks that require voluntary control over movements of the joints and body segments to achieve a goal'. The goals that are being pursued in motor skill are context-related in that they are designed to meet the demands of a particular situation (driving a car, operating a computer, playing tennis, etc.).

A second feature of skill is its learned nature, in that it comprises practice-related improvement in goal-directed action (Stanley & Krakauer, 2013). Here, a distinction is made between instinctive responses (such as breathing and coughing), and learned behaviours. In his analysis of the field, Edwards (2011) concluded that for behaviour to be regarded as skilled it must have been learned. This aspect has been consistently highlighted by skills analysts. Accordingly, Shmuelof and Krakauer (2014) noted that

skill involves acquiring a behaviour that was not previously available to the individual. Similarly, van der Fels, te Wierike, Hartman et al. (2014, p. 697) defined motor skills as 'learned sequences of movements that are combined to produce a smooth, efficient action'.

This definition also highlights a third aspect of skill, namely that it entails fluent and effective performance. In this sense, skill is assessed on the display of procedural knowledge rather than declarative knowledge. In other words, judgements of motor skill are based on what we can actually do rather than on what we can verbalise (Diedrichsen & Kornysheva, 2015). It involves the implementation of complex motor performance in such a way as to demonstrate that a smooth integration of behaviour has occurred (Cratty, 1964). As defined by Proctor and Dutta (1995, p. 18), 'Skill is goal-directed, well-organized behavior that is acquired through practice and performed with economy of effort'.

This leads on to a fourth facet, namely that skill involves *internal processes*, since 'Motor skills are not only the movements themselves, but include the cognitive processes that give rise to movements' (Cameron, Cottone, Murrah et al., 2016, p. 93). Skilled behaviour consists of an integrated learned hierarchy of smaller component behaviours, each of which contributes in part to the overall act (Diedrichsen & Kornysheva, 2015). This requires a high level of practice to control and shape the sequential collation and organisation of all of these movements (Summers, 1989).

While there are commonalities across definitions, theorists tend to emphasise different features, such that Irion (1966), in tracing the history of this research, concluded that there was difficulty in achieving an agreed definition of motor skill. This remains the case, with Diedrichsen and Kornysheva (2015, p. 227) pointing out that there is a general consensus that skill learning enables an individual 'to accomplish a motor task better, faster, or more accurately than before. Beyond this accepted understanding of the common use of the word, there is little agreement in the literature about a more precise, scientific definition'. One reason for this is that the problems related to how we acquire skill are numerous and complex (Robb, 1972).

However, Welford (1958, p. 17) summarised the study of this field as being encapsulated in the question: 'When we look at a man working, by what criteria in his performance can we tell whether he is skilled and competent or clumsy and ignorant?' In other words, his basic distinction was between skilled and unskilled behaviour (although, in fact, these two concepts represent opposite ends of a continuum of skilled performance, with people being more or less skilled in relation to one another). In his pioneering investigations into the nature of skill, Welford (1958) identified three main characteristics.

- 1 They consist of an organised, co-ordinated activity in relation to an object or a situation and, therefore, involve a whole chain of sensory, central, and motor mechanisms, which underlie performance.
- 2 They are learnt, in that the understanding of the event or performance is built up gradually with repeated experience.
- 3 They are serial in nature, involving the ordering and co-ordination of many different processes or actions in sequence. Thus, the skill of driving involves a pre-set repertoire of behaviours, which must be carried out in temporal sequence (put gear into neutral, switch on ignition, and so on).



## INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Given the vast amount of attention devoted to the analysis and evaluation of motor skill performance, it is rather surprising that it was some considerable time before psychologists began to investigate seriously the nature of interpersonal skill. Welford (1980) attributed the growth of interest in this field to the initial work of Crossman. In a report on the effects of automation on management and social relations in industry, Crossman (1960) found that a crucial feature in the work of the operator of an automatic plant was the ability to use social skills to communicate with co-workers. He also noted that no real efforts had been made to identify or analyse these skills. Crossman subsequently contacted Michael Argyle, a social psychologist at the University of Oxford, and together they carried out a study of social skill, explicitly designed to investigate the similarities between man-machine and man-man interactions. In this way, the first parallels were drawn between motor and social skills.

In 1967 Fitts and Posner, in their discussion of technical skills, emphasised that social skills were also important. In the same year, Argyle and Kendon published a paper in which they related the features of motor skill, as identified by Welford, directly to the analysis of social skill. They proposed a definition of skill as comprising an organised, co-ordinated activity that involves

a chain of sensory, central and motor mechanisms ... the performance, or stream of action, is continuously under the control of the sensory input ... [and] ... the outcomes of actions are continuously matched against some criterion of achievement or degree of approach to a goal.

(Argyle & Kendon, 1967, p. 56)

While recognising some of the important differences between motor and social performance, they argued that this definition could be applied in large part to the study of social skill.

The intervening decades since the publication of Argyle and Kendon's paper have witnessed an explosion of interest in the nature, function, delineation, and content of socially skilled performance. However, quite often researchers and theorists in this area have been working in differing contexts, with little cross-fertilisation between those involved in clinical, professional and developmental settings. The result has been a plethora of different approaches to the analysis and evaluation of skill. Therefore, it is useful to examine the extant degree of consensus as to what exactly is meant by the term 'social skill'.

In one sense, this is a term that is widely employed and generally comprehended, since it has already been used in this chapter and presumably understood by the reader. The terms 'communication skill', 'social skill', and 'interpersonal skill' have entered the lexicon of everyday use. For example, many job adverts stipulate that applicants should have high levels of social, or communication, skill. In this global sense, social skills can be defined as the skills employed when communicating at an interpersonal level with other people. In descriptive terms, a distinction is often made between two broad dimensions of interpersonal skill: giving and receiving information, and building and maintaining relationships (Lievens & Sackett, 2012). Such analyses are not very illuminating, however, since they describe what these skills are *used for* rather

than what they *are*. It is rather like defining a bicycle as something that gets you from one place to another. As illustrated in the next section, attempts to provide a more forensic definition of social skill are manifold.

## DEFINITIONS OF INTERPERSONAL SKILL

In an early review of this field, Phillips (1978) concluded that individuals are socially skilled according to the extent to which they can interact with others in such a way as to fulfil their own rights and needs while protecting the equal rights or needs of others. This definition emphasised the macro elements of social encounters, in terms of reciprocity between participants, and focused upon the outcome of behaviour rather than the skills *per se* (although Phillips also noted that knowing how to behave in a range of situations was part of social skill). A similar approach was adopted by Combs and Slaby (1977), who defined social skill as the ability to interact with others in a socially acceptable manner that was beneficial both to oneself and the interlocutor. Both of these perspectives view social skill as an ability, which the person may possess to a greater or lesser extent.

Ability was linked to goal-related performance by Kelly, Fincham, and Beach (2003, p. 724) when they pointed out that 'Communication skills refer to the ability to realize communicative goals while behaving in a socially appropriate manner'. A similar focus has been emphasised by other theorists. Spence (1980) encompassed both the outcome or goals of social interaction and the behaviour of the interactors when she defined social skills as those elements of behaviour which ensure that people achieve their desired outcome from interactions. In like vein, Ellington, Dierdorff, and Rubin (2014) underlined the goal component of skill but perceived this to be mainly interpersonal in nature, primarily involving relationship-building competencies. Ellis (1980) also emphasised the interactive component by contending that skills are sequences of behaviour that are integrated in some way with the behaviour of one or more others. The situational component was noted by Cartledge and Milburn (1980), who viewed social skills as behaviours that are enacted in response to environmental events presented by another and are followed by positive environmental responses.

Several theorists have restricted their definitions to the behavioural domain, with social skill being conceived as a repertoire of verbal and nonverbal behaviours (e.g. Rinn & Markle, 1979; Wilkinson & Canter, 1982). Indeed, Curran (1979) in discussing definitional problems, actually argued that the construct should be limited to motoric behaviour. He based his argument on the fact that the behavioural domain is still being charted and that this task should be completed before expanding the analysis into other domains. This emphasis on behaviourism would not be acceptable to many of those involved in research, theory and practice in interpersonal skills, who regard other aspects of human performance (such as cognition and emotion) as being important, both in determining behaviour and understanding the communication process.

A final defining feature was recognised by Becker, Heimberg, and Bellack (1987), who highlighted the fact that to perform skilfully the individual must have the ability to identify the emotions and intention of the interlocutor and make apposite judgements about the nature and timing of one's responses. Thus, the skilled individual needs to take cognisance of the others involved in the encounter. This involves

perceptual acumen and perspective-taking ability, together with a capacity to mesh one's responses meaningfully, and at apposite moments, with those of the interlocutor.

An evaluation of these definitions reveals a remarkable similarity with the position relating to motor skill, in that there are common elements, but no uniform agreement about the exact nature of interpersonal skill. One problem here is that any detailed study of higher-order skill will involve an extended longitudinal process. The highest level of performance in any field is only attained after a very long period of focused practice (Ericsson, 2013). Although exact estimates vary (Ford, Coughlan, Hodges et al., 2015), the '10-year rule' and/or '10,000 hours rule' have been widely cited as a general guide to the duration of practice time required for the optimum learning of complex skill routines. Top chess players, Olympic athletes, international soccer players, celebrated musicians, etc. will all have engaged in at least a decade of intensive practice. It is very probable that a 10-year rule also applies to complex social skills (negotiating, teaching, counselling, etc.). While there has been study of how various types of motor skill performance change over time (Ericsson, 2009), there is a paucity of such research in relation to interpersonal skill. This makes analysis and synthesis problematic.

In their review of the area, Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) noted that it is difficult to specify the precise nature of interpersonal skill. Phillips (1980, p. 160) aptly summed up the state of affairs that still pertains in relation to social skills definitions, in that they are, 'ubiquitous, varied, often simple, located in the social/interpersonal exchange, are the stuff out of which temporal and/or long-range social interactions are made, underlie and exemplify normative social behaviour and, in their absence, are what we loosely call psychopathology'. Likewise, Segrin and Givertz (2003, p. 136), in arguing that a widely accepted definition of social skills may not be feasible, pointed out that 'Trying to define social skills in a sentence is like trying to define some complex motor skill, such as being a good baseball player, in one sentence. There are many components to these skills'.

However, Furnham (1983) argued that the lack of consensus in skills definitions was not a major problem, pointing out that while there also exists no agreed-upon definition of psychology, this has not retarded the development of the discipline. Definitions are often troublesome, because most concepts have 'fuzzy' aspects, and it is often more fruitful to seek conceptual clarification rather than precise definitions (O'Keefe, 2016). Progress in all areas is a cycle in which initially less precise terms are sharpened and redefined in the light of empirical enquiry. In addition, social interaction is a dynamic, multifaceted, complex process, involving a labyrinth of impinging variables, such that an understanding of even a small part of the process can be difficult to achieve. In their detailed examination of the area, Matthews, Davies, Westerman et al. (2000, p. 139) concluded that, 'Understanding skilled performance is difficult, because of the complexity of skilled action ... Some skills are simply too complex to capture with a manageable model, although we may be able to model critical aspects of them'. Skilled performance is not a unitary activity. There is a large variety of different types of skill, some of which involve basic activities that are simple to execute, while others incorporate a range of intricate sub-elements making them much more complicated to master (Holding, 1989).

It is therefore not surprising that differing definitions of what constitutes social skill have proliferated within the literature. Any definition must, of necessity, be a

simplification of what is an intricate, multifarious and multidimensional process. This is not to say that definitions are without value: at the very least, they set parameters as to what should be included in the study of social skill and, therefore, act as a template for legitimate investigation in this field. Moreover, while definitions vary in emphasis, the defining features of skill have been charted (Hargie, 2017). As such, it is clear that social skill involves *a process in which the individual implements a set of goal-directed, inter-related, situationally appropriate social behaviours, which are learned and controlled*. This emphasises six main features of skill.

## PROCESS

While behaviour is a key aspect of skill, it is in turn shaped by a range of other features. As such, motoric behaviour represents the overt part of an overall process in which the interlocutor pursues goals, devises implementation plans and strategies, continually monitors the environment, considers the position of others involved in the encounter, responds appropriately in that situation, estimates the likelihood of goal success and adjusts future behaviour accordingly (the operationalisation of these process elements of skilled performance will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2). Interaction is a transactional process in which each person's response is guided and shaped by the responses of others. In fact, a common analogy is made between interacting and dancing (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor, 2013; Clampitt, 2013). Both are carried out for a wide variety of reasons, some of which overlap. One may dance or interact to express oneself, to impress others, to help to develop a relationship, to pass the time, to seduce a partner, and so on. Interacting, like dancing a tango or waltz, depends on the co-ordinated intermeshing of learned repertoires between the two parties. Both are forms of performance wherein certain 'moves' are expected and anticipated, and the people involved complement one another in a fluid pattern of co-responding. If one partner is unskilled, the encounter becomes much more difficult.

One of the process dimensions to have attracted considerable attention and debate within the interpersonal communication literature is the notion of competence (Hannawa & Spitzberg, 2015; Sabee, 2016). While this is a concept that has long been of interest to communication scholars (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Greene & McNallie, 2015), the precise meaning of 'competence' and its links to 'skill' have been the subject of considerable debate (Seeber & Wittmann, 2017; Titsworth & Okamoto, 2017). Some theorists have conceptualised skill as being subsumed by competence. For instance, in their research in this field, Laajalahti, Hyvärinen, and Vos (2016) argued that while the concept of 'skills' is often employed as a synonym for 'competence', in their view competence is a wider concept, encompassing skills. Similarly, Samter (2003) contended that competence is manifested by the display of the interpersonal skills that an individual possesses. Likewise, Ridge (1993) defined competence as the ability to choose appropriate strategies and implement these in terms of skilled performance. By contrast, Spitzberg (2003) argued that competence refers to an evaluative judgment regarding the quality of a skill. He concluded that *appropriateness* (the extent to which behaviour meets standards of acceptability and legitimacy) and *effectiveness* (the degree to which desired outcomes are achieved) were the two main criteria used to guide such judgements. A similar perspective has been adopted by Greene (2016).

In a comprehensive review of this area, Wilson and Sabee (2003) concluded that there are three qualities associated with competence.

- 1 *Knowledge* relates to the information that is necessary for the interlocutor to be able to communicate in a way that is perceived to be competent (e.g. what one should say in this situation, how others might feel about this, what the alternative responses are).
- 2 *Motivation* concerns the desire of the person to behave in ways that will be judged as competent.
- 3 *Skill* refers to the individual's ability to act in such a way as to promote the perception of competence.

However, it is also possible to argue that skill subsumes competence. In this way, the *Chambers English Dictionary* defines skill as 'aptitudes and competencies appropriate for a particular job'. The skilled surgeon or the skilled lawyer would be regarded as highly competent in many separate facets of the process in which they are engaged. So, it makes sense to describe someone as 'competent but not highly skilled' at performing a particular action. Would you prefer to be operated on by a 'competent surgeon' or a 'skilled surgeon', or defended in court by a 'competent lawyer' or a 'skilled lawyer'? Furthermore, the terms are often combined, so that Daly (2002, p. 153), for instance, asserted, 'Those who exhibit socially competent skills are preferred in interactions'.

If all of this is confusing, it reflects the confusion that is rife in the deliberations of some theorists who grapple with this issue. For example, the distinction proffered by Sanders (2003, p. 230), was that competence involves the acquisition of an apparently higher-order 'system of computation and reasoning' whereas skill is of a lower-order nature and concerned with having 'acquired a set of methods and techniques'. But Sanders failed to explain how one could be skilled without being competent. Also, his definition of competence implies that it is an abstract ability. Thus, using Sanders' distinction, someone who could provide a flowing rationale (reasoning) as to how one should be, for instance, a good soccer player or negotiator, yet who in practice is disastrous at playing soccer or negotiating, would be very competent in these contexts, but at the same time also highly unskilled. Most theorists would regard this as an unusual state of affairs, to say the least, and would agree with Emmers-Sommer, Allen, Bourhis et al. (2004) that competence incorporates a blend of both encoding and decoding skills. To compound the matter, Sanders (2003, p. 230) further came to the rather strange conclusion that in relation to the concepts of competence and skill 'it is imperative to sharply distinguish them', but then proceeded to argue that they 'are not mutually exclusive'!

Since the terms 'skill' and 'competence' are often used interchangeably (Huang & Lin, 2016), it is hardly surprising that Backlund and Morreale (2015, p. 11), in examining definitional issues, concluded that in relation to competence, 'Everyone knows it when they see it, but when pressed, they may have a difficult time describing what it is, exactly'. Indeed, given the volume of work in the area but the lack of consensus about its exact nature, Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter (2015) concluded that competence is one of the most frequently referred to yet ambiguous terms within the field of communication.

The view taken in this chapter is that the terms ‘skilled’ and ‘competent’, when applied to the interpersonal domain, both indicate that the individual is equipped with the range of skills required to perform effectively, and can execute apposite combinations of these as required. Skills *per se* are processes of which behaviours are the surface manifestations, in turn determined and driven by a whole array of cognitive, affective and perceptual activities.

## GOAL-DIRECTED

Palomares (2014), in defining goals as mental representations of desired end-states, pointed out that social interaction is now widely recognised as goal-directed activity. In general terms, interaction has been regarded as a tool that is employed for the purpose of achieving goals (Berger & Palomares, 2011), while, more specifically, skill has been defined as ‘an individual’s ability to achieve communicative goals’ (Dindia & Timmerman, 2003, p. 686). Skilled behaviours are selected to achieve a desired outcome, and as such are purposeful as opposed to chance or unintentional. The importance of goals has long been recognised. McDougall (1912), for example, claimed that a key characteristic of human behaviour was its goal-oriented nature. A distinction needs to be made between goals and plans. Once goals have been formulated, plans must be devised to attain them. The plan is the route map to the goal. However, while a plan implies that there is a goal, a goal does not always imply that there is a plan. An unskilled person may have ambitious goals, but without carefully related action plans nothing is likely to be achieved (Montani, Odoardi, & Battistelli, 2015). In turn, the execution of plans depends on a range of resources, such as money, access to relevant others, interpersonal skills, and cognitive ability (Carver & Scheier, 1998).

Four main theories for explaining and predicting goal-directed intentions and behaviours have been proposed (Bagozzi & Kimmel, 1995):

- The *theory of reasoned action* purports that behaviour is determined directly by one’s intentions to carry it out, and these are influenced by one’s attitudes (positive or negative) towards the behaviour and by perceived social pressure to perform it.
- The *theory of planned behaviour* extends this by adding the notion of perceived behavioural control as an important predictor of intention and action. Perceived behavioural control refers both to the presence of facilitating situational conditions and to feelings of self-efficacy (personal confidence in one’s ability to execute the behaviour successfully).
- The *theory of self-regulation* emphasises the centrality of motivational commitment, or desire, to act (this aspect will be further discussed in Chapter 2).
- Finally the *theory of trying* interprets goal-directed behaviour within three domains – trying and succeeding, attempting but failing, and the process of striving *per se*. This theory emphasises the importance of personal attitudes to success and failure as predictors of intentions and actions, as well as attitudes to the process involved en route to the goal. So, one may decide not to try to lose weight because of a personal belief that one would fail anyway, or because the

process of dieting and exercising is not viewed as desirable. The frequency and recency of past behaviour is also seen as important. Thus, one is likely to be less hesitant about asking someone for a date if one has had lots of dates (frequency) the last of which was two days ago (recency), than if one has only ever dated three people and the last date was 10 years ago.

Although the processes of goal setting, goal implementation and goal abandonment are affected by a range of variables (Aarts & Elliott, 2012), in essence the decision to pursue particular goals seems to be determined by two overarching factors:

- 1 desirability (the attractiveness of goal attainment);
- 2 feasibility (the strength of belief that the goal can be achieved).

Another distinction has been made between learning goals and performance goals. Those who see themselves as pursuing learning goals (e.g. to learn how to be a better salesperson) view setbacks as opportunities for learning and future development. On the other hand those who are guided by performance goals (to successfully sell 'x' amount of products today) are more negatively affected by failure. Learning goals therefore lead to better achievements than performance goals (Oettingen, Bulgarella, Henderson et al., 2004; Gardner, Jabbour, Williams et al., 2016).

In their comprehensive analysis of the nature, role and functions of goals as regulators of human action, Locke and Latham (1990) demonstrated how goals both give incentive for action and act as guides to provide direction for behaviour. They reviewed studies to illustrate that:

- 1 people working towards a specific goal outperform those working with no explicit goal;
- 2 performance level increases with goal difficulty (providing the person is committed to the goal);
- 3 giving people specific goals produces better results than vague goals (such as 'do your best').

A distinction needs to be made between long-term and short-term goals. In order to achieve a long-term goal, a number of related short-term ones must be devised and executed. Our moment-by-moment behaviour is guided by the latter, since if these are not successfully implemented the long-term goal will not be achieved. Sloboda (1986) used the term 'goal stacks' to refer to a hierarchy of goals through which one progresses until the top of the stack is reached. Skilled behaviour is hierarchically organised with larger goal-related tasks comprising smaller component sub-units (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). For example, the goal of an employer may be to make an appropriate appointment to a job vacancy. In order to do so, there is a range of subgoals that must be carried out – advertising the position, drawing up a short-list of candidates, interviewing each one, and so on. These subgoals can be further subdivided. At the interview stage the chief goal is to assess the suitability of the candidate, which, in turn, involves subgoals including welcoming the candidate, making introductions and asking relevant questions. In this way, the short-term, behavioural, goals provide a route to the achievement of the long-term, strategic, goal.

Another aspect of skilled action is that goals are usually subconscious during performance (Latham & Locke, 2012). The skilled soccer player is not consciously aware of objectives when running with the ball, but these nevertheless govern behaviour. When shooting on goal, the player does not consciously think: 'I must lift back my left foot, move my right foot forward, hold out my arms to give me balance ...' The essence of skill is subconscious processing of such behaviour-guiding self-statements. Likewise, the socially skilled individual does not have to consciously think 'I want to show interest so I must smile, nod my head, engage in eye contact, look attentive and make appropriate responses'. While during skill acquisition people are conscious of such task-related activities, once acquired these tend to be lost from conscious awareness, so that skilled experts can have difficulty in explaining exactly how they do what they do (Greene, 2003).

Those involved in the process of successful learning of new skills progress through the four sequential stages of:

- 1 *Unconscious incompetence*. At this stage we are blissfully unaware of the fact that we are acting in an unskilled way.
- 2 *Conscious incompetence*. Here we know how we should be performing but also know that we are not able to produce the level of performance required.
- 3 *Conscious competence*. At the early stage of skill acquisition we are aware of behaving in a skilled manner as we act.
- 4 *Unconscious competence*. Once skill has been fully assimilated we successfully execute it without having to think about it.

Langer, Blank, and Chanowitz (1978) termed behaviour that is pursued at a conscious level as *mindful* and behaviour carried out automatically as *mindless*. Burgoon and Langer (1995), in analysing these constructs, illustrated how mindful activity is guided by goals that indicate flexible thinking and careful choice-making. Skilled behaviour is therefore mindful (Clark, Schumann, & Mostofsky, 2015). On the other hand, a lack of skill is indicative of mindless behaviour, since this involves limited information processing, a lack of awareness of situational factors, and rigid behaviour patterns.

Part of skill is the ability to act and react quickly at a subconscious level. In discussing the role of the unconscious, Brody (1987) made the distinction between being aware and being aware of being aware. He reviewed studies to illustrate how stimuli perceived at a subconscious level can influence behaviour even though the person is not consciously 'aware' of the stimuli (this issue is further explored in Chapter 2). At the stage of skill learning, such conscious thoughts may be present, but these become more subconscious with practice and increased competence. An example given by Mandler and Nakamura (1987) is that a pianist will initially consciously acquire skills in reading music and in playing chords and trills, but when the pianist becomes skilled these become unconscious. However, the conscious mode will be operationalised again to achieve changes in the automatic skills if the experienced pianist has to learn a difficult piece for a concert.

Boden (1972) identified the features of behaviour carried out to achieve a conscious goal as being: actively attended to; under direct control; guided by precise foresight; and, open to introspection in that the component features are both discriminable and describable. The individual is aware of particular responses and of the reasons



why they are being employed, has planned to carry them out, and is able to explain and justify the behaviours in terms of the goals being pursued. For example, someone who has arranged a romantic date may plan a sequence of steps in order to achieve a particular goal, and be aware of the goals while executing the dating behaviour.

If A is skilled and wishes to persuade B to do something, this may be achieved by using some combination of the following techniques: smiling, complimenting B, promising something in return, emphasising the limited opportunity to take advantage of a wonderful offer, using logical arguments to show the advantages of the recommended action, highlighting the dangers of doing otherwise, or appealing to the moral/altruistic side of B. In this case, these behaviours are directed towards the goal of successful influence over B's behaviour (see Chapter 10 for more information on persuasion).

## INTERRELATED BEHAVIOUR

Social skills are defined in terms of identifiable units of behaviour, and actual performance is in many ways the acid test of effectiveness. In recognising the centrality of behaviour, Millar, Crute, and Hargie (1992) pointed out that judgements about skill are directly related to behavioural performance. They argued that we do not judge soccer players on their ability to discuss the game or reflect upon their own performance. Rather we regard them as skilful or not based upon what they do on the field of play, in the same way as we make judgements about interpersonal skill based upon the behaviour of the interlocutor during social encounters.

A key aspect of skilled performance is the ability to implement a smooth, integrated, behavioural repertoire. In a sense, all that is ever really known about others during social interaction is how they actually behave. All kinds of judgements (boring, humorous, warm, shy, and so on) are inferred about people from such behaviours. As mentioned earlier, skilled behaviour is hierarchical in nature with small elements such as changing gear or asking questions combining to form larger skill areas such as driving or interviewing, respectively. This viewpoint has guided training in social skills, whereby the emphasis is upon encouraging the trainee to acquire separately smaller units of behaviour before integrating them to form the larger response elements – a technique that has long been employed in the learning of motor skills (this issue of skills training is further discussed in Chapter 21).

Socially skilled behaviours are interrelated in that they are synchronised and employed in order to achieve a common goal. As this book illustrates, there is a wide range of differing behavioural routines, each of which can usefully be studied separately. But to be effective in a particular interaction appropriate elements of these must be combined as required (Stivers, 2004). This is similar to the tennis player who, to improve performance, focuses on separate aspects of the game (serve, volley, lob, backhand, etc.) during training, but, to be skilled, must combine these during actual matches. In this sense, while our understanding is informed by a microanalysis of particular elements, for a fuller appreciation of skilled performance the complete picture must also be taken into consideration. One example of this is that when attempting to detect deception attention needs to be paid to the channels of verbal and nonverbal behaviour combined rather than the scrutiny of either channel on its own (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2016). Skilled performance has been likened to an orchestra (McRae, 1998).

All of the instruments (behaviours) must be synchronised, and if anyone is out of synch then the entire performance is adversely affected. In this respect, Bellack (1983) highlighted how performance needs to be viewed as a whole when making judgements about skill, since all of the features combine to form a gestalt. If there is inconsistency between elements of verbal and nonverbal behaviour the interpretation of a response can be dramatically altered.

Skill involves a co-ordinated meshing of behaviour, and is regarded as having been acquired when responses are finely integrated (Proctor & Dutta, 1995). The car driver needs to simultaneously operate the clutch, accelerator, gear lever, brakes, steering wheel, and light switches. Similarly, someone wishing to provide reward to another concurrently uses head nods, eye contact, smiles, attentive facial expressions, and statements such as 'That's very interesting'. These latter behaviours are all interrelated in that they are indicative of the skill of rewardingness (Dickson, Saunders, & Stringer, 1993). Conversely if someone does not look at us, yawns, uses no head nods, yet says 'That's very interesting', these behaviours are contradictory rather than complementary and the interlocutor would not be using the skill of rewardingness effectively. An individual who adopted such a pattern of mixed response over a prolonged period, would be judged to be low in interpersonal skills. People who always act in a socially incompetent fashion are deemed to be unskilled regardless of the depth of theoretical knowledge they may possess about interpersonal behaviour. The English playwright, composer, and actor Noel Coward, in recognising his own performance deficit, once said 'I can't sing, but I know how to, which is quite different' (Day, 2004). In skill, it is performance that counts.

An important criterion for judging skill is that of *accuracy*. Those who are highly skilled make fewer performance errors than those less skilled (Matthews et al., 2000). Just as a skilled golfer misses fewer putts than one less skilled, so too a skilled orator makes fewer speech dysfluencies than a less skilled public speaker. Matthews et al. divided errors into:

- 1 *Errors of omission*. Here an action that should have been executed is omitted: a driver forgets to put the gear in neutral before switching on the engine, or a salesperson fails to get the client's commitment to buy before attempting to close a sale.
- 2 *Errors of commission*. In this instance, the person carries out a behaviour that detracts from performance: a learner driver releases the clutch too quickly and the car engine stalls, or an interlocutor discloses too much deep negative personal information on a first date and the other person terminates the encounter.

This behavioural aspect of the skills definition has been misunderstood by some theorists. In a misinterpretation of the skills perspective, Sanders reached the rather absurd deduction that it purports that 'all speakers of a language are equally able to produce grammatical sentences, and thus must be equally skilled' (p. 235). He does not explain how precisely he reached this conclusion, which is unfortunate as it is the exact opposite of what is being proposed in skills theory. It is completely illogical to make the leap from individuals being able to produce grammatical sentences (and, of course, not all can) to them being equally skilled, and no skills analyst would make such an error. While behaviour (both verbal and nonverbal – although the latter domain is almost

entirely ignored by Sanders) is recognised as being important, it is how this behaviour is contextually employed that determines the extent to which it is deemed to be skilful.

## SITUATIONALLY APPROPRIATE

The importance of contextual awareness for the effective operation of motor skill has long been recognised. In his analysis of motor skill, Welford (1976, p. 2) pointed out that, ‘skills represent particular ways of using capacities in relation to environmental demands, with human beings and external situation together forming a functional “system”’. Likewise, Ellis and Whittington (1981) asserted that a core feature of social skill was the ability to adapt responses to prevailing circumstances. Oliver and Lievens (2014) used the term *interpersonal adaptability* to refer to the ability of an individual to employ the most appropriate use of skills to meet the demands of particular social encounters. For behaviour to be socially skilled it must be contextually appropriate, since behaviours that are apposite when displayed in one situation may be unacceptable if applied in another. Singing risqué songs, telling smutty jokes, and using crude language may be appropriate at an all-male drinking session following a rugby game. The same behaviour would be frowned upon if displayed in mixed company during a formal meal in an exclusive restaurant. It is essential to be able to decide which behaviours are appropriate in what situations. Simply to possess the behaviours is not enough. A tennis player who has a very powerful serve will not be deemed skilful if the ball is always sent directly into the crowd. Similarly being a fluent speaker is of little value if the speaker always monopolises the conversation, talks about boring or rude matters, or does not listen to others when they speak.

Skills must therefore be adapted to deal with particular people in specific settings. The skills definition given in this text was criticised by Sanders (2003, p. 234) as being too ‘broadly drawn and open-ended’. Sanders argued that ‘It is common and meaningful to talk about skilled negotiators, skilled teachers, skilled therapists, and so forth, but not skilled interactants’. But what he failed to recognise is that this is actually in line with the skills perspective. In his criticism, Sanders completely overlooked the import of the ‘situationally appropriate’ component of the skills definition as presented in this chapter. The behaviour of skilled teachers will, of course, differ from that of Sanders’ apparently generic ‘skilled interactants’, as the situational aspect is clearly defined in the former and vague (to say the least) in the latter. Sanders, therefore, beats the ‘broad and abstract’ (p. 223) straw man of skill. Using the definition employed in this chapter, we would need to know in what context Sanders’ hypothetical ‘skilled interactant’ was operating in order to make judgements about effectiveness. In other words, skill is adjudged in the light of specific contextual behaviour. Furthermore, as the chapters in this book demonstrate, we know a considerable amount about the specifics of skilled performance.

While there are few negative critiques of the skills approach in the literature, those who have voiced criticisms have generally misunderstood the importance placed upon context within this paradigm. In this way, Barge and Little (2008, p. 526) argued that ‘skillful activity needs to take into account the temporal flavour of skillful action and the continually unfolding context’, while Salmon and Young (2011, p. 221) contended that, ‘it is implausible to regard any specific behavioural communication skill

as desirable in all possible contexts. Its quality only exists in the context of the whole situation'. These criticisms fail to comprehend that the skills perspective in fact argues that in order to be skilled the interlocutor must be aware of the effects of the ongoing, dynamic, and changing situational parameters within which interaction occurs and respond appropriately within the given context. It also recognises that situational factors play a central role in determining and shaping behaviour.

Magnusson (1981) argued that such factors are important for three reasons: first, we learn about the world and form conceptions of it in terms of situations experienced; second, all behaviour occurs within a given situation and so can only be fully understood in the light of contextual variables; and, third, a greater knowledge of situations increases our understanding of the behaviour of others. In fact, there is firm evidence to indicate that certain behaviours are situationally determined. For example, Hargie, Morrow, and Woodman (2000) carried out a study of effective communication skills in community pharmacy, in which they videotaped 350 actual pharmacist–patient consultations. They found that skills commonly employed when dealing with ‘over the counter’ items, were not utilised by the pharmacist when handling prescription-related consultations. For instance, the skill of suggesting/advising, which was defined as the offer of personal/professional opinion as to a particular course of action while simultaneously allowing the final decision to lie with the patient, fell into this category. When dealing with prescription items, suggestions or advice were not given, probably because these patients had already been advised by their doctor and so the pharmacist did not wish to interfere.

People skilled in one context may not be skilled in another. For example, an excellent striker in soccer may be a terrible defender. Likewise, experienced teachers have been shown to have difficulties in making the transition to being skilled school counsellors (Hargie, 1988). In essence, the more similarity there is between the demand characteristics of situations, the higher the probability that skills will transfer. A professional tennis player is usually very good at other racquet sports, while a successful car salesperson is likely to be effective in other related selling contexts.

One similarity between motor and social skill is that they are both sequential in nature. The skill of driving involves a pre-set sequence of behaviours that must be carried out in the correct order. In social interaction there are also stages that tend to be followed sequentially. Checking into a hotel usually involves interacting in a set way with the receptionist, being shown to your room, and giving a tip to the porter who delivers your cases. Likewise, when going to the doctor, the dentist, or church, there are sequences of behaviour that are expected and which are more or less formalised, depending upon the setting. In the case of the former, the sequence would be:

- 1 Patient enters the surgery
- 2 Doctor makes a greeting
- 3 Patient responds and sits down.
- 4 Doctor seeks information about the patient's health
- 5 Patient responds and gives information
- 6 Doctor makes a diagnosis
- 7 Doctor prescribes and explains treatment
- 8 Doctor checks for patient understanding
- 9 Doctor makes closing comments
- 10 Patient responds, stands up, and leaves the surgery.

This sequence is expected by the patient who would be most unhappy if the doctor moved straight from (1) to (7) without going through the intervening steps.

It can be disconcerting and embarrassing if one is in a situation where the sequence is not as expected or has not been learned (for example, attending a church service of a different religious denomination). Nevertheless, in such situations we usually cope and, unlike the behavioural sequence in, for example, driving a car, these behaviours are expected rather than essential. It is only in certain rituals or ceremonies that a pre-set sequence is essential (for example, weddings in church) and responses are demanded in a fixed temporal order.

Interpersonal skills are more fluid and individualised than most motor skills. Different people employ varying combinations of behaviours, often with equal success, in social contexts. This process, whereby the same goal can be achieved through the implementation of differing strategies, is referred to as *equifinality* (Kruglanski, Chernikova, Babush et al., 2015). These strategies, in turn, have alternative yet equally effective behavioural approaches. While there are common stages in social episodes (e.g. opening, discussion, closing), the behaviours used within each stage can vary depending upon circumstances.

It is clear that 'knowing' the social situation is an important aspect of social skill, in order to successfully relate behaviours to the context in which they are employed. Further aspects of the situational context will be explored in Chapter 2.

## LEARNING

The fifth aspect of the definition is that skills are comprised of behaviours that can be learned. Indeed, one of the widely accepted fundamentals of interpersonal communication is that it is a learned skill (DeVito, 2016). Despite this, some theorists continue to assert that not all skilled behaviour is learned. So, for Salmon and Young (2011, p. 220), 'communication is intuitive'. Similarly, Sanders (2003, p. 228) argued that, 'There are species of behavior for which persons can produce desired results "naturally" because the skills are acquired in the course of bodily or mental development'. As an example, he cites 'speaking and understanding one's native language' (p. 228). Most skills analysts would find the view that language just occurs 'naturally' (whatever that means) to be a rather unusual perspective. Does it mean, for example, that children reared in isolation acquire their 'native' language 'naturally'? The answer of course is no, they do not. While most humans are hardwired to learn language (an exception being those suffering from cognitive impairments), all social behaviour (including nonverbal as well as verbal) still has to be learned.

We know that if children are reared in isolation they do not develop 'normal' interactive repertoires and certainly will not acquire their 'native' language. Indeed there is evidence to indicate that the degree of deprivation of appropriate learning experiences from other humans differentially affects the social behaviour of individuals (Messer, 1995; Newton, 2002). In addition, it has been shown that the interactive skills of parents are key components in the development of social competence in children (Hart, Newell, & Olsen, 2003), leading to the intergenerational transmission of interpersonal skills (Burke, Woszidlo, & Segrin, 2013). Parents who encourage their children to talk, and make elaborations on the child's responses, produce enhanced language

development in the child (Thorpe, Rutter, & Greenwood, 2003). By school age, children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a vocabulary of some 5,000 words as opposed to an average of 20,000 words for those from more advantaged backgrounds (Marulis & Newman, 2010).

Bandura's (1971) social learning theory posited that all repertoires of behaviour, with the exception of elementary reflexes (eye blinks, coughing, etc.), are learned. This social learning process involves the modelling and imitation of significant others, such as parents, peers, media stars, siblings, and teachers. The person observes how others behave and then follows a similar behavioural routine. By this process, from an early age, children may walk, talk, and act like their same-sex parent. At a later stage they may begin to copy and adopt the behaviour of people whom they see as being more significant in their lives, by, for example, following the dress and accents of peers regardless of those of parents. A second major element in social learning theory is the reinforcement of behaviour. People tend to employ more frequently responses that are positively reinforced or rewarded, and to display less often those that are punished or ignored (see Chapter 5).

This is not to say that there are not innate differences in individual potential, since some people may be more talented than others in specific areas. While most behaviours are learned, it is also true that people have different aptitudes for certain types of performance. In this way, although it is necessary to learn how to play musical instruments or how to paint, some may have a better 'ear' for music or 'eye' for art and so will excel in these fields. Likewise, certain people have a 'flair' for social interchange and find interpersonal skills easier to learn and perfect. However, as discussed earlier, practice is also essential for improvement. Comparisons of highly skilled people with those less skilled, across a wide variety of contexts, show that the former engage in significantly more practice (Ericsson, 1996a). Skills are developed and perfected through practice, so that the more we employ a skill, the more skilled we tend to become (Cupach & Canary, 1997). This was aptly expressed by Aristotle: 'If you want to learn to play the flute, play the flute'. But while practice is a necessary factor in skill development it is not on its own sufficient, since feedback on performance is also vital (see Chapter 2). In his analysis of expert performance, Ericsson (1996b) concluded that duration of practice alone is not a predictor of achieved performance, since effective learning requires the operationalisation and monitoring of related goals, processes, and behaviour. Practice alone does not make perfect. It is practice, the results of which are known, understood, and acted upon, that improves skill.

## **COGNITIVE CONTROL**

The final element of social skill is the degree of cognitive control that the individual has over behaviour. Someone with problems in social encounters may have learned the basic behavioural elements of interpersonal skill but may not have developed the appropriate thought processes necessary to control their utilisation. If skill is to have its desired effect, timing is a crucial consideration. Behaviour is said to be skilled only if it is employed at the opportune moment. For example, smiling and saying 'How funny' when someone is relating details of a sad personal bereavement would certainly

not be a socially skilled response. Learning *when* to employ socially skilled behaviours is every bit as important as learning *what* these behaviours are, *where* to use them, and *how* to evaluate them. In his discussion of the notion of interpersonal competence, Parks (1994) highlighted the importance of *hierarchical control theory*, which conceives of personal action as a process controlled by nine linked and hierarchical levels. From lower to higher these are as follows.

### **Level 1: Intensity control**

This is the level just inside the skin involving sensory receptors, muscle movements, and spinal responses. Damage at this basic level has serious consequences for communication. For example, impairments to vision, hearing, or to the vocal chords can dramatically impede interpersonal ability.

### **Level 2: Sensation control**

Here, the sensory nuclei collected at level 1 are collated and organised into meaningful packages. The ability to portray a certain facial expression would be dependent upon activity at this level.

### **Level 3: Configuration control**

The basic packages developed at level 2 are in turn further organised into larger configurations, which then control movements of the limbs, perception of visual forms, and speech patterns. The ability to decode verbal and nonverbal cues occurs at this level.

### **Level 4: Transition control**

This level further directs the more basic configurations into fine-grained responses, such as changing the tone of voice, pronouncing a word, or using head nods at appropriate moments. Transition control also allows us to recognise the meaning of such behaviour in others.

### **Level 5: Sequence control**

At this level, we control the sequence, flow, intensity, and content of our communications. The ability to synchronise and relate our responses appropriately to those with whom we are interacting, and to the situational context, is handled at this level. Judgments of the extent to which someone is socially skilled can begin to be made at the sequence control level.

## Level 6: Relationship control

Here the person judges and makes decisions about larger sets of relationships (cause-effect; chronological etc.), so that appropriate strategies can be implemented to attain higher-order goals. For example, the ability to encode and decode deceptive messages is controlled at this level. Likewise, longer-term tactics for wooing a partner, negotiating a successful business deal, or securing promotion at work, all involve relational control.

## Level 7: Programme control

At this level, programmes are developed to predict, direct, and interpret communication in a variety of contexts. Skill acquisition involves a process of *knowledge compilation* (Tenison & Anderson, 2016). Two types of knowledge are important here (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002).

- Knowing *what* is important in social encounters. This type of *content* or *declarative knowledge* includes an awareness of the rules of social encounters, the behaviour associated with the roles that people play, and so on. In the early stages of skill-learning this knowledge predominates.
- Knowing *how* to perform in a skilled fashion. When the individual becomes skilled, declarative knowledge is ‘compiled’ into *procedural knowledge*. Here, the person has developed a large repertoire of procedures directly related to the implementation of interpersonal skills.

Highly skilled people have a huge store of ‘mental representations’ relating to a wide range of situations, which in turn guide behaviour (Smith & Mackie, 2016). These representations, or conceptual schemas, allow existing circumstances to be compared with previous knowledge and experience, and so facilitate the process of decision-making (Glaser, 1996). A schema is a cognitive structure that is developed after repeated exposure to the same situation. It provides a store of knowledge and information about how to behave in a particular context (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). Schemas contain learned ‘scripts’ that are readily available for enactment as required. By adulthood, we have developed thousands of schemas to deal with a wide variety of people across a range of situations, such as checking-in at an airport, shopping at the supermarket, or giving directions to a stranger on the street.

Our implementation of schemas is guided by *inner speech* (Alderson-Day and Fernyhough, 2015). This process, also known as *covert self-talk* or *intrapersonal communication*, which begins between the ages of 2–3 years, has three main characteristics (Johnson, 1993). First, it is egocentric and used only for our own benefit, in that the producer and intended receiver of the speech is one and the same person (oneself). Second, it is silent and is not the equivalent of talking or mumbling to oneself out loud. Third, it is compressed, containing a high degree of semantic embeddedness, so that single words have high levels of meaning. Using the analogy of a shopping list to explain the operation of inner speech, when going to the supermarket we just write bread, biscuits, soap, etc. on a list. In the supermarket when we look at the word bread we know that we want a small, sliced, gluten-free loaf made by *Bakegoods*, and we select this



automatically. In a similar fashion, as we enter a restaurant, inner speech reminds us of 'restaurant' and this in turn releases the schema and script for this situation thereby enabling us to activate 'restaurant mode'. Other actions within the restaurant will also be guided by inner speech (e.g. 'ordering', 'complimenting', 'paying', or 'complaining'). All of this usually takes place at a subconscious level, which, as discussed earlier, is a key feature of skilled performance. As explained by *cognitive accessibility theory*, schemas enable individuals to use cognitive shortcuts when processing information and making decisions about how to respond (Luechtefeld & Richards, 2016).

New situations can be difficult to navigate since we have not developed relevant schemas to enable us to operate smoothly and effectively therein. In any profession, learning the relevant schemas and scripts is an important part of professional development. In their analysis of skill acquisition, Proctor and Dutta (1995) demonstrated how as skill is acquired cognitive demands are reduced (the person no longer has to think so much about how to handle the situation), and this in turn frees up cognitive resources for other activities. An experienced teacher has a number of classroom-specific schemas, such as 'class getting bored' and 'noise level too high', each with accompanying action plans – 'introduce a new activity', 'call for order'. These schemas are used both to evaluate situations and to enable appropriate and immediate responses to be made. Experienced teachers build up a large store of such schemas, and so are able to cope more successfully than novices. The same is true in other professions. Veteran doctors, nurses, social workers, or salespeople develop a range of work-specific schemas to enable them to respond quickly and confidently in the professional context. This ability to respond rapidly and appropriately is, in turn, a feature of skilled performance. In fact, speed of response is a central feature of skilled interaction (Greene, 2003); in free-flowing interpersonal encounters, less than 200 milliseconds typically elapses between the responses of the interlocutors. One reason for this is that skilled individuals develop a cognitive capacity to analyse and evaluate available information and make decisions about how best to respond. They will also have formulated a number of contingency plans that can be implemented instantly should the initial response fail. This flexibility to change plans, so as to adapt to the needs of the situation, is another feature of skill.

## **Level 8: Principle control**

Programmes must be related directly to our guiding principles or goals and these, in turn, control their implementation. In this sense, we have to create programmes that are compatible with our goals. Unsuccessful behaviour is often caused by individuals lacking the required programming to realise their principles (Parks, 1994). This is particularly true when confronted by unexpected events, for which programmes have not been fully developed.

## **Level 9: System concept control**

At the very top of this hierarchy is our system of idealised self-concepts. These drive and control our principles, which in turn determine programmes, and so on. Someone

whose idealised self-concept includes being a ‘trustworthy person’ would then develop principles such as ‘Always tell the truth’ and ‘Fulfil one’s obligations’. Further down the hierarchy, at the programme control level, schemas would be formulated to enable these principles to be operationalised across various contexts.

## **SOCIAL SKILLS AND MOTOR SKILLS**

From the above analysis, it is obvious that there are similarities and differences between social and motor skills. Indeed, recent research by MacDonald, Lord, & Ulrich (2013) found a relationship between the two sets of skills, in that children with autism spectrum disorder who displayed weak motor skill also had greater social skill deficits. They recommended that more research needs to be carried out to investigate the exact nature of the relationship between motor and social skills. While the parallels between the two sets of skill are not perfect, the analogy between motor and social performance has stimulated considerable debate, and there certainly are considerable areas of overlap. The main similarities are that both sets of skill:

- are learned and improved through practice and feedback;
- are goal-directed and intentional;
- encompass behaviour that is integrated and synchronised;
- involve high levels of cognitive control;
- are situation-specific.

Sloboda (1986) used the acronym FRASK to describe the five central elements of skilled performance as being Fluent, Rapid, Automatic, Simultaneous, and Knowledgeable.

Fluency, in the form of a smooth almost effortless display, is a key feature of skill. Compare, for example, the international ice-skater with the novice making a first attempt to skate on the rink. Likewise, experienced TV interviewers make what is a very difficult task look easy. Fluency subsumes two factors. First, the overlapping of sequential events, in that the preparations for action B are begun while action A is still being performed. A car driver holds the gear lever while the clutch is being depressed, while an interviewer prepares to leave a pause when coming to the end of a question. Second, a set of actions are ‘chunked’ and performed as a single unit. For instance, skilled typists need to see the whole of a word before beginning to type it and only then is a full set of sequenced finger movements put into operation as a single performance unit. In a similar way, the greeting ritual – smiling, making eye contact, uttering salutations, and shaking hands or kissing – is performed as one ‘unit’.

Rapidity is a facet of all skilled action. The ability to respond speedily means that those who are skilled appear to have more time to perform their actions and as a result their behaviour seems less rushed. The skilled person can quickly ‘sum up’ situations, and has the capacity and repertoire of action plans to implement swift responses. In one study of chess players, Chase and Simon (1973) showed novices and grandmasters chessboards on which were placed pieces from the middle of an actual game. After viewing the board for five seconds, they were asked to reconstruct the game on a blank board. On average, novices correctly replaced four out of 20, whereas masters replaced

18 out of 20, pieces. Interestingly, in a second part of this study when the subjects were shown a board on which the pieces were placed in a way that could not have resulted from an actual chess game, masters performed no better than novices. Rapidity was related to actual chess playing. Socially skilled interlocutors develop a similar ability in relation to specific contexts – for example, interviewers will know how to deal with a vast array of interviewee responses. Again, this is context-related, so that an experienced detective will be highly skilled during an interrogative interview but less skilled in a counselling interview.

Automaticity refers to the fact that skilled actions are performed ‘without thinking’. We do not think about how to walk or how to talk – we just do it. Yet, in infancy both skills took considerable time and effort to acquire, and in cases of brain injury in adulthood both may have to be relearned. The other feature of automaticity is that skill once acquired is in a sense mandatory, in that a stimulus triggers our response automatically. When a lecture ends, the students immediately get up from their seats and walk to the exit. Likewise, as we pass someone we know, we look, smile, make an eyebrow ‘flash’ (raised eyebrows), and utter a salutation (e.g. ‘Hello, how are you?’), get a reciprocal gaze, smile, eyebrow flash, and a response (e.g. ‘Fine, thanks. And yourself?’), give a reply (e.g. ‘Good’), as both parties walk on without having given much thought to the encounter.

Simultaneity, or what has been termed multiple-task performance (Greene, 2003), is the fourth dimension of skill. The components of skilled activity are executed conjointly, for example, depressing the clutch with one foot, changing gear with one hand and steering the car with the other, pressing the accelerator with the other foot, while watching the road. Furthermore, because of the high degree of automaticity it is often possible to carry out an unrelated activity simultaneously. Experienced drivers carry out all sorts of weird and wonderful concurrent activities, not least of which include using a mobile phone, operating the in-car entertainment system, eating, drinking, shaving, reading, or applying make-up. Equally, the driver can engage in the social skill of carrying on a deep philosophical discussion with passengers while travelling at speed.

Knowledge, as discussed earlier, is important. Skill involves not just having knowledge but actually applying it at the appropriate juncture (Berger & Palomares, 2011). Knowing that the green traffic light turning to amber means get ready to stop is not sufficient unless acted upon, and indeed for some drivers seems to be taken as a signal to speed up and race through the lights! Similarly, a doctor may know that a patient question is a request for further discussion, but choose not to immediately deal with it so as not to lengthen the consultation, as part of a strategy of getting through a busy morning schedule.

Thus, the FRASK process applies to both social and motor skill. However, the analogy between these two sets of skill is rejected by some theorists. For example, Plum (1981) argued that the meaning of ‘good’ tennis playing can be easily measured by widely agreed criteria such as accuracy and points scored, whereas the meaning of social acts cannot be so judged. Sanders (2003) later used this same analogy, contending that there were two differences here, namely that:

- 1 the specifics of performance outcome that can be enhanced by skill are less apparent in social interaction than in tennis;

2 there is no standardised basis for score-keeping in interpersonal encounters.

Both of these claims can be countered. To take a commonly used analogy between playing tennis and negotiating, like the tennis player the skilled negotiator can be judged upon specified outcomes (percentage pay increase, price of goods, and so on). Secondly, behaviour analysts can evaluate negotiators along a range of behavioural criteria, such as number of questions asked, behaviours labelled, counter-proposals employed, and so on (see Rackham, 2003). This is not to say that there are not differences between the sets of skills, as will be discussed later. Plum and Sanders further argued that good motor skill equals success, but good social skill is purely subjective; for example, what is judged as an act of empathy by one person could be viewed as an insensitive intrusion by someone else. Again, similar disputes exist regarding motor skill operators. At soccer games the author has often debated vigorously with fellow spectators whether a forward was attempting to shoot or pass, whether a goal was the result of a great striker or a terrible goalkeeper, and whether the midfielder was capable of playing at national level or incapable even of playing for the club side. Equally, it is agreed that often the most skilful sides do not win the trophies – if they are lacking in cohesive team spirit, determination, and work-rate, or have not had ‘the luck’.

Both Plum (1981) and Yardley (1979) have iterated that social skills are unique in that only the people involved in interpersonal interaction understand the real meaning of that interaction. This is certainly true, in that phenomenologically no one else can experience exactly what another is experiencing. Of course, the same is also true of motor skill operators. Television commentators frequently ask sportspeople following a competition, ‘What were you trying to do at this point?’ or ‘What was going through your mind here?’ as they watch a replay of the action. This is to gain some further insight into the event, and how it was perceived by the participants. While such personal evaluations are important, so too are the evaluations of others. When people are not selected at job interviews, do not succeed in dating, or fail teaching practice, they are usually regarded as lacking in skill, just as is the youth who fails to get picked for a sports team or the car driver who fails the driving test.

Another argument put forward by Yardley (1979) is that social skills are not goal-directed in the same way as motor skills. She opined that few individuals could verbalise their superordinate goals during social interaction and that, furthermore, social interaction is often valued in its own right rather than as a means to an end. Again, these arguments can be disputed. Skilled negotiators, if asked, can state their superordinate goals during negotiations, while a doctor would be able to do likewise when making a diagnosis. Furthermore, although social interaction is often valued *per se*, it is likely that interlocutors could give reasons for engaging in such interactions (to share ideas, pass the time, avoid loneliness, and so on). In addition, motor skill operators often engage in seemingly aimless activities, for which they would probably find difficulty in providing superordinate goals (as when two people on the beach kick or throw a ball back and forth to one another).

What is the case is that there are gradations of skill difficulty. Opening a door is a relatively simple motor action to which we do not give much thought, while using a head nod during conversation is similarly a socially skilled behaviour to which we do not devote much conscious attention. On the other, hand piloting a jumbo jet or

defending a suspected murderer in court involve more complex skills, and require a much greater amount of planning and monitoring.

While there are numerous similarities between social and motor skills, there are also four key differences:

- 1 Social interaction, by definition, involves other people, whereas many motor skills, such as operating a machine, do not. The goals of the others involved in interaction are of vital import. Not only do we pursue our own goals, but we also try to interpret the goals of the interlocutor. If these concur, this will facilitate social interaction, but if they conflict, interaction can become more difficult. Parallels can more readily be drawn with social skills when motor skill operation involves the participation of others. As already mentioned, an analogy is often made between playing tennis and negotiating. Both players make moves, try to anticipate the actions of their opponent, attempt to win 'points' and achieve a successful outcome. At the same time, of course, while the 'games' analogy is useful there are differences between the two contexts that must be borne in mind. For example, in tennis there are strict pre-set routines that must be followed, determined by hard-and-fast rules, coupled with a rigid scoring system. None of this applies during negotiations, where the rules and routines are usually more fluid.
- 2 While emotional state can influence motor skill performance, the affective domain plays a more central role in interpersonal contexts. We often care about the feelings of other people, but rarely worry about the feelings of machines. The way we feel about others directly impacts upon how we perceive their behaviour and the way in which we respond to them. The concept of 'face' is important here. Skilled interlocutors are concerned with maintaining the esteem both of self and others. Face in this sense refers to the social identities we present to others – it is the conception of who we are and of the identities we want others to accept of us. Maintaining or saving face is an underlying motive in the social milieu. Metts and Grohskopf (2003) identified two types of facework that are important in skilled performance: (1) *preventive facework* involves taking steps to avoid loss of face before it happens; (2) *corrective facework* is concerned with attempts to restore face after it has been lost. Of course, aspects of face are also important when motor skills involves others. To return to the tennis analogy, if we are playing with a good friend who is a much poorer player, then, to save our partner's face, we may not play to our full potential and allow our partner to win some points.
- 3 The perceptual process is more complex during interpersonal encounters. There are three forms of perception in social interaction: first, we perceive our own responses (we hear what we say and how we say it, and may be aware of our nonverbal behaviour). Second, we perceive the responses of others. Third, there is the field of *metaperception*, wherein we attempt to perceive how others are perceiving us and to make judgements about how others think we are perceiving them (Carlson & Barranti, 2016).
- 4 Personal factors relating to those involved in social interaction have an important bearing upon the responses of participants. This would include the age, gender, and appearance of those involved. For example, two members of the opposite sex usually engage in more eye contact than two males.

These differences between social and motor skill will be further discussed in Chapter 2, where an operational model of skilled performance is presented.

## OVERVIEW

This chapter has examined the core elements of skilled performance as identified in the study of perceptual-motor skill, and related them directly to the analysis of social skill. While certain differences exist between the two, there is also a number of features of skilled performance that are central to each, namely the intentionality, learning, control, and synchronisation of context-related behaviour. The realisation that such similarities exist has facilitated a systematic and coherent evaluation of social skill. As summarised by Bull (2002, p.22):

The proposal that communication can be regarded as a form of skill represents one of the main contributions of the social psychological approach to communication. Indeed, it has been so influential that the term “communication skill” has passed into the wider culture.

This has resulted in concerted efforts to determine the nature and types of communication skill in professional contexts, and guided training initiatives to encourage professionals to develop and refine their own repertoire of socially skilled behaviours. However, both of these facets are dependent upon a sound theoretical foundation. This chapter has provided a background to such theory. This will be extended in Chapter 2, where an operational model of interpersonal skill in practice is delineated. As the present chapter has shown, although there are differences between motor and social skills, there are ample similarities to allow useful parallels to be drawn between the two, and to employ methods and techniques used to identify and analyse the former in the examination of the latter. Interpersonal communication can therefore be conceptualised as a form of skilled performance.

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# **Skill in practice: An operational model of communicative performance**

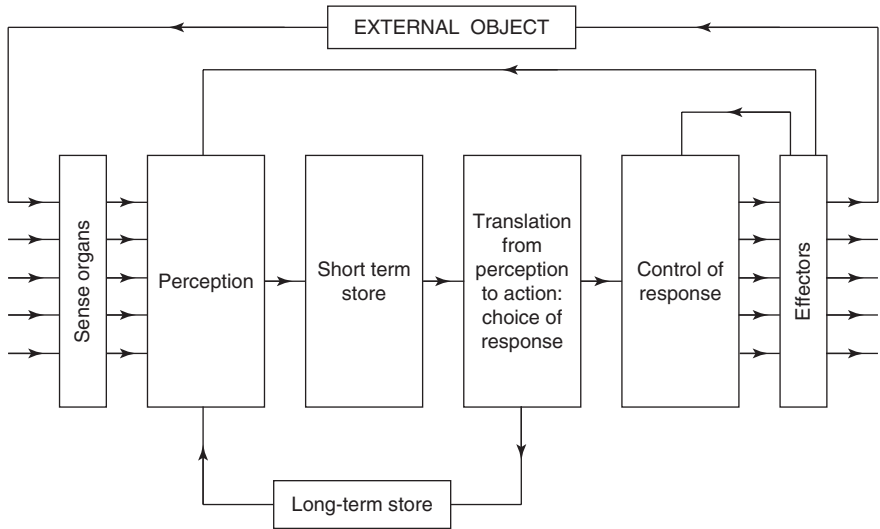
*Owen Hargie*

## **INTRODUCTION**

**T**HIS CHAPTER DEVELOPS AND extends the analogy between motor skill and social skill, as discussed in Chapter 1. In particular, it examines the central processes involved in the implementation of skilled behaviour, and evaluates the extent to which a motor skill model of performance can be operationalised in the study of interpersonal communication. A model of interaction, based upon the skills paradigm, is presented. This model is designed to account for those features of performance that are specific to social encounters.

## **MOTOR SKILL MODEL**

Several models of motor skill, all having central areas in common, have been put forward by different theorists. An early example of this type of model was the one presented by Welford (1965), in the shape of a block diagram representing the operation of perceptual motor skills, in which the need for the co-ordination of a number of processes in the performance of skilled behaviour is highlighted (Figure 2.1). This represents the individual as receiving information about the outside world via the sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, hands, etc.). A range of such perceptions is received, and this incoming information is held in the short-term memory store until sufficient data have been obtained to enable a

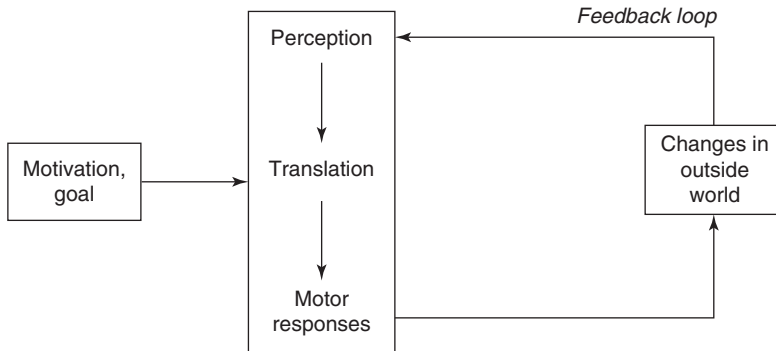


**Figure 2.1** Welford's model of the human sensory-motor system

decision to be made about an appropriate response. As explained by action assembly theory (Greene, 2015), responses are gradually assembled by the individual taking into account information stored in long-term memory, in terms of previous responses, outcomes associated with these responses, and impinging situational factors. Having sifted through all of this data, a response is then carried out by the effector system (hands, feet, voice, and so on). In turn, the outcome of this response is monitored by the sense organs and perceived by the individual, thereby providing feedback that can be used to adjust future responses.

To take a practical example, let us consider a golfer on the green about to make a putt. Here, the golfer observes (perception) the position of the ball in relation to the hole, the lie of the land between ball and hole, and prevailing weather conditions. All of this information is held in short-term memory store and compared with data from the long-term memory store regarding previous experience of similar putts in the past. As a result, decisions are made about which putter to use and exactly how the ball should be struck (translation from perception to action: choice of response). The putt is then carefully prepared for as the golfer positions hands, body, and feet (control of response). The putt is then executed (effectors), and the outcome monitored (sense organs) to guide future decisions.

Argyle (1972) applied this model to the analysis of social skill (Figure 2.2). His model was a slightly modified version of Welford's, in which the flow diagram was simplified by removing the memory store blocks, combining sense organs and perception, control of responses and effectors, and adding the elements of motivation and goal. An example of how this model can be applied to the analysis of motor performance would be where someone is sitting in a room in which the temperature has become too warm (motivation), and therefore wanting to cool down (goal). This can be achieved by devising a range of alternative plans of action (translation), such as opening a window, removing some clothing, or adjusting the heating system. Eventually,



**Figure 2.2** Argyle's motor skill model

one of these plans is carried out: a window is opened (motor response), and the situation monitored; cool air then enters the room, making the temperature more pleasant (changes in outside world). This change in temperature is available as feedback that can be perceived by the individual, to enable goal achievement to be evaluated.

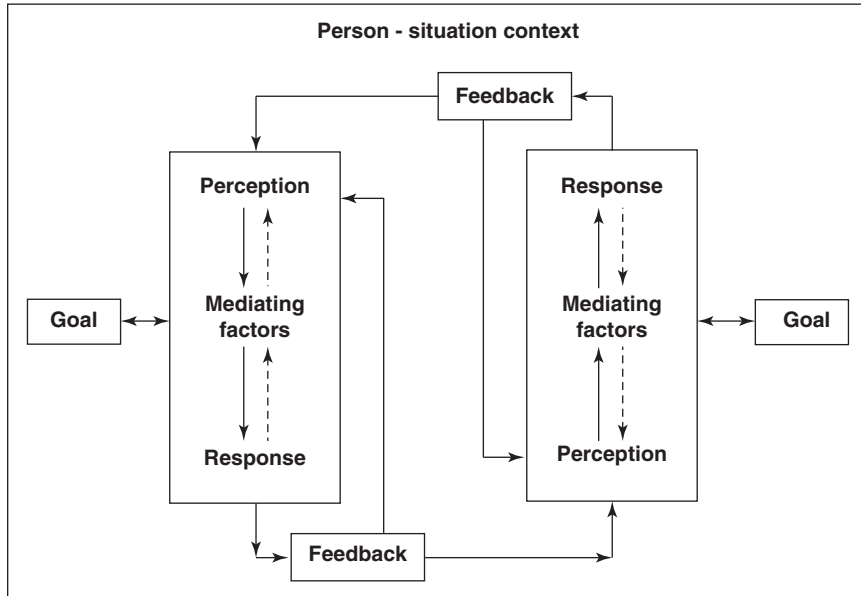
A simple example of the application of this motor skill model to a social context would be meeting someone we find very attractive (motivation), and wanting to find out this person's name (goal). To do so, various plans of action are translated (e.g. ask directly; give own name and pause; ask someone to effect an introduction). One of these is then carried out, for example the direct request: 'What's your name?' (response). This will then result in some response from the other person: 'Alex' (changes in the outside world). This response is available as feedback, which we hear while also observing the interlocutor's nonverbal reactions to us (perception). We can then move on to the next goal (e.g. follow up response, or terminate discussion).

At first sight, then, it would appear that this motor skill model can be applied directly to the analysis of social skill. However, there are several differences between these two sets of skills, which are not really catered for in the basic motor skill model. In fact, many of these differences were recognised by Argyle (1967) in the first edition of *The Psychology of Interpersonal Behaviour* when he attempted to extend the basic model to take account of the responses of the other person in the social situation, and of the different types of feedback that accrue in interpersonal encounters. But this extension did not really succeed and was dropped by Argyle in later editions.

Subsequently, few attempts were made to expand the basic model to account for the interactive nature of social encounters. Pendleton and Furnham (1980), in critically examining the relationship between motor and social skill, did put forward an expanded model, albeit applied directly to doctor–patient interchanges. Furnham (1983) later pointed out that, although there were problems with this interactive model, it was a step in the right direction. In the earlier editions of the present book I presented an extended model of communicative performance that was designed to cater for many of the special features of interpersonal skill. This model was subsequently adapted by Millar, Crute, and Hargie (1992), Dickson, Hargie, and Morrow (1997), Hargie and Tourish (1999), Clarke (2013), and Hargie (2017).

It is difficult to devise an operational model of skilled performance that would provide an in-depth representation of all the facets of interaction. Such a model would





**Figure 2.3** Model of skilled communicative performance

be complicated and cumbersome. As a result, a relatively straightforward, yet robust, extension has been formulated. This model, as illustrated in Figure 2.3, takes into account the goals of both interactors, the influence of the person–situation context, and the fact that feedback comes from our own as well as the other person’s responses. In addition, the term ‘translation’ has been replaced by ‘mediating factors’, to allow for the influence of emotions, as well as cognitions, on performance. The inter-relationship between mediation and goals, perception and responses is also acknowledged. Thus, as a result of mediating processes we may abandon present goals as unattainable and formulate new ones; how we perceive others is influenced (usually subconsciously) by our existing cognitive structure and emotional state (as depicted by the dotted arrows in Figure 2.3); and, our responses help to shape our thoughts and feelings (as in the adage ‘How do I know what I think until I hear what I say?’). This model can best be explained by providing an analysis of each of the separate components.

## GOALS AND MOTIVATION

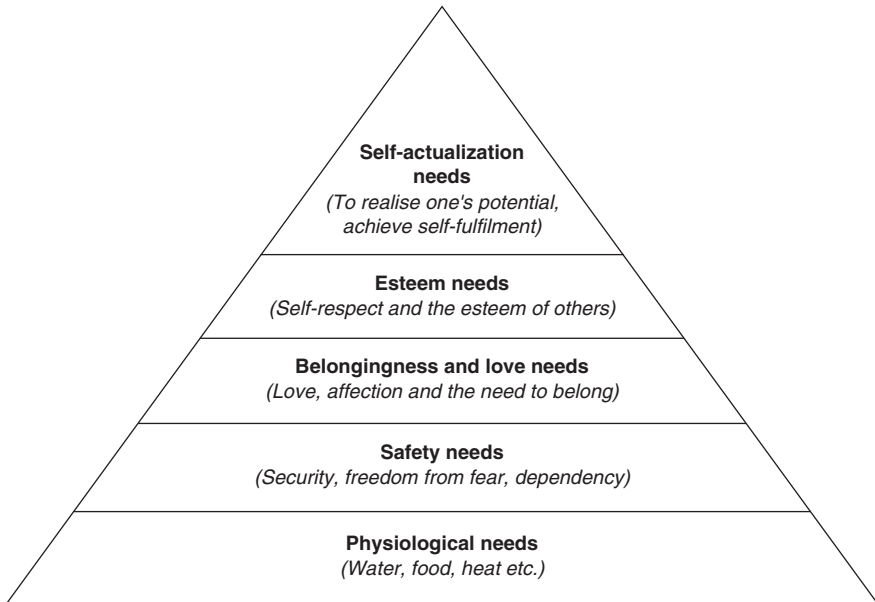
As discussed in Chapter 1, a key feature of skilled performance is its goal-directed, intentional nature. The starting point in this model of social interaction is therefore the goal being pursued, and the related motivation to achieve it. Slater (1997, p. 137), pointed out that ‘The presence of various goals or motivations changes the nature of affect and cognitions generated, and of subsequent behaviors’. In essence, goals shape behaviour, while motivation determines the degree of commitment to pursue a particular goal. There are five main motivations for pursuing goals (Leduc-Cummings, Milyavskaya, & Peetz, 2017):

- *Extrinsic motivation* – here the goal is instrumental in nature and is regulated by outside forces, in that we are pursuing it to obtain rewards or avoid punishment from others (e.g. carrying out a task as regulated by our boss at work).
- *Introjected motivation* – this occurs when external expectations or esteem-based pressures are partially internalised but not fully accepted as one's own, and so an activity is carried out to avoid feelings of guilt or shame, address concerns about approval from self or others, or maintain a sense of self-worth (e.g. we may give money to a homeless person to avoid feelings of guilt created by not giving).
- *Intrinsic motivation* – here, the impetus is non-instrumental in that we pursue a goal simply because we find the behaviour to be inherently interesting, enjoyable and satisfying (e.g. reading a book, or jogging).
- *Identified motivation* – this is a more self-directed form of extrinsic motivation, in that although the behaviour is carried out as a means to a valued end, the goal is internally governed and self-endorsed rather than externally regulated (e.g. a student decides to attend voluntary revision sessions offered by a university lecturer in an attempt to achieve a higher examination mark).
- *Integrated motivation* – in this case, the activity is pursued because it is in line with our self-concept and helps to cement an integrated and congruent sense of identity about 'who we are' (e.g. a political activist goes on a protest march to demonstrate strength of belief in a cause).

In the first two types of motivation, the goals are regulated by external pressures and driven by *have-to* motivation, while in the latter three the goals are regulated by internal pressures and driven by *want-to* motivation. Goals driven by *want-to* motivation are pursued with greater persistence, and tend to result in heightened performance and more successful goal attainment, than those driven by *have-to* motivation.

The motivation that an individual has to pursue a particular goal is, in turn, influenced by needs. There are many needs that must be met in order to enable the individual to live life to the fullest. Different psychologists have posited various categorisations, but the best known hierarchy of human needs remains the one put forward by Maslow (1954), as shown in Figure 2.4.

At the bottom of this hierarchy, and therefore most important, are those physiological needs essential for the survival of the individual, including the need for water, food, heat, and so on. Once these have been met, the next most important needs are those connected with the safety and security of the individual, including protection from physical harm and freedom from fear. These are met in society by various methods, such as the establishment of police forces, putting security chains on doors, or purchasing insurance policies. At the next level are belonging and love needs, such as the desire for a mate, wanting to be accepted by others, and striving to avoid loneliness or rejection. Getting married, having a family, or joining a club, society, or some form of group are all means whereby these needs are satisfied. Esteem needs are met in a number of ways through, for instance, occupational status, achievement in sports, or success in some other sphere. At a higher level is the need for self-actualisation by fulfilling one's true potential. People seek new challenges, feeling the need to be 'stretched' and to develop themselves fully. For example, someone may give up secure salaried employment in order to study at college or set up in business.



**Figure 2.4** Maslow's hierarchy of human needs

Maslow argued that only when basic needs have been achieved does the individual seek higher needs. The person who is suffering from hunger will usually seek food at all costs, even risking personal safety, and is unlikely to worry about being held in high esteem. At a higher level, someone deeply in love may publicly beg a partner not to leave, thereby foregoing self-esteem. At the same time, it should be recognised that this hierarchy does not hold in all cases. Needs can also be influenced directly by individual goals. One example of this is where political prisoners starve themselves to death in an attempt to achieve particular political objectives. But for the most part this hierarchy of needs holds true, and the behaviour of an individual can be related to existing levels of need. Similarly, people can be manipulated either by promises that their needs will be met, or threats that they will not be met. Politicians promise to meet safety needs by reducing the crime rate and improving law and order, internet dating sites offer to meet love needs by providing a partner, while company management may threaten various needs by warning workers that if they go on strike the company could close and they would lose their jobs.

Skilled performers take account of the needs of those with whom they interact. For example, effective salespeople have been shown to ascertain client needs early in the sales encounter and then tailor their responses to address these needs (Johnston & Marshall, 2016). One of the generic needs during social encounters is the quest for uncertainty reduction. We want to know what is expected of us, what the rules of the interaction are, what others think of us, what relationship we will have with them, and so on. In other words, we have a need for high predictability and are happier in familiar situations with low levels of uncertainty about what to expect and how to behave (Knobloch & McAninch, 2014). In interpersonal encounters, skilled individuals take cognisance of the desire for others to have uncertainty reduced. For this reason, skilled

professionals take time at the outset of consultations with clients to clarify goals and agree objectives.

Motivation is therefore important in determining the goals that we seek in social interaction. Indeed, traditionally motivation has been defined as ‘the process by which behaviour is activated and directed toward some definable goal’ (Buck, 1988, p. 5). Our behaviour, in turn, is judged on the basis of the goals that are being pursued. Both parties to an interaction have goals. We therefore engage in the processes of *goal detection* and *goal understanding*, which involves interpreting from the behaviour of others the goals that they seem to be pursuing (Palomares, Grasso, & Li, 2016). This is important, since those who can accurately interpret the behaviour of interlocutors in terms of goals tend to be more successful in achieving their own goals (Berger, 2015). Our goals are determined in three main ways (Locke & Latham, 2015), in that they can be:

- 1 *Assigned*. Goals may be decided for us by others (e.g. parents, teachers, managers), who tell us what goals we should (and should not) pursue.
- 2 *Self-set*. Here, goals are freely chosen by the individual.
- 3 *Participative*. In this case, goals are openly agreed in interaction with others.

We rarely pursue single goals, but rather are attempting to achieve several salient goals simultaneously, so that, on occasions, some of these goals may be adversative to one other, leading to goal conflict (Kruglanski, Chernikova, Babush, et al., 2015). Such conflict may occur where goals being pursued by both sides do not concur, or where there is internal inconsistency in goals. The process whereby the accomplishment of one goal could undermine the attainment of another goal is referred to by Kruglanski et al. as *counterfinality*. Informing a good friend of a very annoying habit while maintaining the same level of friendship would be one example of goal counterfinality. Encounters such as this obviously require skill and tact, yet we know little about how to ensure success in such situations.

For relationships to develop, ways must be found to successfully negotiate mutual goal achievement so that *shared goals* are pursued. The development of such shared goals is essential for the successful coordination of joint actions, and this, in turn, depends on the ability to share representations, accurately predict one another’s responses, and monitor the behaviour of both oneself and the interlocutor (Sacheli, Aglioti, & Candidi, 2015). For a shared goal to be effective, both individuals must be directed towards it, believe that joint goal achievement is possible, and be confident that others will act in accordance with the goal, and each person has to accept responsibility for achieving relevant sub-parts of the goal individually (Butterfill, 2012).

What is clear is that goals, needs, and our motivation to satisfy these all play a vital role in skilled performance. Once appropriate goals have been decided upon, these have an important bearing on our perceptions, behaviour, and the intervening mediating factors.

## **MEDIATING FACTORS**

The term ‘mediating factors’ refers to those internal states, activities, or processes within the individual that mediate between the feedback perceived, the goal being

pursued, and the responses that are made. The concepts of the ‘mediated mind’ (Brinkmann, 2011) and the ‘socially extended mind’ (Kono, 2014) are therefore important elements of interpersonal communication. Mediating factors influence the way in which people and situations are perceived, and determine the capacity of the individual to assimilate, process, and respond to the social information received during interpersonal encounters (Gable, 2015). It is at this stage that the interlocutor makes decisions about appropriate courses of action for goal achievement. This is part of the process of *feedforward*, whereby the individual estimates the likely outcome of particular responses in any given context (Engerer, Berberat, Dinkel, et al., 2016). There are two core mediating factors, cognition and emotion.

## Cognition

As discussed in Chapter 1, cognition plays a very important role in skilled communication in terms of control of responses. This is because it is in the mind that goals are formulated, action plans considered, and behavioural responses generated (Greene, 1988). Cognition has been defined as ‘all the processes by which the sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered and used’ (Neisser, 1967, p. 4). This definition emphasises a number of aspects:

- Cognition involves *transforming*, or decoding and making use of the sensory information received.
- To do so, it is often necessary to *reduce* the amount of information attended to, in order to avoid overloading the system.
- Conversely, at times we have to *elaborate* upon minimal information by making interpretations, judgements, or evaluations (e.g. ‘He is not speaking to me because I have upset him’).
- Information is *stored* either in short-term or long-term memory. While there is debate about the exact nature and operation of memory (Campitelli, 2015), there is considerable evidence to support the existence of these two systems (Baddeley, 2016). Short-term memory has a limited capacity for storage, allowing for the retention of information over a brief interval of time (no more than a few minutes), while long-term memory has an enormous capacity for storage of data that can be retained over many years. Thus, information stored in short-term memory is quickly lost unless it is transferred to the long-term memory store. For instance, we can usually still remember the name of our first teacher at primary school, yet a few minutes after being introduced to someone for the first time may have forgotten the name. The process of context-dependent coding is important, in that remembering can be facilitated by recalling the context of the original event. When we meet someone we recognise but cannot place, we try to think where or when we met that person before – in other words, we try to put the individual in a particular context. A similar process occurs in social situations, whereby we evaluate people and situations in terms of our experience of previous similar encounters. Short-term memory is important in skilled performance in terms of listening and retaining information about the responses of others so as to respond appropriately (see Chapter 9).

- Information that is stored is *recovered* or retrieved from long-term memory to provide information about how similar situations have been dealt with in the past, and thereby facilitate the processes of goal achievement, decision-making, and problem solving.
- In *using* information that is retrieved, working memory, which involves both the efficient storage and management of information (Baddeley, 2012), plays a key role. Working memory has been shown to be fundamentally important in the cognitive control of information (D'Esposito & Postle, 2015). In interpersonal encounters, individuals with a high working memory capacity have the ability to recall information pertinent to the current interactive context and to use this to skilfully guide their responses.

Whereas some thoughts are purposeful and goal-oriented, other cognitive activity may be disordered, less controlled, and more automatic or involuntary in nature. The extent to which these erratic thoughts determine the main direction of mental activity varies from one person to another, but is highest in certain pathological states, such as schizophrenia, where a large number of unrelated thoughts may 'flood through' the mind. Snyder (1987) demonstrated how those high in social skill have a capacity for monitoring and regulating their own behaviour in relation to the responses of others – a system he termed *self-monitoring*. Socially skilled individuals have greater control over cognitive processes and use these to facilitate appropriate responses. In terms of social cognition, in order to interact successfully we must be aware of our own goals, plans, and perceptions, while also paying careful attention to how others are thinking. This is known as *theory of mind*, which refers to the abilities that underlie our capacity to reason about our own and others' mental states. These abilities are crucial for interpreting and attempting to predict the actions of others, and so play a key role in skilled performance (Baimel, Severson, Baron, et al., 2015). Theory of mind involves the processes of *metacognition* and *mentalising*. Metacognition refers to our ability to monitor and reflect upon our own thought processes, while mentalising is the process of observing and trying to understand the cognitive activities of the interlocutor.

Highly skilled individuals have the ability to 'size up' people and situations rapidly, and respond in an appropriate fashion. Such ability is dependent upon the capacity to cognitively process information during social interaction.

## Emotion

The importance of mood and emotional state in the communication process and the part they play in shaping our relationships with others has been clearly demonstrated (Planalp & Rosenberg, 2014). The effective control of emotion is a central component of socially skilled performance. In addition, being responsive to the emotional needs of others is a key aspect of effective relational communication (Lawrie & Phillips, 2016). Skilled individuals are adept both at encoding their own emotions and at accurately decoding and responding appropriately to the emotional state of others (Holmstrom, Bodie, Burleson, et al., 2015). Indeed, one of the characteristics of dysfunctions of personality, such as psychopathy, is emotional malfunction (Boll & Gamer, 2016).

The central role played by the affective domain in interpersonal encounters was aptly summarised by Metts & Bowers (1994, p. 508) as

underlying all interaction, giving it direction, intensity, and velocity as well as shaping communicative choices ... [and] ... framing the interpretation of messages, one's view of self and others, and one's understanding of the relationship that gave rise to the feeling.

Differing theoretical perspectives exist concerning the nature and cause of emotion (Manstead, 2012; Power & Dalglish, 2016). An early viewpoint put forward by James (1884) was that emotions were simply a category of physiological phenomena resulting from the perception of an external stimulus. James argued that when you see a bear, the muscles tense and glands secrete hormones to facilitate escape – as a result fear is experienced. However, this view was undermined by research that demonstrated how patients who had glands and muscles removed from the nervous system by surgery nevertheless reported the feeling of affect. Later theorists emphasised the link between cognition and emotion, and highlighted two main elements involved in the subjective experience of the latter: first, the perception of physiological arousal; and, second, the cognitive evaluation of that arousal to arrive at an emotional 'label' for the experience (Berscheid, 1983).

Differences persist about the exact nature of the relationship between cognition and emotion. Centralist theorists purport that a direct causal relationship exists between cognitive and affective processes, with the latter being caused by the former. Within this model, irrational beliefs would be seen as causing fear or anxiety, which, in turn, could be controlled by helping the individual to develop a more rational belief system. This perspective is regarded by others as being an oversimplification of what is viewed as a more complex relationship between cognition and affect. It is argued that emotional states can also cause changes in cognition, so that an individual who is very angry may not be able to 'think straight', while it is also possible to be 'out of your mind' with worry. In this sense, there is a bi-directional relationship between the two, in that the way we think can influence how we feel and vice versa, and so behaviour is shaped by an interplay of cognitive and emotional factors (Fiedler & Hütter, 2014).

Cognition has been conceptualised as comprising two main dimensions: analytic cognition, which is rational, sequential, and reason-oriented; and, syncretic cognition, which is more holistic and affective in nature. Chaudhuri & Buck (1995), for example, found that differing types of advertisement evoked different forms of cognitive response in recipients; adverts that employed product information strategies strongly encouraged analytic cognition and discouraged syncretic (or affective) cognition, whereas those using mood arousal strategies had the converse effect. There may be individual differences in cognitive structure, in that with some people analytical thought drives central processing, while others are more affective in the way they think. Also, it is likely that when interacting with certain people, and in specific settings, affective cognition predominates (e.g. at a family gathering), whereas in other contexts analytic cognition is more likely to govern our thought processes (e.g. negotiating the price of a car with a salesperson in a showroom). More research is required to investigate the exact determinants of these two forms of cognition.

Emotion itself has been shown to have three main components: first, the direct conscious experience or feeling of emotion; second, the physiological processes that accompany

emotions; and third, the observable behavioural actions used to express and convey emotions. Izard (1977, p. 10), in noting these three processes, pointed out that ‘virtually all of the neurophysiological systems and subsystems of the body are involved in greater or lesser degree in emotional states. Such changes inevitably affect the perceptions, thoughts and actions of the person’. As a result, the individual who is in love may be ‘blind’ to the faults of another and fail to perceive negative cues, while someone who is very depressed is inclined to pick up negative cues and miss the positive ones. Similarly, a happy person is more confident, ambitious, and helpful, smiles more, and joins in social interaction, while a sad person is more cautious, makes more negative assessments of self and goal-attainment likelihood, has a flatter tone of voice and generally avoids interaction with others.

Our emotional state, therefore, plays a key role both in terms of our perception of the outside world and how we respond to it. The importance of the affective domain is evidenced by the vast array of words and terms used to describe the variety of emotional states that are experienced. Bush (1972) accumulated a total of 2,186 emotional adjectives in English, while Averill (1975) identified a total of 558 discrete emotional labels, and Clore, Ortony, and Foss (1987) found 255 terms referring to core emotions. In their review of the field, Power and Dalgleish (2016) concluded that these can be distilled down to five basic emotions – fear, sadness, anger, disgust, and happiness. They further argued that from each of these basic emotions, a range of related complex emotions is derived. For instance, ‘happiness’ is the foundation for, *inter alia*, ‘joy’, ‘nostalgia’, and ‘love’. There are also behaviours associated with the expression of these emotions, so that love involves, *inter alia*, kissing, hugging, and extensive mutual gaze.

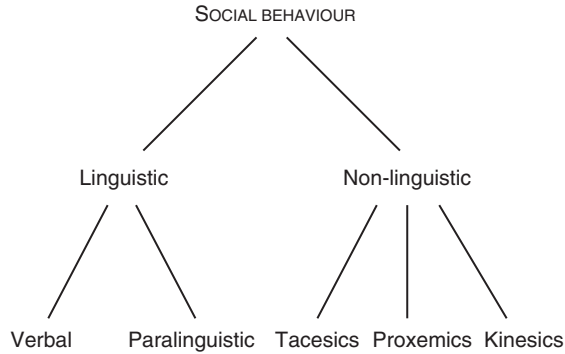
Another distinction has been made between ‘secondary’ emotions, which are seen as thought-imbued and unique to humans, and ‘primary’ emotions that are also experienced by other animals. Animals experience fear, anger, happiness, and surprise, but it is argued that feelings such as disillusionment, cynicism, respect, pride, and optimism are specific to humans. There is some evidence that messages using secondary emotional labels have greater social impact, and are more persuasive, than those employing primary emotions (Vaes, Paladino, & Leyens, 2002).

While emotion and cognition are the two main aspects focused upon in this chapter, there are other related mediating factors that influence how we process information. Our actions and reactions to others are also shaped by, *inter alia*, our beliefs, knowledge, values, and attitudes (Miller, Cody, & McLaughlin, 1994; Brown & Starkey, 1994). These also impact upon our attitudes towards other people, which, in turn, affects our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour during social encounters. Our attitudes are also affected by previous experiences of the interlocutor. All of these factors come into play at the decision-making stage during interpersonal encounters. For the most part, this mediating process of translating perceptions into actions takes place at a subconscious level, thereby enabling faster, smoother responses to be made. As highlighted in Chapter 1, a feature of skilled performance is the ability to operate at this subconscious level, while monitoring the situation to ensure a successful outcome.

## RESPONSES

Once a goal and related action plan have been formulated, the next step in the sequence of skilled performance is to implement this plan in terms of social responses. It is the





**Figure 2.5** Main categories of social behaviour

function of the response system (voice, hands, face, etc.) to carry out the plan in terms of overt behaviours and it is at this stage that skill becomes manifest. Social behaviour can be categorised as shown in Figure 2.5.

An initial distinction is made between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. Linguistic behaviour refers to all aspects of speech, including the actual verbal content (the words used), and the paralinguistic message associated with it. Paralinguistic refers to the way in which something is said (pitch, tone, speed, volume of voice, accent, pauses, speech dysfluencies, etc.). Non-linguistic behaviour involves all of our bodily communication and is concerned with the study of what we do rather than what we say. While there are many approaches to the analysis of nonverbal behaviour (Matsumoto, Frank, & Hwang, 2013), this domain encompasses three main categories:

- 1 *Tacesics* is the study of bodily contact – in other words with what parts of the body we touch one another, how often, with what intensity, in which contexts, and to what effect.
- 2 *Proxemics* is the analysis of the spatial features of social presentation – that is, the social distances we adopt in different settings, how we mark and protect personal territory, the angles at which we orient towards one another, and the standing or seating positions we take up.
- 3 *Kinesics* is the systematic study of body motion – the meanings associated with movements of the hands, head, and legs, the postures we adopt, our gaze and our facial expressions.

These aspects of verbal and nonverbal behaviour are discussed fully throughout the remaining chapters of this book.

One important element of individual behaviour is the concept of style (de Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Konings, et al., 2013). Style was defined by Norton (1983) as an individual's comparatively stable pattern of interacting. In arguing that a macrojudgement about a person's style of communicating is based upon a summation of microbehaviours, he identified nine main communicative styles, each of which can be interpreted as a continuum, as follows:

- 1 Dominant/submissive. Dominant people like to control interaction, give orders, and be the centre of attention; they use behaviours such as loud volume of voice, interruptions, prolonged eye contact, and fewer pauses to achieve dominance. At the opposite end of this continuum, submissive people prefer to keep quiet, stay out of the limelight, and take orders.
- 2 Dramatic/reserved. Exaggeration, story-telling, and use of nonverbal communication are techniques used by dramatic individuals who tend to overstate their messages. The other end of the continuum is characterised by the reserved type of person who is quieter, modest, and prone to understatement.
- 3 Contentious/affiliative. The contentious person is argumentative, provocative or contrary, as opposed to the agreeable, peace-loving, affiliative individual.
- 4 Animated/inexpressive. An animated style involves making use of hands, arms, eyes, facial expressions, posture, and overall body movement to gain attention or convey enthusiasm. The converse here is the dull, slow-moving, inexpressive person.
- 5 Relaxed/frenetic. This continuum ranges from people who do not get overexcited, always seem in control, and are never flustered, to those who are tense, quickly lose self-control, get excited easily, and behave frenetically.
- 6 Attentive/inattentive. Attentive individuals listen carefully to others and display overt signs of listening such as eye contact, appropriate facial expression, and posture. Inattentive individuals, on the other hand, are poor listeners who do not make any attempt to express interest in what others are saying.
- 7 Impression-leaving/insignificant. The impression-leaving style is characterised by flamboyant individuals who display a visible or memorable style of communicating and leave an impression on those whom they meet. They often wear loud clothes, have unusual hairstyles, or use a controversial interactive manner. The opposite of this is the insignificant individual who 'fades into the fabric' of the room, is non-controversial and dresses conservatively.
- 8 Open/closed. Open people talk about themselves freely and are approachable, unreserved, candid, and conversational. At the opposite end of this continuum are very closed individuals who disclose no personal information and are guarded, secretive, loath to express opinions, and 'keep themselves to themselves' (see Chapter 7 for further discussion on self-disclosure).
- 9 Friendly/hostile. This style continuum ranges from the friendly person who smiles frequently and is happy, very rewarding, and generally non-competitive, to the hostile individual who is overtly aggressive, highly competitive, and very unrewarding.

Style of communication can also be affected by situations. A dominant teacher in the classroom may be submissive during staff meetings, while a normally friendly individual may become hostile when engaging in team sports. Nevertheless, there are elements of style that endure across situations, and these have a bearing on a number of facets of the individual. Someone who tends to be dominant, frenetic, inattentive, or hostile will probably not make a good counsellor. Similarly, a very dominant person is unlikely to marry someone equally dominant.

As discussed in Chapter 1, behaviour is the acid test of skill. If someone always fails miserably at actual negotiation we would not call that person a skilled nego-

tiator. For this reason, much of this text is devoted to an analysis of a wide array of responses in terms of skills, styles, and strategies. However, in order to respond in a skilled manner it is also necessary to be aware of available feedback during communication.

## FEEDBACK

It is well documented that a key feature in skill acquisition is the receipt of accurate and timely feedback on performance (Greene, 2003). Feedback enables us to monitor our progress towards goal achievement (Locke & Latham, 2015). The greater the number of channels of accurate and useful feedback we receive, the better we are likely to perform (Tourish & Hargie, 2004). Feedback is a term derived from cybernetics (the study of automatic communication and control in systems), which is the method of controlling a system by reinserting into it the results of its past performance. This concept of feedback as a control process operates on the basis that the output of a system is 'fed back' into it as additional input, which, in turn, serves to regulate further output (Annett, 1969). For instance, a thermostat on a central heating unit acts as a servomechanism, automatically feeding back details of the temperature into the system, which then regulates heating output. One important difference between this mechanistic view and its application to the interpersonal domain is that humans actively interpret feedback. A message intended as positive feedback by the sender may be construed as negative by the receiver. Likewise, feedback from others may either not be picked up at all, or perceived and rejected.

Once a response has been carried out, feedback is available to determine its effects and enable subsequent responses to be shaped in the light of this information. Thus, sighted individuals would find it very difficult to write a letter, make a cup of coffee, or even walk along a straight line in the absence of visual feedback. In order to perform any task efficiently, it is necessary to receive such feedback so that we can judge our present performance and take corrective action where required. For this reason, aperiodic feedback has been shown to be essential to skill acquisition (Sloboda, 1986).

Within the sphere of social interaction, we receive feedback from the reactions of other people, as messages are received and transmitted in a continuous loop. The importance of such feedback was illustrated in a study of advice given during supportive encounters, which concluded that before giving advice, one should ascertain whether such advice is actually desired (MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, et al., 2004). This is because the interlocutor's receptiveness to advice significantly impacts upon whether the advice given is regarded as useful, or is discounted (Chou, Masters, Chang, et al., 2013). Feedback in the form of advice has been shown to be more effective when it contains high-quality content, is delivered with politeness and consideration for the recipient, and includes evidence of expertise and trustworthiness on the part of the advice-giver (MacGeorge, Guntzville, Hanasono, et al., 2016).

As well as getting feedback from the other person, we also receive self-feedback, which provides information about our own performance (see Figure 2.3). If we ask a question that we immediately perceive to have been poorly worded, we may rephrase the question before the listener has had an opportunity to respond. High self-monitors

more readily access such information and by so doing control the images of self they project to others. Our self-perceptions over time help us to shape our attitudes, values, beliefs, and personality. We develop self-schemata regarding the type of person we think we are, and our self-concept in turn influences the way in which encounters with others are perceived and interpreted.

Fitts and Posner (1973) identified three main functions of feedback:

- 1 To provide *motivation* to continue with a task – if feedback suggests the possibility of a successful outcome. For example, a salesperson who believes the customer is showing interest is likely to be more motivated to try to clinch the sale.
- 2 To provide *knowledge* about the results of behaviour. Whether the sale is successful or not will help to shape the salesperson's future sales attempts – to replicate the same approach or make appropriate changes.
- 3 To act as a form of *reinforcement* from the listener, encouraging the speaker to continue with the same type of messages. So, during an interaction, feedback in the form of comments such as 'I fully agree' or 'Great idea', and nonverbal behaviours including smiles and head nods, are overt positive reinforcers (see Chapter 5).

What is referred to as *backchannel behaviour* has been shown to be a key form of feedback. This allows the listener to feed back information (agreement, disagreement, interest, involvement, etc.) to the speaker on an ongoing yet unobtrusive basis, in the form of vocalisations ('mm-hm', 'uh-hu'), head nods, posture, eye movements and facial expressions. The skilled speaker engages in *track-checking behaviour* by monitoring these backchannel cues to assess whether the message is being understood and accepted and is having the intended impact. This enables adjustments to be made to the delivery as necessary. Research findings demonstrate cross-cultural differences in type and degree of backchannel behaviour, with, for instance, Japanese interlocutors using about four times as many head nods as Americans during interactions (McClave, 2000). Such differences in backchannel behaviour can contribute to the formation of negative perceptions between individuals from different cultures (Cutrone, 2014). Judgements of communication skill have also been found to be higher where interactors display similar levels of backchannel cues (Kikuchi, 1994).

In interpersonal communication we are bombarded by a constant stream of sensory stimulation, in the form of noises, sights, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. While bodily olfaction has a very important communicative function and can strongly influence how we relate to others (Pazzaglia, 2015), most olfactory information is processed at a subconscious level. During social encounters we receive a large volume of perceptual information through the eyes and ears, and, to a lesser extent, tactile senses. Indeed, we receive such a barrage of sensory input that it is necessary to filter out some of the available stimuli, to deal more effectively with the remainder. In their analysis of skilled performance, Matthews, Davies, Westerman, et al. (2000) noted that for over a century, it has been recognised that cognitive performance entails a process of attentional selectivity. This is because our capacity for information processing is limited, so that we are unable to process all the stimuli that impinge upon the sensory system (Fiedler & Bless, 2001). We therefore employ a selective perception filter to limit

the amount of information that is consciously perceived, while storing the remainder at a subconscious level (Hargie, 2009). For example, in a lecture context, students are bombarded by stimuli in terms of the voice of the lecturer, the noises made by other students, the pressure of their feet on the floor, backside on the seat, the hum of a data projector, the feel of a pen, and so on. If the lecturer is very stimulating then other stimuli are filtered out, whereas if the lecturer is boring then one's aching backside may become a prime focus of attention.

Unfortunately, vital information from others may be filtered out during social interaction and less important cues consciously perceived. One reason for this is that humans are not objective animals since we sift incoming information to rationalise it in line with our extant belief systems. From all the social stimuli available to us, we may focus upon less relevant stimuli and miss important verbal or nonverbal signals. The difference between feedback and perception is that while there is usually a great deal of feedback available, it is not all consciously perceived. Skilled individuals make appropriate use of the feedback available during interactions, by perceiving the central messages and filtering out peripheral ones.

## PERCEPTION

Perceptual acumen is a key feature of skilled performance. Indeed, Guirdham (2002) argued that accurate interpersonal perception is the basis of all socially skilled performance. Person perception is goal-directed and purposive, so that skilled individuals continually monitor their environment and use the available information to determine the most apposite responses (Hinton, 2016). More generally, the centrality of person perception was emphasised by Hall, Mast, and West (2016, p. 4), who pointed out that 'paying attention to each other and trying to figure out others is an irresistible inclination, and for a good reason: how could complex social life exist if people did not engage in these activities?' People differ in the way they perceive the world around them, so that they 'read' the same situation in differing ways. This is because interpersonal perception is not a dispassionate observation of objective reality, but an active construction that is influenced by a range of internal processes (Martin, Frack, & Strapel, 2004). Reality for each individual is constructed from the way in which incoming information is interpreted (Myers, 2013). To appreciate this more fully, we need to understand some of the factors that impinge upon the perceptual process.

Perceptual ability is affected by the familiarity of incoming stimuli. Knowledge is a set of associated concepts, so that new information is assimilated by building connections to the existing cognitive network. Consequently, if incoming material is difficult to understand, it will be harder to process and conceptualise. Within social interaction such elements as a common understandable language, recognisable dialect, and phrasing influence perceptual capacity. Our speed of perception would drop if someone used technical terms with which we were unfamiliar or spoke at too fast a rate. Likewise, if the nonverbal signals do not register as understandable, or are distracting, then our perceptual reception is hampered. In either situation, we may selectively filter out the unfamiliar or unacceptable and so receive a distorted or inaccurate message (Bodie, St. Cyr, Pence, et al., 2012). Another factor here is that we are not always consciously aware of having perceived stimuli. It has been shown that

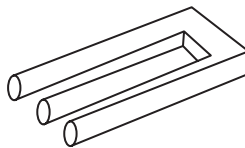
messages received at the subliminal (subconscious) level influence the way in which we judge others (Smith & McCulloch, 2012).

There are two main theories of perception: intuitive and inference. Intuitive theories regard perception as being innate, purporting that people instinctively recognise and interpret the behaviour and feelings of others. There is some evidence to support the existence of such an innate capacity. It has been found that people blind from birth are able to display facial expressions of emotions (albeit of a more restricted range as compared to sighted people), and a number of such expressions seem to be common across different cultures. Although there may be elements of emotion that are perceived intuitively, it is unlikely that many of the perceptual judgements people make about others are innate, e.g. ‘warm’, ‘intelligent’, ‘sophisticated’. Such detailed evaluations are culture-specific and dependent upon learning. Moreover, if perception was innate and instinctive, then we should be accurate in our perceptions. Yet this is patently not the case. There is a great deal of evidence to indicate that we are often inaccurate in our perceptions and can be deceived in terms of what we appear to see (Hall, Mast, & West, 2016; Zavagno, Daneyko, & Actis-Grosso, 2015). In this way, a series of bulbs lit in quick succession seem like the flowing movement of light. Another example of how perception can be distorted is shown in the ‘impossible object’ in Figure 2.6. This object is meaningful if we look at either end of it, but when viewed in its entirety it is, in fact, an optical illusion. Likewise, in person perception one can be deceived by appearances – for example, family and friends are often shocked when someone commits suicide without seeming to be ostensibly unhappy.

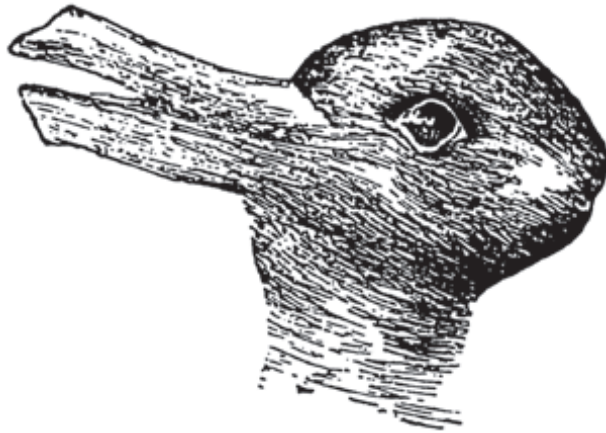
Perceptions are also influenced by context, so that the symbol **1** will be seen as a number in the first sequence and as a letter in the second sequence below. In the same way, our perceptions of people are influenced by the social context.

1 – 2 – 3  
G – H – 1

Likewise, what we see often depends on how we look at things. Thus, in Jastrow’s famous ambiguous illusion (Figure 2.7) we can see either a rabbit or a duck. In like vein, our perception of others depends upon the way in which we ‘look’ at them. The primacy and recency effects also play an important role in perception. The primacy effect refers to the way in which information perceived early in an encounter can influence how later information is interpreted. Our first impressions of people we meet for the first time influence not only how we initially respond to them, but also whether or not to we will develop a conducive relationship with them (Sprecher, Treger, & Wondra, 2013). Important decisions such as whether or not to give someone a job are influenced by the first impressions of the candidate gleaned by the interviewer (Levashina, Hartwell, Morgeson, et al., 2014). The recency effect refers to the way in which the final



**Figure 2.6** Impossible object



**Figure 2.7** Jastrow's duck-rabbit

information received can affect our judgements. For instance, in a sequence of employment interviews the final candidate is more readily remembered than those interviewed in the middle of the sequence. It is also possible to improve perceptual ability, thereby supporting the view that learning processes are involved. This means that while intuition plays a role in our perceptions of others, it cannot account for the entire process.

The second theory of perception purports that judgements of others are based on inferences made as the result of past experiences. Through this process, we develop categories with which to describe others, and hold certain beliefs about which categories 'hang together'. So, if we were told that someone was compassionate, we might expect other related qualities to be displayed (e.g. sympathetic, kind, generous). The process of labelling is used during person perception to enable people to be categorised and dealt with more readily. Labels are related to aspects such as age, physical appearance, gender, race, and mode of dress, as well as nonverbal and verbal behaviour. Labelling arises from the need to classify and categorise others, and to simplify incoming information, which would otherwise become unmanageable. One of the most ubiquitous types of label is that of the social stereotype (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2014). Once a person is identified as belonging to a particular group, the characteristics of that group tend to be attributed irrespective of actual individual characteristics.

Expectations can directly influence both the behaviour of the individual and the outcomes of interaction. This *interpersonal expectancy effect*, which has been shown to be operative in a range of professional contexts, including health, business, education, social research and the courtroom, can be either positive or negative (Trusz & Babel, 2016). If we are given positive information about someone we then tend to form positive expectations and respond accordingly. This means that a self-fulfilling prophecy can occur, in that we actually encourage the anticipated response. The effects of expectations upon behaviour can also be negative. So, if we believe that people from a particular racial background are aggressive, when we meet someone of that race we are more likely to behave in a way that anticipates aggression, thereby provoking a more aggressive response and so confirming our original beliefs.

Thus, both intuition and inference play a part in person perception. The innate perception of certain basic emotions in others is important for the survival of the individual, but in a complex society, learned inferences enable us to recognise and interpret a range of social messages, and respond to these more appropriately. It is at the latter level that perception plays a key role in skilled performance. The more socially skilled individual possesses greater perceptual ability than someone less socially adept. To be socially skilled it is necessary to be sensitive to relevant interpersonal feedback, in terms of the verbal and nonverbal behaviour being displayed both by self and by others. If such perceptions are inaccurate, then decisions about future responses will be based upon invalid information, and the resulting responses are likely to be less appropriate.

Perception is the final central process involved in the model of skilled performance (Figure 2.3). However, in order to attempt to fully comprehend such performance, we must take account of two other aspects, namely personal and situational factors, which impinge upon, and influence, how skill is operationalised.

## THE PERSON–SITUATION CONTEXT

As discussed in Chapter 1, skilled behaviour is appropriate to the situation in which it is carried out. Communication is embedded within a context and interactive messages can only be fully understood by taking cognisance of the situation (S) in which they occur. The way in which we evaluate the responses of others is to a significant extent influenced by the interactive context (Pearson & Dovidio, 2014). On the other hand, the person (P) side of the equation is also important. Bureson (2003, p. 577) summarised it as follows:

enduring features of the person interact with contextual factors in generating both a situated interpretation of a specific event and a situated motivational-emotional response ... [which] ... lead, in turn, to the formation of interaction goals ... and these ultimately generate the articulated message.

It is therefore necessary to study skilled performance within the parameters of the person–situation context. This is important, since skill necessitates being able to systematically adjust performance to meet varying personal and situational demands (Zimmerman, 2000).

The person–situation debate contains two main contrasting perspectives. Personologists purport that social behaviour is mainly a feature of inner factors, while situationalists argue it is primarily a function of the setting in which people find themselves. In a review of this field, Fleeson & Nettle (2008) concluded that the person–situation debate had been resolved and that the outcome was a synthesis of the two positions. Likewise, in reviewing research into the debate, Argyle (1994, p. 102) concluded: ‘The overall results are very clear: persons and situations are both important, but P x S interaction is more important than either’.

But, as Sapolsky (2017) has shown in relation to the question as to what determines particular behaviour, different disciplines emphasise diverse sources – some attribute it to hormones, or genes, others to evolution, while others underscore



childhood experiences, or culture. Sapolsky argues that these are actually intertwined causes, since it is an interplay of genetic and contextual factors that shapes behaviour.

This is reflected in the third perspective, that of interactionists, who hold that social behaviour is a product of P x S. Thus, *person–environment fit theory* contends that behaviour is shaped not by personal or environmental factors separately, but rather by the interaction between the two (Edwards, 1996). For example, in the employment interview the person–environment fit plays a key role, in that selection interviewers attempt to assess whether or not a particular candidate would be a good fit with the existing organisational environment (Hu, Wayne, Bauer, et al., 2016).

## Person factors

As noted by Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, et al. (2003, p 9), 'Person factors are a necessary component of the study of social interaction because they determine the individual's perception of and response to the objective properties of the situation'. While it is recognised that the structure and function of the nervous system play an important role in behaviour, an analysis of the discipline of neuroscience is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, the focus will be upon the following key social science factors pertaining to the person.

## Personality

The concept of personality and the role it plays in determining behaviour has long occupied the minds of social scientists (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). Pervin and John (2001), while recognising that there are many differing perspectives on personality and hence varying definitions, defined it as the characteristics of an individual that account for regular patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. One common unit of analysis in the study of personality has been that of traits. It is argued by trait theorists that whether we are co-operative or competitive, extraverted or introverted, dominant or submissive, dependent or independent, and so on will influence both how we interpret and respond to situations. Although many inventories have been developed to measure a plethora of such characteristics, there is considerable debate regarding the exact number of traits or factors which can reliably be charted. Most agreement centres round the validity of what have been termed the 'Big Five' traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism (emotional stability), and openness to experience (Burger, 2015).

Traits can be viewed as representing naturally occurring goal tensions within individuals. For instance, extraversion/introversion represents the tension between wanting to meet and socialise with others on the one hand and the desire to have peace and quiet and be alone on the other. It would seem that although traits are not universally reliable in predicting behaviour they are most useful in predictions of individual responses across similar situations (Maltby, Day, & Macaskill, 2013). Yet, there is no clear agreement about the exact determinants of personality. Although a combination of hereditary and prenatal factors are contributory, experiences in infancy and early childhood seem to play a vital shaping role. Furthermore, while personality is

relatively stable, it can and does change as a result of experiences throughout the lifespan. There is also some evidence that differences in personality may differentially affect skill acquisition (see Greene, 2003), though more research is required in this field. In addition, skills need to be adapted to meet the specific requirements of different types of people (see the discussion of variations in persuasion techniques in Chapter 10).

We need to interact with others for a period of time before making judgements about their personality, but even before we actually talk to others, we make inferences about them based upon 'how they look'. Such judgements can markedly affect the goals we pursue, our motivation to open an interaction, the way in which we perceive the actions of others, and how we respond to them. Therefore, it is necessary to take account of those aspects of the individual that are immediately visible, namely, gender, age, and appearance.

## **Gender**

During social interaction we tend to respond differently to, and have differing expectations of, others depending upon whether they are male or female. All cultures recognise male/female as a fundamental binary divide and accord different sets of characteristics and behavioural expectations according to which side of the division an individual is located. The first question asked after the birth of a baby (or indeed before, following a scan) is usually whether it is a girl or a boy. Sexual differences are then perpetuated by the ways in which infants are dressed, and responded to, by adults. Gender stereotypes proliferate in child rearing, with children being reminded of gender role expectations. Not surprisingly, by the age of 2 years most children can identify people by gender and can employ gender labels in their speech (Martin & Ruble, 2010); at this age they can also readily distinguish males from females on the basis of purely cultural cues like hairstyle and clothing (Romaine, 1999). Children in most countries divide into boy and girl 'camps' and play exclusively with their own gender, and this segregation then tends to persist in adulthood (Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, et al., 2017).

Gender differences have been reported in studies of interaction (Hall, Gunnery, & Horgan, 2016; Hargie, 2017; Leaper, 2014; Wood & Eagly, 2015). In terms of non-verbal behaviour, some of the trends are that females excel at accurately interpreting nonverbal cues, tend to require less interpersonal space, touch and are touched more, gesture less, look and are looked at more, and smile more frequently than males. In relation to language use, the male-preferred style involves being more directive, assertive, self-opinionated, and explicit, whereas females tend to be more indirect, less assertive, use a greater number of 'hedges' and expressed uncertainties ('kind of', 'it could be'), speak for longer periods, and refer more to emotions. In addition, social skills inventories have revealed consistent gender differences on various dimensions, with females scoring higher on measures of emotional expressivity and sensitivity (Riggio, 1999).

But the extent to which gender-specific patterns of behaviour are innate or learned remains a point of contention. For example, *social constructionist* theorists view gender as being constructed through everyday discourse and relational communication (Burr, 2015). This perspective, which purports that masculinity and femininity exist only in relation to one another, is rejected by evolutionary theorists, who argue that gender variations in behaviour can be understood from an evolutionary

perspective as these arise from biological differences (Helgeson, 2016). Each side cites evidence to substantiate their claims. Neuroscientists have also long debated the extent to which gender differences in the brain exist. In a highly publicised edition, the *Journal of Neuroscience Research* concluded that biological sex does indeed matter, with the editor-in-chief concluding that research shows that:

Sex matters not only at the macroscopic level, where male and female brains have been found to differ in size and connectivity, but at the microscopic level too ... [with] ... sex differences of the brain at all scales, from the genetic and epigenetic, to the synaptic, cellular, and systems differences – differences known to be present throughout the life span.

(Prager, 2017, p. 11)

But both nature and nurture play a part in shaping one’s gender and related response patterns, since ‘Sex differences and gender are not solely determined by biology, nor are they entirely sociocultural. The interactions among biological, environmental, sociocultural, and developmental influences result in phenotypes that may be more masculine or more feminine’ (Becker, McClellan and Reid, 2017, p. 136).

Caution is required when interpreting the behaviour of males and females, since research has shown that in many categories of behaviour, abilities, cognitive processes, and personality that were assumed to clearly distinguish between males and females, there are actually few definitive differences between the sexes (Rippon, 2016). There are many inconsistencies in the findings of studies into gender differences, leading Jones (1999) to conclude that gender is something that we ‘do’ rather than something that we ‘are’. This means that males or females may choose to behave in what is regarded within their particular culture as a masculine or feminine style respectively. Differences in interaction patterns should therefore be regarded as gender-indicative tendencies, since males and females are able to display the same language features if they so wish (Mulac, 2006). The study of gender therefore needs to take account not only of biological features but also psychological make-up. As a personality factor, gender can be divided into the following four categories (Wood & Eagly, 2015):

	<i>High femininity</i>	<i>Low femininity</i>
High masculinity	Androgynous	Masculine
Low masculinity	Feminine	Undifferentiated

A *feminine* female is likely, in various situations, to behave differently from a *masculine* female. Research bearing such psychological gender characteristics in mind is likely to be more fruitful in charting actual behavioural variants of performance.

Of course, gender roles are constantly changing. In many societies females play roles and occupy positions they would have had little opportunity to carry out previously. Furthermore, gender is now accepted to be a variegated concept and the traditional male/female binary divide has been replaced with a more nuanced understanding of fine differences therein. The increasing acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in recent years has changed attitudes to and expectations

of gender (Hargie, Mitchell, & Somerville, 2017). Skilled interaction therefore necessitates careful analysis of the gender identity of the interlocutor and the use of apposite responses to take cognisance of this.

## Age

There has been a rapid growth of research in the field of social gerontology (Samanta, 2017). One reason for this is that social ageing, or how we behave towards others and assimilate to differences as we change with age, is accomplished mainly through communication experiences (Nussbaum & Coupland, 2004). Likewise, communication processes are directly affected by maturational phenomena at each stage of our lives (Gasiorek & Fowler, 2016). It is also clear that our own age, and the age of those with whom we interact, shape our behaviour and expectations (Parry & McCarthy, 2017). Skilled individuals will therefore take the age of the target (and of course their own age) into consideration when framing their responses. In this way, different forms of reward are appropriate for 3-year-olds, 12-year-olds and 25-year-olds; statements such as ‘You’re a clever little person’, ‘You have really grown up’, and ‘I find your ideas intellectually very challenging’ are apposite for one age group but not for others.

Reaction time, speech discrimination, and the capacity for information processing tend to decrease with age. However, there are wide differences across individuals, with some more adversely affected than others. Furthermore, older people have accumulated a larger vocabulary, coupled with a wealth of experience of handling a wide variety of types of people across varying situations. Thus, there can be advantages and disadvantages in terms of the effects of age upon skilled performance. There has been considerable research into patterns of intergenerational communication. Hummert (2014) identified three main negative and three positive stereotypes of the older adult as follows.

**Positive:** *John Wayne Conservative* (patriotic, determined, mellow); *Perfect Grandparent* (kind, supportive, knowledgeable); *Golden Ager* (lively, well travelled, healthy).

**Negative:** *Despondent* (depressed, lonely, neglected, etc.); *Shrew/Curmudgeon* (complaining, selfish, ill-tempered); *Severely Impaired* (slow-thinking, feeble, inarticulate).

Older people face various forms of social exclusion, which is reflected in the way in which others communicate with them (Wethington, Pillemer, & Principi, 2016). The possession of negative stereotypes of the elderly, especially that of being impaired, can lead younger adults to adopt an overaccommodating speech style that has been variously described as ‘secondary baby talk’, ‘elderspeak’, ‘infantilising speech’, or ‘patronising talk’. This pattern includes the presence of simplification strategies (e.g. slower delivery, low grammatical difficulty), clarification strategies (e.g. increased volume, deliberate articulation), and diminutives (e.g. ‘dear’, ‘love’). Such patterns, as well as being demeaning, may actually have negative effects on the self-identity of the elderly persons to whom they are directed and upon their psychological and physical health (Barber, 2017). The corollary, of course, is that older adults may underaccommodate

when interacting with younger individuals, by ignoring their conversational needs (e.g. by not listening, or talking about events outwith the younger person's experience). This means that an important aspect of skilled performance is the pitching of responses at the apposite level, bearing in mind the ability (rather than chronological age) of the other person.

## **Appearance**

The physical appearance of others, in terms of attractiveness, body size, and shape, also affects our behaviour and expectations. People are judged upon their appearance from a very early age, with the influence of attractiveness evident from about 12 months of age (Zarbatany & Marshall, 2015). The impact is almost instantaneous, since within about 34 milliseconds we will have made judgements about people we meet based on their facial appearance, and these judgements are then resistant to change (Todorov, Olivola, Dotsch, et al., 2015). Attractiveness is therefore a very important feature in social encounters. A range of research studies has shown that being rated as attractive has a host of positive benefits, including, *inter alia*, being regarded as more trustworthy, genuine, kind, likeable, socially skilled, intelligent, and having greater academic and occupational abilities (Cross, Kiefner-Burmeister, Rossi, et al., 2017). Attractive people receive higher grades in school, date more frequently, secure employment more readily, and earn more. While they are also seen as more vain, materialistic, and likely to have extramarital affairs, the 'beauty is good' stereotype has a solid foundation in research. In addition, this seems to be universal, as ratings of physical attractiveness are fairly consistent across variations in age, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographical location.

Research has shown strong age and cross-cultural agreement regarding facial features of attractiveness (Zebrowitz, Montepare, & Strom, 2013). These include gender facial averageness, symmetry, sexually dimorphic shape cues (very masculine or very feminine face shapes), and good skin tone and quality (Morrison, Morris, & Bard, 2013). In females, positive facial features include larger eyes relative to size of face, higher cheek bones, and thinner jaw, as well as shorter distance between nose and mouth and between mouth and chin; those with larger breasts, and lower waist-to-hip ratios also receive higher attractiveness ratings from males (Fink, Klappauf, Brewer, et al., 2014). For males, an enlarged brow ridge, thicker jawline and longer face tend to be preferred by females (Dixson, Sulikowski, Gouda-Vossos, et al., 2016), while the male physique rated as attractive by women includes being tall and slim, with medium-thin lower trunk and medium-wide upper trunk, small buttocks, thin legs and a flat stomach. However, research and theory into the study of attraction has also shown that initial judgements of attractiveness can be tempered by psychological, sociological, contextual, and relational influences (Cook, 1977; Duck, 1995). As such, attractiveness involves more than physical features and is not just 'skin deep'. For instance, a physically unattractive professional may be successful and popular with clients by developing an empathic interactive style coupled with a competent professional approach.

Although one of the prime functions of clothes is to protect the wearer from cold or injury, dress also serves a number of social functions (Howlett, Pine, Orakçioğlu,

et al., 2013). The importance of social signals conveyed by apparel is evidenced by the amount of money spent on fashion wear in Western society. This is because in many situations, it is very important to 'look the part'. Socially skilled people devote time and effort to the selection of appropriate apparel for interpersonal encounters in order to project a suitable image. We 'dress up' for important occasions such as selection interviews or first dates, and more generally carefully select other embellishments, including 'body furniture' (rings, bangles, necklaces, brooches, ear-rings, watches, etc.), spectacles, and make up, to enhance our overall personal image. Since so much attention is devoted to the choice of dress, it is hardly surprising that we make judgements about others based upon this feature. In terms of impression management, it is patently advisable to dress with care.

## **The situation**

As explained in Chapter 1, skilled performance is shaped by situational factors. There is ample evidence that social situations have a powerful impact on behaviour (Hample, 2016). This means that 'By understanding situations better, we are bound to gain better understandings of persons and behaviours' (Rauthmann, Sherman, & Funder, 2015, p. 377). While there is no agreed definition of 'situation' and this concept can be analysed in various ways (Rauthmann, 2015), the core features of social situations were identified by Argyle, Furnham, & Graham (1981). These are explained below, with reference to professional interaction.

## **Goal structure**

As noted earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 1, goals represent a central aspect of skill. The goals we seek are influenced by the situation in which we are interacting, while, conversely, the goals we pursue are central determinants of situation selection (Brown, Neel, & Sherman, 2015). In the surgery the doctor will have goals directly related to dealing with patients. But if the doctor has a social goal of finding a mate, social situations in which potential partners are likely to be encountered will be sought. In this way, goals and situations are intertwined (Hample, 2016). Knowledge of the goal structure for any situation is therefore an important aspect of skilled performance.

## **Roles**

In any given situation, people play, and are expected to play, different roles, which carry with them sets of expectations about behaviour, attitudes, feelings, and values. Thus, a doctor is expected to behave in a thorough, caring fashion, to be concerned about patients' health, and to treat their problems in confidence. The roles of those involved affect both the goals and behaviour of participants. For example, a teacher will behave differently, and have different goals, when teaching pupils in the classroom as opposed to attending a staff meeting at lunch-time, or having an interview with the principal about possible promotion.

## **Rules**

Social interaction has been likened to a game, involving rules that must be followed if a successful outcome is to be achieved (see Chapter 1). Professionals must be aware not only of the rules of the situations they encounter, but also how to deal with clients who break them (e.g. pupils misbehaving in the classroom).

## **Repertoire of elements**

Different types of behaviour are more or less appropriate in different situations and, therefore, it is important for professionals to develop a range of behavioural repertoires. In one situation fact-finding may be crucial and the skill of questioning central, while in another context it may be necessary to explain carefully certain facts to a client. These behavioural repertoires are usually sequential in nature (see Chapter 1).

## **Concepts**

A certain amount of conceptual information is necessary for effective participation in any given situation. In order to play the game of poker, one must be aware of the specific meaning of concepts such as 'flush' and 'run'. Similarly, a patient visiting the dentist may need to be aware of the particular relevance of concepts such as 'crown' or 'bridge'. One common error is to assume that others are familiar with concepts when in fact they are not. Most professionals have developed a jargon of specific terminology for various concepts, and must ensure that it is avoided, or fully explained, when dealing with clients.

## **Language and speech**

There are linguistic variations associated with social situations, with some requiring a higher degree of language formality. Giving a lecture, being interviewed for a managerial position, or chairing a Board meeting all involve a more formal, deliberate, elaborated use of language than, for example, having a chat with a friend over coffee. Equally, changes in tone, pitch, and volume of voice change across situations: there are vocal patterns associated with, inter alia, evangelical clergymen addressing religious gatherings, barristers summing up in court, and sports commentators describing ball games. Professionals need to develop and refine their language and speech to suit a particular context.

## **Physical environment**

The nature of the environment influences behaviour. Humans, like all animals, feel more secure on 'home territory' than in unfamiliar environs. For instance, a social worker will tend to find clients more comfortable in their own homes than in the office,

whereas the social worker will feel more relaxed in the latter situation. People usually feel more at ease, and therefore talk more freely, in ‘warm’ environments (soft seats, concealed lights, carpets, curtains, pot plants). The physical layout of furniture is also important in either encouraging or discouraging interaction.

## Culture

Few aspects of the communication process have attracted as much attention within recent years as the study of culture (Asante, Miike, & Yin, 2014). Culture can be defined as ‘a multifaceted concept that includes the shared language, knowledge, meanings, values, beliefs, norms, customs, and practices that are transmitted through social learning’ (Hicks, Levine, Agrawal, et al., 2016, p. 39). This sharing is relatively enduring over time, is passed from one generation to another and, while not static, is a stable system within which people negotiate identity and relationships (Spitzberg, 2003). Furthermore, any group that is significantly different from the rest of society forms a subculture, and the actions of individuals can often be more readily understood in the light of these subcultural influences (Shin, Kim, Choi, et al., 2016).

Culture has been shown to have a definite influence on how interpersonal skills are enacted. This is because, based on the mores of our culture, we learn both the appropriate interaction scripts and the meanings that are assigned to these (Pecchioni, Ota, & Sparks, 2004). The concepts of cultural expertise and multicultural competence have been highlighted as important aspects of skilled performance (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2016). This refers to the ability to adapt one’s responses appropriately across differing cultural settings. An example is contained in the old adage ‘When in Rome do as the Romans do’. It necessitates the development of knowledge and understanding of the cultural and subcultural norms, beliefs, values, and responses of those with whom we are interacting. Being a skilled person includes the possession of a high level of such cultural expertise.

A widely researched distinction is that between *collectivist* and *individualistic* cultures (Hagger, Rentzelas, & Koch, 2014). Eastern cultures (e.g. Japan, China, Korea) tend to be collectivist and *high-context*, in that much of the communicative meaning is implicit and attached to relationships and situations rather than to what is said. The style of communication is more indirect and self-concealing, with the result that verbal messages can be ambiguous. These cultures foster an *interdependent self* with high value placed upon external features such as roles, status, relationships, ‘fitting in’, being accorded one’s proper place, being aware of what others are thinking and feeling, not hurting the other’s feelings, and minimising imposition when presenting requests. Time is conceived as being subservient to duties, relationships, and responsibilities.

Western cultures (e.g. USA, UK, Canada, Germany, Norway) are *low-context*, with an emphasis upon open, direct communication with explicit meaning, so that verbal messages tend to be clearer, more complete, specific, and pointed. There is a discomfort with ambiguity, and anxiety when meaning depends upon something other than the words uttered. These cultures encourage the development of an *independent self* that is bounded, unitary, stable, and detached from social context, with a consequent focus upon internal abilities, thoughts, and feelings, expressing oneself and one’s uniqueness, and being ‘up front’. Goals tend to be more personal and instrumental, and time



is seen as paramount – being viewed as akin to a commodity, which can be ‘spent’, ‘saved’, ‘invested’, or ‘wasted’.

Collectivist cultures therefore inculcate a ‘We’ identity as opposed to an ‘I’ identity in individualist cultures. This impacts directly upon interpersonal skills. For example, cultural differences have been found in style of request, between direct forms (‘Close that window’), indirect forms (‘It’s getting cold’), and those in between (‘Would it be OK to have the window closed?’). Kim and Wilson (1994) found that US undergraduates considered the direct style as the most skilful way of making such a request, whereas Korean undergraduates rated it as the least effective strategy. Furthermore, the US sample saw clarity as a key dimension of successful requests, while Koreans viewed clarity as counterproductive to effectiveness. Thus, those from high-context cultures, such as Koreans, tend to have a greater concern for preserving accord and not causing offence and so try to avoid responding with a direct refusal, as to do so could threaten the interlocutor’s face (Adler, Elmhorst, & Lucas, 2013).

However, it has also been found that there are individual as well as cultural differences in individualism and collectivism (Pfundmair, Graupmann, Frey, et al., 2015). Individuals differ as much as or more than cultures, and so it is the nature of the interlocutor that is important rather than the cultural background from which he or she comes (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2014). Furthermore, at different times, in varying situations, and with different people, we may adopt either a more individualistic or a more collectivist style of communicating. Skilled individuals therefore consider both the nature of the specific individual and prevailing cultural norms when deciding how to respond.

## OVERVIEW

The model described in this chapter has been designed to account for the central facets of interpersonal interaction. It will be apparent from this review that interaction between people is a complex process. Any interpersonal encounter involves a myriad of variables, some or all of which may be operative at any given time. Although each of these has been discussed in isolation, it should be realised that in reality these occur simultaneously. As we are encoding and sending messages we are also decoding and receiving messages. Skilled communication is, in this sense, transactional. People in social encounters are therefore interdependent, and as information is perceived it is immediately dealt with and responded to, on an ongoing basis, so quickly that we are not usually aware that these processes are occurring. This transactional element of socially skilled performance needs to be emphasised, as it has been misunderstood by some theorists, who have then proceeded to misrepresent the skills paradigm. For example, Sanders (2003) criticised the skills approach on the specious basis that by focusing solely upon the behaviour of the individual it fails to recognise that interaction is a two-way process. Sanders patently failed to appreciate or understand that his description of how ‘the quality of individuals’ performance ... depends not only on their own capabilities, motives, and goals, but also on the capabilities, motives and goals ... of the other(s) with whom they interact’ (p. 224) concurs with the skills perspective as described in this chapter.

Given the number of factors that influence the behaviour of interlocutors during social interaction, it is extremely difficult to make judgements or interpretations about

the exact reasons why certain behaviours are, or are not, displayed. A key advantage of the model as presented in this chapter is that it provides a systematic structure for analysing skilled human behaviour. It has taken account of the central processes involved in interpersonal communication, namely: the goals people pursue, and their motivation to attain them; the cognitive and affective processes that influence the processing of information; the feedback available during social encounters; the perception of this feedback; impinging personal and contextual factors; and the responses that people make.

While some of the features of the model of skilled performance (Figure 2.3) are the same as those contained in the motor skills model (Figure 2.2), there are also differences. In particular, the reciprocal nature of social interaction, the role of emotions, the nature of person perception, and the influence of the person–situation context are more impactful during social, as opposed to motor, skill performance. However, the analogy between motor and social skills, as explicated in this chapter and in Chapter 1, has provided a valuable theoretical framework for interpreting interpersonal interaction.

The model also illustrates how communication breakdown can occur at any of the inter-related stages (Hartley, 1999). For example, an individual's goals may be unrealistic or inappropriate, or communicators may have competing, irreconcilable goals. At the mediation level, the person may suffer from disordered thought processes, have underdeveloped schemas, or be lacking in emotional empathy. Problems can also occur because inappropriate responses are used, or because the person has poor perceptual acumen and cannot make use of available feedback from others. Breakdown may be a factor of the person–situation axis, for instance due to cultural insensitivity, or inappropriate personality characteristics (e.g. someone who is highly neurotic is unlikely to be a good counsellor). The model has also been shown to provide a valuable template for research investigations that have been carried out in the fields of health care (Skipper, 1992), negotiation (Hughes, 1994), counselling (Irving, 1995), and the clergy (Lount, 1997). Its applicability to communication between employees in the workplace has also been demonstrated (Hayes, 2002). The conclusion reached by Bull (2002, p. 19) in his analysis of communication theories was that 'the social skills model continues to be highly influential', while Clarke (2013, p. 39), in applying the model to the context of interviewing, argued that it is 'one of the most applicable and useful models for understanding the mechanics and complexities of interviewing'.

The main focus in this chapter has been upon the application of the core interactive processes involved in dyadic interaction. When more than two people are involved, although the same processes apply, interaction becomes even more complex and certainly much more difficult to represent diagrammatically. Despite the increased complexity (in terms of differing goals, motivation and so on), knowledge of these central processes will facilitate efforts to understand, and interpret, the skilled performance of the individual in both group and dyadic interaction.

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**Part II**

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# **Core communication skills**

**Part II**



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# **Nonverbal behaviour as communication: Approaches, issues, and research**

*Randall A. Gordon and Daniel Druckman*

**I**N THIS CHAPTER, WE update our earlier surveys of the large cross-disciplinary literature on nonverbal communication. We focus particularly on the decade since the last chapter appeared in the third edition of this Handbook (Gordon, Druckman, Rozelle, and Baxter, 2006), adding fifty-seven new references that include some pre-2006 articles not covered in the previous chapter. Following the structure of the earlier chapters, we place the study of nonverbal behaviour in historical perspective, highlighting the major approaches that have guided scientific explorations. Nonverbal communication can be understood best in relation to the settings in which it occurs. Settings are defined both in terms of the varying roles taken by actors within societies and the diverse cultures in which expressions and gestures are learned. We also develop implications for the themes and techniques that can be used to guide analyses of behaviour as it occurs *in situ*. We conclude with directions for further theoretical development of the field.

## **NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR IN PERSPECTIVE**

In recent years, it has become increasingly recognised that investigators in a field of inquiry—any field—bring personal perspectives and figurative comparisons to bear on their work. Such perspectives have been called paradigms, metaphors, or fundamental analogies, and their influence has been thought to be pervasive. Indeed, both philosophers and working scientists acknowledge the value and necessity of such processes in the realm of creative thought (e.g. Glashow, 1980; Koestler, 1964; Leary, 1990).

Examples of this phenomenon abound. For instance, in psychology Gentner and Grudin (1985) undertook a review of a sample of theoretical contributions to the field published in *Psychological Review* between the years 1894 and 1975. From the sixty-eight theoretical articles they reviewed, they were able to identify 265 distinct mental metaphors. They defined a mental metaphor as ‘a nonliteral comparison in which either the mind as a whole or some particular aspect of the mind (ideas, processes, etc.) is likened to or explained in terms of a nonliteral domain’ (p. 182). These metaphors were all introduced by their contributors as ways of understanding the field. They were often based on explicit comparisons, such as James’ ‘stream of consciousness’, but also were frequently based on subtly implied, extended comparisons only identifiable from broad sections of text. Gentner and Grudin identified four categories of analogy that characterised the period – spatial, animate-being, neural and systems metaphors – and found clear trends in metaphor preference and rates of usage over time.

Such an examination of the field of psychology is illuminating and provocative. Recognising that the use of different metaphors places different aspects of the field in relief and interrelation, and introduces different explanatory and predictive emphasis, one can identify remarkable shifts in the ways in which psychologists have thought about their subject matter. For example, the recent emphasis on systems metaphors suggests a focus on lawfully constrained interaction among elements where organisation, precision and mutuality of influence are stressed. Predictions are complex but specific, analysis is multifaceted and hierarchic. Fundamentally, such metaphors are thought to be constitutive of the subject matter we study (Gibbs, 1994; Soyland, 1994).

A number of contemporary cognitive scientists extended the analysis of metaphor and other linguistic forms (tropes), showing that they abound in everyday usage (even beyond scientific and creative discourse) and clearly reflect the presence of poetic aspects of mind (e.g. Gibbs, 1994; Lakoff, 1993; Ortony, 1993). Linguistic forms such as metaphor, metonymy, irony, and related expressions, point to our fundamental ability to conceptualise situations figuratively (e.g. non-literally) and transpose meaning across domains. Indeed, such complex processes are assumed to occur essentially automatically and unconsciously (Gibbs, 1994). Although such analyses have focused on linguistic expression, both oral and written, the role played by nonverbal aspects of language does not seem to have been examined explicitly.

Last, the role that our species’ evolution has played in the encoding and decoding of nonverbal behaviour has received increased attention in recent years (Floyd, 2006; Frank & Shaw, 2016; Patterson, 2003; Zebrowitz, 2003). This has occurred, in part, as a function of the discipline-wide influence of evolutionary perspectives on the investigation of human behaviour. The observation that the scientific study of nonverbal communication began with Darwin’s (1872) book on the expression of emotions primarily in the face alludes to the importance of understanding the role that adaptation plays in our nonverbal communication.

## **NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR AS COMMUNICATION**

A comparable examination of contributions to the field of nonverbal behaviour may be meaningful. To this end, it is interesting to note that attention has been directed at the meaningfulness of gesture and nonverbal behaviour since earliest recorded

Western history (cf. Aristotle's *Poetics* (1927); *Rhetoric* (1991)). According to Kendon (1981), classical and medieval works on rhetoric frequently focused on the actual conduct of the orator as he delivered his speech. They occasionally defined many forms of particular gestures and provided instructions for their use in creating planned effects in the audience.

At least as early as 1601, gesture as a medium of communication co-ordinate with vocal and written language was recognised by Francis Bacon (1884; 1947 in 1st ed.). He suggested that 'as the tongue speaketh to the ear, so the hand speaketh to the eye' (quoted in Kendon, 1981, p. 155). Subsequent analyses, inspired by Bacon's proposal, were undertaken to examine chirologia (manual language) as both a rhetorical and natural language form (Bulwer, 1644/1974). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scholars argued that emotional expression and gesture, the so-called 'natural languages', surely provided the foundation for the more refined and artificial verbal symbolic communication (e.g. Lavater, 1789; Taylor, 1878). Spiegel and Machotka (1974) have identified a collateral history in dance, mime and dramatic staging beginning in the late eighteenth century. Body movement as communication has been an analogy of broad and continuing interest.

In examining the focus on nonverbal behaviour as communication, a number of somewhat different analogies can be identified. Darwin (1872) focused on facial behaviour as a neuromuscular expression of emotion, vestiges of the past and informative of an inner affective state. A number of investigators have extended this approach and elaborated the *affective expression* metaphor (e.g. Ekman, 1992b; Izard, 1971; Tomkins, 1962, 1963; Woodworth & Schlosberg, 1954). In delineating bodily movement, gesture, vocalisation, and particularly facial movement as expressive of affect, an emphasis is placed on the rapid, automatic, serviceable, universal aspects of behaviour. Indeed, consciousness, intention and guile are ordinarily not central to such an analysis, although experiential overlays and culturally modified forms of expression are of interest. In examining how readily people recognise affective displays in others (Ekman and Oster, 1979; Matsumoto, 1996; Triandis, 1994) or how rules of expression are acquired (Cole, 1984), an emphasis is placed on the plastic nature of neuromuscular form.

In an ever-increasing manner, tests of hypotheses derived, at least in part, from evolutionary psychology can be found in the research literature on nonverbal behaviour and communication. In a field of inquiry where few general descriptions fail to cite Darwin's (1872) book on the expression of emotions as a starting point for the scientific investigation of nonverbal behaviour, the current increased influence of evolutionary psychology and its search for evidence of adaptation, has reinforced interest and work in this area. In 2003, two issues of the *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* were devoted to research guided by this perspective. As pointed out by Zebrowitz (2003), the studies in the issues 'take an evolutionary approach well beyond the domain of emotional expressions' (p. 133). The impact of evolutionary psychology can be seen across a number of research domains (e.g. social, developmental, cognitive-neuroscience) and is discussed as a primary influence in many contemporary models of nonverbal communication. A recent summary of research on the hypothesised evolutionary role of nonverbal communication by Frank and Shaw (2016) suggests that communication transmitted via the face, body, and voice are tied to both survival and reproductive fitness. Features of the face including size and physiognomy, emotional expression,



eye gaze, static body size, body movements, and tone of voice were all listed as linked to survival. However, this approach is problematic when it neglects the impact of more immediate situational factors.

The perceptually based (cf. Gibson, 1979) ecological approach of Zebrowitz (Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997; Zebrowitz, 2003) incorporates a focus on proximal elements and mechanisms alongside an assessment of behaviour tied to the survival of our species. In an additional commentary on evolutionary psychology and its impact on nonverbal research, Montepare (2003) echoes the need to include proximal (or situational) along with distal (or historical) influences when one studies nonverbal communication. In a brief account of research on nonverbal communication and behaviour, Patterson (2013) also highlights the importance of situational influences and the behaviour setting. Patterson continues to advocate for a comprehensive systems approach to the study of nonverbal communication to provide needed integration.

A related metaphor comparing nonverbal actions, especially accidents and parapraxes, to a *riddle* or *obscure text*, has been employed by psychodynamic investigators. Indeed, Freud (1905/1938, 1924) argued that such actions are usually meaningful and can often be recognised as such by a person. At the same time, Freud acknowledged that people frequently deny the significance of gestural-parapraxic actions, leaving the analyst in a quandary with respect to the validity of interpretation. Freud offered a number of interpretive strategies, including articulation with the person's life context and delayed verification, as approaches to this problem. The influence of this psychodynamic perspective continues to be seen in subsequent examples of psychotherapeutic techniques that incorporate a specific focus on nonverbal behaviour (e.g. Roger's [1961] focus on examining congruence between nonverbal and verbal expression, Perl's [1969] use of nonverbal expression as an interpretive tool in Gestalt psychology). Recent data has revealed that the ability to note verbal-nonverbal inconsistency appears to be already well developed by the time we reach four or five years of age (Eskritt & Lee, 2003).

In dealing with the problem of denial, Freud seems to have foreshadowed the more recent concerns about the questions of consciousness and intention in determining expressive actions. In any event, Freud's approach to the investigation of nonverbal behaviour as communication appears to have taken the analogies of the riddle or perhaps the obscure text that can be made meaningful by the application of accepted interpretive (for example, hermeneutic) principles. Many psychoanalytic investigators have utilised the broad interpretive analysis of behavioural text (Deutsch, 1959; Feldman, 1959; Schafer, 1980). Feldman's examination of the significance of such speech mannerisms as 'by the way', 'incidentally', 'honest', 'before I forget', 'believe me', 'curiously enough' and many others provides an illustration of the fruitfulness of regarding speech and gesture as complex, subtle, multi-levelled communication.

Certainly, the reliance on an affective expression as opposed to an obscure text analogy places the process of communication in different perspectives. In the first instance, the automatic, universal, perhaps unintended, and other features identified above are taken as relevant issues, while the articulation with context, uniqueness, obfuscation, and necessity of prolonged scholarly examination by trained and skilful interpreters are equally clearly emphasised by the behaviour as riddle analogy.

A third approach to the behaviour as communication analogy has been provided by the careful explication of nonverbal behaviour as *code* metaphor. Developed most

extensively by Birdwhistell's (1970) analogy with structural linguistics and the Weiner Devoe, Runbinow, and Geller (1972) comparison with communication engineering, the central concern rests with the detailed, molecular examination of the structure of the code itself, modes (that is, channels) of transmission and accuracy-utility of communication. Conventional appreciation is essential to accuracy and efficiency, as auction applications, stock and commodities trading, athletic coaching, and social-political etiquette and protocol applications may attest (Schefflen and Schefflen, 1972). Levels of communication (for instance, messages and meta-messages), channel comparisons, sending and receiving strategies and accessibility of the intention-code-channel-code-interpretation sequence as an orderly, linear process are all designed to emphasise the systematic, objective, and mechanistic features of the metaphor (Druckman, Rozelle, & Baxter, 1982). Indeed, the utilisation of nonverbal behaviour as meta-message is very informative, if not essential, in distinguishing ironic from literal meaning. This is perhaps especially the case for channels that allow for relatively fine-grained differentiation of nonverbal behaviour (e.g. facial expression, paralinguistic cues).

However, the boundaries of the particular variations in the 'behaviour as communication' analogies that have been identified are fuzzy, and the explicit categories of the metaphors as employed by particular investigators are difficult to articulate fully. Yet the three variations of the communication analogy seem valid as the history and current investigation in nonverbal behaviour as communication is examined. In this spirit, a fourth general communication metaphor can also be identified – nonverbal behaviour as *dramatic presentation*.

While this analogy clearly descends from mime, dance and dramatic stage direction (Poyatos, 1983; Spiegel & Machotka, 1974), the approach has been most skilfully developed by Goffman (1959, 1969), Baumeister (1982) and DePaulo (1992) as both expressive form (that is, identity and situation presentation) and rhetorical form (that is, persuasion, impression management and tactical positioning). The particularly fruitful features of this analogy appear to be the crafted, holistic, completely situated, forward-flowing nature of expression, with emphasis on recognisable skill, authenticity, and purpose. Strategy, guile, and deception are important aspects of this analogy, and subtlety and complexity abound (DePaulo, Wetzel, Sternglanz, & Wilson, 2003; Scheibe, 1979; Schlenker, 1980). Recent work suggests that improvements in deception-detection skills among same sex friends across time may be more a function of the nonverbal encoding performance than increased skill on the part of the decoder (Morris, Sternglanz, Ansfield, Anderson, Snyder, & DePaulo, 2016).

## NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR AS STYLE

Although the 'nonverbal behaviour as communication' analogies hold historical precedence in the area, two additional analogies can be identified: nonverbal behaviour as *personal idiom* (Allport, 1961) and nonverbal behaviour as *skill* (Argyle, 1967; Argyle & Kendon, 1967; Hargie, 2017; Hargie & Tourish, 1999).

Allport introduced the important distinction between the instrumental aspects of action and the expressive aspects, the latter being personalised and stylistic ways of accomplishing the tasks of life. Comparisons with one's signature, voice or thumb print are offered. This perspective emphasises holism, consistency and configurational

uniqueness, while de-emphasising complexity, skill, and authenticity. Demonstrations of the application of the analogy have been offered (certainly among the ranks of the stage impressionists, if not scientific workers), but the richness and fruitfulness of the metaphor have not yet been fully exploited.

Perhaps the most inviting metaphor of nonverbal behaviour has been the emphasis on skilled performance. The fruitfulness of the analogy of acquired skills as a way of thinking about nonverbal behaviour has been recognised for some time (Bartlett, 1958; Polanyi, 1958) and related investigations have continued throughout the decades (Argyle, 1967; Burgoon & Bacue, 2003; DePaulo, Stone, & Lassiter, 1985; Friedman, 1979; Hargie, 2017; Knapp, 1972, 1984; Rosenthal, 1979; Snyder, 1974). The analogy has directed attention to the expressive or sending (encoding) and interpretive or receiving (decoding) aspects of nonverbal exchange, and has begun to highlight aspects of face-to-face interaction not investigated hitherto.

## **The skilled performance analogy**

Since the introduction of the skilled performance metaphor is somewhat recent in the area of nonverbal behaviour analysis, it might prove useful to attempt to explicate some of the categories of such an analogy. As Bartlett (1958) pointed out, in the general case and in every known form of skill, there are acknowledged experts in whom much of the expertness, though perhaps never all of it, has been acquired by well-informed practice. The skill is based upon evidence picked up directly or indirectly from the environment, and it is used for the attempted achievement of whatever issue may be required at the time of the performance. Examples of such performance would include the sports player, the operator engaged at the work-bench, the surgeon conducting an operation, the telegrapher deciphering a message, or the pilot controlling an aeroplane (see Chapter 1).

Initial examination of the comparison suggests a number of important features of skilled performance (for more detailed analysis of these see Chapters 1 and 2), which are relevant to the investigation of nonverbal behaviour. First, skilled performances usually imply complex, highly co-ordinated motor acts that may be present in unrefined form at the outset of training, but in many cases are not, and which only emerge gradually with training and development. Thus, final performances may be quite different from untutored performances. Also, the recognisability of individuality in the crafting of skilful expression seems clearly implied. A second feature of such performance is that it is based on perceptually differentiating environmental properties or conditions often unrecognised by the untutored. A quality of 'informed seeing' or 'connoisseurship' develops which serves to guide and structure refined action.

A third feature of skilled performances is their dependence on practice, usually distributed over extended periods of time (see Druckman & Bjork, 1991). The importance of combinations of both practice and rest as aids in acquiring desired performance levels and the occurrence of marked irregularities in progress during the attainment of desired levels is recognisable, as are the influences of age and many physical condition factors (Bilodeau, 1966). A fourth important feature of skilled performances is their persistence and resistance to decay, interference, and effects of disuse. While comparisons are difficult, the general belief is that skilled actions remain

viable after verbal information has been lost to recovery. A fifth area of importance is the general assumption that individuals vary in the extent to which they display refined performances. A sixth characteristic of skilled actions is that they are ineffable, acquired best by modelling and described only imprecisely by linguistic means. Finally, the expression of skilled performances usually entails the incorporation of internalised standards of the quality of expression. Performers can recognise inadequacies or refinements in their performance, which serve to guide both practice and performance styles.

The development of the skilled performance metaphor in the investigation of nonverbal behaviour as expression seems to have suggested several areas of development and possible advance in the field. Training strategies, individual differences, the role of practice, the importance of performance feedback and internalised criteria of achievement represent a few areas of investigation of nonverbal behaviour implied by this analogy. A number of contemporary research programmes that examine the issue of training and expertise (Ekman, O'Sullivan, & Frank, 1999; Frank & Ekman, 1997; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2011; Vrij, 2000; Vrij, Evans, Akehurst, & Mann, 2004), can be seen as guided, in part, by the skilled performance metaphor. Even though a number of investigations have revealed small increases in decoding accuracy as a function of training, these outcomes have been relatively inconsistent. A study by Levine Feeley, McCormack, Hughes, and Harms (2005) using a bogus training control group showed similar increases in the control group and the training group.

Research that has revealed relationships between nonverbal decoding and interpersonal social skills among adults (Carton, Kessler, & Pape, 1999) and encoding skills and social competence among adolescents (Feldman, Tomasian, & Coats, 1999) point to the importance of continued investigations of these aspects of individual performance. A meta-analysis by Schlegel, Boone, and Hall (2017) suggests that interpersonal accuracy is likely to be a complex affair. The basic decoding skills related to measures of interpersonal accuracy are likely to represent a wide variety of specific interpretive skills.

## THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR

A PsycInfo title search for the keywords: 'nonverbal behavior' or 'nonverbal communication', examined publications from the inception of empirical work on nonverbal communication. A small number of classic empirical studies ( $N = 57$ ) were published from the mid- to late 1960s. The 1970s and 1980s represent the most productive time periods, with 457 articles in each decade – an eight-fold increase. However, publications dropped sharply by approximately 35 per cent ( $N = 292$ ) during the 1990s and were slightly (7 per cent) below that level during 2000-2009 ( $N = 271$ ). Archival assessments have shown that the reduced use of verbal and nonverbal independent and dependent variables within top tier psychological journals are a likely contributing factor to the observed reduction (Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007; Patterson, Giles, & Teske, 2011).

The search revealed 295 publications listed in PsycInfo starting in 2010. Prorating this value through 2019 produces a value of approximately 340, which would represent a 25 per cent increase over the previous decade. It would appear that nonverbal

research might be on the rise again. The relatively large number of edited chapters and handbooks devoted to research published during the last twelve years (2005–2016) and a renewed interest in new methods would be consistent with increased empirical work found in the PsycInfo database. The handbooks edited by Harrigan and Scherer (2005), Manusov and Patterson (2006), Matsumoto, Frank and Hwang (2013), Hall and Knapp (2013), Kostić and Chadee (2015), and Matsumoto, Hwang, and Frank (2016) represent the wide variety of methods and research questions that communication researchers and psychologists have been examining during the last decade and will comprise a good portion of the updated material in this chapter.

Nonverbal research is usually presented with two different emphases: (1) a theoretical-research orientation and (2) an application-demonstration orientation. Because of its relation to the subtle and interpretative aspects of communication, there is a tendency on the part of popular lay texts to emphasise application without a balanced presentation of the theory and research that examines validity and reliability aspects necessary for proper understanding of nonverbal behaviour as one form of communication. Indeed, interesting pieces in this vein regularly appear on the Internet, providing an extended discourse on the psychological meaning of aspects of nonverbal communication. While fascinating, and often face valid, no recognisable empirical data accompanies the analysis.

The challenge of the present chapter is to discuss nonverbal behaviour as a communication skill, while maintaining the scientific integrity needed to evaluate critically the degree to which application is appropriate for any particular reader. In turn, the reader should assume a critical, scientific perspective in treating nonverbal behaviour as a meaningful yet complex topic for research and application.

## **Behavioural dimensions and taxonomies**

Knapp (1972) suggested seven dimensions that describe the major categories of nonverbal behaviour research as related to communication, and are useful for placing this chapter in perspective. The first category is kinesics, commonly referred to as ‘body language’, and includes movements of the hand, arm, head, foot and leg, postural shifts, gestures, eye movements and facial expressions. A second category is paralanguage and is defined as content-free vocalisations and patterns associated with speech such as voice pitch, volume, frequency, stuttering, filled pauses (for example, ‘ah’), silent pauses, interruptions and measures of speech rate and number of words spoken in a given unit of time. A third category involves physical contact in the form of touching. Another category is proxemics, which involves interpersonal spacing and norms of territoriality. A fifth category concerns the physical characteristics of people such as skin colour, body shape, body odour and attractiveness. Related to physical characteristics is the category of artefacts or adornments such as perfume, clothes, jewellery, and wigs. Environmental factors make up the last category and deal with the influences of the physical setting in which the behaviour occurs: a classroom, an office, a hallway, or a street corner. Knapp’s seven dimensions help depict the breadth of nonverbal communication. It is interesting to note that the physical characteristic, adornment, and environmental factor categories do not involve an assessment of overt nonverbal expressions, but rather information about the actor that is communicated nonverbally.

There are numerous examples in the literature that detail these categories, either individually or in combinations (e.g. Argyle & Cook, 1976; Duncan & Fiske, 1977; Harper et al., 1978; LaFrance and Mayo, 1978) and the reader is referred to these for detailed discussion. This chapter will present these categories in various combinations as they pertain to nonverbal behaviour as a communication skill. It is important to stress that nonverbal behaviour is dependent upon all of these factors for meaningful communication to take place. Some of these categories are covered in the theoretical and empirical presentation; others are not, but are nevertheless important and should always be considered as part of the 'universe' comprising nonverbal communication.

## **SETTING AND ROLE INFLUENCES ON NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR**

One of the major problems in focusing on the interpretation of nonverbal behaviour is to treat it as a separate, independent, and absolute form of communication. This view of the topic is much too simplistic. The meaning of nonverbal behaviour must be considered in the context in which it occurs. Several types of contextual factors will be used to guide this discussion of nonverbal communication and the behaviours associated with it.

One involves the environmental setting of the behaviour. Both the physical and social aspects of the environment must be described in sufficient detail to assess possible contributing factors to nonverbal behaviour as meaningful communication. For example, the furniture arrangement in an office can be a major factor influencing the nonverbal behaviours exhibited therein. Body movements are different depending upon whether the person is sitting behind a desk or openly in a chair. The proximity and angle of seating arrangements have been shown to serve different functions during interaction and to affect such behaviour as eye contact, gazing, and head rotation.

Nonverbal behaviour may have very different meanings when exhibited on the street than, say, in a classroom. Background noise level in a work setting may produce exaggerated nonverbal communication patterns that would have very different meaning in a quieter setting such as a library. The influence of ecological factors on behaviour is an important focus in the study of human behaviour (McArthur & Baron, 1983; Willems, 1985). Most research in nonverbal communication dealing with physical-environmental factors has focused on interpersonal spacing, proxemics and cultural differences in interaction patterns (Collett, 1971; Hall, 1966, Patterson & Quadflieg, 2016).

The social climate of the environment is also an important factor in the consideration of social nonverbal behaviour (Jones Rozelle, & Svyantek, 1985). Research has demonstrated that different behaviours are produced in stressful versus unstressful situations (Rozelle and Baxter, 1975). The formality of a setting will determine the degree to which many nonverbal behaviours are suppressed or performed. Competitive versus co-operative interaction settings will also produce different types, levels, and frequencies of nonverbal behaviours. These are just several examples of factors affecting the communicative meaning of nonverbal behaviour. The reader is encouraged systematically to survey factors that may be of importance in more personally familiar settings.

## **Nonverbal behaviour as communication: Process and outcome factors of the interaction episode**

Many communication models as applied to nonverbal behaviour have concentrated on the interpersonal level and have not elaborated to the same degree the role and situational levels of communication. An important distinction in viewing nonverbal behaviour as communication is that between the *encoder* and the *decoder*. The encoder is analogous to an actor or impression manager, producing and 'sending' the behaviours to be interpreted. The decoder is analogous to an observer 'receiving' the presented behaviours and interpreting them in some fashion. Within the context of the encoder-decoder distinction, a major concern is that of intention and whether intended and unintended messages obey the same rules and principles of communication (Dittmann, 1978).

Ekman and Friesen (1969) provided two general classifications for behavioural messages. The first is the 'informative act' which results in certain interpretations on the part of a receiver without any active or conscious intent on the part of the sender. Thus, an individual's nonverbal behaviour is unintentionally 'giving off' signals that may be either correctly or incorrectly interpreted by a decoder (Goffman, 1959). The important point is that an impression is being formed without the encoder's knowledge or intention. A second classification is termed the 'communicative act' or, in Goffman's terms, expressions that are 'given'. In this case, the encoder is intentionally attempting to send a specific message to a receiver. Goffman suggested that as impression managers we are able to stop 'giving' messages, but cannot stop 'giving off' information. A difficulty lies in distinguishing varying degrees of conscious intent as opposed to 'accidental' or non-specifically motivated behaviour. Extreme examples of communicative behaviours intended to convey such emotions as anger, approval or disagreement are usually described in the literature (e.g. Jones & Pittman, 1982). Similarly, informative acts such as fidgeting and gaze aversion are presented as examples of informative behaviour indicating unintended guilt, anxiety, or discomfort.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, role and situational considerations can lead to gross misinterpretations of what is considered 'informative' or 'communicative' behaviour on the part of both encoder and decoder in an interaction. Most interactions among people involve less extreme emotion and a complexity of intentions. Also, many social interactions involve changing roles between encoder and decoder as the participants take turns in speaking and listening.

Requiring communicative behaviour to be explicitly goal-directed, with an immediate adjustment on the part of the encoder depending upon the decoder's response, limits the number of behaviours that can be considered communicative. In typical conversations, many nonverbal behaviours become automatic responses and are performed at low levels of awareness or involve no awareness at all. What was once a specifically defined goal-directed behaviour becomes habitual and is no longer a product of conscious intention. The degree to which nonverbal behaviours involve varying levels of awareness then becomes difficult to determine.

Another consideration for the understanding of nonverbal communication is whether or not the encoder and decoder share a common, socially defined signal system. Weiner et al. (1972) argued that this is a crucial requirement for communication to

occur, regardless of the degree to which any behaviour is intentional. This represents a limited perspective on what is considered communication. One of the more pervasive problems in the use of nonverbal behaviour in the encoding and decoding process is when a common system is *not* shared and misinterpretation of behaviour results. Certain encoded behaviours may have unintended effects, especially when contextual factors such as cultural, role and spatial factors are inappropriately considered during an interaction. The misinterpretation of behaviour that results can lead to profound consequences and must be considered a type of communication *per se*.

## **APPROACHES TO NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR AS COMMUNICATION**

### **Ekman and Friesen**

Perhaps the most useful model of nonverbal communication that encompasses these issues (but does not resolve them) is one originally presented by Ekman and Friesen (1969). They began by distinguishing between three characteristics of nonverbal behaviour: (1) usage, (2) origin and (3) coding.

Usage refers to the circumstances that exist at the time of the nonverbal act. It includes consideration of the external condition that affects the act, such as the physical setting, role relationship and emotional tone of the interaction. For example, the encoder and decoder may be communicating in an office, a home, a car, or a street. The role relationship may involve that of an interviewer–interviewee, therapist–client, supervisor–employee, husband–wife or teacher–student. The emotional tone may be formal or informal, stressful or relaxed, friendly or hostile, warm or cold, competitive or co-operative. Usage also involves the relationship between verbal and nonverbal behaviour. For instance, nonverbal acts may serve to accent, duplicate, support, substitute for or be unrelated to verbal behaviours.

Usage is the characteristic Ekman and Friesen chose to employ in dealing with awareness and intentionality on the part of the encoder, as discussed previously. In addition, usage involves external feedback which is defined as the receiver's verbal or nonverbal reactions to the encoder's nonverbal behaviours as interpreted by the encoder. This does not involve the receiver's actual interpretations of the sender's behaviour, but is only information to the sender that his or her nonverbal behaviours have been received and evaluated. Finally, usage also refers to the type of information conveyed in terms of being informative, communicative, or interactive. Informative and communicative acts have been discussed. Interactive acts are those that detectably influence or modify the behaviour of the other participants in an interaction. Thus, these three information types involve the degree to which nonverbal messages are understood, provide information, and influence the behaviour of other people.

The second characteristic of nonverbal behaviour discussed by Ekman and Friesen is its origin. Some nonverbal behaviours are rooted in the nervous system, such as reflex actions; other nonverbal behaviours are commonly learned and used in dealing with the environment: for example, human beings use their feet for transportation in one form or another. A third source of nonverbal behaviour refers to culture, family or any other instrumental or socially distinguishable form of behaviour.



Thus, we adopt idiosyncratic behaviours when driving a car; we eat in a certain manner and groom ourselves in various ways. Social customs dictate nonverbal patterns of greeting one another, expressing approval or disapproval, and apportioning appropriate distances from each other depending upon the type of interaction involved.

The third characteristic of nonverbal behaviour is coding, that is, the meaning attached to a nonverbal act. The primary distinction is between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* codes. Extrinsically coded acts signify something else and may be either arbitrarily or iconically coded. Arbitrarily coded acts bear no visual resemblance to what they represent. A thumbs-up sign for signalling that everything is OK would be an arbitrarily coded act since it conveys no meaning 'by itself'. An iconically coded act tends to resemble what it signifies, as in the example of a throat-cutting movement with a finger. Intrinsically coded movements are what they signify. Playfully hitting a person, say on the upper arm, is an intrinsically coded act in that it is actually a form of aggression.

Employing usage, origin, and coding as a basis for defining nonverbal behaviour, Ekman and Friesen went on to distinguish among five categories of behavioural acts.

## **Emblems**

These are nonverbal acts that have direct verbal translation and can substitute for words, the meaning of which is well understood by a particular group, class, or culture. Emblems originate through learning, most of which is culture-specific, and may be shown in any area of the body. Examples include waving the hands in a greeting or frowning to indicate disapproval. Ekman, Friesen, and Bear (1984) found substantial regional, national and intranational variation in these displays, leading them to suggest compiling an international dictionary of emblems. Differences have also been found in the way cultures interpret emblems: cultures studied include the Catalans in Spain (Payrato, 1993), Dutch interpretations of Chinese and Kurdish gestures (Poortinga, Schoots, & Van de Koppel, 1993), and Hebrew speakers in Israel (Safadi & Valentine, 1988). The culture-specific nature of emblems can come into sharp focus when unintentional communication occurs as a function of an encoder and decoder having learned different meanings for identical emblematic displays.

A comprehensive cross-cultural investigation of emblematic gestures by Matsumoto and Hwang (2013) found a wide range of unique emblems across the six cultures investigated. Interestingly, the most diverse and differentiated content area was among emblems that depicted religion or religious acts. However, consistent with the hypothesised impact of evolution on nonverbal communication, the most survival-based emblematic expressions show some degree of universality. Emblems representing the attitudinal responses of 'yes', 'no', and 'I don't know' and emblems depicting the mental state of 'threat' and the physical state of 'thirst' were displayed and interpreted with relative consistency across all six cultures.

## **Illustrators**

These are movements that are tied directly to speech and serve to illustrate what is verbalised. Illustrators are socially learned, usually through imitation by a child of a

person he or she wishes to resemble. An example of an illustrator is holding the hands a certain distance apart to indicate the length of an object.

### ***Regulators***

These nonverbal acts serve to regulate conversation flow between people. Regulators are often culture-specific and may be subtle indicators to direct verbal interaction such as head nods, body position shifts and eye contact. Because of their subtle nature, regulators are often involved in miscommunication and inappropriate responses among people of different cultures or ethnic backgrounds. This will be examined later in greater detail when the authors' police-citizen research is described.

### ***Adaptors***

These are object or self-manipulations. The specific behaviours are first learned as efforts to satisfy bodily needs, usually during childhood. In adult expression, only a fragment of the original adaptive behaviour is exhibited. Adaptors are behavioural habits and are triggered by some feature of the setting that relates to the original need. There are three types of adaptors: (1) self-adaptors such as scratching the head or clasping the hands; (2) alter-adaptors, which may include protective hand movements and arm-folding intended to protect oneself from attack or to represent intimacy, withdrawal or flight; and (3) object adaptors, which are originally learned to perform instrumental tasks and may include tapping a pencil on the table or smoking behaviours.

### ***Affect displays***

These consist primarily of facial expressions of emotions. There is evidence that people from different cultures agree on their judgements of expressions for the primary emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, disgust, and interest) but disagree on their ratings of the intensity of these expressions (Ekman, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1994). More recently, the nonverbal facial expression of contempt has been investigated as a possible addition to this list (Matsumoto & Ekman, 2004). Although this expression can be reliably associated with social situations that bring about that emotional response, it appears to be qualitatively different than the other primary emotions in that the facial expression itself is not reliably labelled as 'contempt' (Wagner, 2000). While there is general agreement regarding the presumed universality of six basic facial expressions (happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust), these expressions are usually modified and often hidden by cultural display rules learned as 'appropriate' behaviour. Thus, affect displays may be masked in social settings in order to show socially acceptable behaviour.

Recent findings related to this issue have led to the development of an interactionist perspective that integrates findings supportive of both cultural specificity and universality. A study by Elfenbein and Ambady (2003) documented the degree to which

(cultural) familiarity increases decoding accuracy, and meta-analytic assessments of this question have revealed in-group advantages in decoding accuracy (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002a, 2002b). However, evidence for such an in-group advantage has been questioned due to methodological restrictions in studies documenting the impact of culture (see Matsumoto, 2002). It may be the case that the events that elicit emotions vary from culture to culture, but the particular facial muscle movements triggered when a given emotion is elicited may be relatively universal. In addition, work by Matsumoto, Willingham, and Ollide (2009) failed to show the in-group advantage for assessments based on spontaneous vs. posed nonverbal displays. This outcome questions the ecological validity of previous outcomes based on posed vs. spontaneous nonverbal displays. A meta-analytic investigation by Elfenbein and Eisenkraft (2010) demonstrated the importance of posed vs. spontaneous stimuli as moderated by the relationship between displaying and receiving nonverbal affect cues. These skills were positively correlated when the nonverbal stimuli were posed, but unrelated when more ecologically valid stimuli were used.

The nonverbal characteristic-category system of Ekman and Friesen has provided a useful means of analysing and organising nonverbal behaviours used in communication and is readily applicable in describing processes of information and expression-exchange in normal, social interactions. Extended use of the system has focused on a number of significant topic areas, among which could be cited many investigations into the relationships between genuine and recalled emotion and facial expression (Ekman, 1992b, 1993; Ekman, Davidson, & Friesen, 1990), and the utility of the system in distinguishing honest and authentic expressions from the deceptive and dissembling (Ekman, 1992b; Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1991; Ekman, O'Sullivan, Friesen, & Scherer, 1991; Hyman, 1989). Perhaps one of the most promising findings to emerge from this literature is the recognition of a particular smile, 'The Duchenne Smile', which seems to be a reliable indicator of genuine enjoyment and happiness. Moreover, initial investigations showed that this facial profile seems to be quite resistant to staging and dissimulation (Ekman, 1993). Results from investigations of the Duchenne smile suggest that there may exist a universal cross-cultural response to these displays that could possibly have evolved due to the important communicative role of such smiles (Williams, Senior, David, Loughland, & Gordon, 2001). However, more recent findings reveal that it may be possible to feign the Duchenne smile and that it can be learned, limiting its use as a cue to veracity (Krumhuber & Manstead, 2009).

## **Dittman**

Another way of organising nonverbal acts in terms of their communicative nature, is by focusing on the 'communication specificity' and channel capability of message transmission. These concepts have been presented by Dittman (1972, 1978) as part of a larger model of the communication of emotions and are an important aspect of using nonverbal behaviour as a communication skill. Dittman focused primarily on four major channels of communication: (1) language; (2) facial expression; (3) vocalisations; and (4) body movements. These four channels can be discussed in terms of their 'capacity', defined as the amount of information each may transmit at any given moment. Channel capacity can be described along two dimensions:

(1) communication specificity (communicative-expressive) and (2) information value (discrete-continuous).

The closer a channel is to the communicative end of the continuum, the more discrete its information value will be in terms of containing distinguishable units with identifiable meanings (for instance, words). The more discrete a communication is, the greater the communication specificity it will usually have. These channels have the greatest capacity for conveying the largest number of messages with a wide variety of emotional meaning.

Channels at the other end of the capacity dimension are described as being relatively more expressive and continuous. For example, foot movements or changes in posture are more continuous behaviours than are spoken words, and are more expressive than specifically communicative in their emotional content. These channels have a lower capacity for conveying information regarding how a person is feeling. Facial expressions and vocalisations (paralanguage) may vary in their capacity to convey emotional expression depending on their delivery, the role the person is playing, the setting of the behaviour and whether the decoders are family, friends, or strangers.

Dittman also discussed the degree to which a message varies in intentional control on the part of the encoder, and awareness on the part of the decoder. Intentional control refers to the degree to which an encoder is in control of allowing his or her emotions to be expressed. Level of awareness refers to a decoder either being aware of, repressing or not noticing a message being sent by an encoder.

The most useful contribution by Dittman to the nonverbal communication area is his analysis of channels of communication. A major challenge in nonverbal behaviour research is to examine the degree to which single versus multiple channels of transmission provide more meaningful communication in human interaction. A number of contemporary researchers have called for increased use of observation to provide a more ecologically valid assessment of multiple channels of transmission (cf., Kudesia & Elfenbein, 2013).

## Mehrabian

An influential approach that uses multiple nonverbal categories and attempts to organise them in terms of three dimensions is that of Mehrabian (1972). These dimensions, described as social orientations, are *positiveness*, *potency*, and *responsiveness*. Positiveness involves the evaluation of other persons or objects that relate to approach-avoidance tendencies, usually described in terms of liking. Nonverbal behaviours associated with positiveness represent 'immediacy' cues such as eye contact, forward-lean, touching, distance and orientation.

Potency represents status or social control and is demonstrated through 'relaxation' cues of posture such as hand and neck relaxation, sideways-lean, reclining angle, and arm-leg position asymmetry. Responsiveness is expressed through 'activity' cues that relate to orientating behaviour and involve the relative importance of the interaction participants. Such nonverbal behaviour as vocal activity, speech rate, speech volume and facial activity are indices of responsiveness. Mehrabian's system of nonverbal expression is thus organised into (1) dimensions, (2) associated cues and (3) specific nonverbal indicators of the cues.

Mehrabian's system places nonverbal behaviour in socially meaningful contexts and is especially useful for nonverbal behaviour as a communication skill. The dimensions of nonverbal behaviour can be applied equally to encoding or decoding roles and are supported by numerous experimental results. For example, data collected by Mehrabian and others indicate that the positiveness dimension, with its immediacy cues, is concerned with deceptive or truthful communication. McCroskey's research on nonverbal immediacy in the classroom has also revealed positive effects on both evaluations of teachers (McCroskey, Richmond, Sallinen, & Fayer, 1995; Rocca & McCroskey, 1999), and student learning outcomes (McCroskey, Sallinen, Fayer, & Richmond, 1996). Additional research has revealed that instructor immediacy impacts perceived instructor competency and expertise (Goodboy, Weber, & Bolkan, 2009; Schrodt & Witt, 2006). Recent examinations of nonverbal immediacy have also shown positive relationships with student course engagement in online education (Dixson, Mackenzie, Rogers-Stacy, Weister, & Lauer, 2017). Last, a review of research on nonverbal behaviour in the classroom revealed stronger relationships between immediacy and student attitudes than between immediacy and academic performance, calling for more work on academic outcome measures as well as a focus on how student nonverbal behaviour impacts teacher attitudes and behaviour (Blincoe & Harris, 2013). The potency dimension, as expressed by relaxation cues, is useful in understanding situations where social or professional status is salient, such as military rank, corporate power, teacher-student relations, and therapist-client interaction.

The responsiveness dimension, as expressed by activity cues, relates to persuasion, either as intended (encoding) or perceived (decoding). Thus, Mehrabian organised a complex set of nonverbal behaviours into manageable proportions, which are readily testable and applicable to social situations experienced daily, particularly by professionals whose judgement and influence are important to those with whom they communicate.

## **Patterson**

A more recent attempt to organise nonverbal behaviour into basic functions or purposes of communication is presented by Patterson (1983, 1988, 2001). He argues that as social communication, nonverbal behaviour is only meaningful when considered in terms of an exchange of expressions between participants in an interaction. It is this relational nature of behaviours that must be considered and requires sensitivity to the behavioural context each person constructs for the other (Patterson, 1983), or for third parties viewing participants in a primary relationship (Patterson, 1988). The basic functions of nonverbal behaviour are related to the management (both interpretation and presentation) of those acts primarily involved in social interaction.

There are seven basic functions suggested: (1) providing information; (2) regulating interaction; (3) expressing intimacy; (4) expressing social control; (5) presentation function; (6) affect management; and, (7) facilitating service or task goals. Nonverbal behaviour is best considered as 'co-ordinated exchanges' and configurations of multi-channel combinations as related to the seven functions. Thus, presenting nonverbal behaviour in terms of separate channels (for instance, facial expressions, arm movements, paralanguage, and so on), does not properly emphasise the interdependent

and co-ordinated relationship among channels that are meaningfully involved in the functions. This configural approach is important for application to the development of communication skills. The use of emblems provides a good example of a nonverbal display that often employs multiple channels to produce a direct verbal equivalent. For example, the emblem for the verbalisation 'I don't know' involves a co-ordinated facial expression, shoulder movement, arm movement, and hand movement.

The information provision function is considered to be most basic and is seen primarily from an impression formation or decoder perspective. When observing an encoder's (actor's) behaviour patterns, the decoder may infer aspects of the encoder's acquired dispositions, temporary states, or the meaning of a verbal interaction. Facial cues are emphasised (Ekman & Friesen, 1975) usually to infer emotional expressions. However, other channels of nonverbal behaviour such as the postural, paralinguistic, and visual are also important in formulating the impression.

The function of regulating interaction deals with the development, maintenance, and termination of a communicative exchange. These nonverbal behaviours are usually 'automatic' or operate at low levels of awareness. Two types of behaviour are involved in regulating interactions: the first are structural aspects that remain relatively stable over the course of an interaction and include posture, body orientation and interpersonal distance; the second is dynamic and affects momentary changes in conversational exchange, such as facial expression, gaze, tone and pitch of voice and change in voice volume (Argyle & Kendon, 1967; Duncan, 1972). Both the information and regulating functions are 'molecular' in form and represent communicative aspects of more isolated and specific nonverbal behaviours.

The last five functional categories represent broader purposes of communication and are molar descriptions of more extended interactions. These are of greater importance in understanding and predicting the nature of nonverbal acts during an interaction. Intimacy refers to liking, attraction or, generally, the degree of 'union' or 'openness towards another person'. Extended mutual gazing into another's eyes, closer interpersonal spacing and mutual touching are examples of communicating intimacy.

Social control functions to persuade others and establish status differences related to the roles of the interaction participants. Examples of nonverbal behaviours involved in social control are gaze patterns and touch to clarify status differences; and eye contact, direct body orientation and vocal intonation to attempt to persuade someone to accept another's point of view. Much of the authors' research relates to this function and will be discussed later in the chapter.

The presentational function of nonverbal behaviours is managed by an individual or a couple to create or enhance an image, and is typically aimed not so much at the other partner as it is at others outside the direct relationship. Some authors have identified these processes as 'tie-signs' (Goffman, 1971) or 'witness cues' (Schefflen & Schefflen, 1972). Holding hands, standing close and sharing a common focus of attention are frequent examples. Such behaviours occur more often in the presence of others. The affect management function focuses on the expression of strong affect by demonstrative processes such as embracing, kissing and other forms of touching associated with strong positive affect; or embarrassment, shame or social anxiety, as in instances of decreased contact, averted gaze and turning away from the partner.

The service-task function involves nonverbal behaviours that are relatively impersonal in nature. Role and situational factors are particularly important here

since many of the same nonverbal behaviours involved in intimacy are also present in service-task functions. A good example is close interpersonal spacing and touching behaviour on the part of a physician towards a patient or between hairdresser and customer. The distinguishing feature of service-task behaviours is that they function to service the needs of individuals.

Patterson (1995) has attempted to expand his functional conception of social process maintenance by conceptualising a dynamic, multi-staged, parallel processing model of nonverbal communication. The model encompasses four classes of factors, each containing multiple processes: (1) determinants (biology, culture, gender, personality); (2) social environment (partner, setting); (3) cognitive-affective mediators (interpersonal expectancies, affect, goals, dispositions, cognitive resources, attentional focus, cognitive effort, action schemas); and (4) person perception and behavioural processes (impression formation, actor behaviour). In the broadest sense, the model attempts to describe the complex demands entailed in simultaneously initiating and monitoring interactive behaviour. It is generally recognised that if nonverbal behaviour is discussed separately by channel, it is primarily for organisational clarity; any one channel should not be considered at the exclusion of others in either managing or interpreting social behaviour. This, of course, results in a more complex task in using nonverbal behaviour as a communication skill, yet it places the topic in a more appropriate perspective *vis-à-vis* communication in general.

Patterson's functional approach to nonverbal behaviour is similar to Mehrabian's in its application to social-communicative processes. Both stress the importance of the multichannel use of configurative aspects of nonverbal communication. However, Patterson provides a broader framework in which to view nonverbal behaviour in role- and setting-specific conditions, by emphasising the degree of overlap in multi-channel expression among the functions and the importance of interpreting these expressions in light of the psychological, social and environmental context.

In more recent descriptions of Patterson's (1998, 2001) parallel process model of nonverbal communication, the model is increasingly focused on the roles that goals and automatic processing play in our dealing with the tasks of simultaneously decoding our social environment and managing impressions of ourselves. Patterson observes that many relatively automatic judgements (e.g. the tendency to react in a positive and nurturing manner with baby-faced adults) may have been biologically based. However, he also suggests that due to the experience of processing social information, automatic judgements can occur as a function of forming associations between specific nonverbal cues or behaviours and learned preferred tendencies of the individual. In his commentary on the influence of evolutionary psychology on current nonverbal research, Patterson (2003) states that the evolutionary focus on the adaptive value of specific forms of expressive behaviour is consistent with the functional perspective and that: 'Evolutionary processes play a critical role in providing the foundation for this functional system of nonverbal communication' (p. 207). However, in a manner similar to that of Zebrowitz (2003), his major criticism of the evolutionary perspective is that it does not capture the parallel sending and receiving processes that are representative of an adequately complex interactive model of nonverbal communication. Echoing the work of many within ecological psychology (Barker, 1968; Wicker, 1979), Patterson has called for an increased focus on the impact of behaviour settings and the physical environment (e.g. lighting, temperature, sound, architectural elements, etc.) on the encoding and decoding

of nonverbal communication (Patterson & Quadflieg, 2016). These important variables are included in his current ecological systems model of nonverbal communication. In an attempt to provide integration to the diverse factors that impact nonverbal communication, the ecological systems model examines how factors such as culture, the environmental and social aspects of behaviour settings, and interaction goals (e.g. belonging, control, self-enhancement) impact nonverbal communication and outcomes.

The complexity of the task of communicative and self-presentational uses of nonverbal behaviour has been reviewed by DePaulo (1992). She examined the difficulties of communicating intended messages and emotional states through nonverbal channels. Two factors received particular emphasis. Nonverbal behaviour is more accessible to others in an interaction than it is to the actor. This makes self- (or relationship) presentational refinements and monitoring difficult for the actor and access direct and figural for others; although such refinements have been shown to be affected by self-monitoring tendencies and strategic self-presentational goals (Levine & Feldman, 1997). Second, it is never possible to 'not act' by nonverbal channels. While one can fall silent verbally, one can never become silent nonverbally. These two features of nonverbal behaviour *vis-à-vis* speech highlight the significant and problematic nature of nonverbal behaviour as communication.

## NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN CONTEXT

This chapter has stressed that nonverbal behaviour, as a communication skill, is most usefully understood when discussed in role- and setting-defined contexts. With the possible exception of facial expressions subject to display rules, nonverbal communication cannot be discussed adequately by presenting principles that have universal application. Perhaps a useful way of presenting research results as applied to communication skills is to provide a sampling of findings in selected contexts. At present, research on nonverbal communication is incomplete and asks more questions than it provides answers, yet it is hoped that the reader will better appreciate scientific attempts to study this communication skill meaningfully.

In his review, Knapp (1984) discussed the relevance of nonverbal behaviour to communication in general and suggested several assumptions from which the research can be viewed. Among these are that human communication consists primarily of combinations of channel signals such as spatial, facial and vocal signals operating together. Another assumption is that communication is composed of 'multi-level signals' and deals with broader interpretations of interactions such as general labelling (for example, a social or professional encounter) and inferences about longer term relationships among the interactants. His last assumption is most crucial for the present discussion since it points out the critical importance of context for generating meanings from human communication encounters.

### Setting and role applications

A major limitation of much nonverbal behaviour research is that it is conducted in a laboratory setting devoid of many of the contextually relevant environmental and social



features present in real life interactions (Davis, 1984; Druckman et al., 1982; Knapp, 1984). This is a serious problem in attempts to generalise techniques of impression management and processes of impression formation to specific role-defined settings (such as the psychotherapeutic or counselling session), health professional-patient interactions, the employment interview and police-citizen encounters. Professionals in these areas have a special interest in nonverbal behaviour. Accurate and effective communication is crucial to accomplishing the purposes of the interaction. One series of studies conducted over a number of years is illustrative of setting- and role-defined research and reveals the importance of the interplay among the categories of kinesics, paralanguage, proxemics, physical characteristics, adornments and environmental factors mentioned earlier as describing major categories of nonverbal behaviour.

The specific role-defined setting was that of a standing, face-to-face police-citizen interaction. In the initial study (Rozelle & Baxter, 1975), police officers were asked to indicate the characteristics and features they look for when interacting with a citizen while in the role of a 'police officer' and to indicate cues they used in forming these impressions of the citizen. Cues or information items were classified as either behavioural (that is, the other person's verbal and nonverbal behaviour) or situational (that is, aspects of the environment, such as number of other people present inside a room or on the street, or lighting conditions).

Under conditions of danger, officers indicated a broadened perceptual scan and were more likely to utilise behavioural (mainly nonverbal) and situation-environmental cues (e.g. area of town, size of room, activities on the street) in forming an impression of the citizen. Under the non-dangerous conditions, officers concentrated almost exclusively on specific facial and vocal cues, eye contact, arm and hand movements, dress and behavioural sequences such as body orientation and postural positions and described the citizen primarily in terms of dispositional characteristics (i.e. guilty, suspicious, deceptive, honest, law-abiding).

## **Actor and observer bias in explaining nonverbal behaviour**

An important feature of impression-management (encoding) and formation (decoding) processes deals with differences arising out of the perspectives of the interaction participants (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). In most role-defined interactions, the person in the encoding role is considered to be the actor, whereas the decoder is the observer. It has been proposed that unless otherwise trained or sensitised (Watson, 1982), observers over-emphasise dispositional qualities in inferring the causes of the actor's behaviour, while ignoring the more immediate situational factors related to the observed behaviour. Actors, on the other hand, usually over-emphasise situational factors at the expense of dispositional ones in explaining their own behaviour, especially when it is self-serving to do so. It should be mentioned, however, that a number of factors, including cross-cultural differences (Choi & Nisbett, 1998; Krull, Loy, Lin, Wang, & Zhao, 1999; Masuda & Kitayama, 2004) and differences in the way that individuals process information (D'Agostino & Fincher-Kiefer, 1992), have been found to moderate these general attributional tendencies.

Rozelle and Baxter (1975) concluded that police officers see themselves as observers, evaluating and judging the behaviours of the citizen with whom they are

interacting. As a result, the officer makes predominantly dispositional interpretations, ignoring situational causes of the observed behaviour. It is of particular importance to note that in this type of face-to-face interaction, the officer is probably one of the more distinguishable features of the situation and the officer's behaviour is an important situational determinant of the citizen's behaviour. Thus, the officer under-estimates or ignores personal behaviour as a contributing, situational determinant of the citizen's behaviour. This can lead to misinterpretations of behaviour, particularly when judgments must be made on the basis of a relatively brief, initial encounter.

### **Interpersonal distance, roles and problems of interpretation**

A more dramatic example of how this observer bias can lead to clear, yet inaccurate, interpretations of behaviour was obtained when the category of proxemics was included in the police-citizen interaction. Based on his observations of North American behaviour in a variety of settings, Hall (1959, 1966) proposed four categories of interpersonal distance that describe different types of communications in face-to-face interactions:

- 1 Intimate distances in which interactants stand from 6 to 18 inches from each other. Types of interactions expressing intimacy are 'love-making and wrestling, comforting and protecting'
- 2 Personal distances of 1.5 to 4 feet, which usually reflect close, personal relationships
- 3 Social or consultative distances of 4 to 7 feet that are typical of business and professional client interactions
- 4 Public distances that range from 12 to 20 feet and involve public speaking in which recognition of others spoken to is not required.

Hall (1966) stipulated that these distances are appropriate only for North American and possibly Northern European cultures and that other cultures have different definitions of interpersonal spacing.

A study by Baxter and Rozelle (1975) focused on a simulated police-citizen interview that consisted of four two-minute phases in which the distance between the officer and citizen was systematically varied according to Hall's first three distance classes and examined the impact of increased crowding across time. The nonverbal behaviours exhibited by the subjects during the crowding condition were consistent with typical reactions of people experiencing inappropriate, intimate, interpersonal spacing. As the subject was increasingly crowded during the interview, his or her speech time and frequency became disrupted and disorganised, with an uneven, staccato pattern developing. Eye movements and gaze aversion increased, while few other facial reactions were displayed. Small, discrete head movements occurred, and head rotation/elevation movements increased. Subjects adopted positions to place their arms and hands between themselves and the interviewer, and there was a noticeable increase in hands-at-crotch positioning. Brief rotating head movements increased, while foot

movements decreased. These nonverbal behaviours were produced by a situational manipulation (that is, crowding) but were strikingly similar to those emphasised by Rozelle and Baxter's real police officers as the described behaviours indicating guilt, suspicion and deception.

Recent investigations of nonverbal encoding and decoding related to the police-citizen context have revealed that both students and police officers believe the usual stereotypes and view non-diagnostic (nonverbal) cues such as gaze aversion and increased movement to be indicative of deception (Bogaard et al., 2016). Perhaps one of the most important lessons to be learned from the work on deception is that police officers need to be dissuaded from their belief in the efficacy of nonverbal behaviour as an informative index of deception and appropriately trained to focus on the content of citizen verbal behaviour (Vrij, 2008). Additional data is needed to determine whether such stereotypes guide judgements across contexts (e.g. the courtroom, the boardroom). In a comprehensive review of the existing evidence on our skill in detecting lies and deception with nonverbal behaviour, Vrij (2008) states that although a number of tools have been shown to increase decoding accuracy, all tools and methods have their own sets of limitations.

## Cultural influences

The important role played by cultural differences in nonverbal behaviour is suggested from several directions. Early studies by Watson (1970) and by Watson and Graves (1966) have shown differences in gazing behaviour, space behaviour, body orientations and touching behaviour among members of different cultures. More recent studies by Ekman and his colleagues distinguished the universal from the culturally specific sources for expressions of emotion (e.g. Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1988). While the underlying physiology for the primary emotions may be universal, the actual expression elicited is subject to cultural (Elfenbein and Ambady, 2002b, 2003) and situation-determined display rules as we discussed above. Display rules serve to control an expression or to modify certain expressions that would be socially inappropriate or would reveal deception. Research by Matsumoto et al. (2009) suggests that although the activation of culture-specific display rules occurs quickly, often in less than one second, the universal expression of emotion (e.g. joy over having just won an athletic competition) is encoded first. This fast sequencing of universal and culture-specific emotions may be typical of how display rules get enacted after an initial emotional display.

Klopf et al. (1991) showed that the Japanese subjects in their study perceived themselves to be less immediate – indicated by less touching, more distance, less forward-lean, less eye contact, and oriented away from the other – than their Finnish and American subjects. These variations may reflect cultural differences in rules dealing with intimacy (Argyle, 1986). Anecdotal reports also suggest distinct patterns of expression for Japanese negotiators – in the face (immobile, impassive), the eyes (gaze away from others), the mouth (closed), the hands (richly expressive gestures), and synchronous movements in pace, stride, and body angle with other members of a group (March, 1988). Understanding preferred nonverbal expressions may be a basis for communicating across cultures as Faure (1993) illustrated in the context of French-Chinese negotiations. They may also reveal the way that members of different societies manage impressions (Crittenden & Bae, 1994).

The impact of culture on display rule usage and nonverbal expressivity has been documented in a cross-cultural investigation that included more than 5000 participants across thirty-two countries (Matsumoto et al., 2008). Matsumoto and Hwang (2013, 2016) have developed a taxonomy of nonverbal expressivity across six nonverbal channels: the face (many animated facial expressions, facial amplifying and illustrating), the voice (louder, deeper, and faster), posture (relaxed and open), gesture (frequent emblem use, many illustrators), gaze (direct), and interpersonal space (closer interaction distance). As expected, a strong positive relationship was found between expressivity and measures of individualism. It should be noted that the majority of the relationship was driven by the normative expression of positive emotions (happiness and surprise). The authors suggest that the observed relationship between expressivity and individualism may be a product of higher levels of outgoing behaviour in individualistic cultures, leading to increased verbal and nonverbal emotional expressivity.

Subcultural differences in interpersonal spacing preferences have been examined in several observational studies (e.g. Thompson & Baxter, 1973; Willis, 1966). In general, African Americans tend to prefer interacting at greater distances and at more oblique orientations than Anglo-Americans, who in turn prefer greater distances and more indirection than Mexican Americans. Indeed, the Thompson and Baxter study demonstrates that African, Anglo- and Mexican Americans, when interacting in intercultural groups in natural contexts, appear to 'work towards' inconsistent spacing arrangements through predictable footwork and orientation adjustments. A subsequent study by Garratt, Baxter, and Rozelle (1981) trained Anglo-American police officers to engage in empirically determined 'African American nonverbal behaviour and interpersonal positioning' during an interview with African American citizens. These interviews were contrasted with 'standard' interviews conducted by the same officers with different African American citizens. Post-interview ratings by these citizens showed a clear preference for the 'trained' policeman, along with higher ratings in the areas of personal, social, and professional competence. A similar study with comparable results had been carried out previously by Collett (1971) with trained English interviewers interacting with Arab students.

Differences were also found between African American and white American subjects in gazing behaviour. The African American subjects directed their gaze away when listening and towards the other when speaking (LaFrance & Mayo, 1978). Similar patterns of gaze behaviour were found as well in other societies (Vrij & Winkel, 1991; Winkel & Vrij, 1990). Preliminary evidence obtained by the authors of this chapter suggests that the differences in gaze may reflect differences between subcultural groups in felt stress. A comparison of decoding accuracy between African-American, African, Afro-Caribbean and European Americans demonstrated that decoding accuracy for the nonverbal expression of emotion through posture and tone of voice was significantly related to degree of acculturation (Bailey, Nowicki, & Cole, 1998). Consistent with the likelihood that facial expressions would be more universally understood, acculturation was unrelated to the accurate interpretation of emotion from face in this study. However, other investigations that have compared Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans have revealed cultural differences in 'nonverbal accents' in the facial expression of emotion (Marsh, Efenbein, & Ambady, 2003).

A few studies have investigated cultural factors in deceptive enactments. Comparing Chinese experimental truth-tellers to liars, Cody, Lee, and Chao (1989),

Yi Chao (1987) and O'Hair, Cody, Wang, and Yi Chan (1989) found that only speech errors and vocal stress distinguished between the groups. Other paralinguistic variables were related more strongly to question difficulty. Like the Americans in the studies reviewed by DePaulo et al. (1985), the Chinese liars (compared to the truth-tellers) experienced more difficulty in communicating detailed answers to the questions that required effort. Both the liars and truth-tellers were brief in communicating negative feelings, smiling frequently and suppressing body and hand movements. With regard to Jordanian subjects, Bond, Omar, Mahmoud, and Bonser (1990) found that only filled pauses distinguished between the liars and truth-tellers: the Jordanians expressed more filled pauses when lying than when telling the truth. Compared to a comparable sample of Americans the Jordanian subjects (liars and truth-tellers) displayed more eye contact, more movements per minute and more filled pauses. However, both the American and Jordanian subjects used similar, inaccurate nonverbal cues (avoiding eye contact and frequent pauses) judging deception by others. An examination of beliefs about deception cues among Jordanians by Al-Simadi (2000) revealed some similarities with data from the United States and Western Europe (expectations of increased gaze aversion and paralinguistic cues) and some notable differences (expectations of increased blinking and facial colour). For a review of other cross-cultural studies, see Druckman and Hyman (1991).

While suggestive, these studies are not sufficient probes into the cultural dimensions influencing nonverbal behaviour. None of them describes the way people from different cultures feel when they violate a social taboo, for example, or attempt to deceive or exploit an interviewer. While the studies are informative, they do not illuminate the psychological states aroused within cultures that give rise to the kind of 'leakage' that may be used to examine complex intentional structures in different cultural groups. Based on their review of deception research, Hyman and Druckman (1991) concluded that: 'detection of deception would be improved if one could anticipate the sorts of settings that constitute social transgression or a guilt-producing state for particular individuals (or cultures)' (p. 188).

### ***Some research implications***

Building on the idea of cultural display rules, investigations designed to discover the situations that produce guilt for members of different cultural groups would be helpful. Indeed, there are likely to be cultural differences in the acceptability of deception. Fu, Lee, Cameron, and Xu (2001) found that Chinese students were more likely to interpret lies about prosocial behaviour as a type of modesty than were Canadian students. Situations that produce guilt are likely to vary with an individual's cultural background and experience. When identified, these situations could then be used as settings for enacting scripts that involve either deception or truth-telling by subjects from those cultures. The enactments should reveal the nonverbal behaviours that distinguish deceivers and truth-tellers within the cultural groups. These behaviours would be culturally specific 'leaked' cues.

Following this approach, such studies could be implemented in stages. First, interviews would be conducted to learn about a culture's 'folk psychology' of deception (see Hyman and Druckman, 1991). Respondents would be asked about the kinds

of lies and lying situations that are permissible versus those that are taboo within their culture. Second, experimental deception vignettes would be presented for respondents' reactions in terms of feelings of guilt, shame, and stress. The vignettes can be designed to vary in terms of such dimensions as whether the person represents a group or her/himself, the presence of an audience during the interview, and the extent to which he or she prepared for the questions being asked. Analyses would then suggest the dimensions that influence feelings of guilt or shame for each cultural group. Preliminary findings on subcultural groups, obtained by the authors of this chapter, showed differences in stress for members of different cultural groups and less guilt felt by respondents in all cultural groups when they were in the role of group representative compared to non-representative. (See also Mikolic, Parker, & Pruitt, [1994] for evidence on the disinhibiting effects of being in groups.) Third, the information gathered from the interviews could provide the bases for more structured experimental studies designed to discover those nonverbal behaviours that distinguish between liars and truth-tellers (the leakage cues) for each of several cultural groups. These cues could then be used for diagnostic purposes as well as for the development of training modules along the lines of work completed by Collett (1971), Costanzo (1992), Druckman et al. (1982), Fiedler and Walka (1993), and Garratt et al. (1981).

### **NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS: A SAMPLE OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Although the police-citizen encounter discussed earlier was brief and involved rather extreme situational proxemic variations with only a moderate amount of verbal exchange, it has elements similar to many professional interactions. For example, the actor-observer distinction could be applied to the employment interview. In such an interaction, the interviewer could be considered the 'observer' or decoder evaluating the verbal and nonverbal acts of the interviewee who is the 'actor' or encoder.

In the authors' experience with the professional interview setting, the interviewer often makes an important, job-related decision regarding the interviewee based on dispositional attributions occurring as a result of behaviour observed during a thirty-minute interview. Although the employment interview may be a typical experience for the interviewer during the working day, it is usually an infrequent and stressful one for the interviewee. This could increase the observer-dispositional bias, actor-situational bias effect. The interviewer, in the role of observer, proceeds 'as usual', while the interviewee reacts in a sensitive manner to every verbal and nonverbal behaviour of the interviewer. Unaware that the very role of the interviewer is an important, immediate situational cause of the interviewee's behaviours, the interviewer uses these same behaviours to infer long-term dispositional qualities to the interviewee-actor and may make a job-related decision on the basis of the impression formed. Thus, from a nonverbal communication perspective, the impression formed is, to varying degrees, inadvertently encoded by the interviewee-actor, and possibly misinterpreted in the decoding process on the part of the interviewer (the employment interview is discussed in detail in Chapter 16).

This miscommunication process may be particularly important during the initial stages of an interaction, since expectancies may be created that bias the remaining interaction patterns. Research indicates that first impressions are important in creating expectancies and evaluative judgements (and sometimes diagnoses) of people in interviewing, counselling, teaching, therapeutic and other professionally role-related interactions. Zajonc (1980) stated that evaluative judgements are often made in a fraction of a second on the basis of nonverbal cues in an initial encounter. Others have shown that a well-organised judgmental impression may be made in as little as four minutes.

A meta-analytic study by Ambady and Rosenthal (1992) summarised the research on 'thin slices' (defined as a five-minute exposure or less) of expressive behaviour as a predictor for deception detection. They found a significant effect size,  $r = .31$ , across sixteen studies. Neither length of exposure nor channel exposure (nonverbal vs. verbal and nonverbal) significantly moderated the effect size. Additional findings have shown that even brief (ten second) exposure to teacher nonverbal behaviour while the instructor was interacting with the class is predictive of students' teaching evaluations (Babad, Avni-Babad, & Rosenthal, 2003, 2004). Remarkably, male sexual orientation can be reliably determined in 1/20 of a second (Rule & Ambady, 2008). Current research on factors related to the reliability and validity of thin-slice stimuli have revealed substantial degrees of inter-slice reliability (i.e. slices within interaction sequences tend to be relatively interchangeable). An assessment of which types of nonverbal behaviours are best represented in thin slices showed that gaze, nods, and smiles had the greatest behavioural validity across slices (Murphy et al., 2015).

People who are in professional roles such as interviewing, counselling, and teaching should constantly remind themselves of the influence they have on clients' nonverbal behaviour and not to rely on 'favourite' nonverbal behaviours as flawless indicators of dispositional characteristics. Knowledge of potential effects of verbal and nonverbal behaviour can be useful in impression management techniques to create more effective communication in face-to-face interactions. For example, in a simulated employment interview setting, Washburn and Hakel (1973) demonstrated that when applicants were given a high level of nonverbal 'enthusiasm' by the interviewer (for instance, gazing, gesturing, and smiling), the applicants were judged more favourably than those given a low level of interviewer enthusiasm. Another study showed that when candidates received nonverbal approval during an employment interview, they were judged by objective observers to be more relaxed, more at ease and more comfortable than candidates who received nonverbal disapproval from the interviewer (Keenan, 1976).

Impression management strategies may also be utilised by the interviewee. For example, the American Psychological Association gives specific suggestions, based on research, to graduate school applicants on how to communicate favourable qualities nonverbally during an interview (Fretz & Stang, 1982). Research studies generally show that such nonverbal behaviours as high levels of gaze, combinations of paralinguistic cues, frequent head movement, frequent smiling, posture, voice loudness and personal appearance, affect impressions formed and evaluative judgements made by employment interviewers (Forbes & Jackson, 1980; Hollandsworth et al., 1979; Young & Beier, 1977). Nonverbal immediacy has also been shown to be related to positive subordinate perceptions of supervisors (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000; Jia, Cheng, & Hale, 2017).

Caution should be advised before applying these specific behaviours, since qualifying factors have been reported. For example, one study reported that if an applicant avoids gazing at the interviewer, an applicant of high status would be evaluated more negatively than one of low status (Tessler & Sushelsky, 1978). Evidently, gaze aversion was expected, on the part of the interviewer, from a low-status applicant but not from a higher-status one. Status differences and associated nonverbal behaviours have also been recognised in the military setting where physical appearance such as uniform markings clearly identify the ranks of the interactants (Hall, 1966).

This brief sampling of empirical results provides impressive evidence for the importance of nonverbal behaviour in managing and forming impressions in role-defined settings. However, these results also reveal that nonverbal behaviour in the form of kinesics interacts with other nonverbal categories such as proxemics, paralanguage, physical characteristics, and environmental factors. Although this creates a rather complex formula for applications, all of Knapp's seven dimensions are important to consider in developing communication skills in the various contexts of role-defined interactions that one experiences.

### **AN EXAMPLE OF RESEARCH AND APPLICATION: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS**

In this section, a programme of research will be briefly presented that illustrates an attempt to identify systematically certain nonverbal behaviours associated with specific intentions of the communicator (encoder), and to then apply these findings to develop better skills in interpreting (decoding) observed behaviour of others (Druckman et al., 1982). The context selected for this research is international politics. This is an area that encompasses a broad range of situational, cultural, personal, and social factors and thus attempts to deal with the complexity of nonverbal expression and interpretation. It is also an area that contains elements similar to a variety of everyday experiences encountered by a broad range of people in professional and social interactions.

#### **Laboratory research**

The initial research project involved a role-playing study in which upper-level university students were instructed to play the role of a foreign ambassador being interviewed in a press conference setting. A set of pertinent issues was derived from United Nations transcripts and presented to the subjects in detail. After studying the issues, subjects were randomly assigned to one of three intention conditions that directed them to express their country's position on the issues in either an honest, deceptive, or evasive fashion. Examples of honest, deceptive, and evasive arguments and discussion points were presented to the subjects to help prepare them for the interview. Participants were not aware that the purpose of the study was to assess nonverbal behaviour exhibited by them during the interview and the interviewer was unaware of whether the subject was in the honest, deceptive, or evasive intention condition.



## **Research findings**

Analyses revealed that honest, deceptive, and evasive subjects could be classified accurately solely on the basis of their nonverbal behaviours. Using ten nonverbal behaviours (for instance, head-shaking, gaze time at interviewer, leg movements, and so on), 96.6 per cent of the subjects were classified correctly as being honest, deceptive, or evasive. In another segment of the interview, three nonverbal behaviours (for instance, leg movements, gaze time at interviewer and object fidgeting) were accurate in 77 per cent of the cases in detecting honest, deceptive, or evasive intentions of the subject.

These computer-generated results were in striking contrast to another set of judgements produced by three corporate executives selected on the basis of their experience and expertise in 'dealing effectively with people'. These executives viewed the videos and then guessed if the subject had been in the honest, deceptive, or evasive condition. Results indicated that the experts correctly classified the subject-ambassadors in only 43, 30 and 27 per cent of the cases, respectively. Thus, even 'experts' would appear to benefit from further training and skill development in interpreting nonverbal behaviours – and actually may be in special need of such training (DePaulo et al., 1985).

The vast majority of decoding studies have involved the use of undergraduate students to assess deception. The accuracy rate across these studies tends to hover close to chance: 45 and 60 per cent (DePaulo et al., 1985; Kraut, 1980; Vrij, 2000). Vrij points out that a more specific evaluation that distinguishes between skill at detecting honesty and skill at detecting lies reveals that we tend to be particularly poor at detecting lies (a truth bias). There are data that suggest detection deception accuracy can be higher among specific groups of experts such as members of the Secret Service (Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1991; Ekman, O'Sullivan, & Frank, 1999) and police officers (Mann, Vrij, & Bull, 2004), but this is only likely to be the case when these professional groups have learned or are trained to pay attention to the more reliable nonverbal cues and ignore non-diagnostic nonverbal behaviour.

Research summarised in Vrij and Mann (2004) has demonstrated the utility of combining the evaluation of nonverbal behaviour with the application of various speech content analysis techniques that assess the credibility of verbal content. Accuracy rates in these studies have ranged from 77 to 89 per cent (Vrij, Akerhurst, Soukara, & Bull, 2004; Vrij, Edward, Roberts, & Bull, 2000). Over the last decade, additional criteria-based content analysis models have been developed and used as verbal veracity assessment tools. Vrij (2015) summarises the work to date and the outcomes continue to be quite promising with much better than chance decoding accuracy across most studies. However, the bulk of those data emanate from studies involving undergraduates. As promising as some of the outcomes have been, Vrij (2015) notes that the known error rate of a common technique is 30 per cent and therefore suggests that outcomes from these techniques should not yet be allowed as admissible evidence in court. Additional research that compared decoding accuracy between individuals and small (six person) groups revealed a significant advantage among participants in the group conditions (Frank, Paolantonio, Feeley, & Servoss, 2004). However, this advantage was found only for judgements of deceptive, not honest, communication.

Recent work guided by the use of implicit measurement techniques has generated some support for subliminal processing leading to greater decoding accuracy (ten Brinke, Stimson, & Carney, 2014; ten Brinke, Vohs, & Carney, 2016). However, effect sizes in these studies have been small and some of the work in the area has had methodological limitations (Street & Vardillo, 2016). Future studies need to carefully control for the impact of conscious processing on decoding outcomes.

Another set of analyses revealed significant shifts in nonverbal behaviour patterns when the subject changed from the ambassador role to being 'him/herself' during the informal post-interview period. Generally, subjects showed more suppressed, constrained behaviour when playing the role of ambassador: for example, significantly fewer facial displays, less head nodding, fewer body swivels and less frequent statements occurred during the interview than in the post-interview period. It would appear that the same person displays different patterns and levels of nonverbal behaviour depending upon the role that is being communicated. Also, different patterns of behaviour occurred in the three five-minute segments of the formal interview. Thus, even when a person is playing the same role, different behaviours emerge during the course of an interaction. These may be due to factors of adaptation, stress, familiarity, relaxation, or fatigue.

Yet another set of analyses using subjects' responses to a set of post-interview questions indicated that certain patterns of nonverbal behaviours were related to feelings the subject had during the interview (for example, stress, relaxation, confidence, apprehension), and that these patterns were related to the intention condition assigned to the subject. Evasive and honest subjects displayed behaviours indicating involvement, while evasive and deceptive subjects displayed nonverbal indication of stress and tension. Subjects in all three conditions displayed behaviour patterns related to expressed feelings of confidence and effectiveness.

Current computer-assisted behavioural observation tools such as THEME (Magnusson, 2005) should allow for a more comprehensive assessment of patterns of nonverbal behaviour across time. Early work with THEME by Aglioti, Vescovo, and Anolli (2006) revealed cross-cultural differences and more current investigations have shown some promising outcomes in a series of exploratory investigations examining the impact of deception on multiple behaviours across time (Burgoon, Proudfoot, Schuetzler, & Wilson, 2014).

### ***Training the decoder***

Even though the results of this study were complex, they were organised into a training programme designed to improve the observer's ability to distinguish among honest, deceptive and evasive intentions of subjects playing this role. Four training programmes were presented to different groups of decoders and represented four types of instruction, ranging from general (a global lecture and an audio-only presentation) to specific information (a technical briefing and inference training) regarding nonverbal indicators of intention. Results showed that accuracy of judgement in distinguishing between honest, deceptive, and evasive presentations improved as the specificity and applied organisation of the instructional materials increased. The strategy used for inference training was shown to be especially effective (Druckman et al., 1982).

## **STRATEGIES FOR INTERPRETING NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR: AN APPLICATION OF EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS**

The studies reviewed above support the assumption that gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal behaviours convey meaning. However, while adding value to interpretation in general, an understanding of the nonverbal aspects of behaviour may not transfer directly to specific settings. Meaning must be established within the context of interest: for example, the nonverbal behaviour observed during the course of a speech, interview, or informal conversation.

Building on the earlier laboratory work, a plan has been developed for deriving plausible inferences about intentions and psychological or physical states of political leaders (see also Druckman & Hyman, 1991). The plan is a structure for interpretation: it is a valuable tool for the professional policy analyst; it is a useful *framework* for the interested observer of significant events. In the following sections, themes and techniques for analysis are discussed, and the special features of one particular context, that of international politics, is emphasised.

### **Themes for analysis**

Moving pictures shown on video or film are panoramas of quickly changing actions, sounds and expressions. Just where to focus one's attention is a basic analytical problem. Several leads are suggested by frameworks constructed to guide the research cited above. Providing a structure for analysis, the frameworks emphasise two general themes, namely focusing on combinations of nonverbal behaviours and taking contextual features into account.

While coded separately, the nonverbal behaviours can be combined for analysis of total displays. Patterns of behaviours then provide a basis for inferences about feelings or intentions. The patterns may take several forms: one consists of linear combinations of constituent behaviours, as when gaze time, leg movements and object-fidgeting are used in equations to identify probable intentions; a second form is correlated indicators or clusters, such as the pattern of trunk swivels, rocking movements, head-shaking and head nodding shown by subjects attempting to withhold information about their 'nation's' policy; another form is behaviours that occur within the same time period as was observed for deceivers in the study presented above – for example, a rocking/nodding/shaking cluster was observed during interviews with deceptive 'ambassadors'.

Patterned movements are an important part of the total situation. By anchoring the movements to feelings and intentions, one can get an idea of their meaning. But there are other sources of explanation for what is observed. These sources may be referred to as context. Included as context are the semi-fixed objects in the setting (for instance, furniture), the other people with whom the subject interacts and the nature of the discourse that transpires. The proposition that context greatly influences social interaction/behaviour comes alive in Rapoport's (1982) treatment of the meaning of the built environment. Constraining influences of other people on exhibited expressions are made apparent in Duncan's (1983) detailed analyses of conversational turn

taking. Relationships between verbal statements and nonverbal behaviour are the central concern in the analyses of stylised enactments provided by Druckman et al. (1982). Each of these works is a state-of-the-art analysis. Together, they are the background for developing systems that address the questions of *what* to look for and *how* to use the observations/codes for interpretation. Highlighted here is a structure for interpreting material.

It is obvious that the particular intention-interpretation relationships of interest vary with particular circumstances. Several issues are particularly salient within the area of international politics. Of interest might be questions like: What is the state of health of the leader (or spokesman)? To what degree are statements honestly expressive of true beliefs (or actual policy)? How committed is the person to the position expressed? How fully consolidated and secure is the person's political position?

Knowing where to focus attention is a first step in assessment. A particular theme is emphasised in each of the political issues mentioned above. Signs of failing health are suggested by incongruities or inconsistencies in verbal and nonverbal behaviours, as well as between different nonverbal channels. Deception is suggested by excessive body activity, as well as deviations from baseline data. Strong commitment to policy is revealed in increased intensity of behaviours expressed in a variety of channels. The careful recording of proxemic activity or spatial relationships provides clues to political status. Biographical profiles summarise co-varying clusters of facial expressions and body movements. Each of these themes serves to direct an analyst's attention to *relationships* (for health indicators and profiles), to *particular nonverbal channels* (for deception and status indicators) or to *amount* as in the case of commitment.

Knowing specifically what to look at is the second step in assessment. Results of a number of experiments suggest particular behaviours. These provide multiple signs whose meaning is revealed in conjunction with the themes noted above. Illustrative indicators and references in each category are the following.

### **Health indicators**

- 1 *Pain*: furrowed brow and raised eyelids; change in vocal tone and higher pitch (Ekman & Friesen, 1975); lowered brow, raised upper lip (Kappesser & Williams, 2002), facial expression (Williams, 2002)
- 2 *Depression*: hand-to-body motions, increased self-references and extended periods of silence (Aronson & Weintraub, 1972); lowered facial muscle activity over the brow and cheek region (Gehricke & Shapiro, 2000)
- 3 *Irritability*: more forced smiling (McClintock & Hunt, 1975), fewer positive head nods (Mehrabian, 1971)
- 4 *Tension*: increased spontaneous movement (Mehrabian & Ksionzky, 1972), faster eye blinking, self-adaptive gestures (for body tension) (McClintock & Hunt, 1975)
- 5 *Stress*: flustered speech as indicated by repetitions, corrections, use of 'ah' or 'you know' rhythm disturbances (Baxter & Rozelle, 1975; Kasl & Mahl, 1965, Fuller, Horii, & Conner, 1992), abrupt changes in behaviour (Hermann, 1979), increased eye movements and gaze aversion in an otherwise immobile facial display, increased head rotation/elevation, increased placement of hands in front of the body (Baxter & Rozelle, 1975)

- 6 *General state*: verbal/nonverbal inconsistencies where different messages are sent in the two channels (Mehrabian, 1972).

### **Deception indicators**

- 1 *Direct deception*: speech errors as deviations from baseline data (Mehrabian, 1971), tone of voice (DePaulo, Zuckerman, & Rosenthal, 1980), fidgeting with objects, less time spent looking at the other than during a baseline period, patterns of rocking, head-shaking and nodding movements varying together (co-ordinated body movements) (Druckman et al., 1982), reduction in hand movements among skilled deceivers and those high in public self-consciousness (Vrij, Akehurst, & Morris, 1997), and increased pauses (Anolli & Ciceri, 1997);
- 2 *Indirect deception (evasion)*: more leg movements during periods of silence (when subject feels less assertive), frequent gazes elsewhere especially during periods of stress, frequent head-shaking during early periods in the interaction, increasing trend of self-fidgeting throughout the interaction (Druckman et al., 1982; McClintock and Hunt, 1975).

The search for a coherent set of reliable nonverbal cues to deception has comprised a large segment of the empirical investigation of nonverbal behaviour. However, findings from decoding accuracy studies suggest that either such a set of reliable cues simply does not exist or, alternatively, that the majority of individuals have little knowledge on how to use such a set of cues for diagnostic purposes. A review of findings appears in a meta-analytic assessment conducted by DePaulo et al. (2003) based on 120 independent samples. Although the review reveals consistencies with some of the indicators listed above (e.g. liars tend to talk less, provide fewer details, and tend to be perceived as more tense as a function of perceived vocal tension and fidgeting), the majority of deception cues were found to be unrelated, or only weakly related to deceit. Consistent with many individual studies, response latency was also found to be greater, but only when the lies were spontaneous (unplanned). However, specific cues to deception (e.g. increased vocal frequency or pitch) and overall assessment of nonverbal tension) were found to be more pronounced when encoders were highly motivated to succeed, when lies were identity relevant and when they were about transgressions. These findings are consistent with the work of Frank and Ekman (2004), Vrij (2000), and others that have documented the extent to which motivated lies ('true lies') tend to produce nonverbal cues related to the expression of negative facial affect. Motivated liars have been found to be more easily detected by experts; and, high-stakes lies produce more consistent nonverbal displays especially in the area of paralanguage.

Two recent related meta-analytic reviews have been conducted. An assessment of nonverbal encoding of honesty and deception by Sporer and Schwandt (2007) examined encoding differences across twelve behaviour channels/variables (e.g. eye contact, head movements, nodding, smiling, adaptors, illustrators). Only three differences were found: nodding, hand movements, and foot and leg movements. Contrary to predictions, decreased frequency was observed during deception. Consistent with the review by DePaulo et al. (2003), few reliable differences were found and the motivation level of the liar moderated the frequency and type of behaviours displayed.

Even though encoding data have revealed that motivation significantly moderates what gets encoded during deception, a recent review of decoding studies that involved multiple nonverbal cues to deception failed to find a relationship between the motivation level of the sender and decoding accuracy. The emotional level of the lie (e.g. lies told during legal investigations, negative life events) also failed to moderate the level of decoding accuracy (Hartwig & Bond, 2014). These authors point to the limited ecological validity of the experimental database as a potential explanation for the lack of moderational evidence.

One of the more interesting findings to emerge from the research on nonverbal lie detection is what Bond, Levine, and Hartwig (2015) describe as a *decline effect*. An examination of data from the meta-analysis by DePaulo et al. (2003) revealed a strong inverse relationship between the strength of a nonverbal deception cue and the number of times it had been studied. The most commonly studied cues of response length, response latency and eye contact showed hardly any relationship with deception. Conversely, cues that have not been studied often (e.g. foot movement changes, pupillary dilation) produced some of the strongest relationships. Bond et al. (2015) state that while there is currently no agreed upon explanation for the decline effect, regression towards the mean in conjunction with a publication bias may account for the effect. Strong initial outcomes may set the peer review bar lower for the acceptance of weaker future outcomes. Clearly, further investigations of these understudied nonverbal behaviours are needed.

To summarise, as documented in much of the previous research on the nonverbal encoding of deception, the review by DePaulo et al. (2003) emphasises the salience and relative utility of a number of paralinguistic cues. However, a cue's diagnosticity is moderated by a number of factors including the liar's level of motivation, the spontaneity of the deception, whether or not the deception involved identity-relevant content, and whether or not the lie was about a transgression. In addition, given the universality of the reciprocity norm, it would seem to follow that lies about transgressions (breaching a social contract) might be especially difficult to conceal.

## Techniques for analysis

Whereas patterns of nonverbal behaviour are the basis for interpretation, it is the separate behaviours that are the constituents of the displays. A first step is to code specific, well-defined movements and expressions. Advances in technique make possible the efficient coding of a large variety of behaviours. Particularly relevant is a subset of nonverbal behaviours chosen on the basis of high reliability, as determined by independent coders, and importance, in terms of distinguishing among intentions and emotional states. Included in this list are the following: gaze time at interviewer or other person, leg movements, object-fidgeting, speech errors, speaking frequency, rocking movements, head nodding, illustrator gestures and foot movements. These are some of the movements or vocalisations coded directly from the analysis of laboratory subjects (experiments cited above) and world leaders.

Efficiency is gained by training coders to be channel specialists. Small groups are trained to focus their attention on one channel – vocalisations, eyes, face, body, legs, or spatial arrangements. Frequencies are recorded for some measures (for instance,

leg movements); for others, the coder records time (for example, gaze at interviewer, speaking time). Further specialisation is obtained by assigning the different groups to specific segments of the videos. Such a division of labour speeds the process, increases reliability and preserves the coders for other tasks. A set of twenty-five nonverbal behaviours shown by subjects in thirty, twenty-minute segments was coded in about three weeks, each individual coder contributing only two hours of effort.

The procedures define a coding scheme or notation system for processing video material. Computer-assisted analysis would facilitate the transforming of nonverbal measures into profiles of selected world leaders. Here, one becomes more interested in characteristic postures or movements than in particular psychological or physical states. The emphasis is on idiosyncratic styles of leaders, conditioned as they are by situational factors. Using the nonverbal notation system, these behaviours can be represented as animated displays. They also contribute tools for the creative exploration of movement and expression control, such as manipulating the display to depict styles in varying situations (Badler, Phillips, & Webber, 1993).

The list of behaviours is one basis for structuring the analysis. Another basis is a more general category system that encompasses a range of situations, purposes, and verbal statements, as well as types of displayed nonverbal behaviours. Sufficient footage in each category makes possible the tasks of charting trends, making comparisons, and developing profiles. It also contributes to inventory management: systematic categorising and indexing of materials aids in the task of retrieving relevant types from archival collections. Multiple measurements provide alternative indicators that may be useful when all channels are not available to the observer (such as leg and foot movements for a speaker who stands behind a podium, eye movements for an actor seen from a distance). They also provide complementary indicators, bolstering one's confidence in the inferences made. And, for the time-sensitive analyst, a manageable subset of nonverbal behaviours can be identified for 'on the spot' commentary.

## **Systematic comparisons**

Nonverbal indicators can be used to build profiles of foreign leaders. It is evident that such an approach emphasises Allport's (1961) concept of morphogenic analysis and stresses the analogy of expressive behaviour as personal idiom. This strategy of systematic comparison is designed to increase an analyst's understanding of her or his 'subject'. This is done by tracking the displays exhibited by selected individuals across situations and in conjunction with verbal statements.

Comparisons would be made in several ways: (1) examine deviations from baseline data established for each person (for instance, speech errors); (2) compare nonverbal displays for the same person in different situations (for example, within or outside home country; formal or informal settings); and (3) compare displays for different types of verbal statements (for example, defence of position, policy commitment). These analyses highlight consistencies and inconsistencies at several levels – between situations, between verbal and nonverbal channels, and within different nonverbal channels. They also alert the analyst to changes in nonverbal activity: being aware of changes from a baseline period would give one a better understanding of relatively

unique expressive behaviour. Further analysis consists of comparing different persons in similar situations or dealing with similar subject matter.

The value of these comparisons is that they contribute to the development of a system of movement representation similar to the notation and animation systems described by Badler and Smoliar (1979). Extracted from the data are sets of co-ordinated movements which may change over time and situations. The co-ordinated movements can be represented in animated graphic displays. Illuminated by such displays are 'postural' differences within actors across time and between actors. When associated with events and context, the observations turn on the issue of how the feelings and intentions that are evoked by different situations are represented in body movement. When compared to displays by actors in other cultural settings, the observations are relevant to the question: What is the contribution of culture to observed nonverbal displays? (See our discussion above on cultural influences.)

Several analytical strategies enable an investigator to get to know her or his subject or group. Each strategy formalises the idea of 'following a subject around'. Extended coverage provides an opportunity to assemble baseline data for comparisons. It also permits execution of within-subject analytic designs for systematic comparison of displays observed in different situations and occasions, as well as when addressing different topics. These strategies enable an analyst to discriminate more precisely the meaning of various nonverbal displays.

Extensive video footage makes possible quite sophisticated analyses of leaders' behaviours. Relationships are highlighted from comparisons of responses to questions intended to arouse varying levels of stress. Profiles are constructed from the combinations of expressions and movements seen over time. Predictive accuracy of the form 'Is this person telling the truth?' is estimated from behaviours coded in situations where a subject's intentions are known, namely does the subset of behaviours discriminate between an honest, evasive, and deceptive statement? Contributing to an enhanced analytical capability, these results reduce dependence on notation systems developed in settings removed from the critical situations of interest. They would also contribute information relevant to time-sensitive requests.

### **Time-sensitive requests**

Demand for current assessments often place the analyst on the spot, being frequently asked to provide interpretations without the benefits of penetrating analysis, extensive video footage or hindsight. Indeed, these are the conditions often present for both technical specialist and layman. Scheibe (1979) noted that the informed observer (whom he calls the 'sagacious observer') relies on good memory for past characteristic patterns and astute observation of departure from the 'typical'. Findings on the extent to which decoders can make rapid judgements of verbal and nonverbal cues reveal that such judgements can be made in a reliable and relatively accurate manner subsequent to training (Vrij, Evans, Akehurst, and Mann, 2004). Under these conditions, notation systems are especially useful. They provide the analyst with a structure for focusing attention on relevant details. Determined largely on the basis of what is known, the relevant details are part of a larger coding system whose validity is previously established. Serving to increase the analyst's confidence in personal judgements, the codes



(relevant details) highlight where to focus attention and what to look at. Examples include the following.

### ***Abrupt changes***

Readily detectable from limited data, abrupt changes may take the form of incongruities between different nonverbal channels (face and body) or increased intensity of behaviours expressed in a number of channels. The former may be construed as signs of failing health; the latter often indicates a strong commitment to policies.

### ***Leaks***

Regarded as signs of deception, leaks take the form of excessive activity in one channel (body) combined with reduced activity in another (face) (Ekman & Friesen, 1974). Based on a 'hydraulic model' analogy, the concept of leakage describes the consequences of attempts by a subject to control facial expressions during deception – to wit, the poker face.

A study designed by the authors was intended as a test of the leakage hypothesis. Subjects in one condition were asked to control their facial expressions during a deceptive communication; those in another condition were asked to control their body movements. Both conditions were compared to an earlier session where subjects were not instructed to control expressions or movements during deception. More body movements in the 'control-face' condition and more facial expressions in the 'control-body' condition than in the earlier session would support the leakage hypothesis. Although the results did not support this hypothesis, they did reveal less overall animation for deceivers in both conditions, supporting the findings obtained by DePaulo et al. (1985) showing behavioural inhibition for motivated liars. (See Druckman and Hyman, 1991, for further details.)

The extent to which the deception is encoded under 'high-stakes' circumstances, as alluded to in the DePaulo et al. (2003) meta-analysis, is an additional factor related to leakage and decoding accuracy. When motivation is high (when deception success will lead to reward and failure to deceive will lead to negative consequences), research has revealed that consistency in the facial expression of emotion can betray the deception (Frank & Ekman, 1997).

### ***Micro-momentary expressions (MMEs)***

Regarded as universal expressions, MMEs are the muscle activities that underlie primary emotions (happiness, sadness, surprise, anger, fear, disgust, interest) and information-processing stages (informative seeking, pre-articulation processing, response selection). With the aid of special instrumentation, workers have been able to identify quite precisely the muscle clusters associated with particular emotions (Ekman, Friesen, & Ancoli, 1980) or processing stages (Druckman, Karis, & Donchin, 1983; Karis, Druckman, & Lissak, 1984). Additional research in this area has shown that MMEs

may be useful in decoding body cues as well as the face (McLeod & Rosenthal, 1983). A recent chapter by Burgoon and Dunbar (2016) summarises findings showing that training and experience are positively related to increased decoding accuracy, even with low-stakes lies and especially when interaction sequences are longer, baseline comparisons are possible, and strategic questioning strategies are used.

Illustrated above are the kinds of observations that can be used for inferences from limited data; for example, behaviours that change quickly (MMEs) or obviously (incongruities), and those that occur within the time frame of a statement (leaks). However, useful as these indicators are, they are only a part of the story: missing are the cultural and contextual influences that shape what is observed. These influences are discovered through careful analysis of leaders' behaviour in the settings of interest.

## STEREOTYPES OF NONVERBAL DECEPTION

The empirical investigation of beliefs, expectations, and general stereotypes regarding nonverbal behaviour perceived as indicative of deception has resulted in a relatively consistent set of findings across a number of studies and reviews (Gordon, Baxter, Rozelle, & Druckman, 1987; Vrij, 2000). In one of the earliest investigations of this issue, Zuckerman, Koestner, and Driver (1981) found that a wide variety of cues were thought to be associated with deception (e.g. gaze aversion, smiling, adaptors, body and head movements, response latency, speech errors and hesitations). However, as mentioned in an earlier section, cross-cultural differences in such beliefs have been demonstrated (Al-Simadi, 2000). Other studies have shown that beliefs of 'experts' (police officers) are similar to those of laypersons (Akehurst, Kohnken, Vrij, & Bull, 1996; Vrij & Semin, 1996). Findings from an investigation by Anderson, DePaulo, Ansfeld, Tickle, and Green (1999) also suggest that 'experts' and laypeople alike may rely on a generalised stereotype of deceptive nonverbal behaviour. This same study did show that decoders who indicated they relied on the relevant paralinguistic deception cues, were indeed more accurate at detecting lies.

An examination of the stereotype content listed above in conjunction with the findings from the encoding and decoding accuracy research, suggests that outcomes of chance level performance may be a function of decoders' stereotypes; they usually incorporate both accurate (e.g. increased response latency) and inaccurate (e.g. increased gaze aversion) components. Decoders may be relying on both diagnostic and non-diagnostic information, leading to no better than chance levels of decoding accuracy. A large-scale cross-cultural assessment that included data from fifty-eight countries revealed similar nonverbal stereotypes of deception. Inaccurate cues such as gaze aversion were mentioned by more than 25 per cent of the participants (The Global Deception Team, 2006). Adding to the complexity of the deception detection task is the evidence that motivated or high-status encoders may be more likely to attempt to consciously control leaks in the channels that are more easily manipulated. It may also be the case that more variability is found for the encoding of behaviours in more controllable channels. Indeed, Vrij, Edward, and Bull (2001) found considerably more variability for the 'more-easily controlled' gaze aversions than for the 'less-easily controlled' para-linguistic utterances. Deceivers showed more diverted gazes ( $M = 6.4$ ) than truth-tellers ( $M = 4.3$ ). However, the difference was not statistically significant due

to the large standard deviations (9.4 and 6.2 respectively). Confidence in this interpretation, referred to as the 'leakage-variability' hypothesis, awaits the results of further research.

## OVERVIEW

Considering the large number of full-length books and articles published on nonverbal behaviour, the present chapter has only provided an up-to-date sampling of the literature on this important form of communication. Beginning with an overview and historical perspective, the discussion covered general issues, theoretical and methodological frameworks, and provided some specific examples of research findings and applications. As the chapter has demonstrated, there is a wealth of information generated from scientific inquiry that reveals the significant impact of nonverbal behaviour on communication; yet this body of knowledge is incomplete and often complex.

We have argued that nonverbal behaviour, as a communication skill, is meaningful only if the context of behaviour is taken into account. Incomplete or narrow perspectives regarding others' or one's own behaviour may lead to misinterpretation of actions observed or performed. It is also the case that careful and reliable applications of nonverbal behaviour can enrich and enlighten one's understanding and control of communication in a variety of situations, roles, and cultural settings.

A focus on the issue of universality for both nonverbal encoding and decoding continues to play itself out in the research on the impact of culture-specific display rules and nonverbal 'accents' on perceptions of emotion in the face. Findings from a number of relatively diverse contemporary nonverbal research programmes illustrate the popularity of such investigations to the understanding of nonverbal communication and behaviour. However, it is always important to acknowledge the manner in which factors related to our species' heritage interact with a multitude of interpersonal motives and aspects of the situation to produce nonverbal behaviour (Patterson, 2001). Both distal and proximal factors need representation for a comprehensive assessment of nonverbal communication and behaviour (Zebrowitz, 2003).

The key theoretical issue turns on the relative power of universal versus contextual explanations for the sources of nonverbal behaviour. The main practical issue is whether the diagnostic value of nonverbal behaviour is improved more by knowledge of species-wide expressions or of cultural-specific (or contextually influenced) behavioural displays. Progress on these issues will depend on more complex and dynamic theoretical frameworks and on empirical research that is sensitive to the interplay among these possible sources for behaviour. This issue is pervasive in social science. It is raised with regard to many other aspects of social behaviour and interpersonal or intergroup interactions. (See, for example, Pickering, 2001, for a treatment of the issue in research on stereotyping.)

The last two decades of research on nonverbal communication reflect general trends and lessons learned in psychology and related social and behavioural science disciplines including the importance of replication and the concomitant limitations of null hypothesis testing. As Patterson, Giles, and Teske (2011) have documented, basic computer technology and the trend towards multi-study publications are likely to have also played a role in the reduction of nonverbal communication studies being

published in the highest impact journals. That said, the large number of research handbooks point to the pivotal importance of nonverbal communication to the study of human social behaviour.

The contemporary research programmes within human communication research and experimental social psychology continue to reveal the importance of using ecologically valid stimuli and field settings in developing a comprehensive understanding of nonverbal encoding and decoding. Moreover, promising technological enhancements should facilitate our ability to examine the dynamics of the sender-receiver unit with the use of sequential analytical assessments (Dunbar, Jensen, Tower, & Burgoon, 2014), enhancing our understanding of patterns across time.

Two theoretical approaches point the way to the future of research in this field. One is Burgoon and Buller's (2008) interpersonal deception theory. This theory highlights the importance of a variety of contextual variables as drivers of observed nonverbal behaviour. Their computer-based software facilitates quick and thorough coding of a wide array of nonverbal expressions. Another is Patterson's (2013) systems theory approach. His environmental focus also emphasises the importance of context but is more explicit than Burgoon and Buller on possible moderators and the involuntary bases for many nonverbal behaviours. His more recent work on integrating the field places more emphasis on purpose and goals (Patterson & Quadflieg, 2016).

The purposive versus non-purposive or spontaneous distinction, raised by Patterson, is a pervasive theme across the nonverbal communication literature. It is however becoming increasingly clear that this distinction is fuzzy. Research on implicit bias suggests purpose without conscious intention to discriminate (Amodio & Devine, 2006). The issue is further clouded by a related distinction between sender intentions and receiver perceptions of those intentions. A tennis anecdote illustrates this point.

Repeated failed attempts to beat his opponent motivated the world champion tennis player Andre Agassi to analyse his opponent's nonverbal behaviour. He noticed an association between where he served, left or right side of the service box, and where his tongue displayed a preference, right or left side of his mouth, just before the serve was hit. This signal propelled Agassi to a string of victories against this opponent. Here the sender did not intend to send this signal. Nonetheless it was sent and used to advantage by the receiver. Thus, what might be regarded as involuntary (habitual, automatic) sender encoding is given meaning by receiver decoding.

Goffman's (1969) analysis of strategic interaction captures the tennis example well. Referred to as expression games, Goffman captured the dynamics of a game consisting of a series of moves made through time. In this game, players alternate their roles as receivers of information (decoders) and conveyers of impressions (encoders). The strategic element comes into play when uncovering moves by one player (Agassi's tongue diagnosis) are countered by the other player (stop sending the tongue signal when serving). Extending this analysis to the political domain, Goffman describes political cultures where intentions are disguised and attributions of the other's intentions are influenced by suspicions of deception. An implication of this analysis is that decoding is more than looking for suspected nonverbal clues; it is an act of interpretation that reflects the context or culture in which interactions occur. Further, in non-laboratory settings, interpretations of intentions may be based more on global (multiple communication channel) assessments of behaviour. A message for researchers is that more attention be paid to the sender intentionality-receiver interpretation nexus.

So too should more attention be paid to broader philosophical issues about the concept of intentionality.

The importance of context is emphasised by the Burgoon-Buller and Patterson approaches. By context we refer to the cultural and institutional settings that shape communication. Two larger implications of this emphasis are for evolutionary approaches and levels of analysis. With regard to the former, recent findings on the role of context challenge assumptions about the universality of nonverbal expressions. Darwin alerted us to processes of emotional expression in animals and humans and noted diversity. He did not however provide explanations for the observed variation that shed light on context. On levels of analysis, we may want to consider devoting more research effort to macro-level analyses on nonverbal behaviour. This entails changing the unit of analysis from individuals or dyads to cultures and organisations. Researchers would examine variation between these larger categories. A challenge, however, is to decide on metrics for aggregating data collected from observing individuals nested within cultures or organisations: for example, the differences between additive, multiplicative, and non-linear models for aggregating data to higher-order units of analysis.

We conclude the chapter on a positive note. This is the fourth edition of the Handbook and the fourth update of our chapter, the original version appearing in 1986. The field remains vibrant, marked by progress in understanding the nonverbal elements of communication. More sophisticated methodologies, an array of new empirical findings, and frameworks that point the way towards developing contextual theories are evident in our review. We look forward to the fifth edition when the next generation of research and theory development will be documented in our contribution.

## DEDICATION

This chapter is dedicated to the memory of our colleague and friend Richard Rozelle. Dick was the inspiration behind the nonverbal communication chapters that have appeared in each edition of the Handbook. He also introduced us to the field of nonverbal communication and was our collaborator and co-author on several earlier projects on this topic. We miss his collegiality, insights, encouragement, and sense of humour. He will always remain in our thoughts.

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## Questioning

*Karyn Stapleton*

### INTRODUCTION

**HAWKINS AND POWER (1999: 235)** state that ‘To ask a question is to apply one of the most powerful tools in communication’. Power, here, can be understood as referring both to the high functionality of questions and to their role in the exercise of interpersonal influence. Questions also structure human cognition and learning (Morgan and Saxton, 2006; James et al., 2010) and can significantly affect attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (Daly and Glowacki, 2017). In this chapter, I explore the centrality of questioning in interpersonal communication (IPC), including its role in information management, social interaction, power relations, affiliation, and role identity; in other words, in the very constitution of social and professional life. A central theme of the chapter is that questions can be analysed on two main dimensions: *informational*, involving the acquisition and management of factual and/or affective content; and *interactional*, involving the management of roles and relationships within interaction, as well as regulating the interaction itself. Information-seeking and responding forms the bedrock of much human activity, while question-and-answer (Q&A) sequences are, in effect, the building blocks of interpersonal communication. This point is highlighted by Hargie’s (2017: 143) analogy in which questions provide the fundamental DNA of interaction, and without which IPC cannot be sustained: ‘in the absence of questioning DNA, the communication organism often becomes unstable and eventually dies’.

While their complexity and significance are often overlooked (Dickson and Hargie, 2006; Steensig and Drew, 2008; Freed and Ehrlich, 2010), questions have been studied within a number of research traditions,

ranging from philosophy and linguistics to psychology, communication, and education (Dillon, 1997; Miles, 2013). Focusing on the study of questions in social interaction, Steensig and Drew (2008) identify five key research perspectives and analytic interests: (1) the linguistic resources through which questions are constructed and recognised (e.g. intonation, sentence structure); (2) what questions ‘do’ in interaction and how they attend to social and contextual features; (3) additional social actions performed by questions (including indirect actions and formulations, e.g. requests framed as questions; see further below); (4) the developmental processes whereby children acquire the linguistic and interactional skills of questioning; and (5) the ‘constraining force’ of questions, whereby questions shape and control interaction. I will return to a number of these themes throughout the chapter; before that, I now turn to definitional issues.

## DEFINING QUESTIONS: INTERROGATIVES, KNOWLEDGE AND INTERACTION

Goody (1978, cited in Steensig and Drew, 2008) asked ‘what is it that we do when we ask questions?’ and to a large extent, the answer to this depends on the framework and perspective used to conceptualise and analyse questions. While questioning appears to be a straightforward feature of communication, further analysis reveals many complexities (Dickson and Hargie, 2006; Freed and Ehrlich, 2010; de Ruiter, 2012). Hence, “‘questioning’ is ... not as simple as it first appears’ (Steensig and Drew, 2008: 5). Various attempts have been made to categorise not only question types and functions (see sections below), but also the different levels on which questions may be identified and analysed (Tsui, 1992). For example, Ulijn and Verweij (2000) outline three distinct linguistic levels: *form* (the literal level; including meanings of the words and grammatical structures used), *content* (semantic level, relating to the type of information that is being sought), and *intent* (pragmatic level; what the speaker intends the question to mean or achieve).

Wang (2006) notes that questions have typically been defined from one of three main perspectives. *Syntactically*, questions are interrogative in form, that is, sentences in which the subject and first verb are inverted (e.g. ‘Do you want to go?’), or which begin with a question-word (e.g. ‘Why do you want to go?’), or which end with a question tag (e.g. ‘You do want to go, don’t you?’). *Semantically*, they express a desire for further information or response from the listener. The type and quantity of information expected or sought by the speaker is reflected in the type of question used (see *Types of questions* below). Finally, questions may be defined as a *discourse category*, whereby they are identified by their purpose and function, including information elicitation, directive to perform an action, or intention to produce a response. More recently, Enfield et al. (2010) and Stivers and Enfield (2010) have developed a classification system for coding questions across different languages, comprising key dimensions such as: the form of the question; its social function; mode of next-speaker selection; type of expected response; and role of visible (non-verbal) behaviour (see also Aritz et al., 2017).

Even using these nuanced taxonomies, however, a key difficulty in defining questions is that there is not a necessary match between linguistic form and either social or semantic function (de Ruiter, 2012). In particular, and as discussed in detail by

Huddleston (1994), the use of a grammatical interrogative cannot be equated with the act of asking a question. In relation to a study of classroom interaction, Solem (2016: 19) has similarly noted that, ‘there is no immediate connection between the interrogative format and the act of questioning’ (see also Freed and Ehrlich, 2010; de Ruiter, 2012; Heritage and Raymond, 2012). On the one hand, not all interrogative structures seek information; and indeed, some do not even seek a response. A key example here is rhetorical questions, which are designed to emphasise a point or to persuade the listener of a particular perspective and typically do not seek any verbal response from the listener (Blankenship and Craig, 2006; Dickson and Hargie, 2006). Tag questions (e.g. ‘He likes that film, doesn’t he?’) and phatic communication, or small talk (‘How’s life?’, ‘Isn’t it great weather?’), while interrogative in format and usually inviting a response, do not typically seek information, but rather, perform social and interpersonal functions (Holmes, 1995; Mithun, 2012). Finally, interrogatives may be designed to perform other social functions, through indirect speech acts (see Levinson, 1983; Enfield et al., 2010). Thus, ‘Can you close the window?’ (interrogative) would routinely be understood not as a request for information about the listener’s ability to close windows, but rather as a request or directive to perform that action. The use of questions to indirectly communicate other speech acts (e.g. requests, challenges) is often associated with politeness routines and the desire to avoid face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Steensig and Drew, 2008).

Conversely, questions occur in different structural formats (Dillon, 1997; de Ruiter, 2012). While typically associated with interrogatives, ‘there are other kinds of syntactic forms that routinely “do questioning”’ (Freed and Ehrlich, 2010: 4). Using English conversational data, Weber (1993) found that approximately 59% of questions were framed as interrogatives; and depending on how questions are defined, that percentage could conceivably be lower in other analyses. Of course, many questions *are* framed directly as interrogatives (e.g. ‘What did you do last summer?’), but they may equally appear in other formats: for example, as direct requests/directives designed to elicit information (‘Tell me about what you did last summer’). In addition, a question may be presented as a declarative statement that overtly seeks a response (‘So you had a nice time, then?’). Sarangi (2010) shows that in a counselling context, back-channels (‘mm’, ‘mhm’), may also function as questions insofar as they are understood as an invitation to provide further information, while Koshik (2002, 2010) explores how ‘designedly incomplete utterances’ are used as questions by teachers in order to encourage self-correction from their students. Rhys (2016) discusses how assessments (evaluations) are used by interviewers to elicit information from football managers in televised post-match interviews. Finally, questioning can be conducted nonverbally through such things as raised eyebrows, widening of the eyes, or open, upturned palms (Clark, 2012).

A comprehensive definition is offered by Stewart and Cash (2011: 55), who state that a question is *‘any phrase, statement or nonverbal act that invites an answer or response’* (emphasis in the original). This description effectively encompasses the range and complexity of the issues outlined above, and also allows for a direct focus on IPC behaviours and skills. However, it is still the case that in social and professional interactions, we recognise and respond to questioning as a specific communicative practice. Thus, not all statements or nonverbal acts (even if they overtly invite a response) can be taken to constitute questions. Bolinger (1957) noted that although there is no single

linguistic criterion sufficient or necessary to define questions, a question is (usually) readily recognisable to speakers and listeners. To take an example from a job interview: If the interviewee's account of previous work experience is followed by an interviewer statement relating to some aspect of that account (e.g. 'It sounds like you have used a range of management skills ...'), this may well be treated as a question, or a request for further information. On the other hand, a self-disclosure from the interviewer (e.g. 'I found your overview very interesting') will clearly invite a response from the interviewee (here, perhaps verbal or nonverbal acknowledgement or thanks) but will not necessarily produce further information.

Is it possible, then, to more specifically delineate questions as communicative action? How do we recognise when – and what type of – a response is required? Here, it is useful to return to the dual *informational* and *interactional* dimensions of questions, noted earlier, and to consider the application of two concepts originating in linguistics and/or sociology. At an informational level, questions may be seen as displaying or claiming *epistemic status*. Epistemic status relates to the way that speakers recognise one another as more or less knowledgeable about a given topic (Heritage, 2012; Heritage and Raymond, 2012). Thus, it may be expected that the questioner is less knowledgeable (K-) than the addressee (K+) who is being asked to provide some relevant information.

However, speakers may also adopt a specific *epistemic stance*, which allows them to claim greater or less authority over the issue in question (Heritage, 2012; Jakonen and Morton, 2015), whether that issue is a specific informational topic or a subjective personal experience (Antaki, 2013). The latitude for epistemic stance-taking is often linked to power and status, particularly that deriving from institutional positions. Thus, teachers and other professionals are usually (but not always; Hultgren and Cameron, 2010) seen as having greater epistemic status than pupils or clients. In these cases, the posing of a question does not mean that the questioner is adopting a less knowledgeable stance, but rather, it imposes a requirement for the addressee to provide some information that is already known to the questioner. For example, when a teacher asks, 'What is the boiling point of water?', it is to be expected that he or she knows the answer, and therefore, is not adopting a K- stance in relation to the topic. The answers to these 'test questions' (Heritage and Raymond, 2012) may subsequently be confirmed or rejected by the questioner, thereby reinforcing his or her greater epistemic authority (Antaki, 2013; Solem, 2016). Epistemic status, then, is negotiated through questions, which invite or require specific types of information from addressees, which the latter are (or ought to be) able to provide.

In terms of IPC and conversational sequence, Q&A sequences are examples of *adjacency pairs* (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; Raymond, 2003). Drawn from a conversation analytic perspective, adjacency pairs are interactive sequences structured in a 'paired' manner. These pairs consist of a *first-pair part* (e.g. a question, a request, or an invitation) and a *second-pair part* (e.g. an answer, an agreement, or an acceptance). Second-pair parts are conditional upon first-pair parts. Thus, answers are made relevant, expected, and to some extent, constrained by the questions that precede them. This partly explains how we 'recognise' questions in IPC: they create a conversational slot where an answer is made relevant and expected. In addition, certain second-pair parts are 'preferred' over others, not in a psychological sense, but in line with the structural arrangement of conversation (Koshik, 2002).

Certain types of conversational move ('preferred responses') are more conducive to the smooth conduct of conversation, while other 'dispreferred' responses cause disruption to the conversational machinery and are therefore marked in various ways to attend to the required 'repair' work. For example, an agreement is the preferred response to a request and will typically be given quickly and without hesitation. In contrast, a refusal (dispreferred) will usually be marked in various ways; with delays, explanations, hesitations, or indirect formulations. It can be argued, then, that questions have 'built in' expectations: first, that an answer is required; and second, about the type of answers that are preferred in a given context. Adjacency pairs are also seen by conversation analysts as the 'building blocks' of larger interactional sequences, including everyday conversation and institutional communication (Atkinson and Drew, 1979). Q&A sequences are often taken as the archetypal form of adjacency pair (Raymond, 2003), while questions may be considered, 'the prototypical (perhaps the most fundamental?) initial action in an adjacency pair' (Steensig and Drew, 2008: 7). Moreover, in a cross-linguistic study, Enfield et al. (2010) have noted that Q&A sequences are a universal type of conversational organisation across cultures and languages.

Freed and Ehrlich (2010) emphasise the need for a framework that encompasses both functional and sequential dimensions (broadly equivalent to informational and interactional themes) and thus, they propose a two-part definition: (a) questions solicit information, confirmation, or action; and (b) questions create a conversational slot for the responsive turn (p. 6). In light of these dimensions, Sidnell (2010) claims that questioning is best described as a *social practice*, or a behavioural pattern, with cultural, social, and institutional variants. In IPC, participants may then be seen to recognise and respond to questions as part of such a practice. Of course, a skill perspective on questioning also focuses attention on the effective and ineffective aspects of questioning as well as the functions, goals, and applications of this practice. These issues will be discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter.

## FUNCTIONS OF QUESTIONS IN IPC

Questions serve a range of functions depending on the context of the interaction (Dillon, 1997; Dickson and Hargie, 2006). Bolden (2009: 122) points out that: 'Questions and answers are among the most readily recognizable and pervasive ways through which participants achieve and negotiate their interactional goals'. This is equally true of everyday social interaction and of professional and/or institutional encounters. Hargie (2017: 150) lists the general purposes that may be fulfilled by questioning, as follows:

- obtain information
- initiate interaction
- maintain control of an interaction
- arouse interest and curiosity
- diagnose difficulties
- express interest
- ascertain attitudes, feelings, and opinions
- encourage maximum participation
- assess knowledge



- encourage critical thought and evaluation
- communicate (in group contexts) that participation is expected and valued
- encourage group interaction
- maintain attention in group settings.

While questions are most readily associated with information-seeking (Dickson and Hargie, 2006), this is by no means their only function. In a sample of spontaneous conversations, Stivers (2010) found that only 43% of questions had the primary purpose of seeking information, while the other 57% were used for other conversational management purposes. Questions fulfil a wide range of interactional goals relating to the management of both the communication event and wider social relationships and identities. To take just a few examples, questions may be used to: introduce complaints (Monzoni, 2008); control the focus and pace of negotiations (Rackham, 2003); convey personalised concern in call centres (Hultgreen and Cameron, 2010); accuse or challenge politicians in news interviews (Clayman, 2010); assert different types of managerial leadership (Walker and Aritz, 2015); help clients gain clarity and understanding in therapeutic settings (James et al., 2010); communicate conversational roles and expectations (Kimps et al., 2014); diagnose pupil performance and progress (McCarthy et al., 2016); and elicit un-presented symptoms in medical consultations (Brindle et al., 2012).

A key purpose of questioning in both casual and institutional interactions is that of controlling the content and direction of the communication (see *Questions and power* below). By asking a specific question, the questioner conveys expectations about the type of information that he or she expects (May, 1989) and, further, places an onus on the addressee to either provide this information or to find alternative types of response, such as equivocation, diversion, or direct refusal to answer (Dillon, 1997; Campbell et al., 1998; Bull, 2008; Bull and Wells, 2012). Speakers can also control the specific trajectory of the interaction through follow-up or probing questions (see *Types of questions* below), which direct attention to specific aspects of the addressee's response. Furthermore, by directing questions to individual addressees in group contexts, the questioner can manage the distribution and sequencing of participation by others (Morgan and Saxton, 2006; Solem, 2016).

Another essential purpose of questioning is that of initiating and maintaining interaction. Questions are crucial in order to 'open up' or begin a communicative event and also to gain entry to that event and to establish one's own role within it (Freed and Ehrlich, 2010; Hargie, 2017). Through the compelling nature of Q&A adjacency pairs, questions are also used to sustain communication and to invite (or require) participation from others. In this way, questions can signal interest, affiliation, and a desire to extend the interaction (Holmes, 1995; Steensig and Drew, 2008; Mithun, 2012; Hill, 2014). Conversely, depending on their framing and sequencing, questions may also be used to create *disaffiliation* from others – for example, if they perform face-threatening actions (see below), or appear to challenge the addressee's knowledge or epistemic status (Holmes, 1995; Steensig and Drew, 2008).

In considering the goals and purposes of questions, it is useful to note some further points of complexity. First, the extent to which any question will achieve a specific goal will depend in part on the way it is framed, that is, on the *type* of question asked and its placement within the questioning sequence (Hargie, 2017; see *Types of questions* below). The framing and wording of the question will also affect its function.

For example, Heritage (2002) has shown how negative interrogative structures ('isn't it ...', 'wasn't it ...') are used in news interviews as a strategic means of making assertions, rather than actually asking questions. Similarly, in a study of US Presidents' language (and here, specifically, the Clinton depositions), Wilson (2015) discusses the way in which the polarity of questions creates or assumes the truth of what is being asked. Second, questions are *multifunctional*, and may be used to achieve several goals simultaneously. Therefore, a basic request for explanation (e.g. 'Tell me why you don't get on with your sister') may also be used to convey interest in understanding the respondent's viewpoint, openness to his or her perspective, and a desire for increased affiliation or connection. Of course, depending on the context of interaction, the same question might equally be used to challenge the addressee's perspective (by framing it as something that needs explanation or justification), and/or to assert the authority of the questioner as somebody who has the right to ask for this information. Third, the goals and outcomes of questioning *depend upon the communication activity* in which they take place, including the roles and relationships therein (Dickson and Hargie, 2006; Aritz et al., 2017). In professional contexts, the goals of the relevant institution are also key to this process. For example, many institutions (e.g. courtrooms, classrooms, interviews) are organised specifically around Q&A sequences and this organisation 'plays a significant role in determining what counts as a question in these contexts' (Freed and Ehrlich, 2010: 5).

As noted earlier, in specific institutional contexts, participants are readily able to recognise non-typical structures (e.g. backchannels and incomplete utterances) as questions and to respond accordingly. Furthermore, within different types of communication activity and institutional setting, the same question may serve different functions and elicit different outcomes, as in the following examples of interview exchanges:

### Example 1:

**IR: So, you've had experience of this kind of thing before?**

**IE:** Yes, I have a range of experience in this area. For the last two years, I've worked in a specialised team, and before that, I was involved in a more general capacity with a staff implementation group. I've therefore gained valuable skills in the area ...

### Example 2:

**IR: So, you've had experience of this kind of thing before?**

**IE:** Yes, I've worked in that area for two years.

**IR:** Right. So ... are your qualifications up to date?

**IE:** Yes, all of them.

**IR:** Good, ok, well the next thing is ...

### Example 3:

**IR: So, you've had experience of this kind of thing before?**

*(two-second pause)*

**IR:** Well?

*(one-second pause)*

**IE:** No, I wouldn't say that.

*IR*: Well, what would you say?

*(two-second pause)*

*IE*: No comment

In these examples, all constituting particular types of interview, the same declarative question, 'So you've had experience of this kind of thing before?' can be seen to serve three different functions within the overall communication activities. In the first example, it is treated by the interviewee as an open question, and moreover, as an invitation to provide detailed and positive information about their work experience. In the second example, it is treated as a closed question, designed to obtain specific information as part of a sequence of similar questions. In the third example, it is demonstrably treated as something to be evaded or resisted, and therefore, as having the potential to produce negative outcomes for the interviewee. At least within a Western cultural context, it is easy to identify different genres of interview in each of the above sequences: an employment interview in example 1; a form of screening interview in example 2; and a police interview in example 3. Indeed, it is the very nature of the Q&A sequences in each that constitutes the communication activity in question and that renders it recognisable as a specific form of institutional interaction. As discussed by James et al. (2010), it is important to examine the functions of questions in interactive sequences rather than in isolation.

## TYPES OF QUESTION

In this section, I will briefly outline some core types and dimensions of questions. This is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion, but rather an orientation to key issues relevant for IPC and interaction. For a full examination of different question types, see Hargie (2017; also Dickson and Hargie, 2006).

### Closed and open questions

A crucial distinction concerns the extent to which questions restrict the scope of response (Mishler, 1984; Miles, 2013). *Closed questions* seek specific, and often pre-determined, types of information. According to Hargie (2017: 124), closed questions 'usually have a correct answer, or can be answered with a short response selected from a limited number of possible options'. Three main types have been identified (Dickson and Hargie, 2006):

- *Yes-no questions*. These are sometimes called *polar questions* (Stivers and Enfield, 2010; Heritage and Raymond, 2012) and, as the name suggests, they can be answered with a simple affirmation or negative. Examples would be: 'Are you enjoying your course of study?'; 'Was the door closed when you left?' Polar questions are ubiquitous across casual and institutional communication and are part of the basic organisation of interaction (Raymond, 2003). In a study of 17 casual conversations by US participants, Stivers (2010) found that polar questions (of differing formats) made up 70% of all questions asked by participants.

- *Selection questions.* Sometimes known as *alternative questions* (Stivers and Enfield, 2010), these require the respondent to pick a response from one of two or more options, which are built into the question itself. Examples would be: 'Did she seem happy or sad when you saw her?', 'Do you like classical, rock or dance music?'
- *Identification questions.* These require the respondent to provide a specific piece of information, usually in response to a question-word (or *Q-word*; see Stivers and Enfield, 2010), such as 'what', 'where', 'which', 'when', or 'who'. Examples would be: 'Where were you born?', 'What is the capital of France?', 'Who was the first person you saw?'

In contrast to closed questions, *open questions* place fewer restrictions on the addressee and may be answered in a number of possible ways. Hence, the response is left open and the respondent is given a higher degree of freedom in choosing their answer (Hargie, 2017). Like identification questions, open questions are often framed with question-words (including 'how'), but here the structure and content of the question aims for elaboration rather than restriction of response. Examples of these would be: 'What were your first impressions of London?', 'How did it make you feel when he said that?', 'What kind of solutions might we think of to address world poverty?'. Other forms of open questions can include declaratives (e.g. 'That must have an exciting time for you, with lots of new experiences?') or direct requests and invitations to respond (e.g. 'Tell me how you think that you could contribute to the organisation').

Closed and open questions have different uses and applications. Among other purposes, closed questions are useful for opening and subsequently controlling interaction, for obtaining specific information, and for testing knowledge or learning (Dillon, 1997). They also play a key role in screening or initial assessments by many professionals. For example, Arroll et al. (2003) found that GPs could effectively detect depression in their patients by asking just one or two yes-no screening questions. Another medically based study (Brindle et al., 2012) showed that GPs' closed questions detailing specific changes in health were more effective than open questions in eliciting symptoms relevant to early stage cancer diagnoses. However, a number of studies, ranging from the US to Japan, have identified an over-reliance on closed questions as a weakness in doctors' communication patterns leading to reduced patient participation (Ishiwaka et al., 2002; Chen-Tan et al., 2005). Open questions, on the other hand, are generally more useful for exploring issues in-depth, for eliciting information not previously known to the questioner, for expressing interest and concern, and for empowering the addressee (Dickson and Hargie, 2006; Hill, 2014). Kidwell (2009) notes that closed questions require respondents to merely 'fill in' required information, while open questions invite them to 'fill out' the information that they choose to provide. In teaching, closed and open questions are typically (but not uniformly – see Hargie, 2017) linked with the cognitive level of processing required to answer them. From this perspective, closed questions elicit factual knowledge or 'recall' responses, while open questions typically require higher level cognition and processing to produce a response. Thus, over-use of closed questions by teachers is a commonly identified weakness in studies of classroom interaction (Eliasson et al., 2017).

Counsellors, too, are widely encouraged to make use of open questions as these have been shown to be effective in developing an empathetic relationship and in

producing extended exploration from clients (Hanyok et al., 2012; Egan, 2014; Hill, 2014). However, a recent study by Thompson et al. (2016) of psychiatrists' clinical interactions questioned the binary distinction between open and closed questions in building the therapeutic relationship. In this study, declarative questions, inviting a yes-no response, were strongly associated with both psychiatrists' perceptions of the therapeutic alliance and patient adherence after six months. In the medical context, open questions are also advocated as a means of developing a patient-centred approach (Tsai et al., 2013) and moreover, have been shown to influence patient satisfaction levels (Ishikawa et al., 2002). However, in this regard, it seems that the focus of doctors' questions is at least as important as their level of restriction. In a study of patient-centredness in the Netherlands, both open *and* closed questions by doctors were unambiguously identified as facilitative and patient-centred if they were focused on psychosocial (rather than strictly medical) concerns (Zanderbelt et al., 2005).

It may be concluded, then, that open and closed questions have specific benefits and drawbacks relevant to different interpersonal goals and contexts. As discussed in the previous section, the structural format alone does not determine the function of the question, but it provides a useful basis from which to select the most strategically and interactionally effective question format. Open and closed questions may also be sequenced in specific ways to achieve desired outcomes (Stewart and Cash, 2011; Miles, 2013; Hargie, 2017). These can include working from general ideas to specific facts and examples (open to closed sequence); developing in-depth perspectives on initial factual information (closed to open sequence); or disorienting an addressee by erratic sequencing of open and closed formats. For a full discussion of open/closed question sequences, see Stewart and Cash (2011: 86–90) and Hargie (2017: 127–129).

## Primary and secondary (probing) questions

A second important distinction is between questions that are used to introduce topics and interactions and those that follow from and build upon the responses received. Stewart and Cash (2011) describe these as *primary* and *secondary* (or *probing*) questions, respectively. While the former allow the questioner to initiate, shape, and control the communication, probing questions are crucial in order to sustain interaction, once begun, and also to develop the depth and detail of information received. Once a respondent provides an answer to a primary question, the questioner can explore this further, through a variety of probing options, each requiring or inviting a specific development of the response. For example, a probe may request an explanation or justification of a stated opinion ('Why do you say that?') or it may invite the respondent to provide examples of something that he or she has described or claimed ('So when you say you volunteer for different charities, what sort of things do you do?').

Hargie (2017) describes eleven categories of probe, including requests for clarification, justification, extension, and exemplification, as well as checks for consensus in groups. These types of questions allow interactions to develop and gather momentum; and they also allow the questioner to explore specific aspects of the topic in more depth. According to Millar et al. (1992), a failure to probe leads many inexperienced interviewers to gather large amounts of superficial data, rather than in-depth information. In a similar vein, Bernard (2006: 217) concludes that 'The key to successful inter-

viewing is learning how to probe'. The importance of probing questions has also been highlighted in the education context, where they are seen as important in developing students' learning (Weiland et al., 2014; McCarthy et al., 2016). In summary, probing questions fulfil essential informational and interactional functions; thus probing is an important component of effective questioning in social and professional contexts.

## Tag questions

Tag questions consist of a declarative sentence (the 'anchor' or 'host') followed by an abbreviated question (the 'tag'); for example, 'It's a lovely day, isn't it?' Grammatically, the tag usually contrasts with the polarity of the anchor, which contains the expected response; for example, 'You like chocolate cake, don't you?' vs. 'You don't like chocolate cake, do you?'. There is a substantial body of work on the epistemic and interactional effects of tags (for overviews, see Mithun, 2012; Kimps et al., 2014). Lakoff (1975) characterised tag questions as expressing uncertainty or tentativeness on the part of the speaker; that is, as seeking confirmation for one's own opinion. Subsequent analyses, however (in particular, Holmes, 1995) have shown that tags are multifunctional and that their effects depend on factors such as power differentials, speaker status, and relational concerns (Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006). In some settings, tags may even express speaker *certainty* and/or represent an attempt to compel the addressee to respond in a particular way. A police interrogator who asks a suspect, 'You were there on the night of the burglary, weren't you?' would typically be understood as issuing a challenge, rather than seeking confirmation for a tentatively expressed opinion.

Intonation is a key factor here. Tags with rising intonation are usually heard as seeking verification of a proposition about which the speaker is unsure, while those with falling intonation are heard as inviting confirmation, more akin to an exclamation than a question (Quirk et al., 1985). In addition, tag questions may be used as facilitative devices to engage others, and to promote and maintain interaction by making a response relevant. With respect to these functions, Holmes (1995) has drawn a key distinction between *modal* tags, which express speaker uncertainty and which show rising intonation, and *affective* tags, which are related to aspects of managing the interaction, either attending to politeness and participation, or challenging the addressee in some way. Affective tags are used with falling intonation, and are not related to epistemic or informational concerns. An understanding of the effects and functions of tag questions is relevant for social and professional interactions. For example, Harres (1998) has shown that tag questions can be used by doctors for different purposes; to elicit information, to summarise and confirm patient responses, and to express empathy and provide positive feedback.

## QUESTIONS AND POWER

Questions have been widely associated with power and control in interpersonal interactions (Bolden, 2009). As discussed briefly above, different types and sequences of questions may be used to exercise control over both the content (topic) of a communicative

event and its structure and organisation (speaker order and participation levels). These interactional controls allow the questioner to exert considerable influence on the addressee(s). In a study of workplace interactions, Holmes and Chiles (2010) show that despite different communicative purposes, questions typically work as ‘control devices’: ‘Whether they are intended to facilitate interaction, elicit information, give directives, challenge, or provoke thought, they usually exercise some influence on the behaviour of others’ (p.187). Wang (2006) also discusses the coercive power of questions. He claims that while their power is made explicit in institutional dialogue through speaking roles and overt shows of authority, it is typically more latent, but nonetheless influential, in casual conversation. Thus, in both settings, ‘questions are endowed with inherent abilities to control and dominate’ (Wang 2006: 532).

Questions are also a central means of enacting leadership or of attempting to establish authority. Aritz and colleagues (Walker and Aritz, 2015; Aritz et al., 2017) have examined how questions are used in team-decision meetings to construct different leadership styles. In these studies, leaders used considerably more questions than non-leaders, although the type and purpose of their questions varied with leadership style (e.g. directive vs. collaborative). Questions also influence the attitudes, self-perceptions, and behaviours of addressees (Baxter et al., 2006; Daly and Glowacki, 2017); and moreover, can affect how the addressee is perceived by others. Fiedler (1993) has shown that the manner in which somebody is questioned influences how he or she is seen by others. This latter finding has clear implications for evaluations made, for example, by juries and by interview panels, and hence, it should be fully considered in such settings (see Hargie, 2017).

One of the reasons that questions have the potential to control and influence lies in the *constraining nature of the Q&A adjacency pair* and also in the *links between question wording and broader conversational and cognitive structures*. As noted earlier, when a question has been asked, a response is normally required, and if not forthcoming, its absence needs to be explained or marked. In this way, questioners can oblige the addressee to produce different types of information and/or interactional moves, while rendering other topics and responses less relevant. Heritage (2010) further summarises the constraining power of questions as follows: (1) questions set agendas (determine what is relevant or worthy of discussion); (2) questions embody presuppositions (e.g. about the topic, participants); (3) questions convey epistemic stance (and therefore authority); and (4) questions ‘prefer’ certain types of response.

Wording and framing are important here. In a study of doctor-patient interaction, Heritage et al. (2011) compared the use of ‘some’ and ‘any’ by doctors to elicit further information from patients about ‘unmet needs’, i.e. concerns that they did not initially raise as the purpose of their visit. Before concluding the appointments, doctors asked either ‘Is there something else you want to address in the visit today?’ or ‘Is there anything else you want to address in the visit today?’ In terms of conversational polarity, ‘some’ is positively polarised (‘I have got some money’), while ‘any’ is negatively polarised (‘I haven’t got any money’). Therefore, it might be anticipated that the first question format (‘Is there something else ...’) would elicit more positive responses from patients; and this is indeed what happened. In response to this question, 78% of unmet needs were raised and addressed (as established in a follow-up survey), while the second question format (‘Is there anything else ...’) did not differ significantly from control conditions in terms of eliciting unmet needs.

Different forms of wording can also produce different types of *leading question*, which prime addressees to perceive and respond in particular ways (Dickson and Hargie, 2006; Hargie, 2017). For example, in a study by Harris (1973), when asked to estimate the same individual's height, respondents who were asked 'How tall was the basketball player?' guessed about 79 inches, while those who were asked 'How short was the basketball player?' guessed about 69 inches. This is one in a tradition of many studies examining the effects of wording/framing on perception and response, and again, it illustrates the way in which questioners can strongly influence the answers they receive. Leading questions can have particularly distorting effects on the responses of children (Zajac et al., 2003; Pipe et al., 2014) and therefore, great care should be taken in designing and implementing questions to elicit information from younger respondents (Hargie, 2017).

Questions may also be *overtly challenging or face-threatening*. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, face is the public self-image that every speaker wants to protect. This involves both positive face (the desire to be perceived in a positive light) and negative face (the desire to avoid being imposed upon or impeded by others). Anything that can damage face is seen as a potentially *face-threatening act* (FTA). Questions frequently constitute FTAs (Tracey, 2002; Wang, 2006). They place requirements on the addressee to provide a response (thereby affecting negative face); while the provision of this information may damage the addressee's image or self-esteem (thereby affecting positive face). In addition, all questions contain presuppositions, expressed through their wording, and these may position the addressee in a more or less favourable light. Compare 'What do you think you could do to lose weight?' to 'Why are you not able to lose weight?', where the latter contains presuppositions about the addressee's previous actions, which must either be tacitly accepted or explicitly challenged in his or her reply. In an analysis of the UK Banking Crisis Inquiry, which took place in February 2009, Stapleton and Hargie (2011) showed that the questions posed by the parliamentary committee created a dilemma for the bankers in that they produced a tension between ethical integrity on the one hand (whether the bankers had acted irresponsibly) and professional credibility on the other (whether they had been able to accurately judge the risks they were taking). To manage this dilemma, the bankers used a range of impression management strategies, a core aim of which was undermining the presuppositions embedded in the committee's questions.

In everyday conversation, questions may lead to disaffiliation as well as affiliation depending on their framing and their placement in conversational sequences (Steensig and Drew, 2008). Moreover, some questions are framed in a manner that is overtly accusatory, with the aim of directly challenging the addressee(s). This type of adversarial and critical questioning is normative in a number of professional contexts, including political news interviews (Clayman, 2010) and parliamentary discourse such as Prime Minister's Question Time in the UK (Bull, 2013, Bull and Wells, 2012). In a study of 18 Prime Minister's Questions, Bull and Wells (2012) found that FTAs were both sanctioned and rewarded within this institutional setting.

The potential of questions to exert power and control is also evident in formal allocations of questioning rights and obligations. In most settings, and particularly in formal, institutional contexts, those of higher status have greater rights to ask questions, while those of lower status are obliged to provide answers (Drew and Heritage, 1992; Wang, 2006; Wilson, 2015). This feature is evident in many institutional



contexts including: in classrooms, where teachers, rather than pupils, ask the majority of questions (Dillon, 1982; Brooks, 2016); in courtrooms where the majority of questions are asked by lawyers, rather than witnesses (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Matoesian, 2005; Eades, 2008); and in medical interactions, where doctors routinely ask more questions than patients (West, 1983; Chen-Tan et al., 2005). These contexts are all examples of *asymmetrical communication* (Harris, 1984), where speakers have *differential speaking rights* and where interactional asymmetry, linked to institutional roles and status, is readily understood and usually accepted by all parties. In courtrooms, which are arguably the most explicitly ordered of these contexts, speaking turns are strictly pre-allocated (Atkinson and Drew, 1979) and addressees are not only required to answer questions but are also prevented from asking questions of their own, or indeed from making any contribution that is not a direct response to a question. Such highly ordered, asymmetrical use of questions is also present, in mitigated form, in many institutional settings, where it is accepted that individuals of higher status (e.g. managers) hold non-reciprocal rights to question others.

Thus, questioners may use relative status to ‘oblige the addressee to produce an answer that is conversationally relevant and to control what the next speaker is able to say’ (Aritz et al., 2017: 163). Furthermore, and as noted earlier, in courtrooms and classrooms, the questioner (lawyer or teacher) already knows the answers to the questions that he or she asks. Hargie (2017) points out that this feature is not typical of everyday communication and is likely to place the addressee under considerable pressure, as he or she tries to produce an appropriate or ‘correct’ answer. The power dimension of this type of interaction is underlined still further by the fact that the questioner will often comment upon or evaluate the response received (Cazden, 2001; Antaki, 2013), thereby emphasising their higher status, whether epistemic or interactional, or both.

Interestingly, even when Q&A turns/obligations are not formally pre-allocated, participants show an understanding that questioning rights are linked to institutional status and shape their communication accordingly. For example, Skelton and Hobbs (1999) found that patients often prefaced their questions to doctors with phrases such as ‘I was wondering ...’, while doctors never did so. These phrases constitute politeness markers, which attend to the status differentials and potentially face-threatening act of asking a question of a higher status individual (Tracey, 2002). In the field of pharmacy, Morrow et al. (1993) carried out an observational study of interactions between patients and community pharmacists. In this setting, the rate of patient questions was much higher than in a typical medical consultation with a doctor; and notably, some of the questions were requests for clarification of information previously received from a doctor. While it may be the case that the patients had had time to reflect upon that information between the medical appointment and the visit to the pharmacist, it is likely that they also felt more comfortable asking questions of the pharmacists, insofar as institutional roles and status differentials may appear less marked in the latter setting.

There are, then, clear links between questioning and institutional power. In fact, it is often assumed that ‘asking questions amounts to institutional control’ (Eades, 2008: 37). However, as discussed by Freed and Ehrlich (2010), social changes are transforming many forms of institutional discourse, and in many cases reducing asymmetries of power. In addition, the range of institutional encounters is expanding with the development of service-related industries, such as call centres and customer care. In these new industries, the institutional representative is not necessarily more powerful

than the user or client, and the role and nature of questioning reflects this change. In a globalised context, with increased access to information by all parties, there is an ongoing democratisation of workplaces and a heightened emphasis on customer care. This leads to a ‘conversationalisation’ of institutional discourse (Cameron, 2000) and places increased demands on workers to use questions in customer-oriented ways (Hultgren and Cameron, 2010). Even before (post)modern transformations of the workplace, there have also been exceptions to the institutional questioning power model. In the helping professions, for example, counsellors typically attempt to minimise distance between themselves and their clients and to cultivate a more egalitarian relationship (Hill, 2014). Questioning practice in counselling tries to avoid imposing assumptions about a given topic or issue, but rather aims to develop the client’s own perspectives and contributions (McGee et al., 2005; James et al., 2010), with some theorists advocating that counsellors should *avoid* asking questions completely in order not to be seen as the controller of the interaction (Rogers, 1951). In addition to these points, and as highlighted in the previous section, questions are, by nature, multifunctional and context-dependent. Therefore, while the links with institutional power are clearly still manifest, these should not be viewed as inevitable or uniform across contexts.

## **PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS OF QUESTIONING: EDUCATION AND MEDICINE**

Questioning is central to many professions (Waterman et al., 2001; Freed and Ehrlich, 2010; Hargie, 2017). As noted earlier, some professional activities are entirely constituted through Q&A sequences, including various types of interviews, police interrogations, parliamentary questions, courtroom cross-examinations. Even leaving these aside, however, questions can be seen to feature prominently in the work of a wide range of professions, including medicine and health, education, sales, counselling, law, psychology, and management. Each of these has its own goals, and therefore, the specific practice of questioning will differ from one to another. Dillon (1997: 131) points out that the professional practice of questioning is highly skilled and requires ‘effortful thought and concentrated behaviour’. The sectors in which questioning has been most widely and systematically studied are in education and medicine. These will now be discussed in detail.

Questions have been recognised as a fundamental part of education and teaching since ancient times (Dickson and Hargie, 2006; Margutti, 2006). In ancient Greece, the Socratic method was based on a dialectical process of two individuals asking and answering questions in order to stimulate critical thinking and thereby deepen understanding. Questioning is essential in the process of formal teaching. In a systematic review of 60 studies, Davoudi and Sadeghi (2015) highlight the indispensable role of both teacher and student questions in the development of learning and literacy, including pupils’ knowledge of subject matter, reading and writing ability, critical thinking, and metacognitive skills. Likewise, Pagliaro (2011) concludes that questioning is one of the most important teaching skills, having direct effects on student achievement. In the classroom, teachers use questions for a number of specific purposes. Morgan and Saxton (2006) identify three key aims of teachers’ questions: acquiring information,

building shared understanding, and generating reflection. Teachers may also use questions as a diagnostic tool and to measure progression (McCarthy et al., 2016) or as management devices (Massey et al., 2008).

Given the above, it is unsurprising that questions and answers are a core and ubiquitous feature of classroom interaction. In an empirical study of teacher practice, Tienken et al. (2009) identified questions as their most frequently used strategy, while Massey et al. (2008) report that questions constitute 33.5% of all teacher utterances. Margutti (2006: 314) similarly describes questions and answers as ‘the most prevalent instructional tools’ within the pedagogic tradition. Pupils socialised with this pedagogic tradition, then, learn to anticipate teacher questions and to provide answers when called upon to do so. As illustrated by Koshik (2002, 2010), these questions sometimes take the form of cueing, or building upon pupils’ earlier contributions, in order to elicit further or alternative information, and thus to encourage self-correction as part of the learning process. In order to optimise student learning, a number of writers have called for greater training for teachers in the specific taxonomies and sequencing of questions (Vogler, 2005).

A widespread feature of questions in education is the Initiation-Response-Evaluation/Feedback (IRE/IRF) structure (Cazden, 2001; Waring, 2012; Margutti and Drew, 2014). This is a three-part structure, consisting of an initiation from the teacher, typically a question seeking specific information, followed by a brief pupil response, and some form of evaluation of this response by the teacher. Smith et al. (2006) is critical of the role of this structure in teaching, pointing out that the type of responses required are usually about recall of information, rather than higher order cognitive processes, and further, that teachers’ feedback is usually superficial rather than being geared towards scaffolding higher learning. The cognitive demands placed on learners are, of course, driven by the level of questions asked. Bloom (1956) outlined six cognitive levels as follows: knowledge (level 1 – recall); comprehension (level 2 – understanding); application (level 3 – linked to problem-solving); analysis (level 4 – making inferences, causal effects and judgements); synthesis (level 5 – combining elements to form new solutions); and evaluation (level 6 – providing opinions on the quality of ideas). If teacher questions, as in the typical IRF/IRE, are focused primarily on recall, then student learning is somewhat curtailed. Solem (2016) notes that the IRE/IRF sequence is usually seen to position pupils in a passive role rather than as active learners. Ingram and Elliott (2016) found that some teachers build in ‘extended wait times’ to the IRE/IRF in order to encourage student responses, but that these may lead to difficult interactional norms, rather than encouraging further reflection. However, the IRF/IRE is a useful way of testing subject-specific knowledge and can also highlight areas where pupils are unclear about aspects of the initial question (Zemel and Koschmann, 2011). Hence, it can be combined with questions that build upon the basic recall of information to develop higher order cognitive processes.

Questions in the classroom, as in other institutional settings, are linked to issues of control, both social and epistemic. A key theme from a long tradition of research in this area is that *teachers ask far more questions than pupils* (Dickson and Hargie, 2006; Hargie, 2017). In an early study, using verbatim records of six classes, Corey (1940) found that, on average, the teacher asked a question every 72 seconds. Over 40 years later, Dillon (1982) highlighted the discrepancy in the numbers of questions asked by teachers and pupils. In a review of existing studies, he concluded that while

teachers asked a question, on average, every two minutes, pupils asked an average of only one question per month. Interestingly, this study also showed that teachers both underestimated the number of questions that they asked and overestimated the number of pupil responses that they received. More recently, Hardman (2011) reports that pupil questions make up only about 5% of total classroom interaction and that most of these questions are about procedural issues, rather than about the subject matter of their learning. A similar conclusion was reached by Reinsvold and Cochran (2012) following a study of teacher-student interactions in a third-grade science classroom in the US. Here, the teacher was found to ask 93% of the questions used, while pupils asked only 7%. The majority of these teachers' questions were classified as closed questions. As discussed by Hargie (2017), however, pupils are not necessarily reluctant to ask questions in other contexts. A study by Tizard et al. (1983) found that the same four-year-old girls asked an average of 24 questions per hour when at home, but only 1.4 questions per hour in the school setting. Moreover, Daly et al. (1994) showed that pupils became less confident about asking questions as they got older, although this finding applied less to some groups (e.g. male, White, higher income) than to others.

The *type* of questions asked by teachers has also been the subject of extensive study. This issue is important because, as pointed out by Moodley (2013: 18), 'the type of questions asked by teachers may thwart or promote higher level learning'. A key finding also noted in the discussion of IRE/IRF above is that many teachers over-use closed or recall-based questions, while often also failing to fully develop the responses provided by students. For example, Hargie (1983) showed that teachers ask considerably more recall than process questions. He argued that training should be provided to increase teachers' ability to use thought-provoking questions, rather than those aimed at simple factual recall. Margutti (2006) found that the most frequently used question patterns in a primary school's instructional activities were those that required brief responses: yes/no questions, alternative (or selection) questions, specific wh-questions, and non-interrogative formats such as Eliciting Completion Devices. In a study of interaction in science classrooms, Eliasson et al. (2017) report that 87% of the questions asked were closed and required specific recall information, rather than critical or evaluative processing. Likewise, Piemental and McNeill (2013) found that in whole-class science discussions, pupil responses were typically short, and were not built upon or extended by teachers. Weiland et al. (2014) also identified missed opportunities for probing or follow-up questions as a specific area of weakness in teacher questioning. Using video-observations of teacher-learner interactions, Kathard et al. (2015) conclude that despite some episodic shifts during sessions, teachers mainly used monologic interaction models characterised by closed questions and brief feedback. On the basis of their analysis, they advocate interventions to help teachers develop more dialogic and collaborative styles.

Much of the research in this area has linked the frequency, structure, and distribution of questions to the power imbalance that exists between teachers and students. Brooks (2016: 348) describes classroom talk as 'hegemonic' in this respect. Her findings show the teacher 'questioning and directing students in routinized ways, with students responding passively and participating in familiar discursive patterns'. However, it is worth noting that, as well as their centrality to the learning process, questions (from teachers and students) also provide a means of enacting democracy and participation in the classroom (Morgan and Saxton, 2006). In a study of whole-class interactions with teachers, Solem (2016) shows that students sometimes initiate Q&A sequences, which

allow them to display knowledge (epistemic status) based on personal experiences, and that these student-initiated sequences shape the development of both the topic and the subsequent class interaction. According to a recent study by StJohn and Cromdal (2016), student-led questions contribute to making teachers' instructions followable for other students as they are typically followed by a 'dual addressivity' response from the teacher which is directed at both the individual questioner and the rest of the class.

When considering the use of questions in medical interactions, a number of parallel themes emerge. Questions are a core activity for doctors and other health professionals (van der Zwet et al., 2014). Simultaneously, questioning by doctors is an area often identified as problematic or in need of further training interventions (Lloyd et al., 2000; Chen-Tan et al., 2005; Skolaridis et al., 2014). Similar to research in the education context, many analyses have examined medical questions as a control or power device. Drew and Heritage (1992) show that doctors use questions to direct and manage interactions with patients, while patients have little opportunity to introduce questions of their own. Consequently, doctors' concerns (medical, technical) are shown to prevail in the consultations, rather than social or emotional issues that might have been introduced by patients. As discussed earlier, Heritage (2010) has further demonstrated the link between doctors' questions and the institutional control of agendas, topics, and, ultimately, types of patient responses. Questions also mark status differentials *between* medical professionals. In a diary-based study of interaction between doctors and student doctors, the posing and answering of questions was found to be a 'recurrent and influential' feature of student learning and of managing status and power (van der Zwet et al., 2014: 806). A study of simulated oncologist-patient interviews in Communication Skills Training (Bourquin et al., 2012) showed that 41% of medical students used indirect questions (specifically, of the type: 'I don't know if [you've heard of this]', or 'I don't know [what you do for a living]') as a protective linguistic strategy, to minimise discomfort. By contrast, this sort of question was rare in a comparative sample of oncologists' questions. Other studies show that medical students quickly learn how to use questions to control consultations. For example, Wynn (1996) claimed that medical students learned to handle patient-initiated questions by asking unrelated doctor-initiated ones.

The distribution of questions in the medical setting echoes that of the classroom, with doctors asking far more questions than patients. An early study in this area (West, 1983) found that in a sample of 21 medical consultations, 773 questions were produced, but only 68 (9%) of these were initiated by patients. Sanchez (2001) also highlights the volume of doctor questions, citing a study in which, during an average consultation time of 2.1 minutes, doctors asked, on average, one question every 4.6 seconds. Chen-Tan et al. (2005: 415) describe physicians at all stages of training and practice as using 'a high control barrage of closed questions' when seeking to elicit information from patients. They advocate an alternative medical interview technique (ILS), which relies less on questions, consisting, instead, of three components: Inviting a story; listening effectively; and summarising periodically. In routine medical encounters, patient responses may also be interrupted so that doctors can ask further questions (Epstein et al., 1993). As summarised by Hargie (2017: 121), in light of the pattern and volume of doctors' questions 'patients have little scope to reply, let alone formulate a question'. It is unsurprising, then, that Street and Millay (2001) found 'active participation' (notably, asking questions and expressing concerns) to constitute only 7% of total patient utterances in medical encounters.

Patients' difficulty in asking questions has been demonstrated in many studies (Deen et al., 2011) and is linked to, among other things, the fear of appearing ignorant (Roter and Hall, 2006), lower education and lower income (Siminoff et al., 2006), a lack of medical knowledge, and the perception that questioning doctors is akin to challenging their authority (Rozholdova, 1999). In a randomly controlled study by Fleissig et al. (1999), outpatients struggled to ask questions of their doctors, even when they had prepared these in advance of the consultation. The content and focus of doctors' questions can further deter or inhibit active input from patients. As already noted, medical and technical concerns (e.g. symptoms, measures, treatment) are dominant in doctor-patient interactions, often at the expense of psychosocial concerns (Mishler, 1984; Drew and Heritage, 1992; van Dulmen and Holl, 2000; Tsai et al., 2013). In a US study of 127 physicians and 537 patients, Roter et al. (1997) demonstrated that 32% of encounters were characterised by a 'narrowly biomedical' focus, while only 8% focused primarily on psychosocial issues. Of five different communication patterns identified in this analysis, patient satisfaction was shown to be highest in the psychosocial model.

From a clinical and an interactional perspective, then, there is a need for doctors to facilitate patient questions and moreover, to allow for a focus on psychosocial issues and concerns. According to Hind (1997), one of the elements most highly valued by patients when receiving bad news is the opportunity to ask questions. Patients who actively participate in the medical interaction also show higher levels of satisfaction and greater commitment to follow their treatment plans (Young and Klinge, 1996). For their part, doctors provide more information to high participation patients than to low participation patients (Cegala et al., 2007); and hence, the former type of consultation results in greater alignment of both parties' goals and agendas. Commitment to treatment goals and plans is also an important theme in a major study by Stavropoulou (2011) across 24 European countries. Here, patient reluctance to ask questions of doctors was significantly related to non-compliance with medication regimes. There are, then, serious clinical consequences to overlooking or sidelining patient questions, and doctors need to be aware of these issues. It is significant that in Street and Millay's (2001) study, described above, active participation by patients increased when doctors used patient-centred responses, such as actively seeking opinions and providing supportive comments. Furthermore, studies by van Dulmen and van Weert (2001) and Tsai et al. (2013) have shown that communication training is effective in developing doctors' ability to use open and psychosocial questions to elicit patient problems, queries, and concerns.

## CONCLUSION

Questioning is a fundamental component of effective interpersonal communication. In this chapter, I have explored different aspects of questioning with a central focus on informational and interactional functions. The conceptual bases for identifying and studying questions as an interpersonal practice have been discussed, as well as the purposes and functions of questions in a range of contexts. A core theme of this discussion is that questions interact with power, status, and role identity, to produce specific interpersonal outcomes, such as affiliation, challenge, empathy, and control. Questions, then, are powerful IPC tools, both in their multifunctionality and in their capacity to

control and manage information and interaction. Different categories of questions have been examined and two applied professional contexts, education and medicine, have been explored in detail. The chapter highlights both the richness and the complexity of the interpersonal practice of questioning. As summarised by Dickson and Hargie (2006: 121), 'While at a surface level questioning seems to be a straightforward feature of communication, deeper analysis, at functional, structural, and textual levels, reveals questioning to be a complex and multifaceted phenomenon'.

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# **Reinforcement**

*Len Cairns*

## **INTRODUCTION**

**R**EINFORCEMENT AS A CORE communication skill has a long history and has been a feature of this Handbook since its inception. The fields in which the concept of reinforcement has been theorised and developed have included communication, psychology, education, business and philosophy. More recently the ideas surrounding reinforcement have also been utilised in Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and “deep learning”. Much of the last century was the age when the basic ideas and philosophical underpinnings of reinforcement as a concept and its application in many settings and across many disciplines were prevalent. The exposition of the concept was based substantially on the Behavioral Psychology of B.F. Skinner and further elaborations over the second half of the 20th century. Much controversy and differences of opinion and writing, especially in relation to language acquisition and development took place in that era. What this chapter does, in the early part of the 21st century, is to recount the theoretical basis of the skill, review the research and development in the past years and examine potentials for the future based on recent developments and issues with the reinforcement concept and its derivatives.

## **DEFINING REINFORCEMENT**

The term reinforcement has an extensive usage across a range of areas of research and theory. In the communication skills literature (Hargie, 1986, 1997, 2006, 2017; Hargie et al., 1994) this aspect has featured in the



models of learning and communication refinement. As presented and discussed in this chapter, reinforcement is seen as a core communication skill in a social skills model of communication. It is essential in interaction between people and operates to support, reward and influence communicative acts. The discussion of reinforcement, here, draws on theory and research that has arisen largely from Behavioral Psychology and its more recent adaptations. In operant psychology (as the Skinner-led field became known), the term reinforcement is usually defined in terms such as the following:

The effect of a stimulus, when matched with an emitted response (*an operant action*) increases the likelihood of that action/response being repeated.

Simply put, reinforcement in this mode of thinking can be described as a stimulus that follows a response made by a person that increases the likelihood of the response being repeated. The term reinforcement in communication is defined in this chapter as:

A stimulus by a listener/receiver of an emitted communication (an operant behaviour) that is matched and either increases or decreases the likelihood of such communication being repeated. Positive and negative contingent reinforcement increase the repetition possibilities, while punishment or response cost decrease the possibility of repetition.

Previous editions of this Handbook utilised a simple 2x2 table to clarify the four types of reinforcement and related concepts (Table 5.1). As the definitional distinctions outlined in Table 5.1 illustrate, both positive and negative reinforcement lead to increases in behaviour. *Positive reinforcers* are seen by an individual as of some value (e.g. rewards), while *negative reinforcers* operate as the withdrawal of a negative stimulus which is also desired and so supports repetition of a behaviour (e.g. removal of a disliked food from a child's menu to increase meal-eating). Punishment is the application of an aversive stimulus to discourage behaviour, while Response Cost discourages behaviours by removing a valued aspect after the behaviour (such as fines for speeding, which takes away money, which is valued).

Skinner's own classic book, *About Behaviorism* (1974) offered the following two more specific examples:

When a bit of behavior has the kind of consequence called reinforcing, it is more likely to occur again. A positive reinforcer strengthens any behavior that produces it: a glass of water is positively reinforcing when we are thirsty, and if we then draw and drink a glass of water, we are more likely to do so again on similar occasions. A negative reinforcer strengthens any behavior that reduces

**Table 5.1** Definitional distinctions in reinforcement

	<i>Positive stimulus</i>	<i>Negative stimulus</i>
Application	Positive reinforcement	Punishment
Removal	Response cost	Negative reinforcement

or terminates it: when we take off a shoe that is pinching, the reduction in pressure is negatively reinforcing, and we are more likely to do so again when a shoe pinches.

(p. 51)

So, the concept of reinforcement is concerned with the *after-effects* of a person's response and how consistently *related* (that is, contingent) *after-effects* can lead to the likely repetition of the original type of response. Once this basic point is clear, the significance of reinforcement in everyday life becomes obvious. As the operant theory goes, the application of a positively valued stimulus (be it food, a pat on the back or a verbal praise comment) that is contingent (clearly linked to the emitted behaviour) will be positively reinforcing and lead to a more likely repeat of that behaviour. In this way, in social interaction and discourse, parents use smiles, praise and encouragement in language and social behaviour development. Also, school teachers make liberal use of the skill of reinforcement in social and token forms (the latter covering the gold stars and written praise comments on school work as well). This aspect has a long history in teacher education, particularly in such approaches as "teaching skills" and was a centrepiece of microteaching as a major approach to the education of teachers (Turney et al., 1973a).

In conversation, people use the terms associated with reinforcement theory in discourse in different ways from the specific operant model. It is now common for many to use reinforcement as any positive utterance that seeks to influence increased or modified behaviour in communication situations, and to use "negative reinforcement" as synonymous with "punishment".

In addition, reinforcement is often seen to be synonymous with feedback. Popular usage of the term is often synonymously or interchangeably expressed as the same as *feedback*. Even the Oxford Dictionary online (2018) offers an example for *reinforcement* as: "The process of encouraging or establishing a belief or pattern of behaviour: '*positive feedback leads to reinforcement*'". However, there are key differences between the two concepts. Reinforcement offers a sense of approval, reward, praise or purposeful encouragement, whereas feedback may be information-based, somewhat neutral and even, at times, simply a sign that a communication has been received by someone.

## FEEDBACK AND REINFORCEMENT

Feedback, as a different element of social behaviour, is the reflection of clarity of content or acknowledgement in a communication between people, which may or may not involve any reinforcing aspect. In other settings, such as workplaces and schooling contexts through all levels, feedback may mean knowledge of results. Feedback may also involve questions or clarifications, such as "Did you say?" or, "I did not understand what you just said, can you repeat that". This form of feedback can also be described as "reflective listening".

Communication feedback can also involve comments such as, "Thanks for that point" or "I understand your point". Feedback as elaborated here, is a necessary feature of communication but differs, subtly, from reinforcement in the development of communication behaviours.

Both feedback and reinforcement have been used interchangeably by some commentators and this usage is quite common in everyday speech. This interchangeability can lead to some terminological and clarity misunderstandings. A prominent example of this interchangeable usage can be seen in the writing over the past twenty years of the very popular educational research synthesist (involving extensive use of the meta-analysis approach), John Hattie. In early works (Hattie, 1992; 1999) reported significant research findings for effective teaching across a large number of meta-analyses:

Over the past 10 years I have been accumulating studies, and now have 337 meta-analyses, 200,000 effect-sizes from 180,000 studies, representing approximately 50+ million students, and covering almost all methods of innovation.  
(1999)

In this Inaugural Lecture at the University of Auckland, Hattie reported that the most significant effect was “reinforcement” with an “effect size of 1.13”. This had also been reported in his 1992 study. However, Hattie also uses the term “feedback” in discussing the “reinforcement” finding and as such uses the two terms interchangeably. Later, in his well-received major work, *Visible Learning* (2009, 2012), the research finding is termed exclusively “Feedback” and the word “Reinforcement” does not even appear in the book’s Index. Hattie and Timperley (2007) in a major review article on the “Power of Feedback” do not include the term Reinforcement in their presentation, yet they define Feedback as follows:

Feedback thus is a “consequence” of performance.  
(p. 81)

In this article, Hattie and Timperley cite the above 1999 Inaugural Lecture with a somewhat different emphasis and number of studies:

Hattie (1999) reported a synthesis of over 500 meta-analyses, involving 450,000 effect sizes from 180,000 studies, representing approximately 20 to 30 million students, on various influences on student achievement.  
(p. 82)

There is no doubt that Hattie’s works have made a significant impact on teachers and teacher educators as a set of results across a form of “big data”: in the sense of massive accumulation through meta-analyses and huge numbers of included subjects in the various combined studies (Visible learning.com). Without the critiques of the technique of meta-analysis, there are still questions in this approach and synthesis across so many different and exclusively quantitative statistically based studies. It is especially interesting to question whether the many studies included initially as “reinforcement” are now included as “feedback” and whether there is some definitional slipping in the types of results added to the set.

There are other examples of usage variations of the two terms Feedback and Reinforcement, including the 1996 report of Kluger and De Nisi, whereby they define the term “Feedback Interventions, FI” in terms that are decidedly similar to the above definition of reinforcement in this chapter:

This article is about FIs defined as *actions taken by (an) external agent (s) to provide information regarding some aspect(s) of one's task performance*. This definition is similar to the notion of “knowledge of performance” interventions (Ammons, 1956), “augmented feedback” (Annett, 1969; Salmoni et al., 1984), or “extrinsic feedback” (Annett, 1969; Frese & Zapf, 1994), and as such it has several implications for the boundaries of our investigation.

(p. 255)

For researchers and theorists in communication, however, the difference between the terms has significant impact on the way these aspects are put into practice. Studies of the use, impact and significance of reinforcement as a core communication skill abound in education, psychology and especially in the treatment of communication and/or behavioural dysfunction. Reinforcement approaches have been used in a wide variety of communication applications to change, modify or expunge certain behaviours deemed to need modification and/or improvement.

A key aspect of this volume and of great significance for the concept of reinforcement is that it is situated within a social skills model of interpersonal communication. Reinforcement is socially situated and involves values, judgements and deliberate responses between people (see Chapters 1 and 2). Reinforcement impacts on verbal behaviour, personal efficacy development and agency (Skinner, 1974; Bandura, 1969, 1986, 1997).

## REINFORCEMENT THEORY AND APPLICATION

As mentioned above, the basis for the understanding of reinforcement is to be found in the Operant Conditioning theory of B.F. Skinner and derivatives of that work. Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904–1990) was a major figure in 20th century psychology and his operant theory of behaviour was one of the most significant contributions to that field. The ideas and applications were not always received without criticism and there are many works criticising his theory and its underlying tenets and philosophical roots (Weist, 1967; Stillman, 1975). However, there is no denying that his theory, research and the applications in psychology have been extensive and profound.

In relation to communication and language, the behaviourist theory of language development argued that children learn language through interaction where utterances are reinforced in their environment by parents and others with whom they interact. This reinforcement increases the likelihood of repetition and consolidation of language elements over time (Skinner, 1957a). Skinner's book, *Verbal Behavior* (1957b), was a theoretical account of the acquisition and operation of language within his behavioural approach. Famously, Chomsky (1959) critically reviewed the book and this led to a long and detailed controversy across the language field. There have been counters to the Chomsky position (MacCorquodale, 1970; Leigland, 1989, 2007), and more recent reinterpretations of some of Skinner's verbal behaviour conceptualisation and definition (Palmer, 2008).

Palmer (2008) argued that there were a number of developments and modifications made by Skinner as to the definition of Verbal Behavior over the years. He neatly summarises the significance of these definitional changes as follows in the conclusion to his article:

Is Skinner's definition useful? It is useful at least to this extent: It identifies the subject matter clearly as behavior; the behavior of the speaker is interlocked with the conditioned behavior of a listener; and the listener's behavior was shaped up by a verbal community according to arbitrary but conventional standards. Although little of this seems remarkable to a behavior analyst today, it is fundamentally incompatible with structuralist and formalist approaches to language, those that view languages as a system of symbols that can be abstracted from the messy world of stimulus and response classes. For many years such approaches were ascendant in linguistics and were highly influential among psychologists and philosophers as well. In my opinion, they have led science down a blind alley. It is not my purpose to argue that Skinner's definition is better or worse than other behavioral definitions, but if it helps reorient scholars toward a conception of language as behavior, it will be doing a useful service.

(p. 306)

Significant in the approach to learning embedded within the operant idea is that there are also characteristics of the way interaction takes place between individuals as they communicate.

For communication instances to be reinforcing and, therefore, influencing repetition, it is argued in this chapter that the reinforcers need three interlocking characteristics (Cairns, 2006).

*Contingency:* The term "contingency" refers to a direct linkage or consequential relationship – what Lee (1988), in her detailed discussion of contingencies, refers to as the "if-then relationship", e.g. "if you talk, you hear your own voice" (p. 61). This involves the clear consequential linkage of the stimulus by the receiver of a communication (smile, praise, reward) to the response made by the sender. If there is no contingent link then there is no reinforcement. Random smiles, for example, may be misinterpreted and not related to any specific comment. This element also is influenced by the timing of the reinforcer after the behaviour. Late reinforcement affects the contingent link. However, Alfie Kohn (1993), the strident critic of operant psychology, criticised this aspect in the following terms:

Skinnerian theory basically codifies and bestows solemn scientific names on something familiar to all of us: 'Do this and you'll get that' will lead an organism to do 'this' again.

(p. 5)

Kohn's criticisms have been widely reported but his central thesis starts with the simple, yet deceptive, argument that reinforcement is just another "scientific" term for reward.

*Personal validity:* This aspect is also of significance, as any stimulus must have some perceived personal validity by the emitter of the response in the communication episode. If the stimulus, say of praise, is not seen to have validity, it will not act as reinforcement and may merely be regarded as a gratuitous comment.

*Personal valence:* This refers to the way the recipient perceives the power of the communication, in terms of the value or potential impact of the stimulus. If the communication has strong personal value for the receiver, it will act as a potent reinforcer.

Of course, there are many other discussions in the psychological literature about types of reinforcers and how some are related to “primary” human needs such as hunger and thirst (both of which featured in many laboratory studies with animals in the early days of behavioural research), to others of more socially learned value and appropriateness. The range of reinforcers has generally been proposed as:

**Primary reinforcers:** Food and other basic life needs in animal research. Food and “lollies” have also been used in human research.

**Secondary reinforcers:** These can be symbols or tokens that have some value for the recipients. Money can also feature in this category as well.

**Social reinforcers:** The consequences of the emitted communication may be positive reinforcement in the form of social reinforcers, which can be verbal in the form of praise and other positive responses, or nonverbal as with nods, facial expressions, touch, or other gestures of approval or support.

MacMillan (1973) proposed a hierarchy of reinforcers ranging from what he called “primary rewards”, which related to basic human needs such as food and water at the lowest level, through token, social praise, and towards a highest level of “self-mastery” as a form of self-reinforcement. Such a hierarchy echoes very clearly the famous Maslow (1954) hierarchy of human needs, which even today figures in many basic education and business texts as an explanatory model of what tends to drive people (see Chapter 2). Of course, different people react to different potential reinforcers, and whilst the satisfaction of simple basic needs such as hunger and thirst has quite powerful effects in the reinforcement sense in training animals, humans and the communication processes between them are far more complex. The impact of social reinforcement has to be learned, as usually such reinforcers have little actual value in themselves, but rather, represent, or are proxies for, other personally valued aspects in life.

Many nonverbal reinforcers (e.g. smiles, high fives, winks, thumbs up and other gestures) are learned and associated with particular positive elements and are often culturally bound. Likewise, certain verbal reinforcers can become somewhat idiosyncratic within groups such as families, gangs and other subculture groupings where specific terms take on positive reinforcement message values almost as a proxy for previous uses and or rewards. Many teachers develop close ties with their students by gradually fading explicit rewards and praise towards simple nonverbal gestures and specific personal signals of reinforcement. Parents, too, can utilise gestures, vocal tone and specific ways of both praising and admonishing that become known in the close family and have a different “validity” than in common usage. The use of money as a token for value in our society is an interesting example. It is notable when hyper-inflation occurs in a country that money becomes less and less representative as a reward or reinforcer. Money (coins and notes) has little value in its own substance but has a value set by society. When the metal and paper tokens lose the agreed exchange value they become less and less desirable and then cease to be a reinforcer. In time of war and chaos in societies, money often becomes useless and is replaced by other goods or labour as a currency for exchange.

The application of reinforcement in what became known as the field of “Behavior Modification”, has been especially utilised within education in aspects such as

classroom discipline and management and in special education situations where aberrant child behaviour was targeted through “interventions” to modify that behaviour. Approaches in this usage included work in language and communication issues including considerable work over many years of research in the development of language facility amongst children with autism (Koegel, O’Dell and Koegel, 1987; Sundberg and Michael, 2001).

The approach (often generalised as Applied Behavioral Analysis), has been clearly described by Sundberg and Michael (2001):

The basic intervention program, now quite common in the behavioral treatment of autism (e.g., Maurice, Green, & Luce, 1996), consists largely in identifying goals in terms of specific behaviors to be altered in frequency; recording target behaviors; identifying effective forms of reinforcement; the use of extinction, shaping, and intermittent reinforcement; the development of operant stimulus control, stimulus prompting, and the fading of prompts; and the development of chaining, generalization, rules, imitation, modeling, and other now well-known behavioral procedures.

(p. 699)

The application of reinforcement in communication development and language research across many fields has a long and effective set of reported studies. Specific journals in the field and handbooks of behaviour modification and language frequently include studies where reinforcement is a key feature (Favell, 1977; Bellack, Hersen and Kazdin, 1990; Kazdin, 1989; Martin and Pear, 2015).

## REINFORCEMENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the past two decades, there has been additional development of two areas of communication-related “post Skinnerian” theories and applications with reinforcement variants. The first of these is Relational Frame Theory (Hayes et al., 2001).

### Relational Frame Theory

This theory has developed over the past two decades to lead to considerable reinterpretation of Skinner’s ideas as expounded in *Verbal Behavior*. Relational Frame Theory (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2000; Hayes et al., 2001) offers a different perspective on the way human language is discussed from a behaviourist point of view. As Owen (2002) states:

Relational frame theory also suggests an entirely new theoretical approach to the *nature of language*. Specifically, it suggests that *language behavior is relational framing* behavior ... That is, to talk about something is to frame that thing relationally in a particular way, and thereby to make a particular kind of “sense” out of it. The value of this “sense” can then be checked out against one’s experiences.

(pp. 11–12)

Relational Frame Theory (RFT) maintains that there is a place for contingencies of reinforcement in the traditional operant sense, but the central book and theory exposition (*Relational Frame Theory: A Post-Skinnerian Account of Human Language and Cognition*, Hayes et al., 2001) is basically a critique of Skinner's original book, *Verbal Behavior*, and, as such, attempts to take the field beyond the Skinnerian views.

The manner of the complexity of the way the theory is expressed and the detail of the RFT ideas has led to much controversy.

The field of RFT has emerged as one that has inspired a good deal of recent research and controversy as well. Two different reviewers of the Hayes et al. (2001) edited text, have taken the contributors to task for a number of reasons, including that the text is difficult to read and complex (Salzinger, 2003), that the theory promises much but is less convincing to those who hold Skinnerian views (Palmer, 2004), and that there is some doubt as to the merit of seeing RFT as a basic new theory. As Palmer states in the abstract of his lengthy and detailed review of the work:

The authors dismiss Skinner's interpretation of verbal behavior as unproductive and conceptually flawed and suggest a new definition and a new paradigm for the investigation of verbal phenomena. I found the empirical phenomena important but the conceptual discussion incomplete. A new principle of behavior is promised, but critical features of this principle are not offered. In the absence of an explicit principle, the theory itself is difficult to evaluate.

(p. 189)

A strident and somewhat dismissive review of the basic book was offered by Burgos (2003) who argued that the RFT ideas were, as his title suggested, "unintelligible". His critique is basically a philosophical attack and he concluded by describing the theory as:

Under these interpretations of the authors' own words, RFT seems to me to be as much a cult as anything else, which is in tone with their talk of "those special few who would consider [their] arguments seriously" in the Preface.

(p. 43)

The emergence of RFT as a new paradigm with some promise is not doubted so much by writers such as Salzinger, who concedes that the work is thought provoking and worthy of additional notice, research and follow-up. RFT may offer a more useful approach to the place of reinforcement in human communication as a post-Skinnerian conceptualisation in the 21st century, where many such behaviourist themes and approaches are anathema. Torneke (2010) has prepared a thorough introductory text and included and suggested clinical applications of the RFT model.

Readers who wish to undertake an examination of the RFT ideas and details should embark on an exploration of the Hayes et al. book and the Palmer 2004 review as a starting point. Additional recent entries on websites also offer both introductory and more advanced expositions of what remains a complex theory (Blackledge, 2003; Gross and Fox, 2009; Dymond and Roche, 2013). Hayes and Barnes-Holmes (2004) also have offered a robust response to the Palmer review, which offers some clarifications.

Whether Relational Frame Theory has yet emerged as a more adequate explanation of how language is developed and what the role of stimuli and reinforcement



are in human functioning is still a controversial area, especially amongst behaviour analysts and researchers.

## Reinforcement Learning

The second area of communication theory and application that relates to reinforcement as a key aspect is known as Reinforcement Learning (Kaelbling et al., 1996; Maia, 2009). As early as 1998, Sutton and Barto (1998) published an introduction to the field of Reinforcement Learning. Their initial description was clearly couched in terms that linked in the notion of rewards:

Reinforcement learning is learning what to do – how to map situations to actions – so as to maximize a numerical reward signal. The learner is not told which actions to take, as in most forms of machine learning, but instead must discover which actions yield the most reward by trying them. In the most interesting and challenging cases, actions may affect not only the immediate reward but also the next situation and, through that, all subsequent rewards. These two characteristics – trial-and-error search and delayed reward – are the two most important distinguishing features of reinforcement learning.

(section 1.1)

This approach has been developed further over the years in the artificial intelligence field from the 1990s and has been described more recently by Maia (2009), in the following way:

Reinforcement learning essentially studies how artificial systems can solve instrumental conditioning problems. The relation of reinforcement learning to classical conditioning is perhaps less obvious. However, learning to act so as to maximize rewards and minimize punishments requires the ability to *predict* future rewards and punishments. Reinforcement-learning systems therefore typically incorporate this ability.

(p. 343)

In addition to offering a good overview of the Reinforcement Learning ideas, Maia has introduced the consideration of the way the brains of animals and humans react to rewards and anticipation of such aspects. Maia discussed in detail how dopamine “bursts” in the brain of animals was studied in relation to rewards (and conditioned responses), and the extended studies involving humans, in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The links between dopamine in the brain and reward prediction error (RPE) have been studied in animal experiments with detailed techniques and results showing the connection as important (Morita et al., 2013) but there have been some different results in a more recent study with subjects with Parkinson’s disease (Grogan et al., 2017).

Recent ideas that have their roots in Reinforcement Learning and its applications include Artificial Intelligence (AI) and in the specific areas of “Deep Learning” and how this applies in Machine Learning. These aspects have implications and

applicability across such recent area as self-driving cars and machines that can learn and play computer games.

## **REINFORCEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the application of reinforcement in educational settings has been one of the major documented theory and research areas over the past 50 plus years. Teachers in classrooms have been applying reinforcement as a core teaching skill, which saw a major implementation as part of the pre-service teacher education microteaching approach in Australia and elsewhere in the 1970–1980 decade (Dunkin and Biddle, 1974; Turney et al., 1973b). Teaching skills (Brophy, 1981) and classroom applications within discipline and classroom management were popular approaches utilising reinforcement ideas across the second half of the 20th century (MacMillan, 1973; O’Leary and O’Leary, 1977; Sulzer and Mayer, 1972). In the micro-teaching approach, basic teaching skills were identified as questioning, reinforcement and variability (see Turney et al., Volume 1, 1973a). The links between this approach and the zeitgeist in teacher education at this time can be seen clearly in the works on teacher education globally (Ryan, 1975).

One model of face-to-face communication that has been the subject of considerable discussion, particularly in relation to teach-pupil questioning and answering in classrooms has been categorised as the IRF model (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). The I stands for a teacher initiation (usually a question to pupils) which is followed by a response (R), which in turn leads to F which refers to “feedback” or “follow-up”. While this has been a long standing model that characterises this older pattern of classroom teacher-pupil verbal interaction, there has been variation suggested. Mehan (1978) proposed that the model might better be IRE, where the E stood for “evaluation”. In a previous edition of this Handbook chapter, Cairns (2006), suggested that the model, within the definition and suggested approach of this exposition, could be styled IRR, with the second R standing for reinforcement.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the ideas of Reinforcement were incorporated within a set of teaching materials known as a “Direct Instruction” approach (Becker et al., 1981). This approach began as a way of teaching reading and mathematics elements to young children using operant ideas and very teacher-directed methodology with enthusiastic reinforcement of correct responses in a heavily scripted set of sequenced “lessons”. It was referred to as Direct Instruction System for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading (DISTAR). Later, DISTAR Language was developed and employed to teach oral language skills to young children. In the “follow through” large application study across the USA, DISTAR was found to be more effective than most of the other approaches employed in that study (Becker et al., 1981). More recently, in 2007, the Institute of Education Sciences of the US Department of Education has reviewed the DISTAR Language programme research studies and concluded that: “Direct Instruction was found to have no discernible effects on the oral language, print knowledge, cognition and math skills of special education students” (2007, p. 1). This report’s conclusion illustrates how the controversy about this area and such teaching materials is fuelled.

As mentioned above, the field of Behavior Modification has, since the early popularity in the 1970s, maintained a credible and significant following across psychology and education, particularly in the USA. Handbooks (Leitenberg, 1976; Bellack, Hersen and Kazdin, 1990; McSweeney and Murphy, 2014) and textbooks for higher education students (Martin and Pear, 2015) abound.

Amongst the many areas where reinforcement approaches have been used in education, the research and intervention with children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has been particularly prevalent. Studies have shown that reinforcement (in a range of types) in a treatment intervention has made considerable difference in language remediation and social skills development for children with ASD (Carroll and Klatt, 2008; Sundberg and Partington, 2010).

## **REINFORCEMENT IN COMMUNICATION IN WORKPLACE AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES**

Communication in the various workplaces, be they trade, professional or artistic endeavours, is a significant feature of operations and relationships. Reinforcement responses in these situations involves contingent stimuli to develop and increase behaviours. The sub-field of business communication has emerged as a significant component in business courses at universities, especially in the USA, with substantial success (Dwyer, 2011; Guffey and Loewy, 2016). The importance of workplace communication and how co-workers and supervisors interact with others to reinforce communication skills has emerged as an area for consideration across a wide range of professions and workplaces. Workplace Learning emerged in the first decade of the 21st century as a significant field of theory, research and practice and situated the workplace as a significant place for educational enterprise (Malloch et al., 2010; Cairns and Stephenson, 2009).

Not all aspects of workplace and professional communication practices and training explicitly discuss the role of reinforcement though many do mention the matter of “feedback” from work colleagues and supervisors to develop communication improvement. Once again, the overlap between these two terms remains, in some aspects, blurred. There is no doubt that effective communication in workplaces and professions has become more of a matter for increased concern and examination (Zachry and Thralls, 2017) and in specific professions such as pharmacy (Beardsley et al., 2011) and medical practice (Perera, 2015) the need to undertake training and development in communication aspects has been recognised and implemented.

## **NEW IMPACTS**

As we move forwards in the 21st century it is evident that there are a number of more recent developments and influences in the research and applications of reinforcement. The research mentioned earlier in this chapter that has focused on the area of brain functioning and the connection between dopamine and rewards in animals and humans has led to an increasing understanding and further exploration of which parts of the brain activate and relate to reinforcers. This research has great promise for

clearer insights into human behaviour and the way the brain acts in responses and stimuli (Arrias-Carion et al., 2010; Morita et al., 2013; Niv, 2009; Schultz et al., 2017).

Another development since the pervasive impact of the computer in schools, society and business has been the way humans interact with computers. A very early report (Azevedo and Bernard, 1995), presented a meta-analysis of research on the effects of feedback in computer instruction. The meta-analysis included 22 studies. These authors distinguished feedback from reinforcement which they described as the “now outdated S-R notion” (p. 111). Nevertheless, the aspects of computer feedback reported were about correctness of responses and did differentiate between reinforcement *per se* and computer feedback. The researchers’ conclusion was that:

Feedback has to be regarded as one of the most critical components of computer based instruction, its objective being to provide students with appropriate responses thus allowing them to rectify learning difficulties”.

(p. 120)

As the sophistication of computer programmes emerged after 1995, computer “feedback” became more individualised and reinforcing in its approaches. This has, in a manner, a relationship to the “machine learning” and “deep learning” associated with the recent developments in “Reinforcement Learning” approaches mentioned above and reviewed by Li (2017).

Also early in the debate, in 2004, Bracken and her colleagues were writing about the way computers may be perceived as almost another person by children and adults who are interacting with the computer (Bracken and Lombarard, 2004; Braken et al., 2004). The fact that many computer users actually name their computer and refer to the feedback or programmed reinforcement whilst learning in terms that suggest the computer has a personality or intent supports the perceptions that whilst people know that their computer is a device, they impart, often affectionately, names, characteristics and even motivation to the machine. This anthropomorphism of the computer may also be even more powerfully evident in the way people now use (and abuse) their mobile devices.

The whole area of online learning has become ubiquitous in schooling and higher education, with greater use of the internet and WWW 1, 2 and 3 applications. Over the last few decades of the 20th century and now firmly a major element in all aspects of life in the 21st century, the explosion of what is termed “social media” has changed much of the face of communication. This relative current development is a significantly different area of communication and therefore necessitates consideration. As the descriptor indicates, it is a widely utilised form of social interaction involving a medium (mostly hand-held devices including mobile phones). The medium involves different styles and symbols including “shorthand” versions of messaging and responding between and among groups of people. Significant is the intense personal and, at times quite intimate, elements of shared knowledge and experiences, with response comments and encouragement, praise and approval and disapproval elements that can be seen as related to reinforcement as discussed in this chapter. Mixtures of text and visual elements are frequently used in these communications.

The emergence of “emoticons” (sometimes referred to as “emojis”) in text (SMS) messages on mobile cell phones, Facebook and other email communications as extra

indicators of emotions or as reinforcement (Schamp-Bjerede et al., 2014) is among these more recent 21st century phenomena. Research has emerged on how such symbols and other aspects of online interaction now form a part of communication studies (Vandergriff, 2013). There is a broad lexicon of emoticons that are used widely internationally. As well, there are developing in this area personal symbols that only have meaning in a restricted language sense to a small number of people (<http://www.symbols-n-emoticons.com/p/facebook-emoticons-list.html>). It is interesting that the skill and use of *reinforcement* are easily identified when these social media are investigated. Most of the symbols that are so heavily used in messaging, for example, include various ways of praising or rewarding, or positively reinforcing comments and messages.

## ISSUES

The consideration of the operant model of reinforcement and much of the behavioural philosophy surrounding this exposition remains an area of controversy for many writers and researchers into human behaviour and learning, to say little of the reaction of many language and communication theorists who reject the behaviourist models and accompanying research and methods. Nativist theorists and humanistically influenced researchers, as well as post-modern writers, utterly reject the Behaviorist approach. Language scholars who advocate different “natural” language acquisition and development similarly are not enamoured of the reinforcement ideas. The above mentioned Relational Frame Theorists and researchers have taken the Skinnerian ideas into a new and complex extension. This, in turn, has led to controversy *within* the Behavioral Psychology area.

The feedback versus reinforcement question, which may for many readers seem a semantic division rather than a conceptual and research-based distinction, remains something of a conundrum as the slippage of usage and definition continues in the literature. Is reinforcement just a special case of the more general term “feedback” or is there, as asserted at the beginning of this chapter, a clear difference in definition, purpose and perception of what the two terms mean to humans in communication? The fact that significant researchers and writers have “slipped” between the two terms when discussing the literature and particularly reviewing the research, does not help the clarity, nor the conclusions about the efficacy of reinforcement as a concept and an approach to our understanding of communication.

A final question is the extent to which reinforcement is still a relevant concept. One may well ask, in the way traditional reinforcement theory and research has been criticised and discussed, whether, in the 21st century the concept and its case as a core communication skill are still pertinent. The answer should be through a careful examination of the role(s) of reinforcement ideas, theory, research evidence and applications across the many areas presented in this chapter. While issues, as discussed above and recent further developments and alternative ideas have emerged, there appears to be still a case for a consideration of the way behavioural concepts play out in day-to-day language development and acquisition models and how influential the ideas have been in an understanding of human communication. To dismiss the area as “an old model” is too simplistic and indeed ageist.

## CONCLUSION

Reinforcement, as a core communication skill, has a long and well documented history. That the usage and understanding of this term has some confounding aspects related to meaning (definitional), underlying theoretical roots (philosophical) and application has been a feature of debate in the areas of psychology, philosophy and education over many decades. This chapter has presented, with particular relevance to communication, a clear definition and discussion of the way reinforcement has been theorised, researched and applied in over a century of work.

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## **On explaining**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

**E**XPLAINING TOGETHER WITH QUESTIONING are probably the core skills of the professions. They underpin many of the skills discussed in this book; they are used in everyday conversation and they are of importance to teachers, lecturers, doctors and other health professionals, lawyers, architects and engineers. Despite the ubiquity of explaining, as an area of research, it is still neglected in the 21st century. The reason is, perhaps, that explaining is at the intersection of a wide range of subjects: epistemology, psychology, linguistics, sociology and anthropology.

This chapter does not cover all of these areas but neither does it shirk the deeper issues of explaining. An understanding of the deeper issues will assist readers to relate explaining to their own professional and personal experiences. To assist them in this quest, a framework is provided for understanding explanations in various professions. Research is reviewed, findings include those primarily concerned with explaining to a group, such as a lecture, class, or a group of managers and dyadic encounters, such as doctor–patient consultations. The chapter is based on the premise that explaining is a skill. This skills-based approach is a powerful heuristic for practitioners and it provides a useful theoretical framework in which to explore the subtleties of explaining.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO EXPLAINING

### A definition of explaining

The etymological root of explaining is *explanare*, to make plain. This root suggests two powerful metaphors: 'to strip bare' and 'to reveal'. These metaphors hint at different purposes of explaining. The first has connotations of getting down to the essentials. The second leans towards revelation, to revealing subtleties, intricacies and perhaps the uniqueness of an object, action, event or occurrence. The first metaphor resonates with quantitative approaches and the second with qualitative research (Antaki, 1994; Goffman, 1981).

A useful working definition is: 'Explaining is an attempt to provide understanding of a problem to others' (Brown & Edmunds, 2009, p. 76). Questioning and self-disclosure may lead to understanding but the primary task of giving understanding resides in the skill of explaining. The definition was originally developed for pragmatic reasons. A definition was wanted that would be helpful to professionals engaged in explaining and which would link transactions between explainers and explainees and the connections made in their heads. The weight of the definition rests on the nature of understanding.

### The nature of understanding

Given that explaining is an attempt to give understanding, it is necessary to explore the nature of understanding. Put simply, *understanding involves seeing connections that were hitherto not seen*. The connections may be between ideas, between facts or between ideas and facts.

This definition has strong links with much of educational and cognitive psychology (Dewey, 1910; Piaget, 1954; Bruner, 1966). Ausubel et al. (1978) stressed that the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Research on how students learn (Biggs and Tang, 2013, Entwistle et al., 2010) is built on the proposition that understanding is concerned with forming connections. Entwistle (2003) reported that for many students understanding was not merely cognitive but a feeling, including a feeling of satisfaction, at creating meaning for themselves; they stressed above all coherence and connectiveness and a sense of wholeness, although many recognised that the 'wholeness' was provisional yet irreversible. Once you understood something you could not 'de-understand' it, although your understanding could increase. The composite of their views captures the essence of understanding:

Understanding? It's the interconnection of lots of disparate things – the feeling that you understand how the whole thing is connected up – you can make sense of it internally. You're making lots of connections which then make sense and it's logical. It's as though one's mind has finally 'locked in' to the pattern. Concepts seem to fit together in a meaningful way, when before the connections did not seem clear, or appropriate, or complete. If you don't understand, it's just everything floating about and you can't quite get everything into place – like jigsaw pieces, you know, suddenly connect and you can see the whole picture. But there

is always the feeling you can add more and more and more: that doesn't necessarily mean that you didn't understand it; just that you only understood it up to a point. There is always more to be added. But if you really understand something and what the idea is behind it, you can't not understand it afterwards – you can't 'de-understand' it! And you know you have understood something when you can construct an argument from scratch – when you can explain it so that you feel satisfied with the explanation, when you can discuss a topic with someone and explain and clarify your thoughts if the other person doesn't see what you mean. (Entwistle, 2003, p. 6)

Cognitive psychologists rarely consider understanding. But from Baddeley's model of memory (Baddeley et al., 2015) it is possible to deduce a model of understanding that is rich with implications for explaining as well as understanding. For an explanation to be understood, the explainee must first perceive there is a gap in knowledge, a puzzle or a problem to be explained. This perception, known as encoding, activates the working memory to retrieve schemata from the long-term memory. These schemata may have been stored in any of the procedural, semantic (thoughts and facts) or episodic memories (narratives, events). Cues in the explanation being given are matched to the activated schemata. This matching may lead to assimilation of the explanation into the existing schemata or it may modify the existing schemata. In both it produces new connections of concepts and/or facts. The degree of stability of those new connections depends in part upon the network of existing concepts and facts. The validity of the new connections, that is, of the understanding, can only be tested by reference to corroborative evidence which may be from an external source or from other evidence and rules stored in the person's cognitive framework.

If the cues are clear and well-ordered then they can be rapidly processed. If they are confusing, they will not link with existing schemata and may be rapidly forgotten. Given the limitations of sensory and working memory, one should not explain too quickly and one should chunk the information provided into meaningful and relatively brief sentences. Pauses should be used to separate the chunks of information. Too fast or too distracting explanations cannot be processed by the working memory. The use of analogies, metaphors and similes will create new connections rapidly with the existing schemata of the explainee. The use of frequent summaries, guiding statements and cognitive maps can help explainees to change their schemata which they can elaborate on subsequently. Personal narratives interwoven with concepts and findings can trigger the procedural, episodic and semantic memories and so aid storing and retrieval of understanding.

This brief exposition of understanding has obvious implications for providing explanations in many professional contexts. The problem must be presented so as to be recognised as a problem, the cues given must take account of the existing cognitive structure of the explainees, the cues must be highlighted so they can readily be matched and, if possible, there should be a check on whether understanding has occurred.

## TYPES OF EXPLAINING

The literature abounds with typologies of explanations (see Brown, 2006). A robust and simple typology consists of: *interpretive*, *descriptive* and *reasongiving* expla-

nations. They approximate to the questions, What?, How? and Why? (although the precise form of words matters less than the intention of the question). They may be supplemented with 'Who?', 'When?' and 'Where?'. Together these questions provide a framework for many explanations.

*Interpretive explanations* address the question, 'What?'. They interpret or clarify an issue or specify the central meaning of a term or statement. Examples are answers to the questions: What is 'added value?', What is a novel?, What does 'impact' mean in physics?, What does it mean in management?

*Descriptive explanations* address the question, 'How?' These explanations describe processes, structure and procedures such as: How do cats differ anatomically from dogs? They include procedural explanations such as: How do you prepare a lecture?, How should a chairperson lead a meeting?, How do you measure impact?, How do you bake a Christmas cake?.

*Reason-giving explanations* address the question 'Why?' They involve reasons based on principles or generalisations, motives, obligations or values. Included in reason-giving explanations are those based on causes. Examples of reason-giving explanations are answers to such questions as: Why are there no polar bears at the South Pole?, Why did this fuse blow?, Why do heavy smokers run the risk of getting cancer?, Why are some people cleverer than others?, Why should I keep to deadlines?, Why is Shakespeare a greater writer than J. K. Rowling?, Why am I reading this chapter?.

Of course, a particular explanation may involve all three types of explanation. Thus, in explaining how a bill becomes a law one may want to describe the process, give reasons for the law, define certain key terms and consider its implications for legal practice.

## The functions of explaining

As indicated, the primary function of giving an explanation is to give understanding to others but in giving understanding, one can also fulfil a wide range of other functions. These include ensuring learning, clarifying ambiguities, reducing anxiety, changing attitudes and behaviour, enablement, personal autonomy and, last but not least, improving one's own understanding. These functions imply that explaining and understanding are not merely cognitive activities but also involve a gamut of motivations, emotions and conation. Clearly one needs to take account of the specific function of an explanation when considering the tasks and processes of explaining.

## THE TASKS AND PROCESSES OF EXPLAINING

Explaining may be conceived as an interaction of the explainer, the problem to be explained and the explainees. The explainer needs to take account of the problem *and* the knowledge, attitudes and other characteristics of the explainees and to use appropriate approaches in the process of explaining. To assist in this process, it can be helpful to follow the sequence of defining the problem, deciding on the process, and clarifying and estimating the outcomes.

## The problem to be explained and the problem of explainees

First, the explainer has to identify and specify the problem that requires explanation. The problem may be posed initially by the explainer or by the explainee. The problem presented by a client may require clarification and refinement. It is well known by medical and legal practitioners that the problem presented by a patient or client is not necessarily *the* problem. One has to diagnose and communicate clearly the problem in a way that is acceptable to the client. Herein lies a difficulty of ownership. If a patient does not perceive the problem as his or her own, then the proposed solution may not be accepted and acted upon. Even if the problem is accepted, the solution proffered may not be acceptable. More subtly, the solution may be accepted but not acted upon. This observation is relevant to research using the health belief model. Changes in beliefs do not necessarily lead to changes in behaviour (Janz & Becker, 1984; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Sharma, 2017). In teaching and management, a similar difficulty may arise. If pupils, students or employees do not perceive the problem presented as one worthy of solution then they may reject it and the process of acquiring the solution. Rhetoric, persuasion, principles of pedagogy and power all have a part to play in the acceptance of a problem, its solution and implementation.

But it is not enough to merely identify the problem. To be a skilled explainer, one has also to take account of the explainees, their social and cultural backgrounds, motivations, linguistic ability and previous knowledge and plan accordingly before embarking upon an explanation. An important point here is empathy. To be a good explainer, one needs to empathise with the explainees, to see the world through their eyes and relate one's explanation to their experiences. But empathy *per se* is not enough. As an explainer, one has to decide on one's goals *in relation to the explainees*, identify appropriate content, highlight and lowlight the content appropriately and select appropriate methods and resources to achieve the goals. Once the problem and its possible solution(s) have been identified, the problem might helpfully be expressed in the form of a central question and that question may be then sub-divided into a series of implicit questions or hidden variables. Thus the explanation of how local anaesthetics work contains the implicit questions 'What is a local anaesthetic?' and 'How are nerve impulses transmitted?'. These implicit questions or hidden issues can then provide the structure of an explanation.

## The process of explaining

The task of the explainer is to state the problem to be explained and present or elicit a series of linked statements, each of which is understood by the explainee and which together lead to a solution of the problem. These linked statements may be labelled 'keys' since they unlock understanding. Each of these keys will contain a key statement. A key statement may be a procedure, a generalisation, a principle, or even an appeal to an ideology or a set of personal values. The key may contain examples, illustrations, metaphors and perhaps qualifications to the main principle. When the problem to be explained is complex there might also be a summary of key statements during the explanation as well as a final summary.



The keys are the nub of explaining. But, as emphasised earlier, for an explanation to be understood, the explainer has not only to consider the problem to be explained but also the characteristics of the explainees. What is appropriate as an explanation of the structure of DNA to postgraduate biochemists is unlikely to be appropriate as an explanation to eleven-year-olds. There is no such thing as *the* good explanation. What is 'good' for one group may not be good for another. Its quality is contingent upon the degree of understanding it generates in the explainees. For different groups of explainees, the keys of the explanation and the explanation itself will be different, although the *use* of keys and other strategies remains consistent.

The essence of the process of explaining is that its goal, understanding, is a function of the existing cognitive structure of the explainee as well as of the new information being provided: hence the importance of similes, analogies and metaphors. These devices may, as understanding grows, be seen as crude, perhaps even as false, explanations. Hooks and ball may be a very crude analogy for explaining atoms and molecules but they may be a useful starting point for explaining molecular structure to young children. 'Rotting garden posts' may be an inadequate metaphor for describing the roots of a patient's teeth but the metaphor might be a useful device for justifying extraction.

The process of explaining is not only concerned with identifying problems and proffering solutions. Sometimes the task of the explainer is to explain the problem and sometimes to explain the connection between the problem and the solutions. A problem, such as the relationship between truth and meaning may not have any solution or it may have several unsatisfactory solutions but at least the problem may be understood. This point is emphasised since much of high-level teaching and counselling is concerned not with explaining *the* solutions of problems but with explaining the nature of a problem, exploring the *possible* solutions and judging their relative merits.

## The outcomes

As with all forms of communication, feedback is a key part of the process (see Chapter 2). The outcome hoped for when explaining is that explainees understand the explanation. In terms of feedback, this may be checked by on-the-spot invitations to explainees to *recall* or *apply* the explanation, or to give other examples of where the explanation might hold, or by some more formal type of assessment (Brown et al., 2014). When seeking feedback it is best to avoid the question 'Do you understand?'. The answer 'Yes' may be more a measure of superficial compliance than understanding. Professions may have more distal outcomes, such as medical compliance or educational achievements, but these cannot solely be attributed to understanding.

## Summary

To sum up, explaining is an attempt to give understanding to another. It involves identifying the problem to be explained, a process of explaining that uses key statements and a check on understanding. However, it would be wrong to leave the nature of explaining without pointing out that explaining is only *usually* an intentional activity. One may intend to explain a particular problem but one may explain points that one

did not intend to explain and alas, one may sometimes not explain what one intended to explain.

## PERSPECTIVES ON EXPLAINING AND UNDERSTANDING

The nature of explanations have a long history. An important example is Aristotle's notions of *ethos* (personality and stance), *pathos* (emotional engagement) and *logos* (modelling and judging argument). These laid the foundations of persuasive explanation and argument in speech and written texts and are still referred to today (e.g. Cockcroft et al., 2014). Another is Locke's relevant advice from the 17th century

Confound not his understanding with explications or notions that are above it, or with the variety or number of things that are not to his present purpose. Mark what 'tis his mind aims at in the question and not words he expresses it in; and when you have informed and satisfied him in that you shall see how his thoughts will enlarge themselves, and how by fit answers he may be led on farther than perhaps you could imagine.

(John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 1693)

Galileo's famous dictum 'Measure that which is measurable and make measurable that which is not' is at the heart of scientific approaches to communication in medicine and education. But it is also worth bearing in mind the aphorism attributed to Einstein:

'Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts.'

### The covering law model

At the core of most explanations is the triadic principle derived from Aristotle's syllogistic method and strongly advocated by Hempel (1942). There must be:

- 1 A generalisation or universal law which may be already known, proposed or assumed
- 2 An evidential statement or observation that the situation being considered is an instance of that generalisation
- 3 A conclusion.

Procedural explanations do not easily fit the covering law model but there should be an explanation based upon the covering law model that justifies the procedure. If there is not, the procedure is likely to be faulty. Put in different terms, a good practice is always underpinned by a good theory, even if the practitioner is unaware of the theory.

The covering law model is used for scientific explanations based on strong scientific laws or in a weaker form for highly probabilistic explanations or for generalisations believed by an individual or group. Values, obligations, ideologies or beliefs might form the first statement of an explanation. Kruglanski (1988) pointed out that at some point individuals stop generating hypotheses and attain closure on a belief. This 'frozen' belief becomes the covering law which they use to explain behaviour.

Many of the logical errors in explanations can be identified by recasting the explanation in the covering law form and examining the links between the three statements. The generalisation may not hold, the instance may not be an instance of the generalisation, and the conclusion not validly drawn from the principle and instance. More subtly, the instance may fit more appropriately into another generalisation. To complicate matters further, an explanation may be incorrect yet believed or correct and not believed. Examples of both complications abound in the history of medicine, science and in history itself.

One should be wary of over-extending the first statement of the model lest the explanation becomes vacuous. Appeals to universals such as ‘God’s will’ or the ‘misfiring of neurones’ do not pick out *the* reasons for a specific action or event. Sometimes, one needs to use a counter-factual model (Roese and Olsen, 2014), to identify the regulatory principle that has the most explanatory potency. Even if the covering law holds, there is the question whether the explanation provided would be better if it had been derived from a different principle and evidential statement and the further question whether the explainer was deliberately attempting to give a false explanation.

There are further difficulties here. Even if an explanation is valid, or believed to be valid, there remains the question of whether it is understood. Now clearly it is possible for a scientist or scholar to give an explanation that is not understood in his or her own time, or as was more frequently the case, the explanation may have been understood but rejected by his or her peers. However even in such extreme cases one can assume that the scientists or scholars intended to give understanding to their audience. But is intention enough? On this issue there are various views.

On the one hand, explaining may be seen as a task word such as hunting or fishing; on the other hand, it may be seen as an achievement word such as killing or catching (Ryle, 2000). If explaining is regarded as an achievement word, then the outcome of the explanation takes primacy. As Thyne (1963, p. 126) argued:

If the teacher really has explained something to his class, they will understand it, and if they do not understand it, despite his efforts, what purported to be an explanation was not an explanation after all.

Our own view is that the intentional position is too weak and the outcome position too strong. We suggest there is usually an intention to explain, an attempt to explain and a check on understanding. We recognise that some outcomes may not be attained or attainable, and some explanations, not intended, can deepen understanding. A person may carry away from an explanation much more than the intentions of the explainer.

## EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELD

Most of the research on explaining and other interpersonal skills in the UK was carried out in the latter part of the 20th century at Ulster (e.g. Brown, 1978; Hargie, Dickson and Saunders, 1994), Nottingham and Exeter (e.g. Brown and Atkins, 1986; Wragg and Brown, 2006). Since then there have been changes in research interests and the environments in which professionals work. However, the research is still relevant until proved otherwise.

Some of the evidence from the field tends to be expertise-based rather than experimental-based. Whilst it is easy to disparage craft knowledge, its ‘practical’ wisdom in a profession might be more influential than the research findings *per se*. Indeed, unless the research findings are integrated into the craft knowledge of a profession, they are unlikely to have much effect on practice.

In this section of the chapter evidence is provided from several professions. Readers may be tempted to read only the sections related to their own professions, but there is much to be gained from exploring findings in other professions, matching these against one’s own professional experience and considering whether the findings provide a springboard for similar explorations in one’s own profession. As Gage et al. (1968, p. 3) wryly observed:

Some people explain aptly, getting to the heart of the matter with just the right terminology, examples, and organisation of ideas. Other explainers, on the contrary, get us and themselves all mixed up, use terms beyond our level of comprehension, draw inept analogies, and even employ concepts and principles that cannot be understood without an understanding of the very thing being explained.

Their observation is apposite to explaining in other professional contexts and in everyday conversations.

## EXPLAINING IN THE CLASSROOM

Explaining is a skill of teachers that is highly regarded by students, young and old. The foremost reasons given by pupils for liking a teacher are helpfulness, fairness and clear explanations in lessons and of assignments (Wragg and Brown, 2006). Ten years later, similar findings were obtained in a survey of 11,000 schoolgirls in the UK (GDST, 2016). The main characteristics of effective explaining, are summarised in Figure 6.1. These characteristics are based on reviews and research by Brown and Hatton (1983), Wragg and Brown (2006) and Rosenshine (2010, 2012). Additional suggestions on explaining are given in the section on higher education.

### Preparation and planning

The maxim ‘*Know your subject, know your students*’ appears to be borne out by the evidence from research on teaching. Carter (1990) observed that novices tended to jump in without giving adequate thought to planning whereas more expert teachers had developed and used tacit knowledge of pupils, organisational knowledge and broader cognitive schemata. Brown and Armstrong (1984) showed that clarity of explanations in classrooms was based on competent planning and preparation and that student teachers trained in methods of preparing, analysing and presenting explanations were significantly better than a comparable untrained group.

It is worth noting that knowledge of subject is a necessary but not sufficient condition of effective explaining, in that some people are knowledgeable about their

**Planning strategies**

**Establish what you want the students to learn**

- Analyse topics into main parts, or 'keys'
- Establish links between parts
- Determine rules (if any) involved
- Specify kinds of explanation required
- Adapt plan according to learner characteristics

**Key features**

**Clarity and fluency**

- through defining new terms
- through use of explicit language
- through avoiding vagueness

**Emphasis and interest**

- by variations in gestures
- by use of media and material
- by use of voice and pauses
- by repetition, summarising, paraphrasing, or verbal cueing

**Using examples**

- clear, appropriate, and concrete in sufficient quantity
- positive and negative where applicable

**Organisation**

- logical and clear sequence pattern appropriate to task
- use of link words and phrases

**Feedback in lesson**

- questions asked to test understanding of main ideas
- opportunities provided for pupils to ask questions
- exploration of related attitudes, values and assumptions

**Figure 6.1** Planning strategies and performance

subject area but poor explainers (Calderhead, 1996; Hattie, 2003). There is abundant advice on lesson preparation (e.g. Coe et al., 2014; Teacher Tools, 2009).

**Structures**

Research findings have shown that the structure of good explanatory lessons contains more keys (subtopics) and more types of keys that vary the cognitive demands

Low scoring lesson	High scoring lesson
<p><b>Orientation</b></p> <p>Teacher – “I’m going to talk to you about ecological succession. It’s quite simple really. Ecological succession is an important feature of our natural environment.</p> <p>Oh, er perhaps you don’t know what ecology is. Oh dear er, ecology is the study of er interaction of the er symbiotic interaction, well, er its really more the study of the interaction of a-biotic and biotic forces..... It’s not as difficult as it sounds.”</p> <p><b>Keys of Lesson</b></p> <p>In what two ways can we group organisms?</p> <p>Which organisms are consumers?</p> <p>Which organisms are producers?</p> <p>What is it called when we group organisms that depend on each other together?</p> <p>What do we call it when one community takes over from another?</p> <p>How does ecological succession take place on bare rock?</p>	<p><b>Orientation</b></p> <p>Teacher – “Well, first of all I wonder if you could tell me what this is.”</p> <p>Pupil – “A piece of concrete.”</p> <p>Teacher – “Yes, it’s a piece of concrete, a slab of concrete, out of my garden. Now, if I wanted to plant a tree or a shrub on here, what would you say was missing?”</p> <p>Pupil – “Soil.”</p> <p>Teacher – “Yes, the soil. And today I want to start by talking about some plants that can grow straight on to a rock.”</p> <p><b>Keys of lesson</b></p> <p>Which plants can grow straight on to rock?</p> <p>How do mosses replace lichens?</p> <p>What plants replace mosses?</p> <p>What is this process called?</p> <p>What other examples of ecological succession are there?</p>

One suspects the low scoring young teacher learnt more from her first efforts at explaining than her pupils.

**Figure 6.2** Low and high scoring explanatory lesson

on the pupils (Brown and Armstrong, 1984; Odora, 2014). The teachers of high-scoring lessons use simple language and examples to which the pupils can relate. In psychological terms, high-scoring teachers activate and build upon the cognitive schemata of their pupils. The teachers of low-scoring lessons introduce so many ideas in an inappropriate vocabulary that the pupils become confused. Excerpts from a low-scoring and a high-scoring lesson taught by two young teachers to ten-year-olds are given in Figure 6.2. Often one can predict the effectiveness of an explanation from its opening.

## Processes

The key features of effective explanations in the classroom were given in Figure 6.1. In addition, effective explainers use names and labels rather than pronouns, precise pointing at diagrams and naming of parts, simple definitions, simple sentences, emphases of key points, apt examples, guiding images, metaphors, analogies, repetition and paraphrasing of key points and clear transitions from one subtopic (key) to the next. Excessive use of pronouns is particularly confusing (Land, 1985). Studies of expres-

siveness show that purposeful variations in voice, gesture, eye contact, manner and the skilful use of well-designed teaching aids all contribute to the interest and effectiveness of an explanation (Brophy, 2002; Hargie, 2017). The pattern of examples should be associated with the pupils' prior knowledge. The pattern, not the frequency, of examples, shapes the effectiveness of an explanation. For teaching an unfamiliar topic, the sequence *examples–principles* is more effective in generating new connections, and for restructuring pupils' ideas, the sequence *principles–examples* is preferable; the principles should be educed or stated and positive and negative examples provided (Brown & Armstrong, 1984; Rowan, 2003a, 2003b).

Two paradoxical findings are concerned with fluency and pauses. Fluency is not necessarily related to good explaining but dysfluencies such as speaking rapidly, frequent asides, stumbles and hesitations are. While repeated pauses can be distracting, the judicious use of pauses, such as before or after an important point, can strengthen an explanation (Rosenshine and Furst, 1971). Likewise, expressiveness or enthusiasm *per se* are not necessarily a feature of effective explaining. If the teacher is wildly enthusiastic it may be fun to watch but unless the expressiveness generates the interest of students in the topic it has not fulfilled its function in explaining.

## Feedback and checking understanding

Three common forms of feedback, which provide checks on understanding, are the responses of pupils or students in class, and their performance in assignments and on standardised assessment tests (SATs). The success of the former depends upon the mode of eliciting feedback. Inviting questions, in a friendly way and asking recall or application questions are more likely to be effective (Wragg, 1993) (see Chapter 4 for further discussion of the skill of questioning). SATS and assignments provide distal evidence of understanding but there are many other factors that influence pupil achievements. One should note that not all teachers, or other professionals, are good at checking or estimating understanding (Dillon, 1990).

## Summary

Studies of explaining in the classroom indicate that clarity and interest are crucial but complex variables. These variables are valued by pupils and are associated with better achievement. Preparation and planning are important aspects of training, and using feedback to check understanding is an important, but relatively neglected, feature of explaining in the classroom.

## EXPLAINING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Most studies of explaining in higher education have focused upon the lecture, although explaining also occurs in small group teaching, laboratory work and clinical practice. Lectures may be considered to be sets of linked explanations, so many of the findings on lectures are relevant to explanations in other teaching contexts. Lectures and the

explanations they contain can generate understanding and interest. But they can be boring and, worse, useless.

Live lectures and explanations have a further disadvantage; like other live performances, they are ephemeral. This has led some writers to criticise lectures on the grounds that students do not have sufficient time to process the information provided compared with reading texts (Schmidt et al., 2015). However, this is not so much a criticism of the structure of lectures as a comment on the transient nature of live lectures. Online and video-recorded lectures provide opportunities for students to playback and review sections of the lecture. But if the lecture is badly structured and presented there will still be problems of understanding. Other criticisms of lectures are that they are a passive mode of learning and an authoritarian method of teaching. But passivity and authoritarianism are not necessary features of the lecturing method so much as how that method is used. Despite these criticisms, lectures can be at least as effective at conveying information as other methods of teaching (Adams et al., 2017; Bligh, 2002; Brown & Manogue, 2001). As Spence (1928, p. 61) observed in an early study of the field, ‘the decrying of wholesale lecturing is certainly justified. The wholesale decrying of lectures is just as certainly not justified’.

## **Views of students and lecturers**

Structure, clarity of presentation, and interest are valued by students (Dunkin, 1986; Light, 2001; Murray et al., 1990). The main dissatisfactions of students with lecturers appear to be inaudibility, incoherence, inability to pitch at an appropriate level, failure to emphasise main points, difficult to take notes from, poor audio-visuals and reading aloud from notes (Brown & Manogue, 2001).

## **Planning and preparation**

These areas of research remain neglected, but Bligh (2002) and Brown and Manogue (2001) provide a description of ways of structuring lectures and outline a method of preparation that new lecturers found helpful (see Figure 6.3). Brown (1982) and Pendlebury and Brown (1997) reported studies that demonstrated video-training of new lecturers improved their explanations.

## **Structures and processes**

Lecturers report that their most common method of organising lectures is the classical approach of subdividing topics and then subdividing subtopics (Brown & Bakhtar, 1988; Brown & Manogue, 2001). Structuring moves that yielded high ratings of clarity are shown in Figure 6.4.

Another key feature of effective lecturing and explaining is generating interest. The findings here follow a similar pattern to those in schools. The key to generating interest is expressiveness supported by the use of examples, a narrative mode of explaining and the stimulation of curiosity. This approach can raise levels of arousal



1. Choose topic

- It may have been given to you or is embedded in the learning outcomes of the module.

2. Free associate

- Write down whatever comes to you about the topic – facts, ideas, questions. Ring the things you are going to use.

3. Produce a working title

- Base this on the items you have ringed. Use the title to specify the objectives (outcomes) and structure of the lecture.

4. Set out a structure of the lecture

- Produce a rough structure of the lecture.

5. Read

- Read for specific ideas and facts. Do not read too much. Reading can become a delaying tactic for the serious business of preparing the actual lecture.

6. Setting out the lecture

- Set out the lecture, any media and any student activities. Prepare a summary sheet of the lecture. Check the order of subtopics is OK. If not, change it.

7. Prepare the opening

- Think of a good way of opening the lecture which will gain interest and provide the framework of the lecture.

8. Give the lecture

- Rehearse it privately if you are worried about it. About 40 minutes in private is about 50 in the lecture theatre.

9. Reflect and note

- Make a note of any corrections you need to make – particularly if it is the first time you have given this lecture.
- *A key point is to write the lecture as you would speak it not speak the lecture as you would write an article.*

**Figure 6.3** How to prepare a lecture

and attention and thereby increase the probability of learning and understanding (Brown & Atkins, 2002).

Expressiveness includes enthusiasm, friendliness, humour, dynamism of speech and gesture. However, expressiveness is only a mediating variable for sustaining attention and generating interest. So too does the judicious use of technological aids. Here the advice proffered by Hargie (2017) is not to use too many Power Point slides or excessive information on a slide, and to resist the temptation for spectacular slide shows. The slide show may be interesting to watch but its content is less likely to be remembered.

Persuasive explaining may also have a part to play in motivating. Some people may object to the use of persuasion but the order and quality of presentations always have an influence upon an audience, so one should be aware of the processes and use them to good effect (see Chapter 11 for a discussion of influencing and persuasion). Metaphors and analogies are particularly useful when explaining unfamiliar topics or

**1. Signposts:**

*These are statements which indicate the structure and direction of an explanation:*

- (a) 'I want to deal briefly with lactation. First, I want to outline the composition of milk; second, its synthesis; third, to examine normal lactation curves.'
- (b) 'Most of you have heard the old wives' tale that eating carrots helps you to see in the dark. Is it true? Let's have a look at the basic biochemical processes involved.'

**2. Frames:**

*These are statements which indicate the beginning and end of the subtopic:*

- (a) 'So that ends my discussion of adrenaline. Let's look now at the role of glycogen.'

Framing statements are particularly important in complex explanations which may involve topics, subtopics, and even subtopics of subtopics.

**3. Foci:**

*These are statements and emphases which highlight the key points of an explanation:*

- (a) 'So the main point is . . .'
- (b) 'Now this is very important . . .'
- (c) 'But be careful. This interaction with penicillin occurs only while the cell walls are growing.'

**4. Links:**

*These are words, phrases, or statements which link one part of an explanation to another part, and to the explainees' experience:*

- (a) 'So you can see that reduction in blood sugar levels is detected indirectly in the adrenaline gland and directly in the pancreas. This leads to the release of two different hormones.'

**Figure 6.4** Effective structuring moves in explaining

ideas (Atkinson, 1994; Cockcroft et al., 2014). Figure 6.5 highlights some of the basic principles of persuasive explaining.

## Checks on understanding and feedback from students

A disadvantage of lectures is they do not provide any immediate checks on understanding, hence some writers advocate the use of activities during lectures (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Brown & Atkins, 2002). If these are not used, then observation of nonverbal reactions of the students can provide a clue. Subsequent assignments and tests provide measures of achievement but it is difficult to separate the various effects of student variables, such as study time, availability of resources, prior knowledge and motivation (Berk, 2018).

Svinicki and McKeachie (2012) reported that students' evaluation of teaching (SETs) improved teaching when the ratings were in the middle range and when the lecturers wanted to improve their teaching. Blackburn and Brown (2005) identified four clusters of lecturers in physiotherapy who held differing views on the value of feedback from SETs: *Strong positives* who used the ratings to make changes; *thinkers* who reflected and took into account student evaluations when considering change;

1. Know your audience and decide what kinds of arguments may be appealing and interesting.
2. People are more likely to listen to you and accept your suggestions if you are perceived as credible, and trustworthy and have expertise.
3. When there are arguments in favour and against your proposal, it is usually better to present both sides (especially with an intelligent audience).
4. If you have to stress risks in what you are proposing, do not overdo the arousal of fear.
5. Say what experts or expert groups do when faced with the problem you are discussing.
6. If the problem is complex for the group, draw the conclusions or give them time for discussion. If it is not too complex, let the group members draw their own conclusions.
7. If the suggestions you are making are likely to be challenged by others, describe their views in advance and present your counter-arguments.
8. If you are dealing with a cherished belief, don't dismiss it as an old wives' tale. Instead, say, 'People used to think that . . . but now we know . . .'
9. If the task you are asking a group to perform is highly complex, prepare them for the possibility of failure. Never say a task is easy; rather, say it may not be easy at first.
10. If a task is threatening, admit it and describe how people might feel and what they can do to reduce their anxiety.

**Figure 6.5** The art of persuasive explanation

*negatives* who rejected SETs; and *non-discriminators* who were uncertain. It should be noted that the most reliable and valid ratings of teacher performance were those based on global judgements not detailed specific items (d'Appolonia & Abrami, 1997).

## Summary

Studies of explaining in higher education have been confined largely to the lecture method. Students value clear, well-structured and interesting explanations. Training in explaining can improve the clarity, structure and interest of explanations. Explanations with these characteristics also yield higher measures of recall and understanding. Feedback to lecturers can improve their performance providing that the evaluation forms are well designed and the lecturers wish to change.

## EXPLAINING IN THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS

It is sometimes forgotten that today's health professionals spend much of their time talking to managers or other health professionals or teaching students. Much of the research reported in this book, including this chapter, are relevant to these tasks.

However, in this section we focus upon the specific task of talking with patients. Much of the early research in this area focussed upon the medical consultation rather than the communication to patients by other health professionals.

## **Explaining in the medical consultation**

Given that most doctors give about 200,000 consultations in a lifetime (Pendleton et al., 2004) it is clear that explaining and questioning are important skills for doctors, and patients. However, most studies of the doctor–patient consultation do not isolate the skill of explaining from the other skills involved in the consultation. An exception is Silverman et al. (2013). But it is possible to identify features of the research on doctor–patient interactions that are relevant, if not crucial, to the processes of explaining.

### **Views and beliefs**

Patients want their doctors to be knowledgeable, trustworthy, interested in them as persons and able to explain in terms which they understand (Hall & Dornan, 1988; Levinson et al., 1993; Bensing et al., 2013). As Robinson (1995, p. 12) argues:

‘the most important predictor of a positive outcome is that the doctor offers information and advice which fits easily in to the patient’s pre-consultation framework’.

This suggestion is of particular importance when a doctor is working with patients from relatively unfamiliar cultures or subcultures who may have different belief systems (Ferguson & Candib, 2002; Padela & del Pozo, 2011). However one should be wary of over-generalising on the basis of cultural stereotypes.

Doctors too have their own explanatory frameworks and health beliefs, which are culturally bound and influenced by the scientific and organic-based culture of their medical education (Brown et al., 2003).

### **Preparation and planning**

Courses that prepare medical students and staff have improved since Hargie’s original survey (Hargie et al., 1998) but there is still room for improvement (McDonald, 2016). One suspects that part of the resistance from practitioners is the ‘frozen belief’ (Kruglanski, 1989) that communication skills cannot be taught but there is plenty of evidence to the contrary (e.g. Maguire & Pitceathly, 2002; Hargie et al., 2010; Silverman et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2017).

### **Structures and processes**

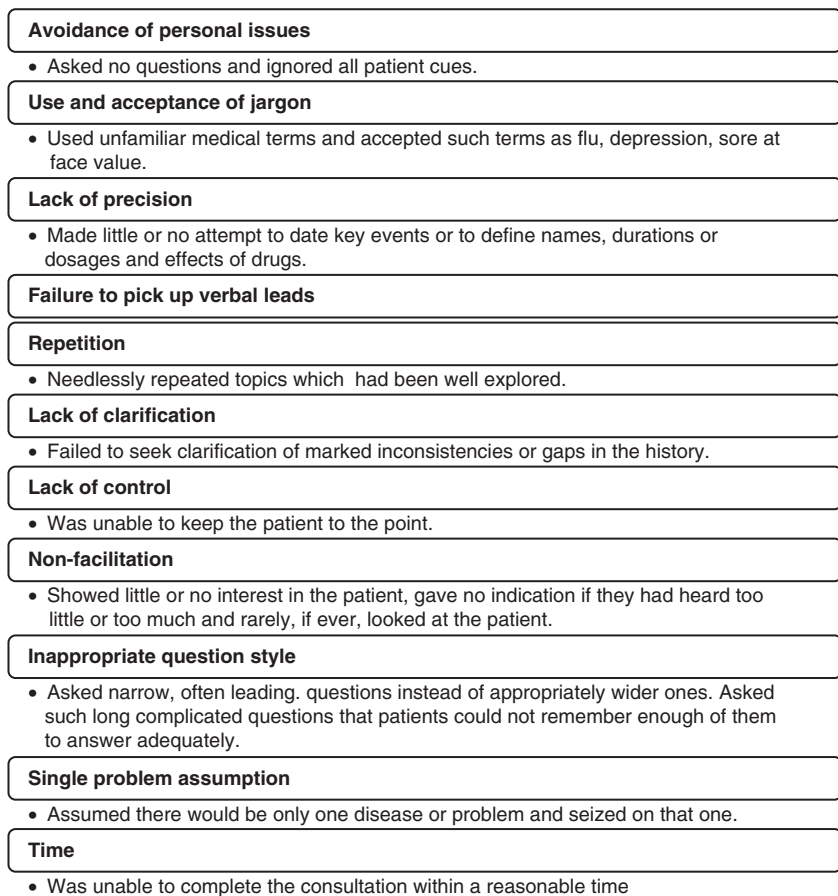
The structures and processes of the consultation have been framed in different formats (see Skills Cascade.com). Bensing et al. (2013) point to two major functions of the

consultation: information-giving and building a relationship. They revealed differences in the evidence obtained from quantitative and qualitative research and it led them to offer this advice:

Listen to the patients. They will tell you what they want and need is a message for researchers as much as it was and is for doctors and trainers.

(p. 290)

Clear explanations and a friendly approach have consistently been shown to be important determinants of patient recall and satisfaction (Harrigan et al., 1985; Deleda et al., 2013), as are the use of checks on understanding (Ley & Llewelyn, 1995; Kinnersley et al., 1999). These take account of a patient's beliefs, concepts and linguistic register.



**Figure 6.6** Common GP weaknesses in the consultation (based on Maguire, 2000)

One way of improving the consultation is to eliminate its deficiencies. Figure 6.6 summarises the main weaknesses identified in research on consultations (Maguire 1985, 2000; Maguire & Pitceathly, 2002).

Another way is to observe video-recordings of one's consultations and perhaps obtain peer ratings and discussion of the recording. A simple, robust schedule for observations is shown in Figure 6.7.

## Outcomes

Assessing explaining and other communication skills in the training of doctors remains a vexing problem. Often a knowledge base of explaining or other communication skills is relied upon for assessment followed by assessment of portfolios or log

### ORDERED

4 = Very good 3 = Good 2 = Satisfactory 1 = Inadequate 0 = Not present

Note: Very good does *not* mean perfect.

The categories are more important than the ratings

Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcoming into the surgery.</li> <li>• Mutual introduction.</li> </ul>	4	3	2	1	0
Rapport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forming a social link between patient and doctor, enabling fruitful communication.</li> </ul>	4	3	2	1	0
Diagnosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questioning, listening, watching and leading the patient where necessary to disclose the patient's real problem or worry, including the unstated ones (hidden agenda).</li> </ul>	4	3	2	1	0
Explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussing the problem and implications with the patient clearly, using suitable vocabulary.</li> </ul>	4	3	2	1	0
Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The recognition and follow-up of verbal and non-verbal cues given by the patient when proposing, negotiating and carrying out treatment</li> </ul>	4	3	2	1	0
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inserting into the consultation a health promotion message with encouragement of self-care.</li> </ul>	4	3	2	1	0
Dismissal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear and mutually acceptable termination to the consultation containing a definite indication of continuing care.</li> </ul>	4	3	2	1	0
Global impression		4	3	2	1	0

**Figure 6.7** The well ordered consultation

books. Neither of these directly assess skill performance but they are often preferred because they are apparently more reliable than direct observation of practical skills such as DOPS (Direct Observation of Practical skills) (Norcini & Birch, 2007) or CEPS (Clinical Examination and Procedure Skills) (RCGP, 2017). However, one might argue that sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice some reliability for increased validity.

A common measure of outcomes is surveys of patient satisfaction. For example, the General Practitioner National Survey (2016) in England reported high levels of satisfaction with doctors, including in relation to explanations of treatment. However voluntary postal surveys are a crude measure of patient recall, understanding, better compliance and better health outcomes. The evidence for these is mixed (Ley & Llewellyn 1995; Stewart, 1995; Mead & Bower, 2002; Silverman, Kurtz & Draper, 2013).

For many medical practitioners the most powerful test of a consultation is the compliance of the patients. However, non-compliance cannot be solely attributed to inadequate information-gathering or explaining by a doctor. The better predictors include patients' attitudes, health beliefs and intentions to comply (Butler et al., 1996). Compliance is likely to be influenced by earlier experiences of compliance and non-compliance and the perceived cost/benefits of complying/non complying

Most studies have focused upon the skills of doctors rather than the patients. However, the effectiveness of a consultation depends also on the patient's ability and willingness to explain. Evidence from discourse analyses has shown there may be disjunctions in intentions, meanings and belief systems of patients and doctors (Greenhalgh & Hurwitz, 1998; Herxheimer et al., 2000). Other studies have demonstrated that patients, like doctors, can be trained to provide better explanations and that such training improves both doctor and patient satisfaction with the consultation (Kaplan et al., 1996).

A summary of processes and likely outcomes are provided in Figure 6.8.

## Summary

Studies of the medical consultation indicate that patients value warmth, care, concern and the ability to explain clearly. Patient recall and understanding is enhanced when doctors provide simple, clear and well-structured explanations. Improved recall and understanding lead to higher patient satisfaction, which may lead to higher patient compliance and contribute to health improvement.

Doctor	Patient	Outcome
Friendly, attentive, creates partnership with patient, encourages, is supportive, explains clearly	Tells own story clearly, is encouraged to ask questions, develops treatment with doctor, and takes responsibility for own health tasks	Increases probability of positive health outcome
Cold, distant, non-attentive, frequently interrupts patient, has quick-fire questions, gives several instructions, offers several pieces of advice	Passive, does not ask questions, unduly deferential, superficially agrees to comply	Decreases probability of positive health outcome

**Figure 6.8** Health improvement: processes and outcomes

## EXPLAINING IN OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Subjects allied to medicine, not surprisingly, have also been concerned with standards of communication, training in communication and, to a lesser extent, with research on communication. Their work merits at least a separate chapter (see Dickson et al., 1997; Thompson et al., 2011; Moss, 2015). Here we only provide an indication of some of the main publications and findings.

All health professions in the UK and other major countries issue statements of expected standards of care and these may be found on their websites (e.g. General Dental Council, 2014; Nursing and Midwives Council, 2015). Often these directives are expressed in imperatives, 'shoulds' or 'musts', with little indication of their rationale or how these might be implemented by health organisations or individuals. Training and continuing professional development is provided by the major professions although its quality may be variable (Dickson et al., 1997). Denniston et al. (2017) provide a set of learning outcomes derived from a systematic literature review of communication skills across the health professions. Assessment of explaining and other communication skills, as in medicine, seem to rely upon assessing the knowledge base and portfolios although the use of direct observation of practical skills in health specialities is increasing.

Ayn et al. (2017) have reviewed ways of improving dental communication, while the Dental Defence Union (2014) provide research-based advice on communication, which emphasises the importance of using language that the patient can understand, and checking for understanding. Likewise, research in nursing underlines the importance of communication with patient and relatives (Kourkouta & Papathanasiou, 2014; Feo et al., 2017). In the field of physiotherapy, there is evidence that effective communication has a range of benefits for patients (e.g. Amoudi et al., 2017). Likewise, Hargie et al. (2000), from Ulster University, found that explaining and rapport are at the heart of pharmacy counselling of clients. Much of the early work on communication skills in the health professions in the UK was developed by the research team at Ulster University; a summary of some examples of this research is given in the following paragraph.

Hargie and Morrow (1986) conducted a survey of all UK schools of pharmacy. Only four out of fifteen provided more than twenty hours training in communication skills. Subsequently they carried out an empirical study based on video-recordings of actual pharmacist-patient interactions. (Hargie et al., 2000); explaining, and building rapport, were found to be the most important skills. Dickson and Maxwell (1985) analysed the key communication skills required by physiotherapists and found that this included effectively explaining treatment procedures and their rationale. Hargie et al. (1994) developed a paradigm for communication training in radiography that included explaining and providing reassurance. Saunders and Caves (1986) conducted a study of communication skills in speech therapy and again found explaining to be a core skill. Crute et al. (1989) and Gallagher and Hargie (1989) provided evidence on training in explaining and other skills for health visitors and counsellors, respectively. Dickson et al. (1997) published a text on communication skills training for the health professions that includes a section on the importance of explaining. This work clearly shows that explaining has a central part to play in many health professions. As an aside, the



researchers in the School of Communication at Ulster also conducted research on communication in management (e.g. Hargie et al., 2004).

A lacuna in the research is the match between what practitioners do in their professional habitats and what is advocated by their professional organisations. This gap is partly due to currently stringent protocols of acceptable research contexts. Early research in nursing (Macleod-Clarke, 1985) reported that nurses usually only talk to patients when performing some aspect of physical care and they avoided providing explanations on treatment or care. Nowadays, it is likely, but not yet proven, that nurses are more likely to interact with their computers than their patients. Rigorous qualitative studies such as McCabe (2004) revealed the importance of patient-centred approaches, empathic explanations, continuity of care and timely reassurances. It remains to be seen whether current regimes in UK hospitals have improved explanations between health professionals and patients.

## **EXPLAINING THE LAW**

A substantial part of the work of solicitors and barristers is concerned with explaining orally or in writing to lay or professional clients, colleagues or opposing lawyers, lay or expert witnesses and members of the judiciary. Interviewing, advocacy, drafting a case and opinion writing all involve the tasks of identifying the problem to be explained, taking account of the explainee's prior knowledge and providing clear, persuasive explanations.

The assessment of these capabilities is the subject of controversy within the legal profession and it is intimately connected with the issue of appropriate curriculum for undergraduate and continuing professional development. The Solicitors Regulations Authority are developing a national examination that will include some assessment of oral communication (Fry & Wakeford, 2017). The proposal has met with opposition from practitioners in England and Wales since 2011 (e.g. Fletcher, 2016; City of London Law Society, 2016). However, Sylvester (2015, p. 256) cogently argued that rather than a national examination,

multiple assessment points need to be embedded within the training process. The one-off assessment, no matter how objective or standardised, does not ensure reliability. These principles will require a more holistic approach to assessment which is hard to reconcile with any move towards a single gatekeeping assessment for legal practice.

This opposition is not surprising since many practising lawyers had little experience of doing practical work on explaining, or other communication skills in their professional courses, other than occasional 'Moots' (role-play of court procedures). The emphasis in courses tended to be on 'black letter' or doctrinal law. Communication to clients was neglected. This view appears to have been transmitted to undergraduates. Bone (2009) reported that out of 1428 responses in a survey of law undergraduates, 1156 (81%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement: "Lectures are the most important part of my learning experience at university", 1324 (93%) agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: "Seminars are an effective means of improving my understand-

ing". Significantly, Bone did not ask students' opinions of courses on learning to communicate with clients. In contrast, in Australia, O'Brien and Littrich (2008) found that students valued communication skills assessment tasks and regarded work-placement as one of the most valuable experiences of their course. They would have devoted even more time to these assessment tasks if they had been assessed in the same way as doctrinal subjects.

The neglect of oral communication in legal courses is paralleled by the neglect of research on explaining or other communication skills in law. Solan and Tiersma (2005) report that judges often overestimated what jurors knew and consequently give ill-planned, poor explanations to jurors. The problem is exacerbated when the same words have different meanings to lay people and legal professionals (Baum, 2013; Tiersma, 2006). The language used by lawyers, judges and other court officials and the procedures used to handle evidence influence the outcomes of cases (Brown, 1996; Drew, 1992; Lees, 1997). Communication with victims and witnesses could be clearer, particularly for vulnerable groups (Wood et al., 2015)

Much of this research does not appear to have influenced policy or advice on legal skills training. Instead, the profession continues to draw heavily upon its long history of craft knowledge and expertise-based opinions. The legal landscape may have changed (Dobbs, 2016) but the architecture of its legal education remains much the same.

## **EXPLAINING IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ORGANISATIONS**

All members of the professions are enmeshed in a web of professional and governmental organisations so it is pertinent to consider how organisations manage and might improve communications, including explanations. Successful organisations use internal and external communications effectively (Hargie et al., 2004) and explaining, particularly clear, persuasive explaining, is, arguably, an important feature of organisational effectiveness but it is rarely singled out from other communication skills. However, there are studies of organisational communication that are relevant to explaining and some of these may serve as salutary warnings to the professions and their managers.

Much of organisational communication is often predicated on two assumptions: first, that training is effective, and second, that if only employees understand, they will comply. The assumption that training in explaining is effective does not appear to have been tested in management and, as in the professions, good working conditions are probably as important as training. The assumption that understanding will necessarily lead to compliance is not borne out by the evidence (Thompson & Findlay, 1999; Covey, 2004). This finding is not surprising. Organisations are interdependent hierarchies who do not necessarily share common values and who may resist attempts to change by top managers. (Kotter and Schlesinger, 2008).

Senior managers are often overconfident about their ability to communicate. They neglect the use of the narrative mode (story telling) and expressiveness in their 'inspirational' talks and so do not engage their audiences (McKee, 2003). It has been suggested that higher-power talking strategies, which include persuasion, decisive speaking and clear cut views, are effective in many contexts whereas low-power talking, which has the characteristics of hesitations, uncertainty and qualifying state-

ments, do not (Huczynski, 2004). However, the high-powered talk may lead to superficial compliance rather than understanding and change.

Employees value clear, direct, understood and brief instructional (procedural) explanations from their line managers (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). Surveys of views of employees of potential managers reveal that employees value ‘the ability to explain and present material in a coherent, convincing and stimulating manner’ (Hargie, 2017, p. 205). But research on ‘feedback’ to senior managers suggests that ‘receivers’ are often reluctant to offer feedback because of its futility, the attitudes of managers to their subordinates, the risk of alienating their managers and consequent career costs (Detert & Trevino, 2010; Morrison, 2014). Perhaps this is why vaunted systems such as ‘180-degree Assessment’ and ‘Employee Voice’ often do not work. Silence may be a safer strategy of survival in the corporate world.

The ethos, or subculture, of an organisation influences the willingness of its members to provide information and explanations. Here the time-honoured concept of open and closed climates is relevant (Gibbs, 1961). Characteristics of open climates are empathy, understanding, openness, egalitarianism, respect for persons, trust and honesty. These characteristics promote collaboration and willingness to provide information, ideas and explanations. Closed climates are non-caring, controlling and deceitful; they generate distrust and unwillingness to share intellectual capital – unless such sharing is to the advantage of the communicator. Tactics of obfuscation, vagueness, illogical explanations and language that masks personal meanings can be associated with closed climates. For example, ‘right sizing’ may mean, for employees, ‘redundancy’; ‘new working patterns’ may mean reducing full-time jobs; and ‘flexibility’ might mean ‘management can do what it wants’. These tactics may be unintentional but often are not. Hargie et al. (2004) provide other examples of miscommunications.

Power difference, language usage and cultural diversity affect organisational communication (Hargie et al., 2004; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). The latter is of particular importance in international organisations. The studies by Javidian and House (2001), Minkov and Hofstede (2014), and Skerlavaj et al. (2013) reveal differential effects across countries in power distance (status), uncertainty avoidance, assertiveness, commitment to individualism–collectivism and attitudes to masculinism–femininism. For example, American managers score high on assertiveness and individualism whereas Hong Kong and Taiwanese managers score higher on concerns for status and collectivism, harmony and a preference for avoiding assertive strategies. All of these affect the processes and success of explanations and of understanding between members of different cultures. Of course, it is also important to recognise that within any cultural group there are individual variations that arise out of the micro-contexts of family, school and community.

Although written explanations are not part of the brief of this chapter, it is worth pointing out that there is a hierarchy of communication modes. At the top of the hierarchy are face-to-face communications followed by video-conferencing, telephone conversations, emails and memoranda (Barley et al., 2011). As one descends the hierarchy, clues of meaning, opportunities to clarify understanding or checks on understanding decrease. Different approaches to explaining are required in these modes. For these reasons alone, it is worth considering the use of communication audits (Hargie & Tourish, 2009), which explore the structures and quality of the communication processes in

an organisation. As Hargie et al. (1999, p. 313) point out, independent communication audits provide an 'objective picture of what is happening compared with what senior executives think (or have been told) is happening.' The advice is pertinent to all workplaces and organisations, including yours.

## OVERVIEW

This chapter has provided a conceptual framework for the exploration of explaining, and brought together studies of explaining from a variety of professions. The framework provides a basis for analysing and providing explanations. The evidence indicates that clear explanations are valued by students, patients and clients. They lead to better learning gains, increased patient understanding, satisfaction and probably improved health outcomes. Expressiveness is valued highly in teaching and in consultations. These contribute to learning gains and health outcomes respectively. Studies in law and in the management of organisations provide some further evidence and some cautionary notes on explaining. The evidence indicates that members of professions can be trained to be better explainers but one needs also to take account of the contexts and cultures in which they work. The chapter has not reviewed all aspects of explaining: that would be a lifetime's work. But it has provided a sufficiently robust framework to permit observations and suggestions for further research and development.

The most obvious of these is that there is a gap between the findings of researchers and professional practice. Each profession could, with advantage, examine its own approaches to research and practice. In teaching, one might examine ways in which students could be encouraged to incorporate models of explaining into their own thinking. In medicine and law, studies of language and power might unravel the complexities of explaining and personal meaning. Hypotheses derived from practice wisdom should be investigated. Such studies will probably confirm much of practice wisdom – it would be odd if it did not. The studies might also identify dissonances between official policies, the value system of a profession, its practice wisdom and actual practice.

But perhaps the greatest challenge is strengthening the links between explaining in a professional context and its outcomes. This task will require an exploration of explaining, not merely as a cognitive act, but also as an affective act through which persuasion and influence lead to changes in attitudes, which in their turn may lead to long-term changes in cognition and behaviour. However, the approach and measurement of such outcomes is a vexing problem for all the professions. It is relatively easy to take short-term measures of understanding and satisfaction; it is more difficult to measure whether changes in cognition and attitudes have stabilised. The difficulties are partly technical, ethical and economic. There is no satisfactory answer to this issue. One may simply have to rely upon 'weak' generalisations based on the covering law model, referred to in this chapter, and continue to explore explaining and understanding by a diverse range of methods. Whilst the goal of explaining will always remain understanding, it may be that the goal of the professions is understanding that leads to action. It is hoped that this chapter will assist professionals in this task.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank Madeline Atkins who contributed to the chapter in a previous edition of this Handbook, Gary Dench and Elizabeth Wilkinson for their patience with us as we updated this chapter and Owen Hargie for his encouragement, suggestions and comments.

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**Self-disclosure:  
Strategic revelation of  
information in personal  
and professional  
relationships<sup>1</sup>**

*Charles H. Tardy and Joy Smithson*

**INTRODUCTION**

**S**ELF-DISCLOSURE, THE PROCESS WHEREBY people verbally reveal themselves to others, is integral to human existence. As noted by Rubin, more than 40 years ago: 'In every sort of interpersonal relationship, from business partnerships to love affairs, the exchange of self-disclosure plays an important role' (1973, p. 168). People reveal their wishes, aspirations, and troubles to friends and spouses, physicians and hairdressers, peers and supervisors. Revelation of such mundane matters as the events of the day may be a cherished ritual in a marriage (Sigman, 1991; Vangelisti & Banski, 1993) while people sometimes confide personal problems to complete strangers (Cowen, 1982).

A half-century of research has now demonstrated the pervasiveness and importance of self-disclosure. Thousands of studies have been conducted and hundreds are published every year on the topic. Research has embraced new practices, contexts, and outcomes as well as new methodologies since our review in the previous edition of this text.

The present review again offers a strategic perspective on self-disclosure by highlighting the motivations and means by which people manage the disclosure of information in personal and in work relationships.

We focus on two facets of disclosure in these contexts: self-disclosure in the development of relationships and the factors affecting self-disclosure. We conclude with a description of the role of disclosure in non-relational contexts.

## **SELF-DISCLOSURE IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Self-disclosure is a primary way of increasing intimacy, and is one of the defining characteristics of close relationships (Brehm et al., 2002). It serves important functions in relationship initiation, development, maintenance, and even dissolution (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Derlega et al., 1993). Revealing personal information can help people advance relationships and recover from negative first-impressions (Voncken & Dijk, 2013). We establish common connections, increase affinity, and shape our identities through mutual self-disclosure. Self-disclosure can promote or erode trust, and serve as a vehicle to nurture and enhance established relationships (Terzino & Cross, 2009).

Disclosure introduces risk, particularly when revealing stigmatising information like addiction or significant financial debt (Lieber, 2010). However, concealing information also has interpersonal consequences, such as destroyed trust, and intrapersonal consequences, such as distress due to a divided sense of self (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). Self-disclosure can help partners discover aspects of their relationship that bring satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and often precipitate or follow relationship turning points (e.g. separating or committing; Menegatti & Rubini, 2014; Walters & Burger, 2013). We first discuss current dialectical theories and then examine self-disclosure's role in initiating, maintaining, and dissolving personal relationships.

### **Dialectical theories and self-disclosure**

Social Penetration Theory proposed a gradual, linear, and positive relationship between self-disclosure and relationship progression (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Altman et al., 1981). The Clicking Model contends that relationships may develop quickly, with abundant and broad self-disclosure, if partners experience mutual affection (Derlega et al., 2008). Relational Dialectics Theories articulate a sophisticated and interpretive view that relationships evolve through interaction as partners strive to achieve a shared system of meaning (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008).

Dialectical theories argue that relationships evolve through turning points, or remembered meaningful events that increase or decrease partners' intimacy and mark relationship changes (e.g. having sex for the first time, having a serious argument; Stafford et al., 2006). Partners experience multiple turning points over the course of their relationship and thus cycle through levels of intimacy and self-disclosure (Derlega et al., 2008). These cycles result from natural tensions created during interaction as partners negotiate contradictory goals to achieve shared meaning (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Derlega et al., 2008; Montgomery, 1993; Schank & Abelson, 1977).

Privacy regulation is a strategic response to the dialectical nature of self-disclosure. Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 1991; Petronio, 2002; Petronio & Durham, 2008) seeks to understand how people regulate concealing and revealing, always viewing disclosure in this context (Larson & Chastain, 1990;

Larson et al., 2015; Petronio & Durham, 2008). Privacy management theory argues that we are motivated to keep some information private, and that revealing information introduces risk, due to factors like loss of control of the information or negative evaluations from others. Consequently, we strategically manage risk. Brummett and Steuber (2015), for instance, found that partners waited until particular relationship turning points or milestones were achieved before revealing interracial romantic involvement to others.

The dialectical perspective better reflects how our identities and relationships are shaped through communication as we struggle to achieve shared meaning. Meaning-making is an ongoing process that informs our social reality (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). In other words, negotiating competing dialectics with another through interaction shapes our identity and is the foundation of our relationship with the other (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Baxter & Erbert, 1999).

## **Relationship initiation and development**

Self-disclosure is used to initiate relationships, functioning to promote liking and reduce uncertainty. During the initial phases of a relationship, self-disclosure is typically superficial and narrow in breadth, and the language itself tends to be abstract and positive (Menegatti & Rubini, 2014). Intimate levels of disclosure are less likely in first interactions, reflecting the newness of the relationship. At this stage, self-disclosure provides information that helps partners 'make assessments about the future of a possible relationship, to infer how they feel about one another, and to decide whether or not they want to construct a closer relationship' (Derlega et al., 2008, p. 158).

Whether partners desire future interaction with one another may depend upon self-disclosure being balanced (Sprecher & Treger, 2015). Indeed, Derlega and Berg (1987) state, 'the most consistent and frequently cited finding regarding the interpersonal effects of self-disclosure is disclosure reciprocity' (p. 4). Mutual self-disclosure is associated with feelings of attraction and is 'key in developing rapport in social interaction' (Sprecher & Treger, 2015, p. 472). Reciprocation can signal acceptance, and increase perceptions of being cared for, understood, and validated. Reciprocation need not occur immediately, but may take place over a period of time.

Reciprocation is not a given, however. When interacting with those whom we dislike, we will limit self-disclosure to superficial topics. In this way, we strategically use self-disclosure to regulate our relationships (Derlega et al., 2008). For instance, Miell and Duck (1986) discovered that participants used superficial self-disclosure, appropriate for conversing with strangers, to restrict relationship development. Conversely, intimate self-disclosure, appropriate for conversing with friends, was used to intensify a relationship.

In her study of intercultural friendships, Lee (2006) noted that sharing intimate information with friends was a dominant theme in relationship development. Sharing information for the purposes of seeking support or expressing emotions made friends feel 'more important and more mutually included in each other's life' (Lee, 2006, p. 13). Friends enhanced their feelings of closeness, co-constructed their relational identity, and established implicit rules for the relationship by spending time together. Thus, disclosure enhances intimacy and can be used to build relationships.



Intimacy may be expedited when individuals can present themselves in a particular light. For instance, the absence of nonverbal communication in computer mediated communication (cmc) promotes stereotypically positive and idealised engagement (Jiang et al., 2011; Walther, 1996), sometimes creating unrealistic expectations. Alternatively, cmc helps people experience intimacy in a less threatening context. CMC is particularly appealing to individuals who are shy (Brunet & Schmidt, 2007). For instance, individuals with anxiety report using cmc to reduce uncertainty when interacting with a new acquaintance (Tokunaga & Gustafson, 2014). Learning about potential partners prior to face-to-face encounters reduces anxiety because individuals can determine whether or not they have common interests or take their time in preparing appropriate written responses, which is sometimes preferred when interacting with a potential romantic partner for the first time (Roth & Gillis, 2015).

Romantic partners strategically use self-disclosure to prompt relationship turning points. Individuals disclose positive feelings about the desired partner and seek information about his or her thoughts and feelings when trying to initiate a romance (Menegatti & Rubini, 2014). Researchers found that college students disclosed personal information, feelings about the partner and the relationship, and the goals of the relationship to intensify their relationships (Tolhuizen, 1989). Individuals even vary their language abstraction according to their relationship goals (e.g. initiating versus escalating a relationship; Menegatti & Rubini, 2014). These strategies illustrate how partners use communication to signal the flow of the relationship, and prompt a transition.

Disclosure introduces risk by eliciting responses of acceptance (increasing intimacy) or rejection (decreasing intimacy) and therefore often precipitates relationship turning points. The perceived risk of disclosing information may override an individual's desire to be authentic and completely open (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). If we can move beyond our fear of risk, the closeness created by disclosure has tremendous benefits for the relationship. Partners that respond to disclosures with empathy and support are likely to have a strengthened bond as a result of the intimacy achieved when partners can 'confidently share the essence of who they [are]' (Sanders et al., 2015, p. 1910).

There are tangible risks, beyond acceptance or rejection of romantic bids, to disclosing information. As one example, a study of intimate partner violence during adolescence revealed that increased self-disclosure predicted higher risk of perpetration. The authors explain this result by speculating 'that some youth may reveal too much, too soon' and that intimate disclosures may fuel arguments and jealousies (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 721). On the flipside, victims of abuse risk their own or their confidants' lives if they reveal their perpetrators' identity (Donalek, 2001). Other risks include protecting the confidant from harm, discomfort, or burden (Hammonds, 2015). Withholding information, known as selective disclosure, is a common strategy to keep conversations light-hearted, reduce burden, preserve dignity, and regulate emotions (Larson et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2012).

Waiting to disclose information introduces its own form of risk. Upon learning newly revealed information, partners 'may feel shocked, foolish, and betrayed by the realisation that their relationship may not be as close as they imagined' (Ragins, 2008, p. 197–198). Partners may wonder if more secrets await, or question the authenticity of the individual and/or relationship, particularly if they made a considerable investment in the relationship prior to the revelation. Hence, delayed disclosures strain and test relationships (Tuval-Mashiach et al., 2015). However, revealing personal information

may be especially difficult for individuals who are socially anxious (Voncken & Dijk, 2013) or stigmatised (Ragins, 2008).

'Stigma' refers to a stable characteristic or attribute that is perceived to damage an individual's reputation (Goffman, 1963). Stigmas include physical disability, character defects, and disease. Individuals are stigmatised because they are associated with possessing or displaying stigmatising characteristics (e.g. having a mental illness, being HIV positive).

Revealing one's stigmatised status depends on perceived consequences of sharing such information and is based on decision-making rules (Marks et al., 1992; Larson et al., 2015). The relationship may have to meet certain criteria, for example, like achieving a particular level of closeness (Brummett & Steuber, 2015). Some people openly and completely disclose personal information, never hiding their stigma (Limandri, 1989; Powell-Cope & Brown, 1992; Dindia, 1998). Alternatively, others self-conceal, even if that requires deception and increases distress (Larson et al., 2015).

## Relationship maintenance

Self-disclosure has been associated with relationship satisfaction, one of the most important predictors of relationship stability and longevity. Partners demonstrate their commitment and signal the status of the relationship through self-disclosure. Individuals' identities even adjust through a process known as relationship-induced self-concept change when they form a close relationship with another (McIntyre et al., 2015). Simultaneously, disclosure itself forms and reforms the relationship as partners negotiate dialectical tensions. Self-disclosure is the life-blood of relationships. The following paragraphs elucidate how self-disclosure sustains relationships.

An important self-disclosure strategy used by partners to maintain the continuity of their relationship across periods of physical absence (e.g. while they are at work) is catching up (Sigman, 1991; Gilbertson et al., Dindia & Allen, 1998). When couples are reunited at the end of the day they often discuss how their day went, who they saw, and how they spent their time. Debriefing is a maintenance strategy that is positively related to marital satisfaction (Vangelisti & Banski, 1993).

In addition to promoting relationship satisfaction, routinised disclosure such as debriefing helps couples adjust to 'distress and sustain the relationship' after disruptive events (Goldsmith, 2009, p. 206). Patients facing serious illness, along with their partners, for instance, described spontaneously discussing illness-related topics through 'ordinary talk surrounding everyday events' to cope with the changes induced by serious illness (Goldsmith, 2009, p. 218).

Especially beneficial to long-term relationship health is relationship-focused disclosure. Spontaneous relationship-focused disclosure to partners during routine conversations positively predicted individuals' relationship evaluations one year later in Tan and colleagues' (2012) two-year study of romantic relationship quality. Relationship-oriented disclosure predicted quality over and above the level of intimacy of self-focused disclosure or the warmth of the conversations. Disclosures focused on the relationship 'should foster increased relational investment and motivation to engage in wider pro-relationship behaviours, which in turn maintains relationship quality' (Tan et al., 2012, p. 532).

Relationship-focused disclosure such as public declarations of commitment through online mediums (e.g. Facebook) boosts feelings of commitment and prolongs relationships by as much as six months (Toma & Choi, 2015). Social networking sites like Facebook are particularly beneficial to partners in long-distance relationships, as these couples may use this medium to stay connected and post intimate messages (e.g. 'I love you') on partners' Facebook walls relative to individuals who live in close proximity to their partners (Billedo et al., 2015; Boyle & O'Sullivan, 2016). CMC offers long distance partners an opportunity to demonstrate commitment and share information despite geographic separation.

Self-disclosure is an important way relational partners care for, mind, or work on their relationship and, in turn, demonstrate commitment (Hendrick, 2004; Galvin et al., 2015). Minding involves intentional self-disclosure and responsiveness among partners to enhance communication over time (Harvey & Pauwels, 2009). Alegria and Ballard-Reisch (2012) argue that 'maintaining relationships at a stable and equitable level is a dynamic process, one that requires the partners' ongoing attention and investment of resources' (p. 79).

The more time partners spend together, shaping each other's worldview, the more likely they are to understand one another and acquire a shared system of meaning. In well-minded relationships, partners develop idiosyncratic behaviours that help them communicate more efficiently (e.g. nonverbally) and accurately (i.e. messages are received in the manner they were intended), increasing partners' overall satisfaction (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013). Idiosyncratic communication is a manifestation of the couples' shared system of meaning. Creating their own signals or communication patterns that are unique to their relationship helps partners balance their autonomy by satisfying the dialectical tension of connection.

Engaging in shared meaning-making reifies the relationship, strengthening partners' bond. Additionally, partners' shared experiences and communication shape their worldview (Harvey & Omarzu, 1997; Terzino & Cross, 2009; Walters & Burger, 2013). Over time, each partner's self-concept incorporates aspects of the other's personality. In healthy relationships, incorporating a romantic partner into one's sense of self is known as self-expansion, which is associated with personal feelings of efficacy and growth, but also relationship outcomes like greater love and relationship quality (Mattingly et al., 2014). Partners may even adopt a relational identity, viewing 'themselves as a collective unit (rather than as individuals) as they become increasingly committed to each other' (McIntyre et al., 2015, p. 858).

Partners can facilitate a shared system of meaning through metacommunication, or communication about communication. Metacommunication is a crucial strategy for dealing with relational conflict and uncertainty. Discussing preferred communication methods or habits helps couples reach agreement on the appropriate amount and type of talk for addressing particular issues. Discussing our relationship expectations prevents relational transgressions and repairs relationships after relational transgressions have occurred (Dindia & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Partners who invest in their relationship through self-disclosure use healthier communication strategies following transgressions, too (Walters & Burger, 2013).

Couples that engage in routine conversations, adopt a relational identity, and engage in metacommunication can overcome amazing challenges and disruptions to the norms of their relationships. Alegria and Ballard-Reisch (2012) studied relational adjustment after male partners disclosed feelings of transsexualism to their hetero-

sexual female lovers after years of involvement. Couples that were able to sustain the relationship after transsexual disclosure navigated uncertainty as a team, and used inclusive language (e.g. 'we', 'our') when describing their transition and the associated challenges. Couples are more likely to survive sea-changes when partners' communication is 'open, authentic, frequent, and interactive' (Alegría & Ballard-Reisch, 2012, p. 96). Routinised conversations provide an outlet to talk about 'normal' things outside of the disruptive event; attention to shifting self-concepts allows partners to renegotiate their relational identity and reaffirm their commitment; and metacommunication helps partners establish expectations and norms for the transformed relationship.

Uncertainty and disclosure can lead to many positive transformations for couples. For instance, self-disclosure in the presence of one's romantic partner, and experiencing responsiveness from other romantic couples in particular, increases feelings of passionate love (Welker et al., 2014). Romantic partners usually experience more intense passionate love at the beginning of their relationship, which tends to decline over time. Welker and colleagues argue that self-disclosure could be a useful method to help well-established couples introduce novelty and passion in the relationship.

Generally speaking, self-disclosure, like passionate love, declines over the course of a relationship (Hendrick, 2004). Total and complete openness was once considered the essence of a good relationship (Jourard, 1971; Rubin et al., 1980). However, Fitzpatrick (1987) argued that couples' relationship type determines the optimal amount of disclosure for relationship success. Some couples place a greater emphasis on disclosure than others, and some couples cast a wider net when determining which topics are appropriate for discussion (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Fitzpatrick, 1987). Moderate levels of self-disclosure, with more rather than less sharing, appear to be most conducive to satisfaction and maintaining relationships over time (Bochner, 1982; Gilbert, 1976; Lippert & Prager, 2001; Parks, 1995). An imbalance of disclosure would no doubt lead to decreased satisfaction. Finally, without any disclosure, relationships will fade away.

## Relationship dissolution

We have argued throughout this section that communication itself forms relationships. Relationships will dissolve without self-disclosure. Partners may intentionally decrease their self-disclosure to express disinterest in a relationship, or it may naturally reduce as a result of changes in partners' living situation and proximity to one another. Disclosure itself may be the catalyst for relationship termination if partners cannot renegotiate the terms of their relationship successfully.

Sometimes, self-disclosure leads to a breakup because the disclosure itself represents a critical event that damages the relationship beyond repair (e.g. infidelity). Partners may choose to withhold information from their significant other to avoid a breakup; one group of women with epilepsy, for example, concealed their health status from future husbands for fear of interrupting marriage plans (Santosh et al., 2007). Unfortunately, that strategy proved undesirable in the long term. The prevalence of dissatisfaction, separation, and divorce was higher among couples when women withheld their health status until after marriage. Concealing information can lead partners to feel betrayed, sparking a desire to end the relationship (Healy, 2015; Rugins, 2008; Tuval-Mashiach et al., 2015).

Partners may strategically use disclosure to prompt the dissolution of a relationship (Baxter, 1985, 1987). In a study of romantic couples' breakup trajectories, Leslie Baxter (1984) found that partners engaged a variety of strategies to initiate a breakup, and that most breakups were one-sided, meaning initiated by one partner (62%) rather than both partners (38%). In one-sided breakups, only 24% of partners explicitly expressed a desire to end their relationship to a significant other. Most often, partners used indirect strategies to avoid hurting feelings or saying things they would regret. Though the direct strategy was not often used by disengagers, it was most effective in soliciting acceptance from the other party compared to indirect strategies. Direct approaches leave little room for discussion, but partners may feel more comfortable using less direct tactics to avoid difficult conversations. During interviews about infidelity disclosures, intimates found it easier to disclose cheating, knowing a breakup would result, than express dissatisfaction with the relationship to their significant other (Walters & Burger, 2013). In this way, disclosure of a transgression allowed some individuals to 'end a relationship they no longer wanted' (Walters & Burger, 2013, p. 43).

Many relationships end without much fanfare, gradually fading away with self-disclosure incrementally decreasing over time. This may happen without either party intending to end the relationship, and may be the result of one partner moving away (Healy, 2015). Other times, partners may intentionally allow the relationship and the communication to fade away, with an implicit understanding that the relationship is over (Baxter, 1984). Reduced disclosure and withdrawal are the most common disengagement strategies to indirectly terminate relationships (Baxter, 1985).

Baxter (1987) argued that relationships dissolve in stages and that self-disclosure varies across the stages. During the private decision-making stage of relationship dissolution, individuals self-disclose to gauge the partner's satisfaction with and interest in repairing the relationship as well as outsiders' perceptions of self, partner, and the relationship. Self-disclosure during the decision implementation stage functions to terminate the relationship and engage directly with the partner, but offers less direct personal feelings about the relationship. Self-disclosure during the public presentation stage of relationship dissolution serves to inform others about the breakup while simultaneously maintaining face with the social network.

The relationship dissolution patterns described by Baxter are observed in online contexts when former partners update their profile relationship status, unfriend one another, and restrict access to profile information (LeFebvre et al., 2015). However, these social networking sites allow ex-friends and ex-romantic partners to stay connected after the relationship has dissolved. The opportunity to maintain a connection with former partners creates distress and interferes with post-breakup adjustment for some individuals (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015). Moreover, maintaining a connection with former lovers can be problematic for new couples. Facebook use predicts negative outcomes like infidelity and breakup, particularly among couples together less than three years (Clayton et al., 2013).

## **Factors affecting self-disclosure**

Numerous interactional, individual, and relational factors influence self-disclosure. Interactive influences include requests for disclosures and reciprocation. Prominent

individual factors include attachment style and personality type. Finally, relational characteristics such as liking and intimacy facilitate and inhibit self-disclosure.

### ***Interactional: Requests and reciprocation***

We often desire personal information about others. In initial interactions, for example, we want to explain or predict a stranger's behaviour, particularly if we hope or expect to see her again (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Other times, we notice erratic behaviour, whether from strangers or loved ones, and want reassurance everything is okay (Knobloch, 2008). We seek information to reduce uncertainty. Direct questions offer the most efficient way to acquire knowledge of others, but norms of social appropriateness, such as Goffman's civil inattention, restrict the use of information requests (Berger et al., 1976; Berger, 1979). Socially astute individuals may use indirect strategies, like revealing their own personal information, to encourage mutual disclosure (Archer & Earle, 1983; Berger & Bradac, 1982).

Self-disclosure occurs more frequently than asking questions during conversations with strangers (Douglas, 1990). In a speed-dating study, Korobov (2011) found that individuals protracted and delayed their answer when directly asked about their preferences in a romantic partner. Blunt requests were met with laughter, taken-aback expressions (e.g. 'wow'), and initially ambiguous responses, signalling the delicacy of such conversations. Requesters offered examples or inferences about their partners' preferences to probe for more information (e.g. 'You like to be spoiled?'). Probes usually focused on a specific thread of the initially disclosed information, but in a way that revealed the requester's own preferences and provided an affiliation opportunity. Probes offered something for the discloser to react to, expanding the discussion. In this way, they functioned to both solicit and reveal preferences. Thus, disclosure appears to be a more appropriate strategy for acquiring information than asking questions in initial interactions.

Indirect tactics at getting information may prove more effective in established relationships as well. In a study of parent-child communication, teenagers withheld information about their smoking habits, even when directly asked, if their parents expressed disapproval of smoking and when communication with parents was perceived as problematic (Metzger et al., 2013). Moreover, soliciting information about a teenager's smoking behaviour was associated with his escalated smoking two years later. On the other hand, teenagers initiated discussions about smoking when their parents demonstrated an ability to listen and seek understanding. These results underscore the importance of routine, non-threatening conversations that seem mundane on the surface, but are in reality performing vital relationship functions (Tan et al., 2012).

Using self-disclosure to gain information is more effective than requests for disclosures due to our tendency to reciprocate. Reciprocity, the idea that 'disclosure begets disclosure' (Jourard, 1971, p. 66), is perhaps the most enduring generalisation from the literature on self-disclosure. Pioneering researcher Sidney Jourard called this phenomenon the 'dyadic effect'. The dyadic effect gets to the heart of what is meant by creating shared meaning. Namely, intimacy is achieved through a dynamic back-and-forth pattern of communication and response (Reis & Shaver, 1988).

Mutual disclosure of emotion, rather than facts and information, predicts romantic partners' reported experience of intimacy (Beach & Tesser, 1988; Laurenceau et al., 1998). Disclosures enhance trust and demonstrate commitment, and in effect, partners' 'expectation[s] that the relationship can work over the long run should be increased' (Beach & Tesser, 1988, p. 347). In interpersonal relationships, the significance of reciprocity, thus, cannot be overstated. Indeed, 'love's longevity depends on its mutuality' (Levinger, 1988, p. 155).

Several theories seek to explain why disclosure prompts disclosure, including the social attraction-trust hypothesis, social exchange theories, and norms of reciprocity (Archer, 1979; Dindia, 2002; Sprecher & Treger, 2015). The social attraction-trust hypothesis assumes that disclosing intimate information signals attraction and trust, engendering mutual feelings of attraction that subsequently prompt disclosure. Social exchange theories suggest that partners perceive disclosure through a return-on-investment or cost-benefit lens, so partners mutually self-reveal to demonstrate equal investment in the relationship (Beach & Tesser, 1988). Norms of reciprocity propose that we respond in-kind to our conversational counterparts. Some theoretical explanations attribute reciprocity to global constraints of conversational norms, reflecting expressed or implied social norms for appropriate responses during interaction (Derlega et al., 1993; Muscanell et al., 2016).

A meta-analysis (Dindia, 2002) found that self-disclosure is reciprocal, whether interactants were strangers or intimates. The rate of reciprocity, how it ebbs and flows, and factors that accelerate or retard reciprocity of exchange have received little investigation. Once considered a time-bound process, some scholars have argued and found that the need for immediate reciprocity declines as the relationship increases in intimacy and commitment (e.g. Altman, 1973; Sprecher & Treger, 2015); however, one study indicated that married couples reciprocate self-disclosure within a 10-minute conversation (Dindia et al., 1997).

A variety of responses to self-disclosure are appropriate; a common reaction to receiving intimate self-disclosure is to express concern or support (Berg & Archer, 1980). In their yearlong study of romantic couples, Logan and Cobb (2012) found that relational happiness varied based on individuals' perceptions of their partners' reactions to disclosed good and bad news. Individuals were most relationally satisfied when they perceived attentive and responsive reactions from their partner when disclosing successes and failures. As the relationship matured over one year, perceptions of support from partners in times of distress was more strongly associated with satisfaction than perceptions of interest and enthusiasm to positive disclosures, though this relationship remained significant. Research in the field of positive psychology indicates that sharing positive events with others, a process known as capitalisation, promotes self-esteem, enhances positive emotions, and increases partners' sense of connection (Smith & Reis, 2012; Sullivan, 2013). Thus, responding to self-disclosure with interest and support, appropriately balanced with reciprocal self-disclosure, maintains relationship health and satisfaction.

### ***Individual: Personality and attachment***

Enduring characteristics such as individuals' personality or global self-esteem impacts disclosure (Stinson et al., 2015). For instance, Cuperman and Ickes (2009) found that

partners most enjoyed interacting with another when their personalities matched (i.e. extravert–extravert or introvert–introvert), and that mismatched partners (extravert–introvert) least enjoyed interactions. Social-personality scholars have recognised dominant patterns of emotional attachment among individuals, characterising them as secure, avoidant, and anxious–ambivalent to reflect the variation in peoples’ comfort level with intimacy and dependence (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Holland et al., 2012; Tidwell et al., 1996).

Attachment styles influence individuals’ perceptions of others’ self-disclosure as well as their own willingness to disclose or engage in activities that promote intimacy (Tidwell et al., 1996). Securely attached individuals are comfortable getting close to, and generally trust, others. Individuals with anxious-ambivalent attachment styles demonstrate a preoccupation with heightened levels of intimacy. Finally, individuals with avoidant attachment styles are uncomfortable getting close to, or becoming dependent upon others. Avoidant individuals’ diaries indicate they interact with members of the opposite sex less frequently and for shorter periods of time compared to securely and anxiously attached individuals (Tidwell et al., 1996). Moreover, a smaller percentage of avoidantly attached individuals’ interactions involve a romantic partner.

Avoidantly attached individuals have more negative interactions with romantic partners (e.g. show less eye contact, have rigid posture and angry tone) after discussing a serious problem in the relationship compared to individuals low on avoidance (Holland et al., 2012). This tendency to avoid intimacy decreases, however, when partners believe the relationship is exceptional or high quality. This belief informs and updates individuals’ attachment schema and promotes relationship enhancing behaviours like risking ‘interpersonal closeness, even in the face of negativity’ (Slotter & Luchies, 2014, p. 31).

Once thought a stable characteristic, attachment patterns shift over time and across partners (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). Adjustments to our preferences and dispositions for intimacy over the course of our interactions is natural and ongoing. Partners create their relationships through discourse, and this discourse can reinforce our predilection to avoid intimacy or challenge this disposition as our worldview gets reshaped by our ongoing interpersonal interactions (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009).

### ***Relational: Liking and intimacy***

Reciprocity and voluntary self-disclosure are highly correlated with relational attraction. Self-disclosure and liking are related in at least three ways: we like people who self-disclose to us (Laurenceau & Kleinman, 2006; Sprecher et al., 2013), we disclose more to people we like (Collins & Miller, 1994), and we like others as a result of having disclosed to them (Collins & Miller, 1994). The effect of self-disclosure on a recipient’s liking for the discloser has been of greatest theoretical interest and studies examining this effect make up the bulk of the studies on self-disclosure and liking (Collins & Miller, 1994). This effect is typically referred to as the ‘disclosure-liking hypothesis’. Though research indicates that self-disclosure leads to liking, content and context make a difference.

Initial research found that attraction was highest when senders disclosed positive rather than negative information (Gilbert & Horenstein, 1975), perhaps because



negative disclosure violates normative expectations (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Bochner, 1982). This generalisation may not apply to all disclosures, however. Romantic partners evaluated their significant other positively even after the other admitted to failing a test during an experiment (Cameron et al., 2009). Gromet and Pronin (2009) found that 'recipients [did] not evaluate disclosures as negatively as disclosers expect[ed]' when personal fears and insecurities were revealed during get-to-know-you interactions (p. 359). Recipients indicated the discloser's honesty and genuineness was more salient than the negative content, increasing feelings of affection. Thus, the subject matter disclosed is also important in determining whether disclosure leads to liking.

The context in which information is shared also influences liking. For instance, indiscriminate disclosures are less appealing and lead to less liking relative to privately shared disclosures (Berg & Derlega, 1987; Bochner, 1982; Collins & Miller, 1994; Miller, 1990). We make sense of contexts and information by making attributions about another's self-disclosure. People can attribute another person's self-disclosure to the person's disposition or personality ('he disclosed to me because he is an open person') or to their situation or relationship ('he disclosed to me because he likes me or because we have an intimate relationship'). The degree to which individuals feel they share similar subjective experiences with another person can increase feelings of closeness, and liking (Pinel et al., 2006). Moreover, liking someone increases our propensity to disclose to them, and can also lead to perceptions of personality similarity (Sprecher, 2014). Thus, liking is also related to personal and situational attributions.

Relationship factors, such as length of time in the relationship, achievement of particular milestones or turning points, and level of intimacy impact partners' self-disclosure. In fact, research shows that we establish rules to guide our behaviour, and these rules are based on social norms that adjust according to our level of intimacy with another person (e.g. whether we are simply acquaintances or close friends; Bryant & Marmo, 2012). Partners are more likely to engage in self-disclosure maintenance strategies like relationship 'work' (e.g. metacommunication) with romantic rather than platonic partners (Jensen & Rauer, 2014).

Social norms and emotion regulation may prevent some discussions. Asking a partner to use a condom might create distress for fear of signalling distrust of one's partner, decreasing an individual's desire to initiate the discussion, particularly in young relationships (Elwood et al., 2003). Research indicates that dating couples have difficulty discussing safe sex practices, and can more easily discuss shared leisure activities than safe sex (Buysse and Ickes, 1999). The relationship type or level of intimacy (e.g. friendship versus one-night stand) influence partners' safe sex discussions as well (Wentland & Reissing, 2011).

Partners' perceptions of the relationship, regardless of the relationship's stated current status (e.g. monogamous or 'on a break'), is most relevant for individuals' decisions to self-disclose. For instance, reduced disclosure and increased withdrawal are typically observed after a breakup; however, such behaviour is not observed among partners in on-again/off-again relationships. Dailey and colleagues (2016) studied on-again/off-again relationships, and discovered that disclosure and feelings of intimacy were high when partners experienced a great deal of fluctuation in their relational certainty and uncertainty, regardless of couples' tendency to break up and rekindle. Self-disclosure may remain high in the dissolution stage for partners in on-again/off-again relationships because partners do not accept the breakup as the

final relationship status. The current state of the relationship may be less relevant to disclosure than the perception that the status will last (Dailey et al., 2016; Healy, 2015).

## **SELF-DISCLOSURE IN WORK RELATIONSHIPS**

Since the publication of the prior edition of this text, social scientists have intensely examined the revelation of personal information in work relationships. This interest is a natural progression, given the importance of self-disclosure in personal relationships and recognition that similar functions and processes are manifest in work relationships. We describe the nature and function of self-disclosure in the work environment and identify factors affecting the revelation of personal information at work.

### **Disclosure and the development of work relationships**

Self-disclosure plays a pivotal role in the development and maintenance of work relationships. We examine self-disclosure in the employment interview, risky self-disclosures, and ordinary social disclosure that build relationships among co-workers.

#### ***Managing self-disclosures in employment interviews***

Though performing numerous functions, the initial job interview primarily provides the employer with information allowing the discrimination of applicants and provides the interviewee with information concerning potential employment (see Chapter 16 for a full review of the employment interview).

What kind of disclosures do interviewees reveal? Given the importance of making a positive impression interviewees will reveal largely attributes and experiences that portray the speaker favourably. A range of impression-management goals and strategies will be present in job interviews. Applicants may want to appear friendly, competent, qualified, honest, conscientious, interested, etc. and can use nonverbal and verbal behaviours ranging from smiling to lying to leave the desired impression. Given the rewards and costs of succeeding and failing in job interviews, the temptation to distort or fabricate information about self can be high. One study suggested that 25% of interviewees falsified information (Kennan, 1980), while Barlund's polygraph study of 400 job applicants concluded that 20% of interviewees falsified or concealed information that might jeopardise their employment (cited in Ekman, 1992). Two-thirds of applicants for jobs as agents with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection failed the lie detection test (Associated Press, 2017). Levashina and Campion (2007) in a series of studies identified four faking strategies that were used by interviewees in job interviews: minor and major image creation, image protection, and ingratiation. They report that 90% of undergraduate students used at least one of these strategies in interviews.

Research demonstrates that not only do potential employees use impression management (im) strategies, but that these strategies can affect interviewer evaluations (Barrick et al., 2009). The Barrick et al. meta-analysis found that several forms of self-presentations by candidates in job interviews positively influenced interviewer

ratings, but were generally not correlated with on-the-job performance ratings. Levashina and Campion's (2007) studies demonstrated that even deceptive im strategies can affect interviewer evaluations.

Interviewers are generally not good at recognising lies and fake im attempts. Roulin et al. (2015) in a series of five studies concluded that evaluators of job interviews were poor at detecting im strategies; experienced interviewers were not better at detecting im than untrained students. One reason these are difficult to detect is that interviewees give away few clues (Schneider, Powell and Roulin, 2015). Interview performance was enhanced by the use of significant image creation, image protection, and ingratiation strategies. Thus research suggests that interviewees present positively biased information about themselves while interviewers are poor detectors of exaggerations and make inflated judgements of some candidates. Moreover, interviewers may misattribute some faking behaviour and unfairly penalise some job candidates. Inevitably, some candidates are preferred who have less experience, capabilities, knowledge, or other qualifications for a job, calling into question the validity of interviews to evaluate candidates.

To make matters worse, interviewees who fake make bad employees. Roulin and Bourdage's (2017) study indicates that applicants with more problematic personality traits, i.e. ones that have been shown to make less desirable employees, use more deceptive im strategies and vary their im strategies more across situations.

Roulin and Krings (2016) demonstrate that faking is correlated with 'dark' personality traits like Machiavellianism and psychopathy, undesirable characteristics for employees. They suggest that companies should take steps to engender more honest disclosures by minimising the competitiveness of interviews, for example, by using phone screening interviews.

### ***Managing risky disclosures in job interviews and beyond***

Job interviews present an intense dilemma for people with invisible disabilities, stigmas, or past behaviours that might be evaluated negatively by potential employers. Because of the bias toward positive information in the interview, negative information about the interviewee significantly and adversely affects interviewer perceptions and selection decisions (Derous et al., 2016; Rowe, 1989). These circumstances make it difficult for people to reveal past failures, shortcomings, or problems. For example, several studies suggest that voluntary disclosures about a disability may jeopardise an individual's prospects for being hired (Herold, 1995; Tagalakis et al., 1988) and reduce opportunities for advancement (Dalgin & Gilbride, 2003). One study indicated that 80% of a sample of individuals with learning disabilities did not discuss their condition with their employer while seeking their current job (Price et al., 2003). For individuals with mental illnesses or conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, the issue of concealment or disclosure is a difficult, recurring one (Allen & Carlson, 2003; Goldberg et al., 2005). However, a person who does not disclose this information in the employment interview may be subsequently perceived as devious or untruthful for withholding the information. These alternatives clearly present a dilemma. We outline the reasons for disclosure and nondisclosure of risky job-related information and describe how individuals and organisations can manage this problem in and beyond the employment interview.

A variety of reasons exist to reveal and to conceal risky information (Brohan et al., 2012; Roberts & Macan, 2006). Mitigating against disclosure, individuals may be fearful of discrimination in hiring; being treated unfairly by superiors; loss of credibility; being the subject of gossip; and, not being accepted by peers. On the other hand, self-disclosure might allow the individual to secure workplace accommodations or adjustments and support, enhance self-esteem, improve inter-group relations, and avoid the stress of concealment.

Individuals are right to recognise that adverse reactions are commonly encountered, even if they are protected by law and even if society is becoming more accepting of differences and stigmas (Burke et al., 2013). Derous et al. (2016) provide a model based on dual-process cognitive theory to explain how stigmas affect interview-based judgements and jeopardise their validity. Their model hypothesises how interviewer, organisational, and interview characteristics (information about applicants, concern, anti-discrimination policies, diversity training; structured interviews, longer interviews) can improve the processing of information about candidates and reduce the bias of stigmatising information. Jones' (2011) review of 23 empirical studies of workers with mental illnesses indicated that people who had disclosed their illness reported support and negative reactions, including problems with co-workers, failures to receive job offers, and terminations. Von Schrader et al.'s (2014) survey of workers with disabilities revealed that 80% had disclosed disability, primarily to receive accommodations; but 25%, reported significant negative repercussions. Farrelly et al.'s (2014) survey of 202 Londoners with mental illness reported that 87% had experienced discrimination in the last year and that 93% expected future discrimination. Hazer and Bedell (2000) found that both students and human resource professionals rated interview applicants lower if they asked for accommodations, even though they had been rated as reasonable.

Toth and Dewa (2014) vividly describe how people with mental illnesses experience discrimination at work. For example, one respondent in their qualitative study described why disclosure was so difficult:

If I come in with a broken leg everyone gets it ... You come in depressed nobody gets it. I shouldn't say nobody, but a lot of people don't get it, right? So the biggest barrier ... to disclosure at work, it's probably the fact that it would be received so much differently than any other health illness.

(p. 735)

There are also tangible benefits to disclosure. Organisations must be informed of disabilities before they can provide workplace accommodations and adjustments, which can enhance employee performance. Likewise, peers can provide social support only if they know to whom it should be provided (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Disclosure can reduce stress associated with concealment and self-stigma (Corrigan et al., 2010).

Hersch and Shinall (2016) argue that it would be in the best interest of applicants to raise some risky issues in interviews rather than ignore them. They contend that the Equal Employment Opportunity regulations in the U.S. that prohibit sexual discrimination in employment have been interpreted inappropriately to discourage employers from talking to candidates about related issues, e.g. family history. Their study with 3,000 subjects indicates that women, but not men, are disadvantaged by this practice.

They found that any account (e.g. divorce, children at home) that explained leaving and entering the workforce benefited women more than no account. The authors attribute this to economic ambiguity theory, which holds that people are bothered more by unknown risks than by known ones. Additionally, this could apply to other types of potentially negative disclosures that may account for an obvious fact, e.g. criminal record, bad credit history. These authors conclude it could be better for individuals to initiate, and for employers to encourage such discussions, as long as information revealed is not used prejudicially.

Even organisations can benefit from some disclosures. By revealing membership in a stigmatised group, an individual may foster intergroup relations by demonstrating to others that their prejudices and stereotypes are unfounded (Ensari and Miller, 2002, 2006; Ensari et al., 2012). Creed and Scully (2011) describe how disclosures can improve inclusivity for gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees.

A few attempts have been made to help people decide if and how to reveal stigmas at work. A group of scholars in Great Britain have developed a self-guided decision aid called CORAL (CONceal or ReveAL; Henderson et al., 2012; 2013; Lassman et al., 2015). Their data indicated that people who use the aid were more confident about the resulting decision and were subsequently likely to be employed (Henderson et al., 2013).

An Australian group developed a programme to be used by employment counsellors working with people with mental illness, the Plan for Managing Personal Information (PMPI) (Waghorn & Spowart, 2010; Hielscher & Waghorn, 2015). In this programme, mentally ill employees working in supported environments are helped to develop a script for a new way of talking about illness; more positively and from a position of strength (see Allott et al. (2013) for a description of how a supported employment programme deals with clients' self-disclosure preferences). Moreover, the PMPI conceives of disclosure as a continuous process that takes many forms and changes over time. McGahey et al. (2016) found that employees who followed this plan had greater employment opportunities than those who did not. Hielscher and Waghorn (2015) conclude that both CORAL and PMPI show promise but need additional testing and refinement.

Coming Out Proud is another programme, developed multinationally, for helping people decide if they should reveal a mental illness to not only co-workers, but friends and family; to develop strategies for safely disclosing; and knowing how to manage disclosure interactions (Corrigan et al., 2010; Corrigan et al., 2013). Their research suggests that the programme can minimise self-stigma.

Researchers now recognise self-disclosure as a complex process rather than a simple open or closed behaviour. People reveal to some at work (e.g. supervisors) but not others (e.g. stipulate who can be told); make partial or full disclosures; disclose directly or indirectly; reveal intentionally or inadvertently; make disclosures sequentially over time and changing circumstances (e.g. Brohan et al., 2012; Hielscher & Waghorn, 2015). Creed and Scully (2011) describe three different ways lesbians, gays, and bisexuals reveal their identity at work: claiming, educating, and advocating. Likewise in not disclosing, people might simply omit something or they might engage in various degrees of deceiving others (Clair et al., 2005). Awareness of these alternatives will enable people to manage their personal information more effectively and researchers to better understand this process.

The self-disclosure of risky job-related information is a salient issue for people with disabilities and stigmas throughout their careers. There are tangible costs and benefits that must be weighed to determine how each person manages his or her unique situation. Research indicates there are no simple solutions.

### ***Self-disclosure that personalises work relationships***

People form bonds with co-workers that affect not only productivity on the job but also organisational satisfaction and commitment. Self-disclosure plays an important role in bonding with co-workers, just as it does in maintaining relationships outside of work. In work as well as social contexts, relationships in which mutual disclosure occurs evidence desirable characteristics or outcomes. For example, a study by Waldron (1991) indicated that respondents who had better relationships with their supervisors reported more frequent personal contacts (e.g. 'Ask about their personal life', 'Share my future career plans with them') and direct negotiation of the relationship (e.g. 'Make it known when I am unhappy about something at work', 'Speak up when I feel I have been treated unjustly'). A study of untenured faculty in colleges and universities revealed that friendship and collegiality of mentors were among the strongest predictors of organisational commitment and connectedness (Schrodt et al., 2003).

Krouse and Afifi's (2007) study of social workers demonstrated the importance of disclosures about home stressors to peers and supervisors at work. Eighty-three percent of the participants of their qualitative study reported cathartic venting about family problems to peers at work. Though some subjects may be discussed less frequently among co-workers, the opportunity to disclose about salient life events is still important. Wittenberg-Lyles and Villagran (2006) found that 'special peers' (close work friends) of cancer survivors had all been told by the individual of his/her illness, about 80% of 'collegial' peers had been told, and about 52% of 'informational peers' (more distant) had been told. Disclosure of illness may enable the cancer patient to obtain work help or emotional comfort. Another example of self-disclosure of personal problems was provided by Kulkarni and Ross (2016). Their survey of employees (500+) revealed that only a small number of employees, approximately 10%, had disclosed incidents of intimate partner violence, but more than 70% who had disclosed reported a positive response from peers, supervisors, human resources departments, and/or employee assistance programmes. White and Wills (2016) found that the more time employees spent providing chronic care at home, the more they disclosed about it at work. Other people's disclosures can have positive consequences for the recipient's identification with and inculturation in the organisation. Bullis and Bach's (1989) study of the socialisation of graduate students indicated that socialising allowed 'students to talk about themselves, their interests, and their professors' (p. 282) and accounted for one of the largest changes in identification. Participating in these types of informal conversations increased students' identification with their new roles.

Perhaps the revelation of an alternative sexual identity is the most difficult but important way to personalise a work relationship. Ragins et al.'s (2007) survey with a U.S. national sample of gay, lesbian, and bisexual respondents revealed that: '11.7% reported being out to no one at work, 37% reported being out to some people, 24.6% reported being out to most people, and 26.7% reported being out to everyone at work'

(p. 1112). Clair et al. (2005) describe factors predicting revealing and passing at work. However, individuals may experience boundary turbulence. Einarsdóttir et al.'s (2016) qualitative study of six British organisations concludes that

the coming out process at work seemed less planned and often beyond individual control and revealed that colleagues played a significant part in the coming out process, primarily by initiating it, but also by reaching their own conclusions about sexual identities.

(p. 494)

Nonetheless, work provides employees the opportunity for disclosing issues arising from their personal lives.

However, having close, personal relationships at work can also have adverse consequences for the individual and the organisation. Bridge and Baxter (1992) noted that people who develop personal friendships with their work cohorts experience common problems or tensions. Likewise, the organisation can experience problems from mutually disclosive relationships, such as cohesive work groups that develop norms and goals that are contrary to those of the employers or the organisation.

## **Factors affecting disclosure at work**

Research indicates a variety of individual, situational, organisational, and cultural factors can encourage and discourage self-disclosure. The most prominent influences on self-disclosures in the work context are fear, systemic factors, and social support.

### **Fear**

Perhaps the most common factor decreasing disclosure is the likelihood of negative repercussions such as rejection, discrimination, and unfair treatment. This is especially of concern for people with stigmas. For example, Ragins et al. (2007) in a study with a national sample of gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees found that fear of disclosure significantly correlated negatively with degree of disclosure at work. Perhaps even more importantly, fear of disclosure was more consistently and more directly related than actual disclosure to important outcomes like job satisfaction, organisational commitment, anticipated turnover, work-related depression, and promotion rate. (In all cases, fear of disclosure was associated with negative outcomes).

Romo et al.'s (2016) qualitative study reported that formerly problem drinkers in the U.S. were fearful of divulging their alcohol abstinence to others, especially co-workers. One of their participants reported: 'I do not talk about [not drinking] at work ... I just don't. I just don't go there' (p. 340). The authors said she 'worried that her peers would judge her for not drinking, particularly if they found out she was an alcoholic, and that her career could be affected if an influential, nonsupportive colleague were to uncover this private information' (p. 340). Toth and Dewa's (2014) qualitative study of Canadian workers with a mental illness found that non-disclosure was the default decision due to the fear of discrimination.

### ***Systemic factors***

The customs, values, and practices of groups, organisations, and cultures also influence behaviours of individual in their work environment. These can encourage or discourage self-disclosure.

Laws constrain requests for information. In many countries legislation prohibits employers from giving preference in hiring, compensating or promoting individuals based on their sex, race, age, marital status, or disabilities, unless these characteristics are fundamental to the performance of the job. In the U.S., employers generally prohibit requests for information that can be used for illegal discrimination (but see Hersch & Shinall, 2016). Recently, the states of California and Massachusetts enacted laws that prohibit employers from asking job candidates about their salary history in previous jobs in order to prevent this information from being used to perpetuate gender gaps in pay (Yuki, 2017).

Laws can define appropriate self-disclosure. Harassment is a significant problem for corporations. In the U.S., the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reported 30,000 claims and \$165 million in fines in 2015; 45% of the private employer cases were related to sexual harassment (Feldblum & Lipnic, June 2016). Three common forms are sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment. Of these three, unwanted sexual attention could involve self-disclosure, e.g. sexual compliments, indications of sexual attraction. Though offensive compliments are one of the least offensive, threatening, and recognised forms of sexual harassment (Konrad & Gutek, 1986; Padgitt & Padgitt, 1986; Powell, 1986) they occur frequently and constitute a significant problem for many people. Feldblum and Lipnic (June 2016) estimated that more than 40% of women and approximately 14% of men have experienced unwanted sexual attention at work. Women are more likely than men to see these behaviours as problematic (e.g. Powell, 1986). Additionally Pryor and Day's (1988) experimental study noted that attributions of sexual harassment and negative intentions to a sexual compliment were greater when spoken by a superior than a peer. Witteman (1993) suggested that persistent sexual disclosures that are non-reciprocated and non-negotiated constitute a 'severe' form of sexual harassment. Since harassment negatively affects workers' attitudes, commitment, turnover, productivity, health, etc., organisations should be committed to ending it (Feldblum & Lipnic, June 2016).

Organisational policies, practices, and ideologies can regulate disclosure. For 17 years the U.S. military allowed gay, lesbian, and bisexual soldiers to serve as long as they did not reveal their sexual identity. President Barak Obama terminated the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy in 2011 (Bumiller, 2011) because of its discriminatory effects.

Hochschild's (1983) classic work on emotional labour demonstrated that organisations can enforce expectations about how employees express their feelings. For example, one worker describing the organisational culture of Disneyworld noted that employees 'may complain of being "too tired to smile" but at the same time may feel guilty for having uttered such a confession' (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989, p. 69). Thus the culture of the organisation may be a control system that discourages employees from honestly revealing their emotions.

In a study of a research and development corporation, Meares et al. (2004) observed that members of minority groups were less likely than others to raise



concerns of mistreatment with supervisors. This has been confirmed in studies of majority–minority interaction within organisations in Northern Ireland (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). These findings are consistent with muted group theory which contends that the communication practices of majority groups make it difficult for members of minority groups to express themselves in ways that are seen as legitimate. These authors recommend that companies proactively seek the input of minority members to prevent these problems and to make effective use of their employees.

If organisational leadership wants to increase the number of people who are open about their invisible disabilities so that they may be provided appropriate accommodations, people who openly express their sexual identity so that they don't feel the stress of concealment, people who seek help with personal problems that might interfere with their work, etc., there are steps they can take. They can implement policies that protect the vulnerable, showcase desired behaviours in company publications, implement employee training programmes, and so on.

### ***Social support***

Research across a variety of disclosure domains indicates that support from peers and supervisors encourages people to self-disclose. Jones et al.'s (2016) longitudinal study of the disclosure of pregnancy indicated that women who reported more support from supervisors and who reported working in a 'family-friendly' organisation reported less concealing of their condition. Krouse and Afifi's (2007) qualitative study of social workers also concluded that a 'family-friendly' environment at work enabled people to talk to co-workers about stressful family situations. Sabat et al. (2014) reported that gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees were more likely to be open about their sexual identity if they anticipated support.

Gignac and Xiao (2009) found that disclosure of arthritis at work was associated with perceived co-worker support. Munir et al.'s (2005) study found that employees of a British university were more likely to confide fully with their supervisor about a chronic illness if the supervisor had previously been supportive. Brohans et al.'s (2012) review of 48 empirical studies of mental illness and disclosure in the workplace concluded that self-disclosure was higher to emotionally supportive co-workers and supervisors. White and Wills (2016) found that co-worker support predicted disclosure among employees with a chronic caregiver obligation. Evans-Lacko and Knapp's (2014) seven-European-country study with more than 7,000 participants discovered that disclosures about depression were more likely in countries with a higher percentage of managers saying they would help subordinates who were depressed, as opposed to referring the worker for professionals, ignoring the problem, or offering work schedule adjustments.

Other studies show that disclosure can elicit support. Jones' (2011) review of 23 empirical studies of disclosure of mental illness at work conducted after 1990 found that disclosures were generally received positively, but occasionally disrupted relations with peers. Kulkarni and Ross (2016) found that people who disclosed being victims of interpersonal violence generally found responses to disclosure to be helpful, e.g. offers of emotional and instrumental support; but 20% reported receiving responses that were not helpful. The authors suggested that organisations that wanted to help

employees would institute training programmes to teach all employees how to respond in similar situations.

Thus, perceptions of supportive managers and co-workers enable employees to overcome fear and other barriers to self-disclose at work important issues in their lives.

## **Extraordinary disclosures**

Most disclosures entail some risk; however, revealing some information engenders great risk. Employees should, and no doubt do, consider the possibility of adverse consequences for these disclosures. Because of these important potentials, we describe below several distinct types of self-disclosures that present special problems for employees.

### ***Incidents of sexual harassment***

Despite 25 years of work focused on this issue, sexual harassment at work is still a major problem in the USA (Feldblum and Lipnic, June 2016). A meta-analysis of 71 studies and more than 86,000 subjects concluded that, depending on whether the term is defined for participants or not, between 25% and 60% of women have experienced sexual harassment at work (Ilies et al., 2003). Another meta-analysis of 41 studies with more than 68,000 subjects found that victims of sexual harassment experience lower job satisfaction as well as a variety of negative outcomes such as depression and lower self-esteem (Willness et al., 2007). Moreover, sexual harassment claims harm the reputation of companies, result in legal costs that average \$125,000 a case, and distract employees from more productive tasks (Feldblum and Lipnic, June 2016). Victims of sexual harassment must decide whether to disclose the incident or not. They can respond by reporting the incident(s) to management, confronting the perpetrator, seeking support from friends and co-workers, doing nothing, or some combination of these (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). Studies suggest that the most obvious strategy, reporting to appropriate company officials, is not commonly pursued; chosen less than 25% of the time (Cortina and Berdahl, 2008). Confronting the harasser is also generally avoided but telling friends or family (30–70%) and ignoring (50–70%) are more commonly selected options (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). Formal reporting is low because victims think they will not be believed, blamed, ignored, trivialised, and retaliated against. Indeed, research suggests they are right (Feldblum & Lipnic, June 2016).

What should victims of harassment do? Research doesn't provide a definitive answer. Perhaps the most frequent recommendation is to tell someone about the problem. This will enable victims to receive social support but some co-workers might instead blame the victim, which may be common and severe within some ethnic groups, like Asians in Great Britain (Fielden et al., 2010). Sharing reactions with others serves to document the occurrence of the offence, an important step if subsequent legal or other formal remedies are pursued. But as Wood (1993) noted, even recounting the incidence of sexual harassment invokes 'a range of fierce emotions ... from shame and feeling wrong or stupid, to feeling violated, to guilt about allowing it to occur, to

entrapment with no viable alternatives, to anger at being impotent to stop harassment' (p. 22). So even confiding in friends entails significant costs and risks for some workers.

Formal or informal reporting would seem the most effective and safest options. But as already noted, fear is real and warranted. Also, the adjudication systems may not be fair. A study of sexual harassment tribunals over 10 years in the UK observed 'vulnerable workers in low-paid, low-skill occupations have a lesser chance of succeeding in sexual harassment claims before tribunals than some higher-skilled workers' (Rosenthal & Budjanovcanin, 2011, p. 253). Given the high probability of making things worse, some scholars conclude that it is unreasonable to expect reporting (Feldblum and Lipnic, June 2016).

In an ideal world, perhaps confronting the culprit would be an effective and efficient resolution. On the basis of experience as a mediator, Gadlin (1991) suggested that mediation is an effective alternative for resolving allegations of sexual harassment and recommended that disputants enlist the help of a supporter throughout the process. Confrontation has been observed more frequently in the military (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). Bingham and Scherer (1993), in a study of university faculty and staff, noted that talking to the harasser in a nonconfrontive style about the problem resulted in more favourable outcomes than did talking with friends. These organisations may provide enough structure to enable confrontation to be a viable option. However, in the absence of a programme that provides mediators and supporters, victims would likely encounter the same dynamics and outcomes as the offending event. For example, Yount's (1991) ethnographic study of female coal miners suggested that women's revelations of distress following incidents of sexual harassment resulted in perceptions of weakness and exacerbated their problems. Thus, confrontation is a viable option for only some workers.

Some people think that doing nothing legitimises and perpetuates the offence (Claire, 1993). For others, denial, minimisation, and avoiding the harasser are effective and safe responses, especially 'when a woman fears for herself or her job, has no other effective response options available, or seeks to bring an end to the harassment without 'rocking the boat' (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008, p. 486). Until organisations can better protect the victims, doing nothing will likely remain a frequent response to sexual harassment.

The choice of response options depends on the nature of the offence and the perceived efficacy of the action (Brooks & Perot, 1991). Also, they are not mutually exclusive. If one response proves ineffective, a person can choose another. As the harassment becomes more intense, the less likely people are to ignore it and more likely to tell others (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). Hopefully, efforts to eliminate sexual harassment (e.g. Feldblum & Lipnic, June 2016) will diminish the need for additional research on the viability of response options.

### ***Employee assistance programmes***

For the last 30 years, large organisations have provided services to employees to help them cope with life events that would otherwise diminish their productivity. A recent U.K. study estimated that approximately 50% of employees work for a company that provides an Employee assistance programme (EAP) (Barrett, 2015). Other reports

document expansion and growth (Lovewell-Tuck, 2014). Despite their growth, there is evidence they are still being underutilised for some problems, e.g. mental illness (McRee, 2017). EAPs provide services for a variety of personal problems including mental health issues (Patton, 2012), alcohol and drug use (Jacobson & Sacco, 2012), interpersonal relations among co-workers (Nair & Xavier, 2012), children (e.g. Rosen, 1987; Soloman, 1992), marital problems (Kendal & Brady, 2009), adoption assistance, elder-care, and cancer survival (McKay et al., 2013). To gain the assistance, workers must reveal their problems. The services may be provided in-house or contracted out. In some cases the benefits may duplicate what is covered by health insurance. EAPs are seen by organisations as the preferred alternative for minimising the workplace effects of employee personal problems. Research has demonstrated they can reduce absenteeism (Spetch et al., 2011) and enhance worker functioning (Jacobson et al., 2011). Mellor-Clark et al. (2013), in a study of 28,000 employees in the United Kingdom, showed that EAPs can provide quality services that are cost effective. A quasi-experimental study (Richmond et al., 2017) demonstrated that a general-purpose EAP decreased absenteeism and presenteeism.

One review of the literature on this subject suggested that four steps are necessary to encourage self-referrals: eliminate stigma, assure anonymity, train employees, and encourage employee self-analyses (Myers, 1984). A few quantitative studies of employee decisions to utilise EAPs indicate that employee confidence in the EAP was the most important attitudinal factor affecting use of this service (Harris & Fennell, 1988; Milne et al., 1994). Also, corporations are discouraged from giving EAPs names that accentuate negative connotations, such as ‘Drug Rehabilitation Programme’. Numerous authors note the importance of confidentiality (e.g. Feldman, 1991). The success of EAPs depends on workers revealing their personal problems to company officials. The EAP research demonstrates that employees and organisations are both helped by these disclosures.

## **SELF-DISCLOSURE BEYOND PERSONAL AND WORK RELATIONSHIPS**

Though this chapter focuses on personal and work relationships, we should recognise that self-disclosure is an important occurrence in additional contexts.

### **Anonymous disclosures**

Sidney Jourard (1959), an early and important advocate of self-disclosure research as well as practice, was perhaps the first social scientist to argue that disclosure of one’s innermost thoughts and feelings would enhance psychological well-being. However, the connection between disclosure and health was not studied systematically before James Pennebaker’s pioneering research begun more than 25 years later. The development of these ideas and the subsequent research are thoroughly summarised elsewhere (Pennebaker, 1989; Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker et al., 2003; Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016).

Pennebaker contends that the act of verbally encoding, by writing or speaking, one's most traumatic life-experiences alters the way those events are stored in memories, resulting in improved physical and mental health (Pennebaker, 1997). In many experimental studies, Pennebaker and others have demonstrated that individuals who write or speak anonymously about their traumas, compared to individuals in control groups who describe mundane daily activities, showed improved subjective well-being, declines in the use of health care resources, and enhanced physiological markers of health (Pennebaker, 1997). These findings have been replicated not only in studies of college students, but also of university employees, unemployed workers, Holocaust victims, and others (Pennebaker, 1997), though his predictions are not always supported (e.g. Kloss & Lisman, 2002). The potential importance of this phenomenon has been reorganised by scholars in a variety of fields. Consequently there have been attempts to assess the utility of Pennebaker's theory to address problems including asthma and arthritis (Smyth, Stone, Hurewitz, & Kaell, 1999), sleeping disorders (Harvey & Farrell, 2003), athletic performance (Scott et al., 2003), performance on a math test (Burns & Friedman, 2012), and post-traumatic stress disorder of war veterans (Sayer et al., 2015).

Pennebaker suggests that the use of explanatory language either facilitates or is primarily responsible for these effects (1993). Other researchers have noted, however, that these findings may also occur when individuals talk not only about traumas but also about positive, meaningful events (King, 2001), suggesting that disclosure facilitates self-regulatory processes.

Pennebaker, from the earliest formulations of this theory, has argued that the effects of disclosure are more likely to occur when made in private, i.e. by writing in a journal, because these disclosures are different than ones made to other individuals (1997, 2002). Self-disclosures to friends, acquaintances, even doctors, will be adapted or altered in some important ways because of self-presentational concerns. Consequently, this literature does not suggest that indiscriminate self-disclosure results in improved health. In fact, indiscriminate disclosure might lead to arguments and hurt feelings, which can impede immune system functioning or accelerate the deleterious consequences of stress. However, it is also possible that some relationships might encourage or permit open disclosure of important life events, and result in positive health outcomes. In fact, some self-report studies, even one by Pennebaker (Pennebaker & O'Heeron, 1984), support the conclusion that naturally occurring self-disclosures of important concerns can positively affect mental health (Bolton et al., 2003). Thus, this research conclusively demonstrates that certain types of verbalisations about important life events produce positive health benefits. Exactly why and how these occur is unknown and of considerable interest to researchers, a great number of whom are currently trying to determine not only the extent, but also the moderators of the connections between health and self-disclosure.

Ironically, a number of websites have emerged that allow people to disclose anonymously. Perhaps the most well-known of these is Frank Warren's website PostSecret.com. In 2004 he started soliciting people to send him anonymous personal confessions on a postcard which he places on the website. Subsequently he has received 500,000 confessions on postcards and had 784 million views of them on his website. Two similar websites currently exist: confessions.net and secret-confessions.com. Both allow people to submit entries online. People reveal an astounding array of feelings, actions, and sentiments, including reports of illegal behaviour. Sample entries include:

*Being a Father + Husband + Provider is slowly killing me, but Guilt would kill me faster if I stopped being any of them.*

(Being a Father, n.d.)

*I want to become pregnant soo much ... and all i see on tv is stuff on pregnancy ... and that makes me want to get pregnant more ... and yet i have no boyfriend.*

(Pregnant, n.d.)

*when I was little, I used to bully this kid. I don't know why I bullied him, but I would make fun of him, call him names, and I even ripped a sticker he had in half .... and I hate my self for it ...*

(Anonymous, 2017, June 18)

No data demonstrate that these websites have the same effects on health and well-being as the revelations made by people in the social psychological experiments using the Pennebaker writing paradigm, but anecdotal testimonials abound (Warren, 2014). The existence and use of these websites suggests many people have a need to disclose feelings but don't know how to do it, otherwise.

## Public disclosures

The disclosures we have so far discussed typically occur when people make a revelation to a specific individual to achieve a particular personal goal. There are times, however, when people disclose to a large audience, hundreds or thousands, that includes close friends, distant relatives, complete strangers, etc. In the last 15+ years, social media have emerged to provide new audiences and contexts for disclosure. The veritable explosion of self-disclosure expressed through these channels is another indication that self-disclosure is so important.

Research establishes that self-disclosure takes on different or additional meaning when it is communicated by computers or is shaped by social media. In a study comparing face-to-face interaction with computer-based chats, Jiang et al. (2011) found that a high self-disclosure message was deemed more intimate in the computer mediated communication (cmc) context than face-to-face context and that this 'hyperpersonal' effect was due to dispositional attributions in the cmc high disclosure condition. Baruh and Cemalcilar (2015) discovered in an experimental study that participants paid more attention to high than low intimacy tweets and that intimacy increased social attraction only if the discloser was seen as similar to the recipient.

Social media also enable people to form communities with shared interests or goals; communities in which people self-disclose to seek and provide support; make and maintain bonds; and establish credibility. Leggatt-Cook and Chamberlain (2012) studied weight-loss blogs in which people publicly discussed issues that are normally very personal. Moreover, readers' responses to the bloggers were important for sustaining the efforts being undertaken to lose weight. Even YouTube.com is used as a site for disclosure and discussion of personal problems like eating disorders. One study discovered that positive, helpful responses outnumbered negative comments eight to one (Pereira et al., 2016). Hassan et al. (2016) examined more than 500,000 posts from

contributors (owners and admirers) to three automobile brand Facebook pages (Volvo, Ford Fiesta, and Honda Fit), identifying 18 value-creating behaviours, validating 14 that have been previously recognised and four new ones. The behaviour categories, like reminiscing and daydreaming, were based on posts that were mostly self-disclosures. All of these sites, and the many more like them, evidently provide an essential social function; they enable people to self-disclose.

## **Celebrity and public figures' self-disclosure**

Every day newspapers, magazines, television, and the internet transmit to readers and viewers worldwide the self-disclosures of movie stars, politicians, and public figures. On scores of television 'talk show' programmes, entertainers and other celebrities are prompted to share their lives and experiences, discuss their sexual identities, and recount how they dealt with substance abuse, marital infidelities, personal tragedies, etc. This form of entertainment is not limited to English-speaking media (e.g. Acosta-Alzuru, 2003). Part of the current appeal of 'reality' television shows is that they allow viewers by the millions to observe self-disclosures that otherwise would be private. One experimental study of self-disclosures in a reality TV show showed that viewers liked characters more who disclosed more than other characters and liked characters best when their disclosures were gradual rather than sudden (Tal-Or & Hershman Shitrit, 2015).

Public disclosures of private information can affect much more than liking. A meta-analysis of 13 studies with more than 3,000 subjects revealed that Magic Johnson's announcement in 1991 that he was HIV positive increased knowledge about HIV, HIV tests, and perceived vulnerability to the disease among adults (Casey et al., 2003). A recent event also demonstrates the power of public disclosures. In the United Kingdom, Prince Harry revealed in a newspaper interview that he had experienced severe depression and had sought professional counseling following the death of his mother, Princess Diana. His disclosure received media coverage around the world and was praised by leaders of five U.K. mental health charities for disclosing his problem and encouraging people suffering to seek assistance (Samuelson, 2017). These cultural performances suggest that intimate disclosures made in public not only are the subject of great interest but can have positive social impacts. Perhaps future research can identify the conditions predicting positive as well as negative outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

Self-disclosure has proven to be a useful concept for understanding a wide array of social behaviours for a long period of time. Its appeal continues to grow as self-disclosure is embraced as an important part of new developments such as social media. How we come to know others, get others to like us, learn our jobs, get along with spouses, select employees, get others to help us, all depend, in part, on the selective revelation of personal information. Prescriptions of more, or less, self-disclosure oversimplify the complex and dialectical nature of human relationships. We are now much more cognisant of the ways people reveal personal information. Individuals must weigh the

potential rewards (personal, relational, and professional) against the potential risks in making decisions regarding self-disclosure. Managing all human relationships requires strategic self-disclosure. Understanding how self-disclosure functions in personal and work relationships can only help people use it effectively.

## NOTE

- 1 The authors wish to acknowledge and thank Kathryn Dindia, co-author of the previous edition's self-disclosure chapter, whose work and ideas are also reflected in this version. However, she is not responsible for any errors of omission or commission.

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# Listening

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## INTRODUCTION

**L**ISTENING REPRESENTS “A KIND of human behaviour that almost everyone thinks important” (Weaver, 1972, p. 24). Abilities to comprehend, understand, and reflect spoken language are universally recognised to help foster professional success and personal happiness alike. Listening is important to parenting (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009), marriage (Pasupathi, Carstensen, Levenson, & Gottman, 1999), salesperson performance (Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993), customer satisfaction (de Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000), and healthcare provision (Watanuki, Tracy, & Lindquist, 2006); and the list could go on. Quality listening can enhance others’ ability to cope with (Bodie, Vickery, Cannava, & Jones, 2015) and remember events (Pasupathi, Stallworth, & Murdoch, 1998); and those who are able to display quality listening on a consistent basis (i.e. competent listeners) are more liked, rated as more attractive (Argyle & Cook, 1976), and garner more trust (Mechanic & Meyer, 2000) than those less proficient. Good listening has additionally been linked to academic motivation and achievement (Schrodt, Wheelless, & Ptacek, 2000) and a higher likelihood of upward mobility in the workplace (Sypher, Bostrom, & Seibert, 1989). Adding to the importance of listening, research finds that natural decrements in the ability to process speech can negatively impact individual and relational health and well-being (Villaume, Brown, & Darling, 1994).

Despite these recognitions, efforts to teach (Janusik, 2010) and research (Bodie, 2011b) listening have paled in comparison to the teaching and researching of speech. These imbalances were acknowledged by Bostrom (2006) who wrote the prior version of this chapter for this



book's third edition. The situation seems to have changed very little in the intervening decade. One potential reason for this inconsistency is found in that self-same chapter: The focus of past research efforts has been on a narrow slice of contexts relevant for understanding listening competency. Any history of the study of listening will show a primary focus on studying how people, usually students in a classroom or second-language setting, process aural information (Beard & Bodie, 2014; Bostrom, 2011; Wolvin, Halone, & Coakley, 1999). As I will show in a subsequent section, comprehension is but one goal of listeners who also aim to learn, connect, relate, support others, find enjoyment, release tension, critically evaluate evidence, and achieve numerous practical aims. On a more fundamental level, several scholars have documented the tendency, at least in Western cultures, to laud speaking and treat listening as an afterthought (C. Glenn & Ratcliffe, 2011; Lipari, 2012). I hope this chapter adds to existing evidence that skilled listening is something worth fostering.

In addition to being essential, also incontrovertible is that listening skills can be taught (Jalongo, 2010; Janusik, 2002, 2010). Thus it likely comes as no surprise that numerous taxonomies have been developed to delineate the skills necessary for listening competence (Fontana, Cohen, & Wolvin, 2015). What most of these lists have in common is a focus on not only the cognitive facets of listening (the primary focus of past research) but also its affective and behavioural components (which are much less researched; Keaton & Bodie, 2013). Indeed, listening is simultaneously a cognitive, affective, and behavioural phenomenon, something that occurs internally but also something that is judged as competent (or incompetent) based on overt behavioural responses in specified contexts (Witkin, 1990). Below, I forward a definition of listening that includes these three components (the "ABCs of listening") and allows me to cover, in separate sections, distinct skill sets that, while not exclusive to listening, contribute to a holistic framework of listening competence.

## DEFINING LISTENING: AS EASY AS "ABC"

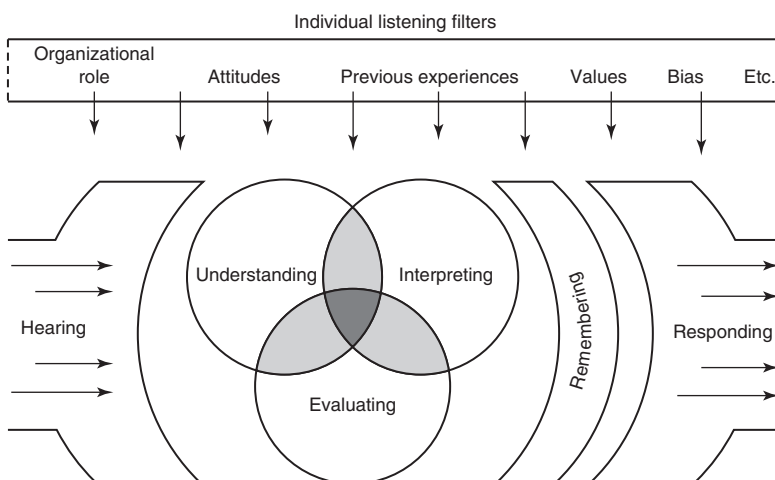
In common parlance, listening and hearing are often used interchangeably. For example, asking, *Did you hear me?* or, *Were you listening?* will not change the recipient's reaction for most intents and purposes. Parents wishing children were more obedient or teachers wishing students were more attentive are equally likely to use either question without giving much thought to differences among terms. Listening scholars are, however, quick to separate the capacity to hear from the ability to listen (e.g. Imhof, 2010; Lipari, 2010; Wolvin, 2009). While hearing denotes a capacity to discriminate characteristics of one's environment through aural sense perception, listening is a relationally oriented phenomenon; it "connects and bridges" (Lipari, 2012, p. 233). To listen thus involves skill sets that go beyond the physiological requirements to perceive sound.<sup>1</sup>

Listening has been defined in hundreds of ways, with most definitions stressing how people come to understand and respond to orally delivered speech (E. Glenn, 1989; Worthington & Bodie, 2017a), a focus that can be traced to early models of language competency (e.g. Shrum & Glisan, 2016). Early models of language competency defined listening as a higher-order cognitive process that involves "taking in sounds" along with an active choice of the individual to select and attend to particular sounds

for particular purposes (Sticht, Beck, Hauke, Kleiman, & James, 1974, p. 21).<sup>2</sup> As a result, most models of listening set hearing as the first step in a complex set of processes including attention, selection, comprehension, understanding, and responding.

As an example, take Brownell's (2013) HURIER model of listening, presented as Figure 8.1. Similar to other holistic models, the HURIER model presents hearing as an innate, reactive, and passive process, something that operates as a "mechanical or automatic outcome of the operation of the auditory anatomical structure" (Sticht et al., 1974, p. 21). Hearing does involve a complex set of sensory and brain processes that allow humans to detect and use sounds (Davis, 1970), and these are non-trivial to be sure. Nevertheless, most models assume that hearing is not under conscious control. Whether sleeping or awake, humans are constantly processing sound; that is, vibrations pass through our ears and are processed in our brains continuously (Antony, Gobel, O'Hare, Reber, & Paller, 2012). Not all of these sounds, however, are attended to consciously. Most sounds we hear are not "listened to" cognitively, that is, in the language of the HURIER model, understood, remembered, interpreted, evaluated, and responded to.

Over the past several decades, scholars have broadened our understanding of listening by defining it not only as a set of complex cognitive processes, but also a complex set of affective and behavioural processes (Halone, Cunconan, Coakley, & Wolvin, 1998). Affective components of listening include how individuals think about listening and their motivation and enjoyment of the activity. Individuals' views about listening and their (often idiosyncratic) barriers to attending to others can have profound effects on comprehension and understanding as well as consequences for personal, professional, and relational success. Listening behaviours are actions such as eye contact and asking questions that serve to signal attention and interest to others. The responses that listeners enact while engaged with another are the only signals that listening is taking (or has taken) place. Finally, cognitive elements of listening are those internal processes that operate to enable individuals to attend to, comprehend,



**Figure 8.1** The HURIER listening model, reprinted by permission of Judi Brownell, School of Hotel Administration, College of Business, Cornell University

interpret, evaluate, and make sense of spoken language. The notion that listening is an information processing activity consisting of a stable set of practices that can be trained and improved is the most popular way to conceptualise the term and one that has framed all listening research at least since the early 1940s. As such, I will begin my extended discussion of our multidimensional definition of listening with its cognitive components.

## COGNITIVE COMPONENTS OF LISTENING

The study cited by most as the catalyst for contemporary listening research was published in 1948 by Ralph Nichols. In that study, Nichols played six 10-minute audio-recorded lectures to a sample of undergraduate students who answered 10 multiple-choice questions after each. Nichols designed the test items to assess the amount of material from the lectures that students could recall without the assistance of note-taking. Student participants recalled an average of 68% of the lecture material with higher scores related to both individual (e.g. intelligence) and situational (e.g. listener fatigue) factors. Subsequent interviews with instructors revealed that students scoring in the upper tertile of the test, compared to those scoring in the bottom tertile, were “more attentive during classroom activities and more conscientious in their ... work habits” (Nichols, 1948, p. 160). Nichols spent the remainder of his career motivating serious scholarly attention to factors likely to discriminate among good and poor listeners and to instructional efforts aimed at improving student ability to comprehend aural input.

Issues related to retention and recall remained strong components of listening research for many years. Nichols’s research suggested that listening (as measured by recall) was associated with individual intelligence, vocabulary size, and one’s ability to identify organisational elements of a message. Definitions forwarded in the 1950s and 1960s proposed listening ability as a separate, unitary skill and reduced listening to an activity of information acquisition (Bostrom, 1990). Kelly’s (1965, 1967) research suggested otherwise, however. His discovery that early listening measures were more highly correlated with tests of intelligence than with each other led listening scholars to re-evaluate listening and its facets in terms of a complex, multifaceted process.

The measures of listening comprehension Kelly used in his research were derived from existing measures of reading comprehension and focused exclusively on memory for facts (Devine, 1978). Although most subsequent work cited Kelly, research conducted prior to his suggested that processing speech was a distinct language ability (for review see Caffrey, 1955). In addition, several large-scale factor analytic studies published around the time of Kelly’s work proposed “a constellation of interrelated listening abilities” (Lundsteen, 1966, p. 311). By the late 1960s, listening scholars began to define listening as a set of cognitive processes, some of which are related to other language facilities like reading, some of which are related to mental acuity and intelligence, and some of which are unique to aural processing (see Weaver, 1972, pp. 9–10). These early models were used as justification to separate listening into multiple cognitive components.

A primary cognitive component that entered into listening research around the time of Kelly was memory. The relations between listening and memory were most

extensively theorised by Bostrom and Waldhart (1980), who suggested that the separation of short- and long-term memory could be usefully applied to the development of measures of listening comprehension.<sup>3</sup> Their Kentucky Comprehensive Listening Test (KCLT), which is now out of production, was designed to measure five components of listening comprehension: (1) short-term listening, (2) listening with rehearsal, (3) interpretive listening, (4) lecture listening, and (5) short-term listening with distractions (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1983). By incorporating memory models into a conceptualisation of listening, Bostrom and his colleagues were able to tease apart relations among certain types of listening and particular individual predispositions. The relation between listening and memory (and thus, recall), however, remains unclear (Bostrom, 1990, 1996, 2011; Thomas & Levine, 1994, 1996).

By separating listening into its constituent parts (e.g. hearing, understanding, remembering), researchers claimed an ability to develop more valid tests that could be shown unique, but complementary to, tests of other language abilities. Test development efforts defined listening research during the 1970s and 1980s, and multidimensional tests of comprehension proliferated. The development of many of these tests was largely a response to the perceived failings of those that had come before. The most popular target of criticism was the Brown-Carlsen Listening Test (Brown & Carlsen, 1955) which was designed as a comprehensive test and claimed to measure recall of items, recognition of word meanings, following instructions, lecture comprehension, and inference making. Each multidimensional test developed during the 1970s and 80s held a similar assumption to prior tests: there exists some identifiable set of skills that can be taught in order for a person to become a good listener. Of course, agreement about which skills to include was far from universal. For instance, while the KCLT reflected the relation between listening and memory, the Watson-Barker Listening Test (WBLT; Watson & Barker, 1983) focused on interpersonal listening abilities necessary within academic settings (e.g. following directions). Research using these tests was primarily concerned with issues of validity with particular attention paid to whether the tests factored appropriately. Unfortunately, early attempts to provide validity evidence failed (e.g. Applegate & Campbell, 1985; Bodie et al., 2011; Fitch-Hauser & Hughes, 1987; Villaume & Weaver, 1996).

## AFFECTIVE COMPONENTS OF LISTENING

In addition to outlining several cognitive processes involved in listening, models (like the HURIER) also feature myriad *listening filters*. Common among recommendations for how to be a “good listener” include recognising biases and learning to work within one’s own and others’ attitudes and values. A focus on individual predispositions and their influence on how people interpret and process aural information was implicit in the work of Nichols but was not formally included in cognitive models of listening until Carl Weaver published *Human Listening: Process and Behavior*. In his book, Weaver (1972) argued that a listener’s “attitudes” should be incorporated as part of a “selective perception” model of listening. For the first time, a listener’s willingness to or attitude toward listening was identified as a separate component of the listening process (see also Barker, 1971). In other words, individual choice is a key element of listening – we choose to listen (or to avoid it).

Indeed, most holistic models of listening (including the HURIER) consider some form of “selective attention” a necessary first step to move from hearing to listening (see also Imhof, 2010). In their systems model of the listening process, Imhof and Janusik (2006) introduced the notion of listening presage, which includes various individual and contextual factors that contribute to how people select among relevant listening goals. How and why individuals come to the conclusions they do as they listen has additionally been studied under the auspices of message interpretation (Edwards, 2011), relational framing (Dillard, Solomon, & Palmer, 1999), and other research programs like constructivism (Burlison, 2011) and schema theory (Edwards & McDonald, 1993). Each line of research has contributed to our understanding that comprehension of aural information is more complex than simply remembering uttered speech. Research in psychology seems to confirm that memory is not as simple as repeating what is seen or heard and that people have “false memories” even with short lists of words or phrases (Loftus & Palmer, 1974). Extrapolating to interactive contexts, individuals often come away from the same oral event with different information or at least different interpretations and evaluations of that information (Edwards, 1998).

One way to make sense of differences in comprehension is to focus on possible trait-like personality factors that may affect individual motivation to listen in particular ways. Scholars have investigated how differences in memory (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1988; Janusik, 2005), schema formation (Fitch-Hauser, 1984, 1990), anxiety (Schrodt et al., 2000; Wheelless Preiss, & Gayle, 1997), and individual preferences for (Bodie Worthington, & Gearhart, 2013) and conceptualisations of (Imhof & Janusik, 2006) listening potentially affect how listeners enact their role. Other examples of research into individual differences include studies between various listening concepts and empathic tendencies (Drollinger Comer, & Warrington, 2006), noise sensitivity (Worthington Keaton, Imhof, & Valikoski, 2015), and related social skills (Gearhart & Bodie, 2011).

In general, affective components of listening include any variable that influences an individual’s motivation to listen (Wolvin & Coakley, 1994). The inclusion of a positive attitude toward listening in models of listening competence mirrored the development of more general models of communication competence, which progressed from defining competence as not only knowing about but also being willing to perform at one’s knowledge level (McCroskey, 1982). Of course, it is ultimately the performance itself that is judged as competent or not.

## **BEHAVIOURAL COMPONENTS OF LISTENING**

While placing an emphasis on a listener’s motivation and willingness to listen in particular ways, Weaver’s book set aside the listening response as a viable research trajectory. It was not until the mid-1980s and the push to develop “speaking and listening competencies” in US high schools and universities that listening scholars began to focus on the performative aspects of listening (i.e. overt behaviours). Most scholars writing in the 1970s and early 1980s considered the response phase to begin a new process, one that was more speaking-focused in nature (Ridge, 1993). Models of listening competency that stressed overt behaviours were, however, natural outgrowths of previous research emphasising outcomes of retention and recall. For instance, in Nichols’s study

reviewed above, the observations made by educators to classify students into upper and lower tertiles were based solely on outward signs of attention and engagement within the classroom setting (i.e. listening behaviours). Even so, a behavioural view of listening was not mainstreamed until the movement toward assessment and measurement was tied to federal funding initiatives in the US (see Beard & Bodie, 2014).

Fundamental to the “listening as competent behavior” perspective is “the view that an identifiable set of skills, attitudes, and abilities can be formulated and taught to improve individual performance” (Bodie, Worthington, Imhof, & Cooper, 2008, p. 107). Indeed, the phrase “listening behaviours” was used until the 1980s to describe internal actions of listeners as they processed information, and the term “response” was reserved for internal actions such as transferring information into long-term memory (see Barker, 1971; Weaver, 1972). What the research between the latter part of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s accomplished was to shift the focus from covert mental processes to overt behavioural ones. Two claims are central in this shift: (1) that our behavioural choices are moderated by our relationships and (2) that competency resides in the eye of the beholder. In other words, our listening competency is judged by others, and this judgement (or at least what is relevant for that judgement) varies with the context. Judgements of listening competence, like judgements of communication competence, are made on the basis of the appropriateness and effectiveness of specific behaviours enacted in particular settings (Cooper & Husband, 1993; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002).

Along with a conceptual shift, the behavioural perspective inspired new measurement techniques. Competency expanded beyond multiple-choice assessments of comprehension to include multi-item scales that could be completed by listeners, their interlocutors, and their peers, co-workers, friends, and family members (Worthington & Bodie, 2017b). Along with traditional self-report measures used to assess affective components of listening, researchers began utilising a variety of other reporting techniques including third party and critical incident techniques. Moreover, there was a growing acknowledgment that listening competency was contextual, with researchers exploring listening competency in the areas of business, education, and health. Researchers in these areas have tied listening competency (measured in multiple ways) to attentiveness, memory, and understanding, as well as employee motivation, upward mobility in the workplace, and job and class performance. At the same time, a focus on the skills needed to be judged as a competent listener meant that research was largely atheoretical in nature (Wolvin et al., 1999). Indeed, no unified framework currently exists to organise and evaluate competency skills, and some even take issue with the need for theoretically oriented research more generally (Purdy, 2011).

## LISTENING SKILLS AND THE COMPETENT LISTENER

[T]he difference between merely receiving an oral message and listening actively is similar to the difference between scanning a textbook and reading it for comprehension and retention ... In oral communication settings there must be *involved listeners* attempting to internalize and evaluate the message in order for a speaker to achieve his communication objective.

(Barker, 1971, pp. 2–3; emphasis added)

The above quote comes from Barker's *Listening Behavior*, one of the earliest listening textbooks. A major goal of Barker's text was to outline what people can do to become more active participants in (versus passive recipients of) a communication exchange. Recommendations such as Barker's were common starting points when designing multidimensional tests of listening comprehension in the 1980s and 1990s as well as attempts to develop standards for teaching listening in US schooling contexts. Furthered by federal funding initiatives in the US, several large-scale efforts were launched as well, including a series of meetings that eventually resulted in the National Communication Association's (NCA) publication of expected outcomes for the basic communication course (see Table 8.1).

NCA's definition of listening, "the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and or nonverbal messages" (Morreale et al., 1998, p. 9), provides evidence that by the late 1990s competence in listening required mastery of the ABCs of listening (that is, affective, behavioural, and cognitive skills). In the sections that follow, I discuss each facet of listening from a competency perspective.

## COGNITIVE LISTENING COMPETENCE

As a reminder, cognitive facets of listening include internal processes such as attention, comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation of message content. As illustrated in the NCA list of listening skills (Table 8.1), understanding speech is generally thought to consist of two related but unique tasks. NCA labels these *literal comprehension* and *critical comprehension*; in the second-language literature they are often referred to as abilities to understand a basic level of meaning and abilities to understand inferences and deduce meaning from "linguistic clues" (Buck, 2001, p. 113). Literal comprehension begins with the ability to recognise sounds and parse those sounds into phrases, sentences, and longer strings of utterances. This, of course, requires various auditory processing capacities. Indeed, people who have some level of central auditory processing disorder (CAPD) can experience difficulties acquiring language or understanding paralinguistic cues (Geffner, 2007). Consequently, a basic level of auditory discrimination skill is necessary to become a proficient listener; but cognitive listening competence requires more than physiological capabilities.

Burleson (2011) offered one model of competent listening from a cognitive perspective. His model, presented as Figure 8.2, suggests that cognitive listening competency begins with hearing (the capacity to discriminate characteristics of one's environment through aural sense perception) and moves through four additional, successive stages. Comprehension or understanding what the speaker has said involves syntactic analysis. In other words, once we have parsed the sound-waves into words and sentences, we engage in a process of *inference* which drives our ability to grasp exactly what the speaker is articulating. Typical measures of comprehension include memory of facts after a lecture-based presentation, and most utilise multiple choice questions scored as right or wrong (Watson & Barker, 1984). So, comprehension is completed when the listener knows what was said or expressed without necessarily knowing what the speaker means.

To understand what a speaker *means*, the listener goes through the third process, the process of interpretation. Edwards (2011) defined the interpretation of messages

**Table 8.1** List of competencies associated with listening as outlined by the National Communication Association

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In order to be a COMPETENT LISTENER, a person must be able to listen with literal comprehension. Specifically, the competent listener should be able to exhibit the following competencies by demonstrating the abilities included under each statement.

A. RECOGNISE MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Distinguish ideas fundamental to the thesis from material that supports those ideas
- 2 Identify transitional, organisational, and nonverbal cues that direct the listener to the main ideas
- 3 Identify the main ideas in structured and unstructured discourse.

B. IDENTIFY SUPPORTING DETAILS

- 1 Identify supporting details in spoken messages
- 2 Distinguish between those ideas that support the main ideas and those that do not
- 3 Determine whether the number of supporting details adequately develops each main idea.

C. RECOGNISE EXPLICIT RELATIONSHIPS AMONG IDEAS

- 1 Demonstrate an understanding of the types of organisational or logical relationships
- 2 Identify transitions that suggest relationships
- 3 Determine whether the asserted relationship exists.

D. RECALL BASIC IDEAS AND DETAILS.

- 1 Determine the goal for listening
- 2 State the basic cognitive and affective contents, after listening.

The COMPETENT LISTENER must also listen with critical comprehension. Specifically, the competent listener should exhibit the following competencies by demonstrating the abilities included under each statement.

A. ATTEND WITH AN OPEN MIND

- 1 Demonstrate an awareness of personal, ideological, and emotional biases
  - 2 Demonstrate awareness that each person has a unique perspective
  - 3 Demonstrate awareness that one's knowledge, experience, and emotions affect listening
  - 4 Use verbal and nonverbal behaviours that demonstrate willingness to listen to messages when variables such as setting, speaker, or topic may not be conducive to listening.
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*(continued)*



**Table 8.1** Continued

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B. PERCEIVE THE SPEAKER'S PURPOSE AND ORGANISATION OF IDEAS AND INFORMATION

- 1 Identify the speaker's purpose
- 2 Identify the organisation of the speaker's ideas and information.

C. DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN STATEMENTS OF FACT AND STATEMENTS OF OPINION

- 1 Distinguish between assertions that are verifiable and those that are not.

D. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN EMOTIONAL AND LOGICAL ARGUMENTS

- 1 Demonstrate an understanding that arguments have both emotional and logical dimensions
- 2 Identify the logical characteristics of an argument
- 3 Identify the emotional characteristics of an argument
- 4 Identify whether the argument is predominantly emotional or logical.

E. DETECT BIAS AND PREJUDICE

- 1 Identify instances of bias and prejudice in a spoken message
- 2 Specify how bias and prejudice may affect the impact of a spoken message.

F. RECOGNISE THE SPEAKER'S ATTITUDE.

- 1 Identify the direction, intensity, and salience of the speaker's attitude as reflected by the verbal messages
- 2 Identify the direction, intensity, and salience of the speaker's attitude as reflected by the nonverbal messages.

G. SYNTHESISE AND EVALUATE BY DRAWING LOGICAL INFERENCES AND CONCLUSIONS

- 1 Draw relationships between prior knowledge and the information provided by the speaker
- 2 Demonstrate an understanding of the nature of inference
- 3 Identify the types of verbal and nonverbal information
- 4 Draw valid inferences from the information
- 5 Identify the information as evidence to support views
- 6 Assess the acceptability of evidence
- 7 Identify patterns of reasoning and judge the validity of arguments
- 8 Analyse the information and inferences in order to draw conclusions.

H. RECALL THE IMPLICATIONS AND ARGUMENTS

- 1 Identify the arguments used to justify the speaker's position
  - 2 State both the overt and implied arguments
  - 3 Specify the implications of these arguments for the speaker, audience, and society at large.
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*(continued)*

**Table 8.1** Continued

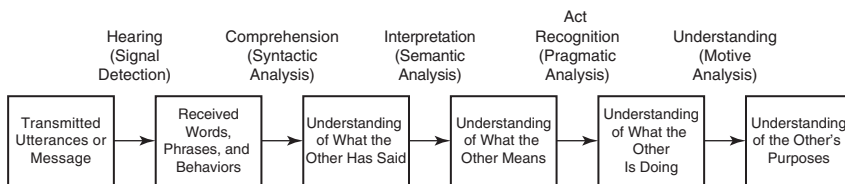
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**I. RECOGNISE DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THE SPEAKER'S VERBAL AND NONVERBAL MESSAGES**

- 1 Identify when the nonverbal signals contradict the verbal message
- 2 Identify when the nonverbal signals understate or exaggerate the verbal message
- 3 Identify when the nonverbal message is irrelevant to the verbal message.

**J. EMPLOY ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES WHEN APPROPRIATE**

- 1 Identify the cognitive and affective dimensions of a message
  - 2 Demonstrate comprehension by formulating questions that clarify or qualify the speaker's content and affective intent
  - 3 Demonstrate comprehension by paraphrasing the speaker's message.
- 



**Figure 8.2** A constructivist model of the listening process (Burluson, 2011). Reprinted with permission from the International Listening Association, [www.listen.org](http://www.listen.org), and the publisher, Taylor & Francis Ltd.

*Note:* Rectangles represent structures; arrows represent processes

as listeners making “sense of messages by choosing from the available meanings;” she gave the following examples to illustrate (p. 47):

A student in a public speaking class gives a bad speech and asks a classmate how she did. The classmate replies, “It was interesting.” A husband trips on a ladder and his wife says, “You need to be more careful.” In these examples, recipients must make sense of the ... messages enacted by another; that is, they need to find meanings for the words ... The public speaking student, for example, may believe the classmate is genuinely interested in her topic. Alternatively, the student may recognize that her speech was deficient and apprehend the comment as a gentle substitute for outright criticism. The wife’s comment may signal caring and concern for her husband’s safety, or it may be perceived as an attempt to dominate.

So, when we grasp the meaning of a person’s message, we understand both the conventional meanings (the content level of meaning) and the meaning specific to the situation and relationship (the relational level of meaning) (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). That is, we understand not only the words used because we are part of a larger culture who has agreed to use those words in particular ways, but we also understand

that by using these words (and not others) that our conversational partner is trying to communicate something specific to us.

These two examples also highlight the fourth process, act recognition or understanding what the speaker is doing (pragmatic analysis). When we communicate we are not only sending a bunch of sound waves to be parsed into words and interpreted, we are performing certain actions (Yule, 1996). When we produce messages, we are performing actions like comforting, persuading, directing, or informing. When the listener understands the performance of certain words and phrases they have understood or recognised the act.

The final process, understanding, refers to grasping what our conversational partner wants to accomplish. When we infer the goals underlying our partner's behaviour, we are engaging in this process (Palomares, 2008). So, for instance, when we get that our friend is trying to gauge our availability to help him move after graduation by asking "So, what are you doing on Saturday?" we have fully engaged in the cognitive process of listening by understanding.

To illustrate these processes in action, suppose your boss says, "Hey, can you take a walk with me?" Let's also assume that you are in a position to have the sound-waves carrying this question register with your eardrums and, thus, initiate in you a call to action. When they do, you will grasp the words that your boss is using – you know the conventional use of the term *walk* and you know what walking means (at least denotatively). You also know the relationship implicated by your boss asking this question – that your boss is in a hierarchically more powerful position than you and can ask you this question because of that position (relational level of meaning). You also understand your boss's intention – by speaking these words, your boss is, in effect, inviting you to accompany her to have a private conversation; she is not literally asking you about your ability to put one foot in front of the other (act recognition). And you probably have an adequate understanding of your boss's motives. For example, you know that your boss likes to discuss delicate matters in private (understanding). So, while the question is actually a yes-no question – that is, the content of the question is literally asking about your physical ability to walk – your knowledge of your boss, the workplace, and how the phrase is typically used help you know to say "Sure," then stand up and start moving.

But why is this important? Bursleson (2011) noted that misunderstanding can come from a variety of sources, each of which is a component of his model of listening:

All of the actions performed by a source through a message must be interpreted by the listener, and each represents a potential source of misunderstanding; a listener may not understand what was said (confusion about words and/or sentences), what was meant (confusion about reference and/or predication), what was done (confusion about the speaker's illocutionary act), what the speaker wanted to achieve (confusion about the intended outcome), or the speaker's underlying motivation for these interrelated actions.

(p. 31)

As we listen, the chances of us making a mistake are fairly good. It is up to us to analyse our listening to ensure that we are not engaging in activities that will inhibit our hearing, comprehension, interpretation, act recognition, or understanding.

## AFFECTIVE LISTENING COMPETENCE

Affective listening competence was defined by Wolvin and Coakley (1994) as an “attitudinal component – the willingness to engage as a communicating listener” (p. 151). The importance of listeners developing a “positive listening attitude” is stressed in listening instruction across primary/secondary (Cooper, 1998) and higher education (Wolvin & Coakley, 2000) alike. Most textbooks stress the importance of “knowing why you are listening” and being aware of listening-related goals and priorities (Brownell, 2013; Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2012). In particular, students are taught to take responsibility as a listener, to “demonstrate willingness to listen to messages when variables such as setting, speaker, or topic may not be conducive to listening” and “attend with an open mind” (see Table 8.1). Each piece of advice taps some facet of the affective dimension of listening with the general assumption that sheer knowledge is not enough to listen well: the genuine desire to listen effectively is equally important.

In addition to being a popular component of teaching listening, affective components of listening also are popular in the academic literature. Keaton and Bodie (2013) reported that 80 out of 110 studies published in the *International Journal of Listening* (IJL) between 1987 and 2011 (nearly 75%) examined one or more facets of motivations to or tendencies toward listening. Mirroring work in the social sciences more generally, most of these studies ( $n = 67$ , 61%) asked participants to report on their own attitudes, motivations, or perceived tendencies; the remaining 13 studies (or 39%) asked participants to report on another person (e.g. friend, co-worker, spouse). As a result, much of what we know about listening is limited to what people report about their own listening (retrospective self-report) and how this self-knowledge aligns with (or diverges from) what other people report (retrospective other-report). Below, I provide a brief overview of four categories of affective listening components, namely internal states, beliefs about listening, motivations to listen in particular ways, and situationally influenced listening goals.

**Internal states.** This first affective category contains measures of how listeners think and feel about listening. The earliest self-report measure of a listening trait was the Receiver Apprehension Test (RAT). Originally defined as “fear of misinterpreting, inadequately processing, and/or not being able to adjust psychologically to messages sent by others” (Wheless, 1975, p. 263), RA has since evolved into a construct called Informational Reception Apprehension (IRA). IRA is a three-dimensional construct related to an individual’s anxiety regarding: 1) listening, 2) reading, and 3) thinking about abstract concepts (Wheless et al., 1997).

The listening subscale of the Information Reception Apprehension Test (IRAT) measures the degree to which a listener experiences anxiety when confronted with a listening task. Other internal listener states that have readily available operationalisations include the Affectionate Communication Index (ACI), Attributional Complexity (AC), the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), and the Rational-Experiential Inventory (REI) (for reviews of these measures, see Worthington & Bodie, 2017b). Each of these measures can be used to tap trait-level characteristics, and most measures also can be modified to tap state-level characteristics; for instance, the degree of listening anxiety experienced before, during, or after a particular listening event.

**Beliefs about listening.** What people believe about listening can have powerful effects on how they enact (or fail to enact) behaviours in the service of attending to others. Our beliefs about listening also likely influence how we judge others as they listen to us. When asked, participants readily list a consistent set of behaviours associated with good listening (Bodie, St. Cyr, Pence, Rold, & Honeycutt, 2012), most of which are represented on scales that tap self-perceived listening competence. Two such scales are the Self-Perceived Listening Competence Scale (SPLCS) and the Organizational Listening Survey (OLS). These scales are intended as self-reports of how well one listens, in general; or, if instructions are modified, in a context of interest (e.g. the classroom, at work). As defined in this chapter, however, behaviours are concrete actions that are displayed in the moment, not what people think they do. These scales also can be modified to measure what other people (like a co-worker or relational partner) think about you.

Another strategy for exploring what people think about listening is to ask them to define the term, a strategy used to develop the Listening Concepts Inventory (LCI) (Bodie, 2010; Imhof & Janusik, 2006). The first step in developing the LCI involved exploring the lay and scholarly literature related to listening and gathering several dozen terms considered synonymous with or closely related to listening (e.g. understanding, attention, learning). Then, college students in the US and Germany rated the degree to which each term was identical to or not at all similar to listening. Results suggested four broad ways one can think about listening: as organising information, as relationship building, as learning and integrating information, and as a critical activity. The work on the LCI is similar in many respects to work on implicit theories of relationships (Knee, 1998), personality (Krzystofiak, Cardy, & Newman, 1988), communication (O'Keefe, 1988), and other facets of human life that influence how we behave in the presence of others.

**Motivation to listen.** The motivation to listen is an integral part of listening competence – in order to behave in effective and appropriate ways, the listener must not only know how to behave, but also have the motivation to behave in that way (Wolvin & Coakley, 1994). Roberts and Vinson developed a willingness to listen (WTL) instrument based on successful past attempts to operationalise willingness to communicate (Roberts & Vinson, 1998). Their WTL scale simply asks respondents to estimate the percentage of time they would choose to listen in 36 situations; the average score out of 100 becomes the person's WTL score. A second WTL measure was developed by Richmond and Hickson (2001) to assess students' willingness to listen to classroom presentations.

Other scales also tap listening motivation, though, much like measures of listening competence, they are often positioned as measures of dispositions or tendencies to listen in particular ways. Those include the Active-Empathic Listening Scale (AELS), the Attitude Toward Active Listening Scale (ATALS), the Conversational Sensitivity Scale (CSS), the Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS), the Talkaholic Scale (TS), and several measures of Nonverbal Immediacy (NVI). Empirical evidence awaits, but these scales show promise of tapping the motivation to be a particular type of listener (Worthington & Bodie, 2017b). In the case of the AELS, for instance, perhaps this scale taps the degree to which a listener wants to consciously understand another individual from that individual's perspective. Interpreting the scale in this way is supported by high associations between the AELS and measures of empathy (Bodie, 2011a; Gearhart & Bodie, 2011).

**Situationally derived listening goals.** The fourth and final affective category to which self-reports seem appropriate is the measure of situationally derived

listening goals. The first conceptualisation of listening-related goals was developed by Watson, Barker, and Weaver (1995), who proposed the construct of *listening style* as the variability in how people attend to and process information. In particular, Watson et al. identified four listening orientations – people, action, content, and time – that individuals habitually use, especially in novel situations (Imhof, 2004). Problems encountered in studies utilising the LSP-16 (Bodie & Worthington, 2010), led Bodie et al. (2013) to revise and frame this typology as representing four distinct “goals that listeners have when engaged in situations that call them to be a particular kind of listener” (p. 17).

Indeed, if we return to the NCA definition of listening competence, we see a recognition that listening is a goal-directed activity; that is, people make choices about how they listen. In particular, NCA recognised that listening can be directed to “comprehend information, critique and evaluate a message, show empathy for the feelings expressed by others, or appreciate a performance” (p. 9–10). Their list seems to have been derived from the taxonomy developed by Wolvin and Coakley (1979; 1993, 1996) which outlined five purposes for which people can listen.<sup>4</sup> The first two, discriminative and comprehensive, build a base of skills upon which the three higher-order purposes, therapeutic, critical, and appreciative, rest. *Discriminative listening* includes those skills necessary for perceiving and noting differences between distinct audio (and visual) information. This listening goal seems to map onto what NCA labelled literal comprehension or listening for a basic level of understanding and recall. *Comprehensive listening* is listening to understand, comprehend, and retain presented information, which seems to align with NCA’s notion of critical comprehension. The next three goals (appreciative, therapeutic, critical) seem to map onto the goals for which listeners strive according to the NCA document. *Appreciative listening* is the process of listening to appreciate either what another is saying or sounds for one’s own enjoyment. *Therapeutic listening* is used to describe listening to others as they talk about stressful or otherwise negative life events. Finally, *critical listening* requires moving beyond understanding to evaluating and making judgements about a message’s veracity or consistency with other arguments. This taxonomy directed the development of the Self-Perceived Listening Competence (SPLC) scale which was included above under “beliefs about listening.” Thus, the SPLC might also be interpreted as identifying different goals that listeners might seek to accomplish in interaction.

Although theirs is not the only taxonomy, it is highly representative. While labels differ, the basic implication of taking a taxonomic approach to defining listening competence is that the skills needed for proficiency are at least somewhat unique to the purpose for which one is primed to listen. In other words, the skills needed to be a competent therapeutic listener will differ, albeit perhaps only slightly, from the skills needed to be a competent critical listener. Past approaches to measuring listening competence such as the Watson-Barker Listening Test (WBLT) or Kentucky Comprehensive Listening Test (KCLT) tap only a basic level of skill (discriminative and comprehensive listening in the language of Wolvin and Coakley’s taxonomy). Neither the WBLT nor the KCLT is well suited for providing evidence for or against whether someone is, for instance, a quality therapeutic or critical listener. To be sure, listening to someone describe a current stressor involves abilities to discriminate sounds and understand (and perhaps paraphrase) the events leading to feelings of stress; but the skills needed to listen in a therapeutic manner go beyond these basic skills.

The skills necessary for higher-order listening goals include a mix of internal processes (e.g. remembering details) and overt behaviours (e.g. ability to formulate questions and paraphrase a speaker's message). While cognitive components of listening can be assessed with standard listening tests, listening behaviour is something that individuals (or dyads or larger groups) *do* that has to be *observed* by others. As you listen to another person, you do a variety of things like nod in agreement, say "mm-hmm" and "yeah" to encourage continued disclosure, ask questions, and tell reciprocal stories. While listening for appreciative purposes, you might move your body to music or close your eyes and lie on your back to take in all the available soundscape; and when you listen in a critical manner, you might shout out loud "No way!" when you hear something surprising. All these are listening behaviours because they are outwardly observable by others.

## BEHAVIOURAL LISTENING COMPETENCE

Skills that qualify as behaviour are normally organised under the label of response or responding in holistic models of listening (e.g. HURIER). For instance, Ridge (1993) listed the following as "listening skills of responding (R)":

- Asking questions
- Giving appropriate feedback commensurate with purpose of speaker
- Responding in consonance with speaker/situation/mood
- Withholding preparation of response until speaker has finished
- Paraphrasing or checking back for understanding.

(p. 7)

Similarly, in her HURIER model of listening, Brownell (2010) listed several verbal and nonverbal components of a skilful listening response including perception checking, avoiding "you" language, expressing feelings using non-confrontational language, appropriate eye contact, vocal pleasantness, and using gestures to add emphasis to particularly important words. For purposes of classification, I prefer the framework offered by Bavelas and her colleagues.

Using a discourse analytic strategy called microanalysis of face-to-face dialogue, Bavelas and her team have discovered two classes of listening behaviour (Bavelas, Gerwing, Healing, & Tomori, 2017). The first, *generic responding*, includes those familiar and ubiquitous utterances such as "mm-hmm" or actions such as head nods that can go anywhere in a narrative and usually occur in the backchannel of speech; that is, these behaviours do not signal that the listener wants an extended turn at talk. The second, *specific responding*, includes specified utterances and actions that are tied to specific points of a story. For example, in one study Bavelas's team did a detailed analysis of a close-call story<sup>5</sup> about a bedside lamp that got so hot it caught the pillow on fire while the woman was sleeping (The Sleeper Story; Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2002). In their analysis, Bavelas and her team noticed that,

[a]t the precise moment when the speaker described the light as 'really strong' ... the addressee bit her lip. When the speaker went on to say that it was a

‘hot light,’ the addressee smiled and looked alarmed at the same time, conveying that she had begun to anticipate what the close call might be.

(Bavelas & Gerwing, 2011, p. 188)

Thus, behaviours such as biting one’s lip are called *specific* because “they would definitely not fit just anywhere. None of the addressee responses described above would have made sense if they had occurred earlier or at other points in the story” (p. 188). Table 8.2 summarises the characteristics of generic and specific responses.

Importantly, both generic and specific responding can be audible (heard) or visible (seen); the primary distinction is whether the listening response is placed at a specific point in the conversation, presumably on purpose by the listener to communicate something to the speaker (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, Lemery, & Mullett, 1988). In his book *Using Language*, Herb Clark (1996) posited that listening behaviours signal attending, understanding, and identification. As part of a joint contribution to discourse, typical listening behaviours operate to signal to disclosers they are understood well enough for current purposes and that there is the building of mutual knowledge between interlocutors. Clark further claimed that contributions to discourse are achieved in two main phases, the presentation phase and the acceptance phase. As part of the acceptance phase, listeners can engage in a range of behaviours, some of which will provide more valid evidence of understanding. In particular, Clark laid out four types of positive evidence of understanding, including (1) displays (e.g. using immediacy cues, and verbal statements acknowledging emotions), (2) exemplifications (e.g. paraphrasing, using iconic gestures), (3) assertions (i.e. generic backchannel responses), and (4) presuppositions (i.e. uptaking or initiating the next turn). Displays and exemplifications offer more explicit evidence of understanding than assertions and presuppositions. In this framework, listening is a joint construal problem – the listener and the speaker are collaboratively settling on what the speaker is to be taken to mean. As related to generic and specific responding, there is implicit versus explicit uptake of a speaker’s proposition; that is, specific responses assist the joint construal process more than generic responding because specific responses are more clearly communicating understanding. As my primary area of research and teaching is what Wolvin and Coakley call therapeutic listening (what my team and I call supportive listening), I will use this context to illustrate how Clark’s model can be used to explain competence in at least one important listening context.

**Table 8.2** Characteristics of generic and specific responses

<i>Generic responding</i>	<i>Specific responding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• familiar and ubiquitous</li> <li>• saying “mm-hmm,” “yeah,” or nodding</li> <li>• generic because they are not uniquely tied to the meaning of any particular narrative or point in a narrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• highly specific to particular, precise points in conversations</li> <li>• would definitely not fit just anywhere in a conversation</li> <li>• would not make sense if placed at other points in a conversation</li> </ul>



**Competent supportive listening.** It is important to note that I do not study formal helping – therapy, counselling, and the like. I am interested in everyday instances of support; these are common, and research from communication studies, epidemiology, social psychology, and health promotion converge to show the extensive health benefits of having a supportive set of relationships, people you can turn to in times of need (for reviews, see MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011; Uchino, Carlisle, Birmingham, & Vaughn, 2011). Having a supportive social network has health benefits on par with smoking cessation and reducing alcohol consumption; and it is a better predictor of morbidity than obesity and lack of physical exercise combined (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

Most of the work in supportive communication does not, however, explain how social relationships convey health benefits – what is it about them? Why are some people judged as more supportive than others? In the popular press and textbook literatures, the advice is to act like a therapist: to be supportive, you should do what good therapists do. And what do good therapists do? Generically, they listen. The most popular model of therapeutic listening comes from the work of Carl Rogers (1955) and is colloquially known as *active listening*. In his framework, active listening refers to the enactment of visible and audible behaviours that function to demonstrate attention, understanding, responsiveness, and empathy; to encourage continued expression of thoughts and feelings; and to aid in relational maintenance (see also Bodie et al., 2012). In terms of visible behaviours, active listening typically is cast as nonverbal immediacy (NVI) – behaviours such as head nods, eye contact, and forward body lean that reflect the degree of psychological distance between (or closeness with) others. Audibly, active listeners signal attentiveness through four primary behaviours: paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, assumption checking, and asking questions.

Recommendations for “active listening” found in textbooks and most popular press outlets are extrapolated from counselling with little direct evidence of its effectiveness in interpersonal relationships (Cramer, 1987; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). With a few collaborators, I conducted a study to address whether active listening behaviours influence important outcomes of informal supportive conversations (Bodie et al., 2015). For purposes of this chapter, I focus on results that showed audible listening behaviours are sizably more important to perceived emotional awareness and affect change than visible listening behaviours. In particular, we found that perceived emotional awareness is a function of how well a listener paraphrases and reflects feelings, suggesting that emotional awareness is primarily communicated through summary statements that show understanding of a discloser’s content and feelings. On average, the audible behaviours (paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, asking questions, check outs) were 3.31 times more important to the prediction of emotional awareness than was the set of nonverbal immediacy behaviours. For affect change, open questions, check outs, paraphrasing, eye contact, and facial expressions contributed substantively. Although the overall effect was small for any given behaviour, on average, the audible behaviours were stronger predictors of affect change (2.72 times stronger on average) than were visible behaviours, mirroring results from the model predicting emotional awareness.

Interestingly, when added to the findings of two additional studies (Bodie & Jones, 2012; Jones & Guerrero, 2001), these results clearly point to the superiority of audible listening cues when judging people as competent therapeutic listeners. Our research team also found evidence for an audible-over-visible pattern in the context

of initial interactions (Bodie et al., 2012). Our results seem to fall into line with Clark's views that displays and exemplifications provide better evidence to a speaker that the listener has understood well enough for current purposes. When listeners use statements that acknowledge what the speaker has said (exemplification) and felt (display), speakers are better informed that they are understood than when listeners simply assert with generic responses.

What does this mean for people wishing to become more competent therapeutic listeners? First, listeners called on to provide emotional support have to set aside their own agenda to problem solve or otherwise “fix” the other's dilemma, instead opting to show the speaker that he or she is understood and should continue exploring relevant thoughts and feelings. Abilities to enact behaviours such as paraphrasing and strategic questioning are of course predicated on both affective and cognitive competencies, bringing our discussion full circle. For instance, in order to paraphrase one must have a range of interpretation abilities (i.e. “literal comprehension”) as well as abilities to draw larger inferences based on common themes and habits of action (i.e. “critical comprehension”). Without the motivation to perform as an active conversational participant and the knowledge of how to perceive others' speech, appropriate behavioural responding seems much less likely. (Further discussion of counselling behaviours can be found in Chapters 18 and 19 of this text.)

## OVERVIEW

Listening is an essential life skill. At least that is what we are told by nearly everyone we encounter – parents, guardians, friends, romantic interests, teachers, and bosses, just to name a few. Popular phrases such as “Look at me while I am talking to you!” and “Are you listening?” as well as the need to “be heard” by “a listening ear” suggest a universal recognition of the importance of listening. We are told that planes crash and governments fall due to a failure to listen to instructions or constituents. Politicians love to go on “listening tours.” Several professions are built on listening – therapists, social workers, customer service specialists, and healthcare providers come easily to mind. Even more businesses and occupations rely on listening (or at least on the perception that they are willing to listen) to survive. Pick up a self-help book on effective management, parenting, sales, or general relational well-being and you will find listening is a key contributor to putative success. Good listening is thus perhaps *the* quintessential positive interpersonal communication behaviour (Bodie, 2012).

But what does that mean, to be a good listener? That is, what are the defining features of listening, and what does someone have to do, specifically, to be judged as operating at a high level of listening competence? I hope that the first section of this chapter helped to answer the first part of this question: Listening is a multidimensional construct, consisting of several affective, behavioural, and cognitive processes (the “ABCs of listening”). As for the second part of this question, judgements of listening competence are based on how a rater sees the listener being willing to perform and actually performing their listening role. Other questions that research has sought to answer include: Are listening attributes and behaviours universal? If not, what are the boundary conditions that specify the important attributes and behaviours? Is good listening situational? Cultural? Relational? Personal? Can we really tell if someone is

listening to us? If so, how? And what are the specific advantages of being a good listener, ensuring that you will have success in personal and professional life when you become one? Can good listening ever be detrimental to success? Is it always in our best interests to listen well? Do all cultures place this much emphasis on listening? What are the costs of being a good listener?

Based on my research, I currently believe that judgements of listening competency are based on the degree to which a listener is perceived as attentive, understanding, responsive, friendly, and able to sustain conversational flow (Bodie et al., 2012). Attributes, such as intelligence, confidence, humour, and clarity are not highly related to listening competence. In addition, a range of specific behavioural indicators are associated with these five attributes and are likely universal, though their relative importance to judgements may differ across contexts; in other words, we would expect differences in degree and not kind when looking at the behaviours that signal good listening across contexts (Hample, 2010). In particular, my own research has shown (a) eye contact is primarily associated with attentiveness, (b) smiling and laughing with friendliness, (c) verbal and physical composure with conversational flow, and (d) asking questions with understanding and responsiveness.

Although as a scientist I am always willing to suspend belief when presented with disconfirming evidence, current evidence does seem to provide solid support that people have implicit expectations or mental representations about good listening and subsequently “look for” certain kinds of behaviours that fulfil these expectations. In a sense, however, listening is a practical art, something that one can learn and improve over time, but that may never be done to the full satisfaction of all interlocutors. As a result, more research should be conducted but more importantly this research should be tested in practice and theories modified as they do (or do not) allow people to become competent listeners.

## NOTES

- 1 The way I have used the term “hearing” may seem to exclude the deaf or hearing impaired from being able to “listen.” Although I use hearing in this framework to focus on the reception of orally presented information, listening also involves processing visual, olfactory, tactile, and perhaps even gustatory information (Bodie & Wolvin, in press).
- 2 One of the most influential models of listening was first published as part of a Research Pamphlet Series by the National Education Association (Taylor, 1964). In this model, Taylor described listening as “the total act of receiving auditory communication” (p. 5). The emphasis on the “auditory” was clearly reflected in the three sequential stages of hearing, listening, and auding that was characteristic of the language competency literature more generally. According to Taylor, hearing referred to the reception of speech sounds; listening included operations such as attention, mental reorganisation, and auditory discrimination; and auding described the internal process where words gain meaning for the listener, elements of the message are evaluated, and general impressions are formed. The term auding has since largely faded from the literature, replaced by listening to describe a more global, holistic auditory dimension that includes several

- interrelated stages such as reception, perception, interpretation, and response to stimuli. What remains with such stage models, however, is a separation of hearing from listening.
- 3 From a research standpoint, it is instructive to note that short-term recall of information was the focus of the earliest measures of listening (Gilkinson, 1944) and remained a standard in major listening measures developed from 1950 until the 1970s (Brown & Carlsen, 1955; Dow, 1955). The more you retained, the better, more competent listener you were believed to be. The format of these early tests – multiple-choice with one correct and three or more incorrect answers – remains standard practice (Bodie et al., 2011).
  - 4 Andrew Wolvin was a member on the taskforce that helped develop the NCA document as well as instrumental throughout the 1980s and 1990s in developing standards for defining and assessing listening competency.
  - 5 A close call story is a story that has a happy ending but that is surprising or could have turned out negatively.

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## Humour and laughter

*May McCreddie and Jon Harrison*

Humour is a source of power and healing and may be a key to survival

(Gregg, 2002, p. 1)

### INTRODUCTION

**B**Y 1986 WHEN THE first edition of this handbook was published, Hugh Foot – the original author of the chapter – had co-chaired the first International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) Conference in Cardiff, Wales (1976) and the field of humour research was in its relative infancy. Back then, the notion that humour and laughter might have beneficial effects on health, work and personal life was only just starting to catch our imagination. Research was relatively sparse and much of the subsequent upswing in professional interest in the use of or need for humour was a development based more upon an act of faith than on any substantial research evidence. Nevertheless, the ISHS provided a consistent forum to nurture researchers drawn to this integral feature of human existence. Thus, the eclectic mix and increasing numbers of psychologists, sociologists, nurses, educationalists, biologists, folklorists, computer programmers and linguists that gather at the ISHS annual conference prove that humour is more than just a joke; it is a vibrant field of academic research.

In subsequent decades humour-related websites and programmes have developed exponentially; all extolling the virtues of humour and laughter and holding out the carrot of enhanced well-being and a healthy body and mind. One of the best known of these programmes was Robert Holden's Happiness Project, a series of workshops designed for health professionals and company managers, amongst others. This followed on from his laughter clinics set up in the UK in 1991. As Mauger (2001) reports, there are now websites for those with phobias, panic attacks and anxiety states, which advise subscribers to 'laugh yourself calm'; and

there is an online Laughter Therapy Centre, which offers guidance on how to put more laughter into your life. The Laughter Club (Kataria, 2002) which originated in India will undoubtedly share this sentiment, whilst, in the States, 'jest for the health of it' workshops for nurses were developed and delivered by the effervescent Patty Wooten (1992) with the laudable aim of reducing burn-out or loss of caring. The subsequent emergence of the positive psychology movement in 1998 and the inclusion of humour as a 'strength' under the virtue of 'transcendence' (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) created even more interest in and clamour for humour as a viable, legitimate and positive feature of life and well-being. It became fashionable to appreciate the psychological benefits that humour can bring, but whether humour is an easy recipe or solution for self-help is still somewhat questionable.

Beyond doubt, humour is a very complex phenomenon involving cognitive, emotional, physiological and social aspects (Martin 2006; Martin and Kuiper, 2016). It is neither surprising that humour research has spilled over into fields of psychology like personality, emotion and motivation, nor that there is such a diverse range of conceptualisations of sense of humour. However, the idea of humour as a communicative or social skill is still relatively novel, perhaps because we tend to think of it as a relatively stable expression of personality. Unless we are planning a career as a professional comedian, we tend not to think of humour as something that needs nurturance and cultivation.

In 1995, the story emerged of British Airways (BA)' sudden 'discovery' that humour could soften criticism and therefore, be more effective than traditional forms of communication. BA had apparently appointed a 'Corporate Jester' to stalk executive offices and tell top managers where they were going wrong whilst simultaneously putting a smile on their faces. Despite first-quarter profits being up by 57 per cent, the Confederation of British Industry reportedly remained sceptical (Clegg and Birch 1998). Part of the apparent ludicrousness of this venture is the implication that humour can be marshalled and deployed to order, without immediately losing any of the positive impact that it may have had. It might work once but how can any beneficial effect possibly be sustained? There is a wide gulf between the potential effectiveness of humour that is spur of the moment, arising directly from the situation one is in, and humour that is rehearsed and carefully groomed to fit a particular occasion. Perhaps this is why there is a degree of discomfort in considering humour as a skill: a skill by its very nature is practised and studied; humour is spontaneous, fleeting, situation-specific and so essentially frivolous and playful.

Much of the research on humour has occupied itself with explaining why we find jokes funny and why we are amused by certain episodes in real life. So the focus of attention has been primarily on the features or ingredients of the joke or episode that render it humorous. Rather less attention has been paid to the creation or production of humour, either in terms of the task facing the professional comedian in consciously constructing new jokes for a comedy show, or in terms of the ordinary individual deciding when or how to initiate humour in a social situation. Sometimes, we might argue, such a 'decision' to initiate humour is not under our conscious control; an amusing event occurs and quite spontaneously an apt comment or witticism 'pops out' that neatly captures the feeling of the moment. This is probably a naive view; with few exceptions we are in control of what we say and we do 'initiate' humour in order to achieve some interpersonal goal.

Essentially, the distinction we are drawing here is that between the 'decoding' of humour – understanding the meaning of a joke that we have just read or heard – and

the ‘encoding’ of humour – understanding how and when we use humour to convey a message to others. To consider humour and laughter as social skills, therefore, is to be concerned with encoding characteristics, the reasons why we initiate humour. The bulk of this chapter is devoted to the social uses to which humour and laughter are put.

Before embarking upon this analysis, some of the main humour theories are briefly summarised.

## **THEORIES OF HUMOUR AND LAUGHTER**

There are probably well over 100 theories of humour, some quite narrowly focused and some more general in nature. However it is recognised that no single theory of humour can ever do justice to the rich array of characterisations of humour. Researchers and theoreticians have even been somewhat reluctant to define humour and laughter. Most have chosen to emphasise some particular elements, like incongruity or surprise, as necessary prerequisites for a stimulus to appear humorous. Most of the theories address the question of humour appreciation and the outcome of our responses to humour rather than dealing with our motivation for encoding humour.

Historical conceptions of humour and laughter and problems of definition have been outlined in more detail in Goldstein and McGhee (1972), Chapman and Foot (1976) and McGhee (1979). Broadly, humour theories fall into four main groups.

### **Incongruity and developmental theories of humour**

These theories stress the absurd, the unexpected, the inappropriate or out-of-context events as the basis for humour. While these incongruities are necessary, they are not sufficient prerequisites for humour alone (McGhee, 1979). After all, incongruous events or statements can lead to curiosity or anxiety rather than to humour; so the perception of humour is dependent upon how the incongruity is understood in the context in which it occurs. Suls (1972) suggested that not only does an incongruity have to be perceived for humour to be experienced, but it has to be resolved or explained. Rothbart (1976), on the other hand, proposed that the incongruity itself is sufficient to evoke humour as long as it is perceived in a joking or playful context. And, of course, the same ludicrous idea can continue to evoke merriment long after the surprise has gone.

This debate has proved exceptionally fertile ground for cognitive investigations. McGhee (1979) carried the debate forward by interpreting ‘resolution’ as the need to exercise ‘cognitive mastery’, without which the incongruity cannot be accepted and used in the humour context. He has proposed a developmental-stage approach that maps out the types of incongruity understood by children across the stages of their increasing cognitive development. For example, the child first recognises incongruity when making pretend actions with an absent object, based upon an internal image of that object. Then the child learns the fun of deliberately giving incongruous labels to objects: ‘girls’ may be called ‘boys’, ‘cats’ may be called ‘dogs’. Later come more subtle forms of incongruity, like endowing animals with human characteristics (‘the dog is talking to me’) and learning that words and phrases may have multiple meaning (puns and riddles).

Forabosco (1992, p. 60) has extended the cognitive model to show that mastery involves understanding the cognitive rule and identifying both aspects of congruity and incongruity with that rule:

there is therefore a succession (diachronicity) of incongruity-congruence configurations that terminates in a contemporaneousness (synchronicity) of incongruity/congruence. What is more, typical of the final act in the process is an attention-shift situation in which the subject passes from the perception of congruence to the perception of incongruity and, sometimes, vice versa, with several shifts.

Seen from this perspective, both the perception of the incongruity and its resolution are essential components for the humour process.

Ruch and Hehl (1986) argued that we should not look for a general model of humour but rather just accept that there are at least two kinds of humour: one in which the solubility of the incongruity is important (e.g. congruous build-up to an unexpected and cognitively incongruent punchline) and one in which the incongruity alone is sufficient (e.g. nonsense or absurd jokes). Research suggests that preference for these major dimensions of humour correlates with personality variables like conservatism (Ruch 1984).

## **Superiority and disparagement theories of humour**

These theories have a long tradition going back at least three centuries to the work of the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, and for some they are the key to humour (Gruner, 1997). They are based upon the notion that humour stems from the observations of others' infirmities or failures. Hobbes spoke of 'sudden glory' as the passion that induces laughter at the afflictions of other people and it results from favourable comparison of ourselves with these others. So at one level, for example, we find it amusing when our companion slips on a banana skin; at another level we take delight in the downfall of our enemies. Zillmann (1983) and Zillmann and Cantor (1976) proposed a 'dispositional' view that humour appreciation varies inversely with the favourableness of the disposition towards the person or object being disparaged. In other words, the less friendly disposed we are towards someone, the more humorous we find jokes or stories in which that person is the butt or victim. The source of the disparagement is also important; we are highly amused when our friends humiliate our enemies but much less amused when our enemies get the upper hand over our friends. These ideas relate very much to jokes and humour involving social, national, ethnic and religious groupings, with which we personally identify.

What is interesting, as Ruch and Hehl (1986) pointed out, is that this model works well in predicting the behaviour of groups that believe they are traditionally 'superior': for example, men appreciate jokes in which women are disparaged but show less appreciation for jokes in which a woman disparages a man. However, 'inferior' group members are no more amused at jokes that disparage a man than at jokes disparaging a member of their own sex. Indeed, sometimes the inferior groups laugh more at jokes putting down a member of their own group. Clearly some moderating variables are at work here. From their factor analytic studies, Ruch and Hehl (1986)

suggested that the personality dimensions of conservatism and tough-mindedness are conjointly associated with enjoyment of disparagement humour. This does not say much for the humour of men, who are more likely to score higher on these scales than women. Tough conservatives (chauvinistic, ethnocentric, authoritarian) will appreciate disparagement jokes directed at outside groups but tender-minded liberals will not. Authoritarians tend to be preoccupied with power relationships, the strengthening of in-group bonds, and feeling of superiority over the weak or out-group members (Adorno *et al.*, 1950). One might, however, question their sense of humour. Perhaps those who enjoy disparagement humour are singularly lacking in appreciation of other kinds of humour. We certainly might expect this if, as Allport (1954) claimed, a sense of humour and ability to laugh at oneself is a clear measure of self-insight.

The tendentious theories also include self-defeating, self-disparaging/self-deprecating humour (SDH); humour use against oneself – and there has been an increasing interest in this form of humour over the last two decades. For example, Kuiper *et al.* (2004), building upon previously identified ‘negative’ aspects of humour (Kirsh and Kuiper 2003), suggest that there are adaptive and maladaptive forms of humour, with SDH falling into the latter category. It has also been suggested there is a positive association with daily psychological well-being for people who do not engage in SDH very often overall (Edwards 2013; Edwards and Martin 2014), but a negative association for those who do. It is unlikely, however, that such a relationship would necessarily be fixed or stable and as Martin and Kuiper (2016) suggest, there are likely to be distinctions between self-defeating and self-disparaging/self-deprecating humour. Accordingly, there is increasing evidence that humour is not a wholly positive entity and that some types and uses can be dysfunctional. Unsurprisingly, SDH has featured heavily in healthcare research and we will therefore revisit this area later in the chapter.

## Arousal theories of humour

A number of theories have been proposed that suggest that the most important qualities of humour operate at a physiological level. These theories assume that the initiation of humour brings about measurable arousal changes, which directly influence the experience of amusement. Berlyne (1972) has linked humour with fluctuations in arousal in two ways: first, humour is associated with the reduction of high arousal and, second, it is associated with moderate increases in arousal followed by a sudden drop. This ‘arousal boost-jag’, as he terms it, accounts for the pleasure derived from many jokes. The build up to the joke is moderately arousing in that it attracts attention (for example, the audience latches on to the fact that a joke is being told and becomes attentive). The joke may be additionally stimulating by virtue of having a sexual, aggressive or anxiety-arousing theme, or it may be intellectually arousing. The punchline comes when the audience is suitably aroused and seeking a resolution to the joke; timing can be crucial here. The resolution produces a rapid dissipation of arousal frequently associated with laughter. The build-up and subsequent dissipation of arousal are rewarding and pleasurable, and produce the experience of amusement. An important aspect of Berlyne’s position is his belief that there is a curvilinear relationship between arousal level and amount of pleasure experienced: that is, moderate levels of arousal are more enjoyable than either very low or very high levels.



Arousal theories of laughter also feature in explanations of certain kinds of non-humorous laughter. For example, *nervous laughter* occurs in states of tension after periods of shock and fright or when acutely embarrassed; more extreme *hysterical laughter* is conceived of as a psychogenic disorder (Pfeifer, 1994) and is often exhibited cyclically with weeping, possibly shouting, in an uncontrolled outburst after periods of intense stress or prolonged deprivation of some kind. Laughter through arousal can also be easily induced by tactile stimulation, normally *reflexive laughter*, rather than involving any cognitive process. Tickling is a more complicated kind of stimulus because the desired response may only be achieved when a mood of fun, compliance or self-abandonment is already operating. If unexpected, or in the wrong company or environment, tickling can be a very aversive stimulus and elicit an aggressive response.

## Psychoanalytic and evolutionary theories of humour

Freud's (1905, 1928) view of the function of humour is akin to his view of dreaming, namely that they both serve to regulate sexual and aggressive desires. Humour is the outcome of repressed sexual and aggressive wishes, which have been pushed into the unconscious due to society's prohibition of their expression. Wit and humour are not forbidden; indeed, they may be socially valued and therefore present an acceptable outlet for such repressed feelings. The process of repression, according to Freud, involves the use of 'psychic energy', which is saved once the joke has been emitted; thus repression is no longer necessary. The experience of humour and laughter flows directly from the saving of psychic energy whose repressive function is (momentarily) relaxed.

Freud's theory shares with arousal theory the basic view that humour serves a physical as well as a psychological function by manipulating arousal or the level of felt tension. The well-known criticism that psychoanalytic theory is rarely amenable to scientific investigation does not debase the insights and ideas that the theory has generated.

Freud's ideas represent one strand of what are more widely referred to as evolutionary or biological theories of humour in which laughter is viewed as an adaptive response with an early onset. Just as play has evolved to allow children to rehearse and develop the practical and social skills they need as adults, so humour has evolved to allow rehearsal of more abstract cognitive skills (McGhee, 1979). Laughter is also a release from the inevitable tensions of daily life and permits the flights of imagination that lead to innovations and ways of coping (Christie, 1994). It is adaptive because it can operate as a circuit-breaker, momentarily disabling people and preventing them from continuing with misguided behaviour patterns (Chafe, 1987).

## OUR SOCIAL EXPERIENCE OF HUMOUR AND LAUGHTER

As Norrick (1993, p. 1) put it: 'Everyday conversation thrives on wordplay, sarcasm, anecdotes, and jokes. Certainly these forms of humor enliven conversation, but they also help us break the ice, fill uncomfortable pauses, negotiate requests for favors and build group solidarity'.

Above all else, humour is essentially a shared experience. While on solitary occasions we may savour a joke or funny incident that we remember, or may laugh pri-

vately at a funny sketch on television, our appreciation of humour is expressed much more expansively in company. Amongst research participants, Provine and Fischer (1989) reported thirty times more emissions of laughter in social than in solitary settings. In social situations there are few more useful social skills than humour and there are probably no contexts, however dire, in which humour is not a potentially appropriate response. Throughout history the more frequently remembered and oft-quoted last remarks of those waiting to be led to the gallows are their rueful witticisms about their fate, society, humankind, or life after death. There is humour in chronic sickness and adversity, humour about old age, adolescence and puberty, aggression and war, sex, love and marriage. The most formidable and powerful feature of humour as a source of social influence is its inherent ambiguity (Kane *et al.*, 1977). We can use humour to communicate a message that we mean; we can use it to communicate the opposite of what we mean. Because humour is playful and can be interpreted in several different ways at the same time, we can retract our message at any time, if it suits us. According to the reaction of our audience and the impression we wish to create, we can choose, through the use of humour, whether to claim or disclaim responsibility for our message or action (Hay, 2001).

Although the mechanics of encoding humour are poorly understood, and there are wide individual differences, a variety of motives can be identified quite easily for our skilled use of humour and laughter. We shall now review what these motives are.

## **Humour as a search for information**

### ***Social probing***

A common objective in social interaction, especially when striking up conversations with comparative strangers, is to discover what attitudes, motives and values the other individual possesses. Standards of propriety may prohibit us from directly asking their views on certain issues and, in any case, we may not initially want to engage in a detailed conversation about politics, religion or anything else that direct questioning may commit us to. Introducing a topic in a light-hearted way helps to probe indirectly the other person's general attitudes and values about an issue and to reveal 'touchy' subjects. We can take our cue in pursuing or changing the topic of conversation from the other person's response. Whether or not the humour is reciprocated may determine whether the discussion becomes more personal and intimate and whether the relationship moves forward.

### ***Social acceptance***

In addition to probing for information about others, we may also be interested in finding out how others respond to us. Telling jokes is a way not only of drawing attention to ourselves but of gauging others' acceptance of us and disposition towards us. It is their response to our humour that provides the social barometer by which we assess our popularity or lack of it. This constitutes a reason for encoding humour and is not to be confused with social laughter, whose primary function is to win social approval.

## **Humour as a means of giving information**

### ***Self-disclosure***

Humour may often be used as a vehicle for conveying to others our motives and intentions and it is especially useful when we wish to intimate feelings that we might not normally wish to reveal publicly: for example, fears about imminent hazards and anxieties about forthcoming ordeals. The use of humour can, of course, offset the embarrassment of revealing highly personal information (Bloch, 1987). Humour may also convey fairly explicit sexual interest in our companion in a light-hearted and socially acceptable way that is easily revoked or shrugged off if the message is not reciprocated. Of course, such 'humour' can become excessive and may reach the proportions of sexual harassment if carried too far.

Self-disclosure and SDH are fellow travellers with key gender differences (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 1998, 2006). Women are more likely to self-disclose and self-disparage in all female groups and this generally leads to more convergent talk. Self-disclosure or self-disparagement promotes attractiveness, as it conveys vulnerability especially if focused on an emotional rather than factual level. It therefore, increases attractiveness and is likely to be reciprocated. However, Greengross and Miller (2008) note that self-disclosure too early in a relationship may signal insecurity and therefore, decrease attractiveness (see Chapter 7 for more information on self-disclosure).

### ***Self-presentation***

Humour is an expression of character in times of adversity or stress. A humorous perspective on one's problems allows one to distance oneself from them, to take them less seriously, and thereby to experience them as less distressing or threatening. Martin (1989) has hypothesised that humour may reduce stress by means of several different processes, including appraisal-focused, emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Lefcourt and Martin (1986) have demonstrated that sense of humour moderates the relation between stressful life events and mood disturbance. Individuals with a low sense of humour typically experience greater upset (mood disturbance) during high levels of stress than individuals with a high sense of humour. Sense of humour is, therefore, related to more positive self-esteem and more realistic standards for evaluation of self-worth. Putting on a brave face and being 'seen to cope' also sustains the image of ourselves that we wish to maintain to the outside world.

### ***Denial of serious intent***

Kane *et al.* (1977, p. 14) referred to this function of humour as 'decommitment' whereby,

when a person faces failure, a false identity is about to be unmasked, an inappropriate behaviour is discovered or a lie uncovered, he or she may attempt to save the situation by indicating that the proposed or past action was not serious, but was instead meant as a joke.

Recourse to humour, then, is self-serving: a way of backing down without injury in the event of having our credibility or motives challenged. A serious confrontation, or one in which our actions or intentions are likely to be maligned, can be converted into jocular repartee, by which we admit we were jesting all the time.

### ***Unmasking hypocrisy***

Another information-giving function of humour is when we use ridicule or sarcasm to show that we do not believe the ostensible motivation for someone's behaviour. Political cartoons are rife with examples of satirists' attempts to highlight what they believe to be the essential motivation for the actions or pronouncements of a prestigious political figure or the absurdity of professional pretensions, privileges of class or institutional rules. At an interpersonal level, our jest at the expense of other people may serve as a gentle hint that we do not accept the image of themselves that they are projecting; for example, the eager and over-earnest young trainee doctor presenting an identity as an experienced and competent expert on a medical symptom.

## **Humour in interpersonal control**

### ***Expression of liking and affiliation***

Humour is valued as a social asset and, exercised judiciously, confers upon its encoder the animated interest and welcoming approval of others. Sharing humour fosters rapport and intimacy and promotes friendship by showing common sentiment and reducing tensions. As a basis for developing friendship and attraction, therefore, humour signals three affective ingredients about its encoder: first, as a jovial person who is rewarding and fun to be with; second, as a sensitive person who has a friendly interest and willingness to enter relationships with others; and third, as one who seeks, and probably wins, the social approval of others (or likes to be liked). Mettee *et al.* (1971) found that a job candidate giving a short lecture was rated as more likeable by an audience when he used humour.

### ***Expression of dislike and hostility***

We have already seen under the heading 'Unmasking hypocrisy' that humour can be used to inform others that we do not accept the image of themselves that they are trying to project. In a more general manner, humour is one way, possibly the only socially acceptable way, of expressing personal antagonism. We are inclined to enjoy cruel forms of humour, obtaining amusement from incompetence and deformity and from the oddities and incongruities of others' behaviour. On the one hand, we may not be able, on occasion, to conceal our amusement at the *faux pas* of our friends; our suppressed aggression leads us to savour their little defeats with gentle relish. On the other hand, against those we do not like, our ridicule and amusement at their undoing may be out of proportion to their defeat; we revel in their downfall out of the feeling of superiority that it gives.

Among social equals and friends, the use of reciprocal sarcasm and derision may constitute a normal and regular feature of their interactive style. Indeed, what may appear to an outsider as a hostile slanging match may be seen as playful bantering to the participants. Those with power and authority may avoid being cast as figures of fun to their faces but may frequently be the butt of ribald laughter and ridicule behind their backs. In group situations an individual can be unjustly selected (scapegoated) as a target of repeated aggressive humour.

### ***Controlling social interaction***

Humour, like laughter, helps to maintain the flow of interaction in daily encounters, 'filling in pauses in our conversations and maintaining the interest and attention of our conversational partner' (Foot and Chapman, 1976, p. 188). In terms of sheer social expediency, therefore, the motive in encoding humour may be little more than to create and sustain a congenial atmosphere, as when breaking the ice at a party. Humour helps to regulate interactions and serves as a social mechanism to facilitate or inhibit the flow of conversation (La Gaipa, 1977). Hostile wit within a group, for example, may dampen the social interaction or the tempo of conversation because it threatens the cohesiveness of the group.

Humour also provides a smooth and acceptable means of changing the level or direction of a conversation. It provides spontaneous comic relief in the context of a turgid or boring conversation and draws attention away from a topic of conversation that one of the participants does not wish to pursue. It also helps to indicate to others that they are taking things too seriously and need to look at their problems from a more detached or balanced perspective. As will be illustrated later, this is a particularly useful tactic in psychotherapy when the patient is over-anxious and completely bound up with personal problems.

### ***Ingratiation***

While humour can be used to win from others approval that is genuinely sought and valued for no other motive than friendship, it can also be employed to capture the approval of others from whom favours are sought or who happen to be in powerful positions. The humour may be self- or other-enhancing or it may be self-disparaging as a tactic to express a submissive, dependent posture (Wilson, 1979). The risk with ingratiation humour is always that its insincerity will be revealed.

## **Humour as a device for group control**

### ***Intra-group control***

Group process and emergent leadership frequently reveal two types of processes that need to be evident to ensure group efficacy. There are task-relevant aspects such as information and relevant views of the group members. However, the second process

is related to the maintenance of the cohesion and well-being of the group. Sometimes these functions are channelled through one leader within the group, sometimes through two or more group members. A successful group needs safe outlets by which to express its feelings, sustain its morale and deal with internal conflicts, and humour has an important role to play in this process (Mauger, 2001).

Humour can positively galvanise groups and even when disparaging can still serve to promote solidarity within the group (e.g. the football coach using sarcasm to motivate his players against imminent defeat) or to control group members who step out of line. However, disparagement may also provoke demoralisation, conflict within the group and ultimately the disintegration of the group.

## **Intergroup control**

Hostile or derogatory jokes are perhaps least appreciated when they attack ourselves or group members whom we like or with whom we identify. And one reason for humorous disparagement in the first place is to bring about dissension in the out-group. An ethnic in-group, for example, will use anti-out-group humour not only to express hostility against that out-group, and in an attempt to undermine the morale of its members, but also to strengthen the morale and solidarity of its own members (Bourhis *et al.*, 1977).

Anti-out-group humour can, therefore, be a creative and effective way of asserting in-group pride and distinctiveness from a dominant out-group. But it cuts both ways, because hostile humour directed at the in-group from an out-group may also tend to produce greater consensus and cohesion on the part of the in-group members as they close ranks to meet and challenge the implied threat to their position. Intergroup disparagement and hostile wit, therefore, serve only to increase the tension and conflict between the groups, and they are tactics used the world over in parliamentary wrangling, professional disputes, industrial strife and international gamesmanship.

Drawing upon sociological, psychological and communicative approaches (Lynch, 2002, 2007), the workplace has become a fertile area of research in recent years, further developing the notions of 'control' and inter/intra group relations. There are significant similarities in how humour is expressed and functions in the workplace, including fostering productivity and concertive control (Lynch, 2009, 2010), navigating occupational identities (Schaefer, 2013), or as a community of practice with shared repertoires (Holmes and Woodham, 2013). Humour in teams and workplaces has many functions be it building solidarity, being subversive or managing emotions.

## **Anxiety management**

### ***Saving face***

Humour offers a path to control and restraint in more tense interpersonal encounters. An individual encodes humour, for example, to defuse a tense or hostile situation prevailing between two other interactors, thus enabling the contesting parties to back off from the confrontation without loss of face. At the very least, such humour may make it difficult for the parties to continue their altercation without incurring the wrath or scorn of other

bystanders. The humour serves both as a corrective to restore the normal boundaries of social etiquette, and an admonition that the argument has gone quite far enough.

### ***Coping with embarrassment***

Humour is invoked as a control to restore composure and self-presentation on occasions when they are undermined by some sudden and perhaps unexpected event – for example, being caught out in a lie. More commonly, we are embarrassed by some little accident that spoils the image we wish to convey at that particular moment in time: the elegantly dressed lady at a formal dinner party tripping on the carpet as she is about to be presented to her fellow guests; the spilling of a drink down someone else's clothes; some clumsy or unscripted act by a well-known politician or television personality that becomes typical subject matter for satirical television programmes. Joking is about the only way to save the situation, treating the event as a trivial one, merely an accident that could have happened to anyone.

### ***Safety valve for under- and over-arousal***

Humour has already been suggested as a mechanism of social control in as much as it brings comic relief to a boring conversation or relieves the tedium of an uneventful activity like waiting for a bus or queuing for an exhibition. On the other side of the coin, humour can help to reduce unwanted and unpleasantly high levels of anxiety and stress. Laughter, according to Berlyne's (1969) arousal theory of humour, results from the tension-release that follows heightened, albeit pleasant, arousal, such as that created by the build-up of a joke before the punchline. It may be that the impetus for encoding humour in times of anxiety stems from anticipation of the release of tension that dissipates pleasurable through laughter. Perhaps doctors and dentists could help to alleviate their patients' anxieties before the consultation by the liberal provision of humorous literature and cartoons in their waiting rooms! Some do, of course.

But solitary amusement may not be the answer here. In stressful situations, sharing humour with a fellow sufferer may be a more potent way of dissipating unwanted anxiety. The pleasurable experience of mutually appreciating a joke may establish rapport and reduce concern over one's own plight. Laughing with people is compassionate, laughing at them is immoral (Mauger, 2001). And last but not least, humour may also be experienced as a direct consequence of realising that one is safe after a threatening stimulus has been removed.

## **Humour as a means of changing and sustaining the status quo**

### ***Freedom from conventional thought***

Humour is often viewed as emancipatory. It can be empowering and its unconventional aspects can allow us to recreate a possible threat into something amusing and,

therefore, less threatening and oppressive. It is also a frame of mind that transcends both reality and fantasy. It frees us from moral inhibitions, from the constraints of language, from rationality, from a sense of inferiority and feelings of inadequacy. It is a guilt-free release from frustration and aggression.

This perspective accords with Freud's (1905) view that humour and laughter occur when repressed energy, which normally keeps one's thoughts channelled in socially prescribed and rational directions, is momentarily freed from its static function of keeping something forbidden away from consciousness. A witticism starts with an aggressive tendency or intent, which is repressed. The aggressive intentions are manipulated and disguised in the unconscious mind with 'playful pleasure repressed since childhood and waiting for a chance to be satisfied' (Grotjahn, 1957, p. 256). The thoughts emerge into consciousness when they are socially acceptable and the energy originally activated to keep the hostility under repression is freed. By this time the repressed energy is no longer needed and the shock of this freedom from repression spills out in pleasure and laughter.

Joking, therefore, may be seen as a revolt against the structure of society. It may not, in practical terms, bring about much change in the world, but it is enjoyable for its own sake in making the unthinkable thinkable.

### ***The reinforcement of stereotypes***

While this freedom of thought may be characteristic of the way humour is used to perceive and experience life, it is paradoxical but also true that, in its overt expression, humour serves to sustain and reinforce narrow-minded attitudes and blinkered vision within society. Wilson (1979) put his finger on the same point when he wrote that '[j]oking is a powerful conservative. Its effects reinforce existing ideology, power, status, morality and values within a society' (p. 230). So much of the content of our humour concerns human weakness and foolishness that if we were freed from ignorance, inhibitions, fear and prejudice there would be little room left for humour:

though jokes feed on subversive thought, on deviations from the normal and expected, they reinforce established views of the world. Though their content appears to undermine norms, mores, established power and authority, jokes are potent in preserving that status quo.

(Wilson, 1979, p. 228)

In the present authors' view the power of humour in perpetuating myths and reinforcing stereotyped and traditional attitudes is greatly under-estimated. How else, except through humour, do we derive our stereotyped views about the Irish, the English, the Scots, the Welsh, the Latin-American temperament, Protestants, Jews and Catholics? Because the joke is a socially acceptable form, the message it conveys is extremely powerful and the recipient or target, however much offended, can scarcely denounce it without standing accused of the greatest crime of all – lacking a sense of humour. While real institutional changes have been taking place in the outside world through legal and social reform in relation to say, homosexuality, equal pay and equal opportunities,



the old attitudes about 'poofs' and 'women's libbers' still remain enshrined in jokes that can span a generation and may still be as popular as ever, even though usually disguised or suppressed under the veil of 'political correctness'.

There are undoubtedly tensions in ethnic jokes that relate to humour in society being used as a means of regulation, control and emancipation (Billig, 2005). However, Christie Davies (2002) offers an alternative view in his text *The Mirth of Nations* considering ethnic and religious jokes to be the product of rich cultural traditions and intelligent insight. Whatever your view, the ethics and aesthetics of ethnic jokes and political correctness is an important and enduring discussion (Lockyer and Pickering, 2006).

## THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF LAUGHTER

Although the foregoing section outlined different sources of motivation for encoding *humour*, it offered little guidance about the functions of *laughter* as social skill. The reasons for laughing may have nothing whatever to do with humour and it may occur in situations where nothing humorous has actually happened. Pfeifer (1994, p. 170) expresses this rather aptly:

One of the interesting things about laughter is that it's a 'middle range' behavior, in the sense that it falls between such physiologically determined behaviour as blinking on the one hand and such culturally determined behavior as language on the other. We sometimes laugh at nothing, or else laugh at something, but for no particular reason. That's more or less at the level of what a dog does when it's barking?

Of course, laughter itself may be a response to a situation in which a cognitive failure has occurred and where the individual is at a loss to know how to respond. This is not to deny that, on many occasions, humour and laughter may function as displays of the same social purpose: we may well be laughing as we encode humour.

McGhee (1977) drew particular attention to the problem of low intercorrelation between funniness ratings and laughter (or smiling) and suggested that researchers should use both measures as dependent variables in their studies. He also suggested that they report the correlation obtained between these measures to provide a database from which hypotheses can be made concerning factors that will influence the relationship between expressive and intellectual measures of appreciation. Ruch (1990) has proposed that exhilaration is a consistent emotion elicited by humour and that this accounts for the behavioural, physiological and experiential changes typically occurring in response to some non-humorous (e.g. tickling) as well as humorous stimuli. Ruch (1995) has also shown that correlation size may be a methodological artefact: for example, within-subject designs tend to yield higher correlations than between-subject designs.

To understand laughter, one must inquire into the situational context from which it emerges. In her book *Laughter: A Socio-scientific Analysis*, Hertzler (1970) made the useful point about the function of laughter in society that it is an economical aid ('almost a gift') in getting things done. It is a quick, spontaneous reaction to the immediate situation, which, often because it is not subject to the normal controls of deliberate speech, gives away directly the perpetrator's thoughts, feelings or desires:

A good laugh may contribute more than vocal or written admonitions or commands; it may be easier, cheaper, and more successful than laws and ordinances, police and supervisors, hierarchical chains of command, or other regulative and operative personnel and organisational machinery.

(Hertzler, 1970, p. 86)

This is not to signify that laughter is not regulated by conscious control. There would be little point considering it as a social skill if it were entirely outside one's control. As in the case of most other habitual behaviours, we have each developed our own particular style of expressing ourselves: for some individuals laughter is free-flowing and virtually automatic, for others it is a scarce commodity, reserved for a more limited range of social occasions.

Within everyday language, one talks about laughs as being 'hollow', 'forced', 'mocking', 'bubbling', and so on, as if they possessed characteristic attributes that were uniquely disparate. There is also a rich vocabulary by which to denote types of laughter – giggle, titter, chortle, guffaw, cackle, roar, crow, snigger, jeer – which also gives substance to the view that there are many types of laughter that qualitatively differ from each other. No one would deny this. What humour researchers have failed to show is any systematic correlation between particular types of social situations and particular types of laughter. So when an individual displays incompetence in front of others, audience reaction is just as likely to consist of raucous guffaws as a quiet chuckle or a restrained snigger. The interpretation of what the laugh means, therefore, comes from the participants' understanding of the social situation they are in and not from any inherent characteristics of the laugh itself.

The functions and purposes of laughter have been reviewed at length by Gruner (1978) and by Hertzler (1970). Giles and Oxford (1970), Foot and Chapman (1976) and Pfeifer (1994) have summarised these functions. For the purposes of this social skills analysis it is important to recognise that laughter is wholly a social phenomenon. As Hertzler (1970) pointed out, it is 'social in its origin, in its processual occurrence, in its functions and in its effects' (p. 28). Let us briefly outline these functions here.

## **Humorous laughter**

Following Giles and Oxford's (1970) analysis, humorous laughter may be regarded as an overt expression of rebellion to social pressures, codes and institutions. Continually conforming to such social constraints places an insufferable limitation on individual freedom, which causes an accumulation of frustration, which, in turn, is perfectly displaced through humorous laughter. Such laughter is, of course, very responsive to social facilitation effects, and the frequency and amplitude of its emission is governed by the responsiveness of those around us (Chapman, 1973, 1974, 1975; Chapman and Chapman, 1974; Chapman and Wright, 1976).

## **Social laughter**

Social laughter serves the primary purpose of expressing friendship and liking, of gaining social approval and of bolstering group cohesiveness. This function of laughter for

integrating ourselves within a particular group does not depend upon the individual having experienced anything amusing, and far from expressing rebellion against social pressures, it can be viewed as an act of social conformity, fulfilling normative group expectations. It is more intended to convey an image of good-natured 'sociability'. Possibly as much as humour, social laughter is used for controlling conversations and 'oiling the wheels' of social interaction, as through polite laughter when we laugh at what others have said, not because we find it funny but out of consideration for them.

## **Ignorance laughter**

This type of laughter implies both the presence of humour stimuli and the presence of others. Typically, we recognise that a joke has been told but wish to conceal our ignorance or inability to comprehend it. So we laugh along with everyone else in the group in order not to be left out or not to look stupid. Ignorance laughter is also a version of imitative or feigned laughter as described by Pfeifer (1994).

## **Evasion laughter**

In an important way, laughter, like humour, may serve as an emotional mask behind which to hide our true feelings. If a friend or acquaintance of ours is being attacked or ridiculed by others behind their back, we have a choice to defend our friend or, out of expediency, go through the motions of joining in the ridicule in order not to appear different. Laughter gives the impression of sharing in the prevailing feeling of the group. Embarrassment laughter is another example of masking our feelings or as a circuit-breaker to stall for time. We laugh because we are not quite sure what the other person's comments to us mean, or whether his or her intentions towards us are amicable or hostile.

## **Apologetic laughter**

Related to embarrassment laughter and laughter designed to mask our feelings, is apologetic or defensive laughter. This may precede an action on our part, the outcome of which we are uncertain about. We sometimes say, 'I've never done this before' or 'I can't guarantee what's going to happen' when we embark upon a novel task. Laughter may either accompany or substitute for the oral statement and its meaning is clear. We are paving the way for possible failure or for making ourselves look foolish and thereby preparing the audience to believe that we are not taking the situation too seriously ourselves. We may also preface the telling of bad news with laughter, perhaps partly in an attempt to soften the blow and partly by way of apologising for being the one to announce it.

## **Anxiety laughter**

Tension in social encounters stems from anxiety as well as from embarrassment, and anxiety laughter is a manifestation of tension-release to a specific anxiety-provoking situation.

Such laughter may be provoked directly by the feeling of relief when a period of acute tension comes to an end. To cite an extreme example, the hostages from a hijacked aircraft may, when suddenly freed, break down in laughter (often alternating with weeping) bordering on the hysterical at the sheer relief that they are safe and the crisis has passed. Rothbart (1976) has noted the close relation between laughter and fear in young children and has argued that laughter comes as a consequence of the child's realisation of being safe again, the moment the fear or distress is over.

### **Derision laughter**

Derision laughter (also referred to as sinister, sarcastic, mocking or acerbic laughter) is another category of laughter that is obviously an alternative, or an additive, to the encoding of hostile humour in situations where one wishes to express superiority over another individual. It is particularly prevalent among children whose laughter may be deliberately cruel or mocking, for example, in the face of another child's physical or mental deformity or stupidity. Adults use derision laughter as a weapon in more subtle, psychological ways and less for deriding the physical abnormalities of their victims (for which they cannot be blamed) and more for ridiculing the odd behaviours, mannerisms, accent, attitudes or incompetence of their victims (for which they can more readily be blamed).

### **Joyous laughter**

One final category of laughter might be described as joyous laughter, which is a pure expression of excitement or *joie de vivre* (Foot and Chapman, 1976). This is a spontaneous reaction to pleasurable and exhilarating activities and is often an expression of mastery, like riding a horse without a saddle, climbing a difficult mountain, or experiencing a fair-ground roller-coaster. Joyous laughter is of less interest in the present context because it is largely non-functional, other than as a signal of shared enjoyment.

## **APPLICATIONS OF HUMOUR**

Humour and laughter have been hailed as good for the body and good for the mind (Ruch *et al.*, 2011). According to Keith-Spiegel (1972), the body benefits because they: 'restore homeostasis, stabilise blood pressure, oxygenate the blood, massage the vital organs, stimulate circulation, facilitate digestion, relax the system and produce a feeling of well-being' (p. 5). Goldstein (1987) in reviewing the evidence points to the inevitable conclusion that most studies on the arousal and tension-reducing properties of laughter are short-term experimental studies. Studies that examine the long-term consequences of laughter are almost non-existent (Mantell and Goldstein, 1985). Popular books on humour, however, clearly imply that it unquestionably leads to a healthy and prolonged life. Norman Cousins (1979) has documented his relief and 'cure' (through laughing at *Candid Camera* episodes) from a painful rheumatic inflammation of the vertebrae. Yet to associate humour and laughter with longevity is hardly compatible

with the clear evidence that professional comedians and comic writers do not live longer than anyone else. As Goldstein (1987) put it: 'the quality of life is surely enhanced by a sense of humour and not necessarily its duration' (p. 13). It should, however, be noted that laughter is not totally unconnected with the life-threatening states. Fry (1979) has suggested that laughter is actively related to the reduction of stress and hypertension that can lead to risk of heart attack, especially in those who smoke, are overweight, lack exercise or have tension-related conditions. Mantell and Goldstein (1985) suggest that 'Type B' personalities displace anger, anxiety and aggression through humour, while 'Type A' personalities are more at risk of heart attacks because of the seriousness and impatience (and therefore lack of humour) that they typically display.

Most literature, however, does not support the view that physical and psychological well-being is necessarily facilitated by a sense of humour. In their review of the field Bennett & Lengacher (2009, p. 164) concluded that, '[r]esearch results concerning humor and healing are thus far rather tentative, and more work is needed before broad claims can be made concerning an effect of humor upon health outcomes.' Individuals with high daily levels of laughter do not generally show greater positive emotion (Kuiper & Martin, 1998) nor do they display higher levels of intimacy in interpersonal relationships (Nezlek & Derks, 2001). Kuiper and Olinger (1998) and Martin (2001) have proposed models that specify the conditions under which a sense of humour may or may not benefit physical and psychological health, and on the assumption that there are negative as well as positive elements to having a sense of humour. Kirsh and Kuiper (2003) identified three higher-order patterns of humour:

- 1 positive, socially skilled, adept sense of humour that entails an ability to generate humour effortlessly and elicit laughter from others;
- 2 boorish, aggressive humour, involving coarse or vulgar humour or poking fun at others;
- 3 'belaboured' humour reflecting a strained or obsequious style, more designed to gain the approval of others and mask personal and social anxieties.

Martin *et al.* (2003) also developed a multi-dimensional approach that identifies styles of humour as either adaptive or maladaptive, and focused on self or other. Individuals with self-focused adaptive humour styles have a humorous outlook on life and can maintain a humorous perspective even under stress. Other-related adaptive humour is essentially affiliative humour used to enhance interpersonal and social relationships. Maladaptive humour is potentially destructive and injurious to self (self-disparagement) or to others (aggressive humour). By drawing attention to the different functions served by different styles of humour, these models reveal very clearly why a sense of humour may produce mechanisms that result in detrimental as well as facilitative effects on psychological well-being (Kuiper *et al.*, 2004). Other research by Kerkkanen *et al.* (2004), on Finnish police officers, suggests that a sense of humour can negatively impact on a number of health indices, such as obesity, smoking, risk of cardiovascular disease.

The general notion that a sense of humour facilitates health and psychological well-being has, therefore, received equivocal support. Research shows that it is not a unidimensional positive attribute. Whether or not facilitative effects are demonstrated depends upon how a sense of humour is measured or what elements of humour are

explored. Most of us probably have the capacity to display both adaptive and maladaptive humour when it suits our purpose. This looser linkage between sense of humour and healthy adjustment may also explain why there is little evidence to connect lack of humour appreciation with poor mental health. Derks *et al.* (1975) were unable to pinpoint any particular differences in the kinds of humour appreciated by samples of neurotic, schizophrenic and normal individuals. Ecker *et al.* (1973) found that patients from clinical populations may fail to see humour in jokes closely related to their own area of conflict, but not necessarily fail to appreciate other kinds of humour.

When focusing on a healthy, adaptive sense of humour, there are several mechanisms by which humour may potentially promote health. Martin (2004) identified four such mechanisms:

- 1 the physiological changes accompanying vigorous laughter in the muscular-skeletal, cardiovascular, endocrine and neural systems;
- 2 positive emotional mood states accompanying humour and laughter which may, for example, increase pain tolerance (Bruehl *et al.*, 1993) or enhance immunity (Stone *et al.*, 1987);
- 3 the moderation of adverse effects of psychological stress by enabling individuals to cope more effectively with stress (Martin *et al.*, 1993);
- 4 the level of social support enhanced by more satisfying social relationships brought about by a healthy indulgence in humour.

## Humour in therapy

Whether drawing on research or on their own experience, some professional helpers see humour as something to be cultivated and strategically deployed rather than ignored or used purely incidentally. Most therapists accept that humour is an index of self-knowledge, a prerequisite for personal exploration (Bloch, 1987). Mauger (2001) argues that humour can provide an emotional bonding between client and therapist that demonstrates the therapist's supportiveness and acceptance of the client, and enhances the 'therapeutic alliance' by confirming parity between them.

Let us be quite clear what kind of humour we are talking about in relation to therapy. Clearly, it is not the intrusion of jokes nor any direct attempt to make the patient or client laugh. Mindess (1971) endeavours to define it as conveying an 'inner condition, a stance, a point of view, or in the largest sense an attitude to life' (p. 214). As a therapeutic tool it must be flexible, unconventional and playful, the kind of humour that erupts as a spontaneous reaction to the patient's account of a tale of sorrow or state of mind. Killinger (1987) describes humour in therapy as an interactive personal experience that occurs between client and therapist. Its potential lies in its usefulness as a tool to enable people to view their problems from a new perspective. It serves to broaden clients' self-awareness by improving their ability to take stock of themselves and others more objectively and to develop fuller affective reactions (Rosenheim, 1974). Mauger (2001) describes it as a means of 'untwisting' a client's cognitive distortions.

This broadening of perspective, from which clients begin to see the irony or absurdity of their own predicament, must nonetheless be facilitated cautiously and sensitively. Kubie (1971) has warned that humour introduced by the therapist too soon

can be destructive if the therapist is assumed to be laughing at (maladaptive) rather than with (adaptive) the client. Mauger (2001) too sees laughing *with* people as compassionate, laughing *at* them as immoral and unethical.

Therapeutic contexts vary, of course, and the literature on therapy methodology gives examples of therapists' experience of using humour in individual contexts, in group therapy and in family therapy.

### **Individual therapy**

Killinger (1987) believes fundamentally in the creative, but spontaneous, development of humour to capture and crystallise the essence or meaning within the immediate client-therapist interchange. Her clinical approach emphasises gentleness and therapeutic sensitivity to a client's needs. Killinger (1987, p. 31) believes that this sensitivity can be best achieved through 'verbal picture painting or framing an image', which is designed to open the client's eyes while at the same time maintaining some 'psychic distance':

In the process of active listening and attempting to understand what clients are thinking or saying about themselves, the therapist can focus the intervention at a significant point by creating a humorous word picture to frame the essence of the client's dynamics. The humorous interpretation hopefully serves to shift clients from a fixed view of themselves or their situation while simultaneously reinforcing the *now* by expanding on what clients are saying about themselves. By focusing the subject matter of the humor onto objects, people or situations slightly removed from the client this change of focus can be achieved without being 'too close' and raising undue anxiety in the client.

Mauger (2001) also uses humour to reinterpret or reframe distressing events in such a way as to distance the client sufficiently from the stressor while creating a feeling of perspective and safety.

### **Group therapy**

Most long-established groups (like therapy groups) whose members develop a sense of belonging and loyalty create what Yalom (1985) called a 'social microcosm' – shared experiencing of a broad array of emotions. Inevitably, humour becomes an intrinsic feature of the therapy group and, far from repressing it, the main concern is how it can be optimally built into a group's culture without making it too contrived.

Bloch (1987) considered the various advantages and disadvantages of using humour in long-term group therapy. In particular, he stressed the desirability of adopting an interactional model in which change stems mainly from the relationship between members rather than from the relationship between each client and the therapist. Thus it is important that humour revolves around or emanates from the clients' relationships with each other rather than with the therapist. Bloch has identified ten ways in which humour can be therapeutically useful. Three of these are classified as therapist-related uses, four as client-related and three as group-related.

*Therapist-related uses* include *modelling* – good-natured expressions of attitude or behaviour which help to dislodge obstacles to a client's more spontaneous self-expression; *transparency* – self-disclosure by the therapist which shows a willingness to laugh at oneself; *interpretation* – helping clients, through humour, to examine themselves in a different way.

*Client-related uses* include several techniques for facilitating clients to perceive the light-hearted nature of some experiences that arise during discussion amongst group members. These involve helping clients to put their experiences into a proper *sense of proportion*, to *overcome earnestness*, to *promote social skills* (by forging social relationships) and provide opportunities for *catharsis and self-disclosure*.

*Group-related uses* include *cohesiveness* – the use of humour within the group to foster cordiality and friendliness; *insight into group dynamics* – helping group members to appreciate the relevance of processes like undue dependency on the therapist, avoidance of distressing topics; *reduction of tension* – the use of humour to handle conflict and embarrassment.

## **Family therapy**

According to Madanes (1987), a therapist can follow one of two broad approaches in using humour to change the 'drama of a family': one is based on the use of language to redefine situations: the other relies on organising actions that change a course of events and modify sequences of interaction.

In relation to language, the art of the therapist is much the same as we have just been discussing (i.e. to facilitate the family members' reinterpretation of the meaning of their behaviour towards each other). Often humorous interventions do not appear humorous to the family members at the time; only in retrospect do they appear so. The therapist can sometimes revisit with the family events that happened earlier in the therapy and help them, through humour, to penetrate the family system, to loosen their grasp of cyclical dysfunctional patterns of family behaviour and to reorganise the tasks that alter the interactions amongst family members.

In relation to action, the use of comic or slapstick routines may be helpful in situations where the behaviour of one family member irritates another. Madanes' device here is to have the behaviour deliberately practised by the perpetrator but responded to in an exaggeratedly affectionate way by the individual who is irritated (e.g. a sulky pout of the lips or angry finger-stabbing). This draws attention to the behaviour in a non-threatening way, which can release amusement by both family members in the exchange. In all humour there may be an element of defiance of authority – of rules, or socially accepted norms. Defiance can be used in ways that are not only humorous but therapeutic, as antagonism is changed into playful challenge.

Most therapists would agree that if humour is to be employed in therapy it must be used sensitively and caringly, in a way that indicates that the therapist values and respects the client and is concerned about their well-being. Many warn against the sudden and unguarded insertion of humour into therapy and view its introduction as a delicately judged business. This view of the psychological fragility of clients, however, has been questioned. Farrelly and Matthews (1981) and Farrelly and Lynch (1987)



describe the technique of provocative therapy in which humour is explicitly used as a means of challenging clients' pathology and provoking them into a strong emotional reaction designed to make them relinquish their self-defeating behaviours. However, this is potentially a dangerous strategy if not handled very carefully.

## Medical and caring contexts

In medical and nursing relationships, humour helps cement the bond and feeling of trust between patient and healthcare provider (e.g. Astedt-Kurki *et al.*, 2001; Beck, 1997). It also helps to establish the perception of a more egalitarian relationship, serving to offset the obvious asymmetry of a relationship in which one person (patient) is dependent upon another (carer), and effectively passes over control for their well-being. This does not mean to imply that the humour relationship actually becomes symmetrical. Haakana (2002) has shown that doctors typically laugh less than their patients during consultations and do not invite laughter as much as their patients do. When doctors do initiate humour, however, it is very likely to be reciprocated.

In one large-scale study of medical consultations, Sala and Kapat (2002) found a strong association between the use of humour and reported satisfaction with medical care by the patient. Female patients in particular used humour more than males in consultation visits with which they were satisfied. Where such visits were judged to be unsatisfactory, patients used more self-disparaging (maladaptive) humour; where visits were judged by patients to be more satisfactory, then the physicians themselves were more likely to use self-deprecating humour. Perhaps the level of satisfaction was related more to patients' perception of their relative parity with their doctor during the consultation than to anything to do with their confidence in the doctor's competence or the medical outcome. Sala and Kapat also reported that patients were less likely to sue physicians for malpractice on the basis of more humorous consultation visits!

Several other results have emerged from research that has examined the use of humour in medical care and consultations. For example, there is some evidence that the use of humour helps to manage conflict, difficult caring situations and difficult patients (Beck, 1997; Mallet & Ahern, 1996). Similarly use of humour can help restore patients' feelings of control (Wooten, 1992) and reassert their autonomy and self-esteem, especially after a stroke (Heath & Blonder, 2003). Humour has also emerged as a means of providing hope to residents (and staff) in an 'assisted living facility' (Westburg, 2003), as a means of coping and improving the working climate (Astedt-Kurki *et al.*, 2001), and as an antidote to burn-out, emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation (Talbot & Lumden, 2000; Wooten, 1992).

In addition to the studies cited above, humour is being increasingly reviewed in a variety of 'real-world' settings using authentic discursive methods (e.g. Davies 2003; Glenn 2003; Holmes 2007). One might expect nursing and nurses as key players in healthcare to be a promising area for humour research. However, nursing appears to be somewhat reticent about entering the humour arena and much of the literature in this area is largely anecdotal or opinion-based, suggesting perhaps that nurses may view humour and professionalism as mutually exclusive terms (McCreaddie and Wiggins 2008). Nevertheless, the work that has been undertaken in this area clearly demonstrates the importance of humour to healthcare communication, especially in the era

of the Francis Report (2013) and increasing NHS complaints – all citing poor communication and attitude as pervasive problems.

McCreaddie and Wiggins (2009) used a baseline data corpus of Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS)–patient interactions, supplemented with pre- and post-interaction audio diaries with theoretical sampling, adding interviews, field notes and focus groups involving patients, patient groups and CNSs. The study concluded that patients enacted a ‘good patient’ persona incorporating sycophancy, coping and compliance and reconciled this with potentially problematic (SDH, gallows) and potentially non-problematic (incongruity) humour use. In short, humour is used to deferentially package concerns without compromising the good patient persona and threaten the relationship with the CNS. Thus, how the CNS identified or addressed humour was central to whether patients’ concerns were resolved or not. In particular, it is suggested that the use of SDH alone, or SDH with gallows humour only, repeated in a relatively short time-frame was indicative of an unresolved issue or concern. Notably, the CNSs were generally unaware of humour use and had a limited perception of humour and its role in interaction, with patients being much more likely to initiate and reciprocate humour than the CNS.

McCreaddie (2010) outlined a negative case that contradicted the above description of the CNSs. This particular CNS worked in a ‘non-accomplishment’ setting with female drug users and frequently used humour to affiliate and engage patients in their consultation, often in conjunction with a midwife colleague. The particular use of ‘harsh humour’ evident in this setting used commonalities such as drug use, sex and men, in an upfront, brash format that was not encoded or, in any way, subtle. This use appeared to speak the language of the patient, demonstrate the CNS’s non-judgemental approach and highlight her knowledge about the area of drug use. It therefore facilitated the CNS to *engage* this disenfranchised group in their consultation. Consequently, the CNS or midwife was able to obtain consent to undertake difficult and unpleasant tasks (e.g. cervical smears) successfully. The use of this type of humour in this context was therefore, therapeutic.

In a further article McCreaddie (2016) also outlined the more visceral use of humour among the nurse-peers working in the non-accomplishment setting. It was argued that the candid expressions of humour aimed at self and the patient group enabled staff to deal with the difficult situations they worked with on a daily basis e.g. sexual assault/violence, child sexual abuse – whilst still maintaining a sense of self-worth and commitment to the work. Interestingly, McCreaddie suggests that non-accomplishment work/settings such as working with drug users, may attract individual hedonists with a particularly well-developed sense of humour who are, therefore, able and willing to take risks with patients. Further, such individuals use humour in a recreational way to build resilience, maintain self-esteem and foster solidarity among their peers, enabling them to remain in these difficult and potentially unfulfilling caring contexts for many years (McCreaddie and Payne 2014).

## HUMOUR AND EDUCATION

Humour in the classroom can clearly make lessons more enjoyable. *Sesame Street* is an obvious example of an educational television programme designed to present teaching

in an atmosphere of fun by use of the 'Muppets' as well as to inject humour into specific lessons to be taught. The question is, does humour actually help people to learn? Unfortunately, the evidence remains equivocal; with a number of early studies showing that humour does not aid memory (Gruner, 1976) and further, showing that humour may actually confuse younger children (Bryant and Zillmann, 1989). However, the majority of later studies have tended to show a more positive relationship between humour and learning (Garner, 2006; Wanzer and Frymier, 1999; Wanzer *et al.*, 2010; Ziv, 1988).

Clearly, there is a risk that humour may distract from the lesson in the sense that it draws the learner's attention towards the joke and away from the message, but if the humour is related to and integrated directly with the items to be learned, it can assist the learning of those items (Kaplan and Pascoe, 1977; Wanzer *et al.*, 2010). The type of humour, length of the joke, temporal position of the insertion of the humour and the method of presentation may all contribute to the humour's effectiveness, and the type of lesson or material to be learned may also be crucial (Davies and Apter, 1980; Ziv, 1988). So there are no easy answers. The case for humour as a means of aiding subsequent recall is not yet proven, but this is no reason why teachers should abandon it as a means of maintaining their learners' attention (see also Banas *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, there is very little evidence supporting the view that it could be detrimental. Some evidence suggests that it makes individuals more creative by improving their flexibility of thinking (Isen, 2003). Aside from memory recall, more recent work in this area has outlined additional specific benefits that humour may have for learning and teaching. These include: reducing stress, improving focus, facilitating learning, enhancing relationships and emotional intelligence and, of course, as something that is fun (Chabeli, 2008; Ulloth, 2002; Wanzer *et al.*, 2010)! Of course, appropriate humour is entertaining and can render the communicator more popular (Gruner, 1976; Torok *et al.*, 2004). However, the challenge for research into humour in education is, currently, how we make the processes and outcomes more explicit and, therefore, develop them for translational impacts.

## OVERVIEW

For whatever purposes we use humour in our daily lives, it is above all else a coping mechanism: it buffers us against stress and against the criticisms of others; it enables us to maintain and possibly enhance our own self-concept and preserve our self-esteem (Martin, 2006). The evidence we have surveyed in this chapter demonstrates just how goal-directed humour is and how it comes to be involved in a broad range of human activities and functioning. Not only does humour appear to be an effective means of mitigating stress, but it also appears to be associated with a greater enjoyment of positive life experiences and a more positive orientation towards self. Patently, humour is a subtle and complex skill and some individuals are more proficient in its use than others. The origins and development of the skill are poorly understood and little is known about why some adults and children become particularly versed and adept at using it to express themselves. As a social skill, however, humour is an ability and everyone has the capacity for developing it. No matter what, there seems little danger that the intrinsic pleasure of humour will be destroyed by our serious attempts to comprehend and exploit it.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The authors would like to acknowledge the originator of this chapter, Emeritus Professor Hugh Foot, School of Psychological Sciences and Health, University of Strathclyde.

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## Persuasion

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### INTRODUCTION

**P**ERSUASION IS ONE OF the most common functions of communication – something people routinely attempt to achieve. Indeed, persuasion is ubiquitous: it occurs in the marketplace (e.g., consumer advertising, sales), the courtroom, the political arena (election campaigns, public policy issues), family and interpersonal settings, healthcare, the workplace, and so on. Given persuasion's manifest importance, it is perhaps unsurprising that considerable research attention has been devoted to trying to understand what makes persuasive messages effective.

If there is one skill that is most fundamental to persuasive success, it is message adaptation – adapting or tailoring one's persuasive efforts to the particular situation faced, the particular audience to be influenced. Skilled persuaders adapt their messages to the specific challenges of the situation at hand. But how do persuasion situations differ? What *are* the different challenges that persuaders face? In some ways, the circumstances persuaders face will naturally be quite diverse, if only because persuasion occurs in so many different settings. This diversity of persuasion situations guarantees that there can be no simple, completely dependable directives for skilful persuasion; what's needed in one persuasion setting may be quite different from what's needed in another.

However, it is possible to point to four recurring persuasion challenges – four situations that persuaders commonly face. These are not limited to any one influence setting, any one specific target audience or any one kind of behaviour. (This analysis is drawn from Fishbein and Ajzen's [2010] reasoned action theory, a useful general account of the

determinants of voluntary behaviour; for reviews and discussion, see Conner & Sparks [2015]; O'Keefe 2016, pp. 98–131; Yzer [2013].) These four challenges can be thought of as four different possible answers to a key question that persuaders should always ask themselves before embarking on persuasive efforts. That question is: “Why aren't people already doing this behaviour? Why aren't people already doing what I want?”

One possible answer is: They don't think it's a good idea. That is, they don't have positive attitudes about the advocated action or viewpoint. Correspondingly, one potential challenge for a persuader is getting people to have appropriately positive attitudes, getting them to think that what the persuader is urging is a good idea.

A second possible answer is that social considerations are a barrier. What is meant by “social considerations” here is what people think *other people* think or do. For example, it is possible for a person to have positive attitudes about doing something – but then not do it, because they think that other people think they should not. (“I'm in favour of it, but all these people around me are saying it's a bad idea.”)

Third, people's perceived ability to perform the advocated behaviour can be the challenge the persuader faces. That is, sometimes people have the appropriate positive attitudes, and the social considerations (about what other people think or do) are all positive, but people don't think they *can* perform the behaviour (maybe they don't know *how* to perform the behaviour) – and so they don't even try.

Finally, sometimes people have the appropriate positive attitudes, and the social considerations are positive, and people know they're able to engage in the behaviour, and so in some sense they vaguely intend to do what the persuader wants – but somehow they don't translate those good intentions into action. That is, sometimes the challenge a persuader faces is the task of helping people to convert their intentions into behaviour.

In what follows, each of these possible challenges is addressed through the lens of current theory and research concerning effective persuasive communication. For each challenge, the social–scientific research literature concerning persuasion offers a number of principles and guidelines that can be useful in illuminating how to effectively overcome that obstacle. As one might imagine, different kinds of approaches (strategies) are appropriate for the different challenges. A strategy that works for one sort of persuasion problem will not necessarily work for a different kind of problem. But for each distinct challenge, there are useful evidence-based strategies that have been found to be successful.

Thus, the following analysis is meant to provide a general toolkit for skilful adaptation of persuasive messages. Once a persuader has identified the particular obstacles to compliance that are active in a given situation, the strategies described below provide a guide to the design of messages adapted specifically to those obstacles.

## **INFLUENCING ATTITUDES**

### **Supportive arguments**

Sometimes the basis of opposition to the persuader's advocated viewpoint is negative attitudes: people don't have positive evaluations of the public policy being recommended, of the product being offered, of the action being advocated. And one obvious

avenue to encouraging people to have positive attitudes is to make arguments supporting the advocated view; persuaders commonly try to give people good reasons why they should favour the advocate's viewpoint.

For encouraging positive attitudes, one especially familiar kind of supportive argument is an argument invoking the *consequences* of the advocated view. "This economic policy will stimulate growth," "This car gets great gas mileage" (i.e., if you buy this car, the consequence is you'll have a car with great gas mileage), "Wearing sunscreen reduces your risk of skin cancer" – these are all arguments based on consequences.

Unsurprisingly, such consequence-based appeals are more persuasive when they invoke outcomes that are (from the audience's point of view) relatively more desirable than when they invoke outcomes that are not seen as so positive (for a review, see O'Keefe, 2013). Although this point is surely obvious, it does emphasise the importance of designing persuasive appeals that are adapted to the audience's views. Different people will value different things, and hence creating effective consequence-based arguments requires skilful adaptation of messages to recipients.

A nice example is provided by research concerning the individual-difference variable called "consideration of future consequences" (CFC; Strathman, Gleicher, Boninger, & Edwards, 1994). CFC refers to differences in the degree to which people tend to naturally emphasise longer-term as opposed to shorter-term behavioural consequences. Such differences between people are reflected in corresponding differences in which kinds of arguments they find more persuasive. Arguments emphasising more immediate consequences are relatively more persuasive for those low in CFC, whereas arguments emphasising long-term consequences are more persuasive for those high in CFC (see, e.g., Orbell & Kyriakaki, 2008; Zhao, Nan, Iles, & Yang, 2015).

As another example: in the evaluation of consumer products, persons differ in their relative general emphases on different kinds of product attributes. This difference is related to variation in 'self-monitoring', which refers to the control or regulation (monitoring) of one's self-presentation (Snyder, 1974). High self-monitors are concerned about the image they project to others and tailor their conduct to fit the particular circumstances they're in; low self-monitors are less concerned about their projected image and are less likely to adapt their behaviour to external circumstances. In evaluating consumer products, high self-monitors are relatively more interested in symbolic or image-related aspects of the product (the kind of image projected by the car, what the watch says about me as a person), whereas low self-monitors are relatively more interested in instrumental or product-quality attributes (whether the car gets good gas mileage, whether the watch is accurate).

These differences (in what high and low self-monitors value in products) are reflected in corresponding differences in the relative effectiveness of different persuasive appeals. A number of studies have found that high self-monitors react more favourably to image-oriented advertisements than to product-quality-oriented ads, with the opposite effect found for low self-monitors (e.g., DeBono & Packer, 1991; Snyder & DeBono, 1985; Zuckerman, Gioioso, & Tellini, 1988; relatedly, see Wang, 2012; for reviews and discussion, see Carpenter, 2012; Watt, Maio, Haddock, & Johnson, 2008). Obviously, then, a persuader will want different kinds of appeals in messages aimed at these two different sorts of audiences.

So the question a persuader faces when designing supportive arguments is: Which arguments will be most effective in this specific circumstance (this topic, this

audience)? The answer will vary from case to case – and the answer may not always be obvious.

For example, it seems plausible to assume that for altruistically oriented behaviours such as donating blood and agreeing to be an organ donor, altruistically oriented appeals (emphasising advantages to others, the prosocial nature of the behaviour, and so forth) will naturally have some special purchase that self-oriented appeals (focused on benefits to the individual) do not. And yet in some studies on these topics, altruistic appeals were found to be less persuasive than self-oriented appeals (e.g., Barnett, Klassen, McMinimy, & Schwarz, 1987; Ferrari, Barone, Jason, & Rose, 1985).

As another example: for trying to discourage smoking by young people, the sorts of arguments that naturally come to mind might be arguments about negative health consequences (lung cancer, heart disease, etc.). But it turns out that at least some adolescents are more persuaded by appeals invoking the negative *social* consequences of smoking (e.g., being shunned by others; see Pechmann, Zhao, Goldberg, & Reibling, 2003; relatedly, see Kingsbury, Gibbons, & Gerrard, 2015; Mahler, Fitzpatrick, Parker, & Lapin, 1997). Similarly, for encouraging skin protection behaviours (e.g., sunscreen use), some studies have found that arguments emphasising skin cancer prevention can be less persuasive than ones focused on appearance-related consequences (e.g., having unattractive skin; Cornelis, Cauberghe, & De Pelesmacker, 2014; Jones & Leary, 1994; Thomas et al., 2011).

In short, it is easy to be mistaken about which arguments will be most effective in changing attitudes. Appeals that might plausibly be thought to be highly effective can turn out to be relatively less persuasive than others (e.g., altruistic appeals for altruistic behaviours); appeals that are relatively successful for some recipients might not be so effective with others (as illustrated by the differences between high and low self-monitors). Thus, skilful deployment of supportive arguments requires careful adaptation of one's arguments to the particular circumstance at hand.

## Handling counterarguments

Sometimes receivers' negative attitudes will be based on objections they have (stated or unstated) to the advocate's viewpoint. The question that arises is how a persuader should handle such objections. That is, in addition to making supportive arguments, how should a persuader deal with potential opposing arguments? Three broad alternative courses of action are available. One is to ignore the opposing arguments and so present only supporting arguments (commonly termed a "one-sided" message). A second is to present supporting arguments and also attempt to refute the opposing arguments (a "refutational two-sided" message). The third is to present supportive arguments and mention the opposing arguments, but without trying to undermine the opposing considerations (a "non-refutational two-sided" message).

A considerable body of research evidence focuses on the question of the relative persuasiveness of these alternatives. The evidence suggests that refutational two-sided messages are significantly more persuasive than their one-sided counterparts; non-refutational two-sided messages, on the other hand, are significantly less persuasive than one-sided messages. That is to say, persuaders are well-advised to meet counterarguments head-on by attempting to refute them (a refutational two-sided message)

rather than ignoring them (a one-sided message) or – even worse – mentioning them without undermining them (a non-refutational two-sided message). (For reviews and discussion, see Eisend, 2006, 2007; O’Keefe, 1999.)

But the persuasive advantage of refutational two-sided messages may be limited to cases in which the refuted counterarguments are ones that the audience actually holds (or might plausibly entertain); if a persuader refutes trivial or far-fetched objections, no persuasive benefit may occur. And in consumer advertising, non-refutational two-sided messages might sometimes be a useful strategy (for discussion, see O’Keefe, 2016, pp. 224–225). But in general, persuaders ought to seek to undermine opposing arguments whenever possible.

Smoking cessation interventions provide a nice illustration of the value of addressing active objections. Smokers are sometimes reluctant to quit smoking because of a concern about possible weight gain. To defuse this objection, some researchers have combined a smoking cessation intervention with a weight control intervention, finding that such combined treatments produce significantly greater abstinence than do smoking cessation treatments alone (for a review, see Spring et al., 2009).

## INFLUENCING SOCIAL FACTORS

Even if people have positive personal attitudes about the persuader’s viewpoint, they still might not necessarily adopt the advocated view because of *social* considerations – factors connected with people’s perceptions of what other people are thinking or doing. Two such social factors are worth distinguishing: descriptive norms and injunctive norms.

### Descriptive norms

The descriptive norm is the person’s perception of whether other people perform the behaviour, that is, the perception of what other people are doing. Descriptive-norm perceptions can and do influence people’s behaviour: As people come to think a given behaviour is more widely performed by others, then they themselves may be more likely to undertake the action. For example, people may be more likely to recycle if they believe that many of their neighbours are recycling (Fornara, Carrus, Passafaro, & Bonnes, 2011).

The most straightforward way to influence descriptive-norm perceptions is simply to convey such information – tell people what others are doing. And indeed, a number of studies have shown that delivering descriptive-norm information to people can influence their behaviour. Some examples are as follows. People can be influenced to vote by learning that some of their Facebook friends have voted (Bond et al., 2012; similarly, Gerber & Rogers, 2009). People are more likely to pay the taxes they owe, and to pay on time, when they have received messages indicating that most other taxpayers pay on time and pay what they owe (e.g., Hallsworth, List, Metcalfe, & Vlaev, 2014). Physicians are less likely to inappropriately prescribe antibiotics if they receive information comparing their behaviour to that of those with the lowest rates of inappropriate prescribing (Meeker et al., 2016).



Such descriptive-norm interventions are not guaranteed to be successful, however. An instructive example is provided by interventions aimed at influencing college student alcohol consumption. Students commonly overestimate the frequency or amount of alcohol consumption by others; because such misperceptions might encourage alcohol abuse, interventions that correct such misinformation (by giving accurate descriptive norm information) have been extensively studied. However, these interventions have had mixed success, and it is not yet entirely clear what influences these outcomes (for examples and discussion, see DeJong & Smith, 2013; Polonec, Major, & Atwood, 2006; Reilly & Wood, 2008; Rimal, 2008; Scribner et al., 2011). But even without a fully worked-out account of exactly what makes for the most effective descriptive-norm messages, persuaders will want such messages to be part of their toolkit.

## **Injunctive norms**

The injunctive norm is the person's perception of whether other people think he or she *should* perform the behaviour in question. The injunctive norm thus is prescriptive (what I think other people think I ought to do, what they are prescribing for me), as opposed to the descriptive norm (what I think other people do). Injunctive-norm perceptions can and do influence people's behaviour. If people think that others (especially others who are important to them) approve of a behaviour, they are more likely to be willing to engage in it; disapproval by others makes people less likely to engage in an action.

Naturally, then, injunctive-norm perceptions provide another potential avenue of influence for persuaders. Researchers have found, for example, that injunctive-norm messages can be an effective means of influence about such subjects as phone-related distracted driving (Lawrence, 2015), tobacco use (Hohman, Crano, & Niedbala, 2016), healthy eating (Mollen, Holland, Ruiters, Rimal, & Kok, in press), sun protection (Reid & Aiken, 2013), smoking (Bresnahan & Zhuang, 2016), and environmental behaviour (de Groot, Abrahamse, & Jones, 2013). Sometimes injunctive-norm interventions invoke generalised social norms (suggesting that people in general approve or disapprove of a given behaviour), and sometimes more specific groups or individuals (e.g., popular peers or celebrities) are deployed (e.g., Kelly et al., 1992; Vet, de Wit, & Das, 2011). But the general idea is to convey information about the extent to which others approve of the behaviour.

As with descriptive-norm interventions, however, much remains to be learned about the design of effective injunctive-norm messages, the circumstances in which such messages are most likely to be effective, and so on (for some review discussions, see Chung & Rimal, 2016; Robinson, Thomas, Aveyard, & Higgs, 2014; Stok, de Vet, de Ridder, & de Wit, 2016).

## **INFLUENCING PERCEIVED BEHAVIOURAL ABILITY**

Even if people have positive attitudes, positive descriptive norms, and positive injunctive norms concerning the advocated action, they still might not undertake that behaviour – if they think that they are *unable* to do so. That is, perceived behavioural

ability (perceived behavioural control, self-efficacy) can be a barrier to behavioural adoption. For example, a person might have a positive attitude towards exercising regularly (“I think exercising regularly would be a good thing”), a positive descriptive norm (“I know lots of other people do exercise”), and a positive injunctive norm (“Most people who are important to me think I should exercise regularly”), but negative perceived behavioural ability (“I don’t have the time, and the health club is too far away”) – and so the person doesn’t even form the intention to exercise regularly.

A large number of studies have confirmed that perceived behavioural ability does indeed often have a significant influence on behavioural intentions (for some reviews and discussion, see Andrew et al., 2016; Conner & Sparks, 2015; Cooke, Dahdah, Norman, & French, 2016; Overstreet, Cegielski, & Hall, 2013; Sutton & White, 2016). To take just one example of the distinctive role of perceived behavioural ability: In a study of recycling, householders who recycled and those who did not were found to have similar positive attitudes about recycling, but non-recyclers perceived recycling to be much more difficult to do than did recyclers and indicated uncertainty about exactly how to perform the behaviour; that is, the barrier to behavioural performance appeared to be a matter of a perceived inability to perform the action, not a negative attitude towards the behaviour (De Young, 1989).

Given that a lack of perceived behavioural ability will sometimes be the primary obstacle to gaining the audience’s compliance, the question becomes one of identifying ways in which persuaders might enhance self-efficacy. Broadly speaking, persuaders have at least four different means by which they can attempt to influence a person’s perceived behavioural ability. The usefulness of these various mechanisms will depend on the particular behaviour of interest, but each can be helpful in the right circumstances.

First, sometimes persuaders will be able to remove some barrier to behavioural performance. In cases where the barrier is a lack of information, persuaders can simply supply the necessary information. For example, parents’ self-efficacy for lowering the temperature setting of a water heater (so as to prevent tap-water scalding of infants) can be enhanced by an informational brochure describing how to perform the action (Cardenas & Simons-Morton, 1993). Similarly, better instructions may improve self-efficacy concerning do-it-yourself medical tests (Feufel, Schneider, & Berkel, 2010). Prospective voters may not know where to go to vote, adolescents may not know how to use condoms properly, homeowners may not know how to recycle; in all these cases, simply providing the relevant information may remove a barrier to behavioural performance.

In cases where the barrier is substantive (rather than informational), persuaders may sometimes be able to address it. For example, among low-income patients whose initial medical test results indicate a need for a return hospital visit, transportation problems might represent a significant barrier to returning; Marcus et al. (1992) found that providing such patients with free bus passes or parking permits significantly increased the likelihood of a visit for follow-up procedures.

This first approach to enhancing perceived behavioural ability, that of removing barriers to compliance, might be crystallised this way: skilful persuaders make it easy for people to do what they want. For example, people who have just expressed positive attitudes about registering to be an organ donor are more likely to register given an immediate (as opposed to delayed) opportunity to do so (Sharpe, Moloney, Sutherland, & Judd, 2017); racquetball players who don’t have eye protection equipment are more

willing to wear it when the recreational facility provides it at the court as opposed to at a separate checkout centre (Dingus, Hunn, & Wreggit, 1991).

Second, persuaders can sometimes create opportunities for successful performance of the target behaviour. Rehearsal of the behaviour – that is, practice at accomplishing the behaviour – will presumably enhance perceived self-efficacy (the underlying reasoning being something like “I’ve done it before, so I can do it again”). For example, a number of studies have found that self-efficacy for safer-sex practices can be enhanced by interventions that include role-playing (or mental rehearsal) of discussions with sexual partners, practice at using condoms correctly, and the like (e.g., Calsyn et al., 2010; Noar, Carlyle, & Cole, 2006; Yzer, Fisher, Bakker, Siero, & Misovich, 1998). (For examples of other research concerning the effects of successful practice on perceived behavioural control, see Duncan, Duncan, Beauchamp, Wells, & Ary, 2000; Latimer & Ginis, 2005; Luzzo, Hasper, Albert, Bibby, & Martinelli, 1999.)

Third, audiences can be given examples of other people (models) performing the behaviour successfully. Such modelling can enhance self-efficacy (by receivers reasoning, in effect, “if they can do it, so can I”). For example, compared with a no-treatment control group, preservice teachers who viewed a videotape that described and demonstrated various effective behaviour management techniques subsequently reported enhanced self-efficacy for using such techniques (Hagen, Gutkin, Wilson, & Oats, 1998). Similarly, Anderson (2000) found that viewing a video in which successful breast self-examination was modelled produced significantly greater perceived behavioural self-efficacy compared to various control conditions. (For some additional studies of the potential effects of modelling on self-efficacy, see Gaston, Cramp, & Prapavessis, 2012; Mahler, Kulik, & Hill, 1993; and Ng, Tam, Yew, & Lam, 1999.)

Finally, perceived behavioural ability can sometimes be enhanced simply by receiving encouragement from others. A persuader who indicates confidence in the receiver’s behavioural abilities can sometimes thereby increase the receiver’s perceived self-efficacy. For example, assuring people that they can successfully prevent a friend from driving while drunk can enhance their perceived ability to perform that behaviour (Anderson, 1995; see also Anderson, 2009).

Of course, these are not mutually exclusive possibilities. Indeed, several studies have explored multicomponent interventions, such as combining modelling with rehearsal (e.g., Luszczynska, 2004; Robinson, Turrisi, & Stapleton, 2007). But whether deployed individually or jointly, these various mechanisms all offer good prospects for enhancing perceived behavioural ability. (For some general reviews and discussion, see Ashford, Edmunds, & French, 2010; Higgins, Middleton, Winner, & Janelle, 2014; Prestwich et al., 2014.)

## **CONVERTING INTENTIONS INTO ACTION**

Even if people have the relevant positive attitudes and social factors (injunctive and descriptive norms), and they believe that they do have the ability to perform the behaviour – even then, although people may (in some vague sense) intend to do the behaviour, they nevertheless sometimes don’t follow through. In those circumstances, the challenge a persuader faces is that of getting people to convert their intentions into behaviour. Three general strategies can be useful for addressing this challenge.

## Prompts

First, a persuader might use a prompt: some simple cue (reminder, trigger) that makes performance of the behaviour salient. In the right circumstances, persuasion can be effected through such relatively straightforward prompts. To take some examples: stair use can be significantly increased in office buildings and train stations by placing simple signs (mentioning the benefits of stair use) next to escalators or elevators that have adjacent stairs (e.g., Sloan, Haaland, Leung, & Müller-Riemenschneider, 2013); reminder calls can improve glaucoma medication adherence (Cook et al., 2017); reminder signs in restrooms can encourage handwashing (e.g., Ford, Boyer, Menachemi, & Huerta, 2013); and automated medical appointment reminders can increase appointment-keeping (Guy et al., 2012). (For some reviews, see Fry & Neff, 2009; Head, Noar, Iannarino, & Harrington, 2013.)

However, for prompts to be successful, two conditions probably have to be met. People must already be willing to perform the behaviour (e.g., have positive attitudes), and have to believe they are capable of performing the behaviour (perceived behavioural ability must be sufficiently high). Reminding people of something they do not want to do, or don't think they can do, is unlikely to be very successful.

## Explicit planning

Second, people can be encouraged to engage in explicit planning of their behaviour. In numerous studies, planning behavioural performance has been found to help people to convert their abstract intentions into concrete "implementation intentions," which facilitate behavioural performance. For example, Sheeran and Orbell (2000) found that people who specified when, where, and how they would make an appointment for a medical screening test were much more likely to subsequently attend the screening than those in a control condition. Similar effects have been found for exercise (e.g., Andersson & Moss, 2011), voting (Nickerson & Rogers, 2010), and a great many other behaviours (for some reviews, see Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006; Hagger & Luszczynska, 2014).

The success of such explicit-planning interventions depends on various preconditions being satisfied. For example, people must already have the relevant abstract intentions (e.g., Elliott & Armitage, 2006), and perceived behavioural ability must already be high (e.g., Koring et al., 2012). But under the right conditions, such interventions can be very successful in getting people to convert their intentions into behaviour.

## Inducing hypocrisy or guilt

Third, when people have positive attitudes and intentions but are not acting consistently with them, another potential influence strategy is to make people feel bad about that inconsistency – to make them feel guilty or hypocritical. Guilt can be a powerful motivator (for some reviews, see Boster, Cruz, Manata, DeAngelis, & Zhuang, 2016; Xu & Guo, 2018), so persuaders might consider harnessing it to this purpose.

Inducing feelings of hypocrisy or guilt requires that both the existing positive attitude and the previous inconsistent behaviour be made salient. And several studies

have suggested that when that happens, persons will commonly be more likely to subsequently act consistently with their attitudes. For example, in a study of home energy conservation in which participants had pledged to conserve energy but weren't actually doing so, some people got feedback about their actual energy use (making their behaviour salient), but others received both the feedback *and* a reminder about their positive attitudes; greater subsequent energy conservation was seen in that latter group than in the former (Kantola, Syme, & Campbell, 1984; similarly, see Aitken, McMahon, Wearing, & Finlayson, 1994). (For reviews and discussion, see Freijy & Kothe, 2013; Stone, 2012.)

But this strategy can easily backfire if not deployed carefully. For instance, persons made to feel hypocritical about apparent attitude-behaviour inconsistency might resolve that inconsistency not by changing their behaviour so as to align it with their attitudes, but by changing their attitudes so as to justify (be consistent with) their previous behaviour (Fried, 1998). And several studies have found that although more explicit guilt appeals do arouse greater guilt than less explicit appeals, those more explicit appeals are significantly less persuasive than less explicit appeals, perhaps because the strategy generates anger or resentment (e.g., Cotte, Coulter, & Moore, 2005; similarly, see Bessarabova, Turner, Fink, & Blustein, 2015; for reviews and discussion, see O'Keefe, 2000, 2002). So although trying to convert people's intentions into actions by making them feel bad is a strategy that can be successful, it is also a strategy that can boomerang.

## OVERVIEW

Persuaders often seem prone to suppose that the primary reason that the audience currently fails to embrace the advocated action or viewpoint is that the audience does not have the appropriate attitudes. Thus, it might be assumed that, for instance, the reason that households don't participate in recycling programmes is negative attitudes towards recycling; the reason that consumers don't purchase one's product is negative evaluations of the product; and so forth. But as should now be apparent, the audience's resistance to the advocated action need not necessarily lie in negative attitudes. On the contrary, often the audience already has the desired attitudes. In such circumstances, skilful persuaders will want to carefully identify the locus of such non-attitudinal resistance. It might be that the persuader needs to address social factors (injunctive or descriptive norms) or perceived behavioural ability, or it might be that people need help converting their intentions into action.

Skilful persuasion requires adaptation to the basis of the audience's resistance to the advocated view. Discerning the current obstacles to compliance is not always easy, and fashioning effective messages aimed at those barriers can be difficult. However, as should be apparent, the research literature on persuasion provides a number of useful insights into the diagnosis and management of obstacles to persuasion.

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**Part III**

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# **Applying skills in specific contexts**

**Part  
III**



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# Asserting and confronting

*Richard F. Rakos*

If not I for myself, who then?  
And being for myself, what am I?  
And if not now, when?

Hillel

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE WORDS OF THE ancient Sage, though discussing knowledge and meritorious behaviour in general (Goldin, 1957), also apply to the effective use of assertive skills: accepting the right to express one's desires, understanding the social responsibilities that accompany the expression of rights, and making a sound decision to engage in such expression. Hundreds of studies over the past 45 years have confirmed that Hillel's wisdom remains highly relevant even today.

Assertiveness rose to prominence in the mid-1970s as both a pop psychology fad that promised to be a panacea for human unhappiness and as a clinical focus of behaviour therapy. The contemporary notion of assertiveness emerged from the cultural philosophies and social changes that the US and other Western nations experienced in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Rakos, 1991). These include *rationality* that helped to meet the demands of an accelerating scientific and technological society, *social and political activism* that promoted personal empowerment, *ethical relativism* that expanded the range of socially acceptable behaviours, and *pragmatism* (cf. Dewey, 1957) that prioritised outcome over ideology. Though scientific and popular interest in assertion waned in the 1990s, assertiveness today is widely accepted as an appropriate way to empower oneself, influence others, and resolve conflicts; assertiveness training remains a standard cognitive behaviour therapy intervention (e.g., Spiegler, 2016); and rationality, activism, relativism,



and pragmatism still embody the heart of assertion as a response *option* in a rapidly changing, globalised, and technological environment.

The assertion concept has been utilised in contexts far from the clinical settings in which it originated. For instance, its value in the work environment is recognised widely (Back & Back, 1999; Hayes, 2002; Hargie, Dickson, & Tourish, 2004), particularly within predominantly female professions, such as nursing (Okuyama, Wagner, & Bijnen, 2014) and social work (McBride, 1998), where deference by females can undermine job satisfaction. Assertion also can have longer term benefits for employees as assertive persons, compared to nonassertive individuals, receive fairer performance appraisals and feel more positively toward the appraisal and supervisor (Korsgaard, Roberson, & Rymph, 1998).

Assertiveness also contributes to physical and behavioural wellness. The skill helps low income cancer patients access the most appropriate medical care (Adler, McGraw, & McKinlay, 1998; Krupat et al., 1999), and permits women to respond to stress as a challenge rather than as a threat (Tomaka et al., 1999). Assertive skills are associated with superior coping with issues as varied as alexithymia (McIntosh, Ironson, Antoni, Fletcher, & Schneiderman, 2016), autonomy connectedness (Bekker, Croon, van Balkrom, & Verme, 2008), household labour allocation (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007), and racial and ethnic prejudice (Hyers, 2007; Upton, Panter, Daye, Allen, & Wightman, 2012). Assertiveness is correlated with academic self-efficacy in Asian students studying in US universities (Leea & Ciftcib, 2014) and with school achievement in non-gifted students (Ghobary & Hejazi, 2007; Jurkowski & Hanzel, 2017). On the other hand, deficits are associated with anorexia (Raykos, McEvoy, Carter, Fursland, & Nathan, 2014), depression (Pearson, Watkins, & Mullan, 2010), psychological distress in African Americans (Lightsey & Barnes, 2007), peer victimisation of children (Toma, Schwartz, Chang, Farver, & Xu, 2010), and depressive symptoms in girls (Keenan et al., 2010). Finally, sexual assertiveness, which will be discussed in detail later, is correlated positively with sexual satisfaction and performance (Leclerc et al., 2015; Menard & Offman, 2009) and negatively with victimisation.

Assertiveness training is included in interventions for a wide range of problems that compromise the quality of life, such as chronic pain (Winterowd, Beck, & Gruener, 2003) and depression (Klosko & Sanderson, 1999). It can empower vulnerable individuals, such as the chronic mentally ill who are at risk of contracting HIV infection (Weinhardt, Carey, Carey, & Verdecia, 1998), women with intellectual disabilities who need to be partners in their health care (Lunsky, Straiko, & Armstrong, 2003), gay men struggling with rejection sensitivity (Pachankis, Goldfried, & Ramrattan, 2008) or who are HIV-positive and need to refuse drugs (Semple, Strathdee, Zians, McQuaid, & Patterson, 2011), children at risk of being abused or bullied (MacIntyre, Carr, Lawlor, & Flattery, 2000), and adolescents facing decisions about substance use (Trudeau, Lillehoj, Spoth, & Redmond, 2003) or condom use (Schmid, Leonard, Ritchie, & Gwadz, 2015). Among international students studying in the US, assertiveness training decreases negative emotional reactions (Tavakoli, Lumley, Hijazi, Slavin-Spenny, & Parris, 2009) and, in women, depression (Hijazi, Tavakoli, Slavin-Spenny, & Lumley, 2011). In recent years, assertiveness programmes have been seen as a way to teach adolescents and women how to set boundaries in sexual situations (see later discussion). Assertiveness also retains its popular appeal as a self-improvement strategy, and new self-help books continue to be published regularly, including the 10th edition

of the classic *Your Perfect Right* (Alberti & Emmons, 2017) A powerful reflection of the extent to which the assertiveness concept is embraced in the developed world is the Spanish Education Act of 2006, one goal of which is to develop in students a range of social skills based on assertiveness and empathy (Garcia-Lopez & Gutierrez, 2015).

Interestingly, assertiveness training and use of the assertion construct have spread in the last decade to numerous developing countries, demonstrating that its individualistic philosophy increasingly is accepted in regions of the world where communal values are traditional. This is consistent with recent research demonstrating that individualistic practices and values have increased markedly over the last 50 years across the world, including in collectivistic societies where strong socioeconomic development has introduced a postindustrial, urbanised, and more educated foundation that reduces reliance on others for survival (Santos, Varnum, & Grossman, 2017). Research of varying methodological soundness has found assertiveness training to be a successful intervention in Mexico (abused women, Cruz-Almanza, Gaona-Marquez, & Sanchez-Sosa, 2006), Japan (stress management of nurses, Yamagishi et al., 2007; wrist cutting in borderline personality disorder patients, Hayakawa, 2009), Iran (anxiety and insomnia in high school students, Younes & Nejad, 2012; shyness among adolescents, Shariatnia & D'Souza, 2007), Taiwan (psychiatric patients, Lin et al., 2008), Nigeria (management of negative self-image in university students, Obiageli Agbu, 2015), Turkey (counsellor trainees, Gundogdu, 2012), and Brazil (elderly, Braz, Del Prette, & Del Prette, 2011). Assertiveness deficits contribute significantly to burnout among both Japanese nurse managers (Suzuki et al., 2009) and novice nurses (Suzuki, Kanoya, Katsuki, & Sato, 2006), to peer victimisation among Hong Kong schoolchildren (Toma et al., 2010), and to high risk for Internet addiction among Turkish university students (Dalbudak et al., 2015).

Even though assertion now embodies a positive social value across many different cultures around the world, the use of these skills will not be the preferred option in every situation. This chapter will review our current understanding of appropriate and effective assertive behaviour in conflict situations, but because virtually no research has been conducted in the last decade on the content of the skill itself – despite widespread acceptance in both developing and developed countries – the next sections will summarise very briefly the literature concerned with the conceptualisation of assertive behaviour, noting that fuller discussions can be found in Rakos (1991, 2006).

## DEFINING ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Early definitions of assertion emphasised the right to express personal desires while respecting the rights of the other person (e.g., Alberti & Emmons, 1970; Lange & Jakubowski, 1976). They were developed by clinicians from the pioneering formulations introduced by Salter (1949) and Wolpe (1969), and specified components (be direct, use a firm but respectful tone, maintain eye contact) derived from face validity. These conceptualisations were insensitive to situational, individual, and cultural factors and failed to promote systematic theoretical and empirical inquiry, prompting Rich and Schroeder (1976) to propose a functional, contentless operant definition: “(Assertive behaviour is) the skill to seek, maintain, or enhance reinforcement in an interpersonal situation through the expression of feelings or wants when such expression risks loss of reinforcement or even punishment [...] the degree of assertiveness may be

measured by the effectiveness of an individual's response in producing, maintaining, or enhancing reinforcement" (p. 1082). This definition highlights the core features of assertion: it is a *learned skill* that varies as a function of the situation (Ames, 2008a; Vagos & Pereira, 2009), not a "trait" that a person "has" or "lacks;" it occurs only in an *interpersonal* context; it is an *expressive* skill, involving verbal and nonverbal components; it always involves *risk* that the recipient may react negatively; it is frequently measured by *outcome*, which some consider to be the "ultimate criterion for evaluating performance" (McFall, 1982, p. 17).

However, assertion can be evaluated by more than an immediate *outcome criterion* (Rakos, 1991). Because assertion involves risk, proficient behaviour may fail to produce reinforcement in any given instance, indicating the importance of a *technical criterion* that assesses response quality independent of impact. Additionally, an assertion that achieves its immediate goals may enhance or weaken a continuing relationship with the other person, suggesting the importance of a *cost-benefit criterion*. Finally, appropriate behaviour has social validity (Kazdin, 1977; Wolf, 1978); because unskilled behaviour can produce reinforcement, a *cultural criterion* that encompasses social acceptability is usually necessary. In practice, in fact, trainers emphasise technical expertise, net benefit, and cultural appropriateness far more than immediate outcome (Heimberg & Etkin, 1983).

Criteria such as technical expertise and cultural appropriateness reintroduce some content into the functional definition of assertion. While a consensus has been elusive (St. Lawrence, 1987), content commonalities from diverse investigations can be extracted (Vagos & Pereira, 2009).

## CLARIFICATION OF THE ASSERTION CONCEPT

### Response classes

Assertive behaviour encompasses several response classes that have been dichotomised as active/initiative–reactive (Gambrill, 1995; Trower, 1995) or, more frequently, positive–negative (e.g., Vagos & Pereira, 2009). The latter is exemplified by Schroeder, Rakos, and Moe (1983)'s identification of four positive response classes: admitting personal short-comings/self-disclosure, giving and receiving compliments, initiating and maintaining interactions, and expressing positive feelings, and three negative or conflict ones (expressing unpopular or different opinions, requesting behaviour changes, and refusing unreasonable requests). While the conflict response classes have received the bulk of the research and clinical attention, it is important to recognise that assertiveness encompasses interpersonal expressiveness in positive contexts as well (Gambrill, 1995; Rakos, 1991).

### Distinguishing assertion from aggression

Assertion typically has been conceptualised as the midpoint on the continuum between non-assertion and aggression though recent data suggest it incorporates elements of aggressive and submissive behaviour as well (Dirks, Suor, Rusch, & Frazier, 2014; Dirks, Treat, & Weersing, 2011; Wilson & Gallois, 1993). Further, while a single

continuum highlights the appropriateness of assertiveness training for both aggressive and timid individuals, it fails to differentiate clearly between socially acceptable conflict assertive behaviour and inappropriate aggressive behaviour (Hargie, 2017). This is a critical distinction because laypersons often fail to distinguish the two styles of responding, label conflict assertion as aggression, describe assertion as pushy, rude, and insensitive (Rakos, 1991), and see high levels of assertiveness as a weakness of leaders rather than as a strength (Ames & Flynn, 2007).

Nevertheless, differences between aggressive and assertive response styles are evident as early as preschool (Ostrov, Pilat, & Crick, 2006) and distinguishing between the two concepts relies on one or more of the four criteria discussed earlier (see Rakos 2006). Appropriate conflict assertion, unlike aggression, respects the other person's rights, uses non-hostile verbal content and vocal attributes, and tries to minimise negative emotions and enhance ongoing relationships. Assertion employs only reasonable threats and only when necessary to deal with repeated noncompliance (see below). Additionally, assertion differs from aggression in how intentions, consequences, and context are interpreted. Unfortunately, a functional definition also excludes critical context such as social values, behavioural goals, and cultural expectations; for instance, people commonly endorse "the general goals of avoiding conflict and not straining the relationship" (Wilson & Gallois, 1993, p. 99). However, a functional definition allows us to identify other functionally related, socially appropriate behaviours with specified but still very general content. Assertion, which is typically viewed as a discrete behaviour and a personal right, instead can be analysed as a *chain of overt and covert responses* encompassing rights (actually, *rights behaviours*) and their functionally related antecedent and consequent responsibilities (*obligation behaviours*). Verbalisation of the rights behaviour alone, without the obligation behaviours, is *expressive behaviour*, and by itself, aggressive, as it violates the social norm of conflict minimisation and employs dominance and power to achieve an outcome (Wilson & Gallois, 1993). Conflict assertion, in contrast, requires the emission of specific categories of socially responsible behaviour (Rakos, 1979):

Antecedent obligations (emitted prior to expressive behaviour):

- Engaging in sufficient overt and covert behaviour to determine the rights of *all* participants.
- Developing a verbal and nonverbal response repertoire that is intended to influence the other person's offending behaviour but not his or her "self-worth."
- Considering the potential negative consequences the other person may experience as a result of expressive behaviour.

Subsequent obligations (emitted after expressive behaviour):

- Providing a brief, honest, but non-apologetic explanation for the expressive behaviour.
- Providing empathic communications and short clarifications in an attempt to minimise hurt, anger, or unhappiness experienced by the other person as a consequence of the expressive behaviour.
- Protecting the other person's rights if that person is unable to do so.
- Seeking a mutually acceptable compromise when legitimate rights conflict.

The antecedent obligations are necessary prerequisites to expressive behaviour in all conflict situations, while the subsequent ones preserve ongoing relationships (Rakos, 1991; Wilson, Lizzio, Whicker, Gallois, & Price, 2003) but are not seen as helpful when interacting with a stranger (Heisler and McCormack, 1982). Not surprisingly, subsequent obligations are more commonly used by women, unlike men who tend to focus on rights (Wilson et al., 2003), and by persons who exhibit the Type B behaviour pattern compared to Type As (Bruch, McCann, & Harvey, 1991).

Two recent studies indirectly support the behaviour chain conceptualisation. Vagos and Pereira (2009) analysed 20 investigations spanning four decades to arrive at a formulation of assertion as a skill involving protection of the other's rights as well as one's own, empathy and respect for the other, social competence, concern for relationship growth, direct and honest expression of feelings and desires, and recognition "that compromises need to be made in order for all parts involved to attain their goals" (p. 104). Thompson and Berenbaum (2011) developed a scale to distinguish between aggressive behaviour, which achieves needs through coercion and violation of others' rights, and assertion, which reflects socially acceptable behaviours that get needs met without violating the rights of others, typically by including variants of the subsequent obligations. The scale, which also eliminated sexist and heterosexist language, demonstrates good reliability and validity in distinguishing between the two concepts. Thus, the behaviour chain definition differentiates aggressive behaviour, which only expresses rights, from assertion, which includes both expressive and obligation behaviours. The obligations, by encompassing only very general content, accommodate variability due to situational, social, and cultural factors, yet possess sufficient specificity to be reliably trained and effectively generalised to the natural environment (Rakos & Schroeder, 1979).

## THE SKILL OF CONFLICT ASSERTION

As discussed earlier, research in clinical, school, and work contexts convincingly indicates that conflict assertive skills characterise psychologically adaptive, "healthy," individuals and facilitate personal growth and satisfactions. But exactly what behaviours constitute this valuable skill? Certainly, overt response elements, such as verbalisations and eye contact, are important components. However, because the response must be sensitive to the context, covert behaviours must be integrally involved in selecting the overt responses that best meet the needs of the situation. Fortunately, the extensive research provides a good number of general guidelines for the development of a diverse behavioural repertoire that can be adapted to the specific circumstance.

### Overt behavioural components

The overt response elements include:

- Content: the verbal behaviour of the asserter, or what the person *says*.
- Paralinguistic elements: the vocal characteristics of the verbal behaviour, or how the asserter *sounds*.

- Nonverbal behaviours: the body movements and facial expressions that accompany the verbal behaviour, or how the asserter *appears*.
- Social interaction competencies: the timing, initiation, persistence, and stimulus control skills that enhance the impact of the verbal behaviour, or how the asserter behaves in the *process* of the interaction.

## Content

The verbal content of conflict assertion includes the expression of rights and the emission of obligations, as described by the chain of conceptualisation presented above.

### *Expression of rights*

The expression of rights is the core of any assertion, its *raison d'être*. The specific content will vary as a function of the response class and situation, but will always include a statement of desire, affect, or opinion (Kolotkin, Wielkiewicz, Judd, & Weiser, 1984; Romano & Bellack, 1980). For example:

*Refusal*: “No thank you, I am not interested.”

*Behaviour change request*: “I feel that I am doing most of the housework” (statement of opinion or affect). “I would like to sit down and talk about our agreement” (request for new behaviour).

*Expression of unpopular or different opinion*: “I don’t think your job performance is up to our expectations.”

These rights statements exemplify important features of skilled responding. First, they utilise “I-statements,” in which the speaker assumes responsibility for personal feelings, rather than “you-statements” that attribute responsibility to the other person (Lange & Jakubowski, 1976; Winship & Kelly, 1976). For example, “You make me angry when you don’t do your share of the housework” is a very different communication than “I am angry because I feel I am doing more than my share of the housework.” The “I-statement” offers a legitimate yet unconfirmed perception, while the “you-statement” allocates responsibility to the other for a presumed problematic fact. Thus, it is not surprising that “I-statements” are strongly related to judgments of overall assertion, while “you-statements” are associated with aggression (Kolotkin et al., 1984). However, because “I-statements” do not characterise ordinary conversation, they may be difficult for many individuals to adopt (Gervasio, 1987), making them a particularly appropriate target of training programmes.

Expressions of rights are also direct, specific, and respectful. A *direct* statement contains a clear, honest, and succinct message that describes the relevant feelings, desires, perceptions, or opinions. However, brevity should not violate conversational rules; compound sentences joined by “and” or “but” should be employed (cf. Gervasio & Crawford, 1989). Additionally, an introductory “orienting statement” that signals the topic to be discussed is usually appropriate (e.g., “I have some concerns about the plans we made,” Kolotkin et al., 1984). Explanations are not included in the rights statement,

as they obscure the focus of concern and dilute the impact of the assertion, but may be emitted as a subsequent obligation (see below). A *specific* statement delineates the central issue clearly and avoids generalisations. “I have concerns about how we divide the housework” is much more specific than “I have concerns about how we divide our responsibilities.” The latter statement introduces a myriad of other issues (child care, financial matters, etc.) that can only confuse the discussion, dilute the focus, increase perceived demands, and impede problem solving. A *respectful* expression adheres to norms of politeness and avoids labelling, blaming, demeaning, attacking, or making motivational assumptions about the other person.

Thus, a direct, specific, and respectful behaviour change request simply describes the offending behaviour and then politely asks for a behaviour change. The expression of an unpopular opinion is similarly constructed: “I feel Issue 1 fails to recognise the real needs of the schools” is quite different from “Anyone who supports Issue 1 is deceiving himself and rationalizing.” The latter generalises (“anyone”), labels (“self-deceiving”), and makes motivational assumptions (“rationalising”). Refusal of unreasonable requests also incorporates these three features: “No thank you, I’m not interested” is all that is necessary in terms of expression of rights. Conflict assertions that lack directness are likely to be seen as nonassertive, those lacking respect as aggressive, and those lacking both as passive-aggressive, while lack of specificity may characterise all three alternatives to assertion.

The actual verbalisation of behaviour change requests and refusals likely will deviate from textbook guidelines in line with social and conversational norms. For example, behaviour change requests are conceptualised as containing a statement of feeling and a specific request for altered behaviour; however, while trained judges rate the specific request component as part of an assertive response, untrained judges evaluate it as bordering on aggressiveness and of little functional value (Mullinix & Galassi, 1981). This suggests that the specific request statement may be most appropriate when the conflict statement alone is insufficient (escalation is discussed below). Similarly, refusals include the stereotypical “no” but its direct verbalisation may be socially awkward and breach conversational conventions (Gambrell, 1995; Gervasio, 1987), as when a spouse responds to a partner, “No, I don’t want to see that film. Let’s choose one we both want to see.” An alternative approach is to embed the “no” within the response: “I know that’s not my kind of film. Let’s find one that we will both enjoy.”

A conflict assertion that only expresses a right has been termed a “standard assertion” and consistently is judged to be equally potent to and somewhat more desirable than, conventional aggressive behaviour, and less likeable but more socially competent, than nonassertive behaviour. Standard assertion is valued for competitive or socially skilled persons and in certain work settings (e.g., corporations, psychiatric hospitals), but it also is less likeable and more unpleasant than ordinary conversation and expressing positive feelings (see Rakos, 1991, for review). It is perceived as most effective when consistent across time and situations (Yagil, Karnieli-Miller, Eisikovits, & Enosh, 2006).

These conclusions are supported by research with a range of populations. Assertiveness in preschool children was associated with peer acceptance whereas aggressive behaviour was correlated with peer rejection (Ostrov et al., 2006). Standard assertion by older adults in health care encounters was evaluated as more competent and more

likely to provide future satisfaction than both passive and aggressive alternatives by older and younger subjects (Ryan, Anas, & Friedman, 2006), though a passive response was seen to promote more positive and less negative affect from the health care practitioner compared to assertive or aggressive behaviour. A follow-up study again found that young and older participants viewed standard assertion by older adults as more competent, more likely to achieve goals, and more likely to be successful than passive behaviours, particularly in community settings and for serious concerns (Ryan, Anas, & Mays, 2008). Standard assertion may help women cope with discrimination: compared to women who react passively, those who assert in response to prejudice are likely to be more satisfied with their response and achieve greater closure, as all asserters felt no further action was needed, whereas 78% of those who reacted passively viewed the issue as closed (Hyers, 2007). However, while a standard assertion clearly is likely to improve immediate outcomes, it also introduces a risk of social disapproval and of being perceived as aggressive.

### *Expression of subsequent obligations*

Experienced clinicians always recognised that the standard assertion does not address social context, cultural norms, or the growth potential of a continuing relationship. Researchers followed suit and investigated the impact of the obligations that accompany rights, identifying a short explanation, an acknowledgment of the other person's feelings, and offering compromises, alternatives, reasons, praise, and apologies as verbalisations that enhanced the social reaction to assertion without detracting from its potency (Rakos, 1991). These data, then, support the behaviour chain definition distinguishing assertion from aggression.

Assertions that include subsequent obligations have been termed *empathic assertions* (Rakos, 1986), and are judged to be as potent as, but more likeable and appropriate than, standard assertions. Empathic assertions are as effective as aggressive responses but provoke less anger. They are comparable to non-assertions in terms of likeability but more efficacious. Finally, they are as pleasant as neutral non-conflict conversation (see Rakos, 1991, for a comprehensive review).

The empathic assertion's social validity makes it the generally preferred training goal, particularly when maintenance or enhancement of a continuing relationship is important (Wilson & Gallois, 1993). The specific components, which can be operationalised and reliably assessed (Bruch, Heisler, & Conroy, 1981) as well as successfully trained (Rakos & Schroeder, 1979), include:

- A short, truthful, non-defensive explanation for the expression of rights.
- A statement conveying understanding of the effects of the expression of rights on the other person; this can include a short apology that is directed toward the inconvenience or disappointment that will result from the expression of rights (e.g., "I am sorry you will have to miss the concert") rather than an apology for the actual expression of rights (e.g., "I am sorry I have to say no").
- Praise or another positive comment directed toward the other person.
- An attempt to achieve a mutually acceptable compromise when legitimate rights conflict, recognising that such a solution may not always be possible.



## ***Paralinguistic and nonverbal components***

The paralinguistic and nonverbal features are critical components of social skill (see Chapter 1), effective communication (see Chapter 3), and assertion (Gambrill, 1995). Women in particular strive to demonstrate emotional control and a conscious non-stereotypical presentation in confrontations (Wilson & Gallois, 1993). These elements of skilled communication have been the focus of a great deal of research, which is summarised below.

### *Paralinguistic characteristics*

The features commanding the greatest attention are voice volume, firmness and intonation, response latency, duration, and fluency. An extensive review of the numerous research studies can be found in Rakos (1991).

**Latency.** Research failed to confirm an early hypothesis that hesitation indicates nonassertion and a short latency then characterises assertiveness, indicating instead the data suggest that situational variables such as sex of the participants and type of assertion are important factors. The speed with which a person responds will be related to his or her ability to process the situational information and determine the desired and appropriate response. In practical terms, a short latency is less important for effective conflict resolution than is the avoidance of a very long latency. If the desired response is difficult to determine or not in the current behavioural repertoire, then the appropriate assertion, with modest delay, is to request additional time to formulate a reply or to arrange a specific time for further discussion.

**Response duration.** A short duration was assumed to be characteristic of assertion, since nonassertive persons tend to produce excuses, lies, apologies, and long explanations. However, the inclusion of obligations will lengthen a conflict assertion, and in fact, Heimberg, Harrison, Goldberg, DesMarais, and Blue (1979) found a curvilinear relationship between assertiveness and duration: moderately assertive individuals exhibited much shorter duration than either highly assertive or nonassertive persons.

**Response fluency.** Fluency is considered to be an important paralinguistic feature of assertion, yet research finds only a very weak relationship with effective skill. However, because hesitant, choppy speech is associated with anxiety (Linehan & Walker, 1983), and anxiety can hinder effective assertion (Wolpe, 1990), it is likely that fluency does contribute to judgments of social skill. Interestingly, speech *rate* has not attracted the attention of researchers, but generalising from other paralinguistic data, it is likely that assertive individuals deliberately adjust their rate of talking to reflect the particular context.

**Voice volume.** The data on loudness is fairly consistent: effective conflict assertion is characterised by an appropriate, moderate volume that is louder than the speech produced in ordinary conversation and by nonassertive persons.

**Intonation** (inflection). Lay people consider intonation to be one of the most important features of effective assertion, particularly when at a moderate level. Like response duration, both highly assertive and nonassertive people evidence greater inflection than moderately assertive individuals (Heimberg et al., 1979).

**Firmness** (affect). Research consistently finds that high levels of firmness are strongly correlated with judgements of assertion in a variety of contexts and may even contribute more than content. The data suggest that the absence of vocal firmness is likely to detract from the impact of a conflict assertion, and that the development of an appropriately firm “tone” should be a high training priority.

### *Summary of paralinguistic qualities*

Firmness, intermediate levels of volume and intonation, and moderate response latency and duration characterise effective conflict assertion, with the latter two showing particular sensitivity to situational variables. Intuitively, a fluent response and a moderate speech rate make sense but lack definitive empirical support. In general, appropriate conflict assertion requires flexible paralinguistic abilities that are sensitive to changing environmental conditions.

### **Nonverbal characteristics**

Nonverbal behaviours convey a great deal of information in an assertive interaction (McFall, Winnett, Bordewick, & Bornstein, 1982) as they do in interpersonal communication in general (see Chapter 3). Research has examined the contribution eye contact, facial expression, gestures, and “body language” make toward effective conflict assertion.

**Eye contact.** Eye contact, a key characteristic of social and communication skills in Western cultures, is also an important component of conflict assertion. However, skilled and unskilled persons do not differ consistently in duration, suggesting that assertive eye contact involves flexible and intermittent use that avoids a fixed stare.

**Facial expression.** Deception and anxiety are both betrayed by a variety of facial movements and expressions (Ekman, 2001). Thus, it is not surprising that judgements of assertion, a presumably honest and non-anxious communication, are strongly influenced by overall facial expression as well as by specific mouth, eyebrow, and forehead cues, like fidgety mouth movements, wrinkled forehead, and moving eyebrows that communicate unassertiveness. These cues, which are used more by women than men, are more influential in evaluating female asserters; for example, women observers judge smiles by women asserters as harming effectiveness while males view smiles as enhancing a woman’s assertion (see Rakos, 1991).

Facial expression, then, is an important component of assertion, especially for women. They are more astute than men at discriminating these cues in others but as asserters are also judged by them more strongly. Thus, women’s concern with controlling their emotional personas (Wilson & Gallois, 1993) appears fully warranted.

**Gestures.** Socially competent persons increase their use of gestures in conflict situations and use their arms and hands differently than less skilled individuals; for example, their arm movements are smooth while speaking and still while listening. For both males and females, physical gestures enhance the evaluation while extraneous and restrained movements are viewed negatively, especially when the interaction involves opposite sexed participants (see Rakos, 1991). Thus, an appropriate repertoire of gestures is likely to enhance the effectiveness of conflict assertion.

**Body language.** Though experts discount the importance of body language, lay people consider it quite significant; an upright body, minimal extraneous movement, facing the other person directly, maintaining appropriate distance, and using purposive movement and posture shifts are associated with assertive behaviour. Non-assertiveness is linked with excessive nodding and head tilting, stooped, hunched, or shrugging shoulders, and squirming, rotating, or rocking torsos. These cues are more influential in the evaluation of male asserters, but overall, are the least important nonverbal responses, contributing only very modestly to perceptions of assertion.

### *Summary of nonverbal responses*

Eye contact, facial expression, gestures, and to a lesser extent body language, all influence evaluations of conflict assertion. Facial expression for female asserters may be especially important. Overall, steady but not rigid eye contact, a calm, sincere, serious facial expression, flexible use of arm and hand gestures, and a relaxed, involved body posture characterise behaviour judged to be assertive (see Rakos, 1991; Vagos & Pereira, 2009). Body movements should be fluid and purposeful when speaking but quiet and inconspicuous when listening.

### **Process (interactive) skills**

The overt skill components are emitted within an ongoing social interaction. Their impact, therefore, depends on competence in the process skills of response timing, initiation and persistence, and stimulus control.

#### *Response timing*

Competent assertiveness requires the discrimination of the verbal, nonverbal, and situational cues that indicate when it is appropriate to respond. Socially unskilled persons misjudge situational cues, talk relatively little, and mistime their statements and gestures (see Rakos, 1991). This suggests that an assertion's effectiveness will be related to its timing within the conflict interaction.

#### *Initiation and persistence*

The decision to behave assertively in a particular situation involves covert responses to be discussed shortly. On occasion, passivity or compliance may be preferred options, as when the realistic risk of assertion is excessive or the offending person's situation invites extraordinary "understanding." However, when assertion is the desired option, the initial verbalisation should be the *minimal effective response* (MER), defined as "behaviour that would ordinarily accomplish the client's goal with a minimum of effort and of apparent negative emotion (and a very small likelihood

of negative consequences)” (Masters, Burish, Hollon, & Rimm, 1987, p. 106). The MER operationalises the social rules of minimising conflict and relationship strain (cf. Wilson & Gallois, 1993). If the MER proves ineffective, and the decision is made to persist, *escalation* is appropriate. This may involve increasing the intensity of paralinguistic qualities (voice volume, intonation, affect, response duration) and/or expanding the use of appropriate nonverbal behaviours such as gestures and body language. Typically, the verbal content will be modified in some manner. For example, in continuing relationships, further explanation may be provided, empathy increased, or additional potential compromises suggested. Aversive consequences may be articulated or the specific behaviour change request added if the statement of the problem alone fails to alter the behaviour in question. Consider, for example, a credit card representative in an airport who approaches you with an offer you do not want and does not respect your lack of interest. Appropriate assertion might involve the following:

*MER*: “No, thank you, I am not interested.”

*Escalation 1*: “No, I told you: I am not interested.”

*Escalation 2*: “I am *not* interested.” (Louder volume, firmer affect and intonation.)

*Escalation 3*: “I told you three times I am not interested. Please respect that or I will contact your supervisor.” (Volume, affect, intonation maintained or increased slightly from previous response, and aversive contingency specified.)

Determination of the MER is critical because an escalated response emitted as an initial assertion, a common error by novices, likely will be evaluated as inappropriate and aggressive, which may result in negative consequences for the asserter and reinforce beliefs that such behaviour is indeed risky. For instance, Escalation 2 above would likely be perceived as aggressive if emitted as the initial response.

Effective persistence requires that the asserter maintain the conflict focus and resist manipulations (Rakos, 1991). In non-continuing relationships, the asserter is served best by a repetitive response that avoids the introduction of new material, as modeled in the airport example above. If the credit card salesperson persists, and begins to describe the “free” travel contest, and frequent flyer miles that accompany the card, the appropriate assertive response remains: “No, thank you, I am not interested.” This avoids the manipulative ploy of discussing freebies, a shift in focus that extends the interaction. Maintaining the focus in such a situation usually means simple repetition without qualification; if you say, “I am not interested at this time,” you may be asked why not “now,” and then “when,” and if “lack of need” is the problem, there is actually a good reason to get the card.

Maintaining the focus is particularly difficult in a valued continuing relationship when the asserter is starting to behave less submissively. The new behaviour is inconsistent with the other person’s expectations and is likely to arouse negative feelings such as hurt or anger. This makes persistence in ongoing relationships by the novice a greater challenge than for experienced asserters who have taught their social environment to expect self-enhancing behaviour. Escalation must be highly skilful to maintain the focus while simultaneously addressing the issues that impact on the long-term integrity of the relationship. The escalations ideally embed repetitions in diverse syntactic surface structures (Gervasio, 1987) and in layers of elaborations. For example,

suppose a father whose adult daughter comes to his house for dinner every Sunday now learns that she won't be coming this week:

*MER*: "Dad, I won't be coming to dinner this Sunday. I've made plans to see some friends – we're going to a party. I know this disappoints you because you look forward to my visits so much. But I'll see you again next Sunday as usual." (This *MER* expresses the unpopular communication along with an explanation, attention to feelings, and a potential mutually acceptable compromise.)

*Father*: "I do look forward to your visits so much. And I invited two friends of mine to meet you. Couldn't you meet your friends after dinner?" (Father at this point is responding with an appropriate assertion of his own – a request for a behaviour change – and includes an explanation and potential compromise.)

*Escalation 1*: "Dad, if I come to dinner, I'll miss a good deal of the party. I see you are very disappointed I won't be here Sunday, but this is an exception. It's a special party that I really want to attend. I know you'll miss me, but it's only one time." (Repeated expression of the unpopular content, with additional explanation and empathy, all offered with a changed surface structure.)

*Father*: "Then go with your friends to your party! I wish you cared more. I'll just cancel the dinner."

In this complex continuing relationship, the daughter's assertion results in her father experiencing an unexpected loss of reinforcement and the feelings of hurt and anger that frequently accompany disappointment. Protecting the relationship and maintaining the focus in this situation involves an increased attention to underlying feelings, repetition and possible expansion of the explanation, and a wider search for a mutually acceptable compromise. The focus will be maintained best if the asserter can manage the exceptionally difficult task of addressing these verbalisations to the *existence* of the feelings rather than to the *content* of the feelings.

*Escalation 2*: "Dad, I see how angry and disappointed you are that I will not be coming for dinner this Sunday, but as I said, I very much want to go to this party. There will be a lot of new people there, and I've been feeling a bit isolated lately. I hope you understand. But how about this for a compromise: I'm free Wednesday evening – I can stop by for a few hours after work, we can get dinner together, and of course I'll still come next Sunday. How does that sound?"

This escalated response repeats the assertion, attends to the feelings the father is experiencing, expands the explanation, offers a new compromise, and changes the surface structure. It does not lose the focus by becoming defensive through a debate on the extent of "caring" for father or the relative importance of different relationships. Caring, if present, can be demonstrated through the compromise. Sometimes, however, the interaction will continue and the content of the feelings will have to be addressed more directly, resulting in an increased probability of losing the assertive focus.

*Escalation 3*: "Dad, I really do understand your feelings about our dinners, and I enjoy them very much, but sometimes other important engagements occur on Sundays.

I love you very much even if I miss dinner this week. Anyway, as I said, I am free Wednesday evening. I'd like to stop by then – how does that sound to you?"

Escalation in continuing relationships requires expanded content and therefore longer response duration, but louder volume, greater firmness and inflection, and increased use of nonverbal cues will depend on the context. If the other person in a valued relationship continues to experience negative feelings, an assertion directed at the negative feelings may be necessary, either immediately or at a later, planned time. Persistence should be conceptualised as the behaviours required over time to solve the problem as best as possible. As the interaction continues, issues may shift, and further escalation may become counterproductive. A new, legitimate issue usually indicates the need for a new MER rather than endless escalation:

*MER*: "Dad, I want to talk to you about our phone conversation last week. You sounded hurt and angry, and seemed to equate caring with always making Sunday dinner. I would like to talk about that because I think I need some flexibility in my plans." (This MER includes an orienting verbalisation and the conflict statement component of a behaviour change request.)

Persistence increases the chances for a desired outcome but cannot guarantee it. Covert skills (see below) are necessary to accurately assess the situation, avoid rationalisations that justify passivity, and decide whether to assert and how much escalation is desirable given the importance of the conflict, the nature of the relationship, and the probable positive and negative outcomes. Persistence is likely to be most effective when it embodies consistency, as consistent responses over time to the same situation increase perceptions of assertive effectiveness (Yagil et al., 2006).

### *Stimulus control skills*

Stimulus control skills facilitate effective, socially acceptable assertion by altering the context in which the assertion is emitted. Antecedent stimulus control involves arranging the environment prior to asserting so that the likelihood of a favourable outcome is maximised. These skills are assertive behaviours themselves: requests to move to a private room prior to a confrontation, requests for a delay prior to making a decision (which provides time to identify and rehearse appropriate responses), or inquiries to the other person regarding convenient times to set aside for the discussion of concerns. They may also involve self-management skills that inhibit assertions judged to be inappropriate or counterproductive. Conflicts that are discussed in private, at the right time, without time pressures, and with prior deliberation are more likely to be resolved satisfactorily.

Consequent stimulus control refers to reinforcing the other person (see Chapter 5) for listening to and/or complying with the assertion. Providing contingent verbal reinforcement for desired behaviour in response to an assertion is likely to encourage similar behaviour in the future and may also minimise negative perceptions of the conflict interaction (Levin & Gross, 1984; St. Lawrence, Hansen, Cutts, Tisdelle, & Irish, 1985).

## Covert behavioural components

Cognitive skills are core components of social skill (see Chapter 5). They categorise and manipulate information and are essential for the self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement that comprise behavioural self-regulation (Kanfer & Schefft, 1988). For example, socially skilled and unskilled persons differ in the standards they employ to evaluate their actions. Skilled persons utilise objective criteria based on situational and interpersonal cues that generate social roles, norms, and rules, as well as empirically grounded expectations generated by personal experience. Unskilled individuals, on the other hand, rely on subjective standards that focus on idiosyncratic, nonempirical beliefs, perceptions, and expectations (Trower, 1982). The ability to use empirically based, objective criteria requires conceptual complexity (CC; Schroder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967), through which individuals make increasingly precise discriminations among situational cues, allowing consideration of broader and more varied viewpoints, increase the use of internally but rationally developed standards for problem solving, and integrate more information and increase tolerance for conflict.

The importance of CC for assertive performance is clear: assertive individuals demonstrate greater CC than nonassertive persons, and further, high CC people, compared to low CC ones, manifest a better knowledge of assertive content, superior delivery skills, and more effective use of adaptive cognitions. Further, high CC individuals behave more assertively and include more obligations in conflicts involving continuing relationships (Bruch, 1981; Bruch et al., 1981). Ongoing relationships demand the greatest ability to utilise multiple perspectives and internal rational standards to resolve conflict and enhance the relationship. Conflicts involving noncontinuing relationships require less CC since social norms provide fairly straightforward behavioural guidelines. The specific cognitive abilities necessary to produce a rational, empirical analysis of and response to a conflict include knowledge, self-statements, expectancies, philosophical beliefs, core beliefs (schema), problem-solving skills, social perception skills, and self-monitoring skills.

## Knowledge

Both nonassertive and assertive persons accurately categorise and differentiate passive, assertive, and aggressive responses and nonassertive individuals can describe or enact appropriate assertive responses (see Rakos, 1991), reflecting clinical observations that deficiencies in *response content knowledge* account for some, but by no means all, instances of nonassertive performance.

A second category of essential knowledge concerns the social rules, norms, and expectations that are likely to operate in particular contexts or circumstances (Wilson & Gallois, 1993). Unskilled persons, as noted above, are likely to lack accurate *social cue knowledge* (Trower, 1982).

## Self-statements

A “negative internal dialogue” interferes with competent social responding (Meichenbaum, Butler, & Gruson, 1981). Negative self-statements are exemplified by “I will be

embarrassed if I speak up” and “He won’t like me unless I agree.” Positive versions might be “My opinions are valuable” and “I have the right to express myself.” Assertive persons emit approximately twice as many positive as negative self-statements when confronted with social conflict, while nonassertive individuals produce approximately equal numbers of each (see Rakos, 1991). Direct training in these self-instructions, apart from any other intervention, has resulted in significant gains in assertiveness (e.g., Craighead, 1979). Wine (1981) noted that self-verbalisations that are labelled as “negative” or “dysfunctional” typically focus on the needs of others and fear of rejection, and stem from a “feminine” emphasis on relationships (Wilson & Gallois, 1993). A masculine bias is avoided if such self-statements are conceptualised as conciliatory, nurturant, and communal, and the positive/negative continuum is replaced with one anchored by autonomy and affiliation; from this perspective, effective conflict assertion entails significant use of autonomous self-statements.

### **Expectancies**

An expectancy is a cognitive behaviour that makes a specific prediction about performance in a particular situation. *Outcome expectancies* predict the probability that specific consequences will be produced by a particular response, and in some circumstances can be the strongest predictor of assertive intentions (e.g., asserting to smokers in Bulgaria, Lazuras, Zlatev, Rodafinos, & Eiser, 2012). Assertive and nonassertive persons expect standard assertion, and to a lesser extent empathic assertion, to have greater negative long-term effects on a relationship than non-assertion (Zollo, Heimberg, & Becker, 1985). However, assertive individuals expect conflict assertion will produce more positive short-term consequences and fewer negative ones than do nonassertive persons (see Rakos, 1991). Nonassertive and assertive persons do not differ in their identification of the *possible* consequences but in the *probability* that the potential outcomes will actually occur. Further, assertive individuals perceive the potential positive consequences of assertion as more desirable and the potential negative ones as more unpalatable while nonassertive persons may rationalise to reduce the perceived demand for engaging in a conflict interaction (Blankenberg & Heimberg, 1984; Kuperminc & Heimberg, 1983). Recent research with MBA students found that both instrumental goal outcome expectations and social outcome expectations are correlated with self-reported assertion and that persons with strong assertion outcome expectations are more likely to prefer high assertive response options (Ames, 2008a). Further, Ames found a curvilinear relationship between assertion and both social and instrumental outcome expectations: persons expect that moderate amounts of assertiveness will maximise the cost-benefit criterion, though they differ regarding the point at which the ratio is maximised, while assertiveness at low and high levels (which here can include aggressive responses) reduce positive outcome expectations.

*Self-efficacy expectations* refer to a person’s belief that he or she can emit a specific response in a particular circumstance (Bandura, 1977). Assertive individuals evidence much stronger self-efficacy in conflict situations than do nonassertive persons (Chiauszi & Heimberg, 1986). Finally, assertive individuals demonstrate greater *situational efficacy expectancies*, which describe the confidence a person has of being able to generate any successful response to deal with a specific situation (Chiauszi & Heim-



berg, 1986). For instance, the strongest predictors of Greek non-smokers' intentions to assert to a coworker violating a no-smoking policy are specific self-efficacy beliefs related to smoking assertions and successful past assertive behaviour to transgressing smokers (Aspropoulos, Lazuras, Rodafinos, & Eiser, 2010; Lazuras et al., 2012). Thus, assertive persons approach conflict situations with an adaptive appraisal of the context and a realistic self-confidence in their ability to emit appropriate and effective behaviours.

### ***Philosophical beliefs***

Ellis (1962; Ellis & Grieger, 1977) has identified at least a dozen “irrational” beliefs, of which several are directly related to assertion:

- 1 demands for perfection in self and others in important situations, which lead to self- and other blame when inevitable fallibility occurs;
- 2 demands for universal approval from significant others;
- 3 conditional self-worth and personal rights, based on external achievements or approval;
- 4 catastrophising, or magnifying the meaning of an undesired outcome;
- 5 viewing passivity as preferable to active intervention, in the belief that things will “work out” eventually without “rocking the boat.”

These irrational thoughts generally are produced only in response to subjectively important issues: the person fails to accept that events in the world occur without regard to the personal value ascribed to a particular situation. Thus, someone may very rationally tolerate incompetence in a meaningless hobby (e.g., volleyball), yet react with extraordinary emotion to an objectively similar event of subjective import (e.g., an audition).

Underlying all irrational thinking is a basic logical error: things, people, or events *should* be a certain way. Ellis argues that the use of “should” elevates legitimate desires that may or may not be met into absolutistic value-laden demands that if unmet lead to emotional upset and turmoil that prevents rational analysis and effective problem solving. If, on the other hand, unfulfilled desires are viewed rationally as unfortunate events that one wished were otherwise (“it would be better if ...” rather than “it should not have happened ...”), the person will exhibit thoughtful concern that can contribute to resolution of the issue.

Research supports the importance of rational thinking as a contributor to assertive competence (see Rakos, 1991). Nonassertive individuals endorse more irrational ideas than do assertive individuals. In conflict situations, nonassertive persons entertain the possibility of many more negative “overwhelming consequences” than positive ones, while assertive persons consider similar frequencies of each. Therefore, rational alternatives to the irrational beliefs are likely to facilitate assertive responding.

Thus, the typical nonassertive person might engage in the following thought process: “I must assert myself without any mistakes or the assertion will fail [self-perfection], the other person will think I’m weird or will be hurt or angry [universal approval],

and that would be absolutely terrible [catastrophising]. It would be my fault [self-blame] and confirm that I am no good [conditional self-worth]. It will work out better if I let it pass and see what happens [inaction].” These belief statements might be prefaced by additional irrational ideas: “I don’t have the right to infringe or make demands on this other person [conditional rights]” and/or “I should not even have to deal with this situation because the other person should not be acting this way [other-perfection/other-blame].” This cognitive framing will lead to emotional upset, experienced often as blame, shame, guilt, anger, anxiety, depression, immobilisation, avoidance, aggression, ruminations, self-denigration, or other negative affective states.

Rational beliefs can be taught fairly directly. The initial step requires the identification of the specific irrational thought(s) produced in the particular context. Non-assertive people frequently are so practised in irrational thinking that they do not actually covertly verbalise the irrational thoughts, but behave “as if” they did. Following specification of the actual or implicit thought, the individual is taught to challenge it by actively substituting a rational alternative, first in behaviour rehearsal and later in the actual situation, and then assessing whether emotional arousal has decreased and effective problem solving increased. The general content of the rational alternatives would include the following:

*Acceptance of imperfection:* I am human and imperfect, and in a complicated world I will make mistakes even when the situation is important to me and I very much want to behave competently. There is no reason I *should* behave competently simply because it is important that I do so, although it would be nice [...] Other people also are human, live in the same complex world, and will make mistakes in situations that are important to me. There is no reason that others *should* act in the exact fashion I judge to be desirable, just because it is important to me, although it would be nice if they did. (These thoughts avoid self/other-blame and accept inevitable human imperfection and limits of control.)

*Acceptance of disapproval:* I cannot always satisfy everyone who is important to me, even if I always place their needs ahead of my own, because the world is too complicated and capricious. It would be nice if I could, but there is no reason why I *should* do so. (These beliefs recognise that some rejection or disapproval from others is unavoidable.)

*Noncatastrophising:* Negative outcomes are unfortunate, inconvenient, unpleasant, perhaps even bad – but not terrible, horrible, awful, or unbearable. I will try to resolve the problem when possible and adapt to the situation when change is not feasible, even when the issue is important to me, because the world does not know or care what is important to me. Things, including people, are as they *should* be even if not as I *want* them to be, and demanding that they should be different ignores the complexity of the world and the reality before me – though it would be nice if my desires were met. (These cognitions clarify the nature of the world and foster a realistic understanding and acceptance of one’s place in it.)

*Action:* Since the world is not oriented toward fulfilling my desires, active attempts to influence it will increase the probability that I will achieve my desires. Without action on my part, events in the complex world are unlikely to just work out. (These thoughts promote personal responsibility for change, though they do not demand that such efforts be successful.)

*Unconditional self-worth:* I am inherently worthy, and have the same rights as anyone else, including the right to assert myself, regardless of my achievements, social status, or income. (These ideas accept one's unqualified self-worth and human rights.)

A similar rational thrust underlies Vagos and Pereira's (2009) suggestion that cognitive schema, or core beliefs, characterise individuals who are skilled at conflict assertion. Theoretically, the assertive person sees the social world as based in reciprocity in terms of respect and nurturance, accords to others the same rights as oneself, and seeks to achieve common goals in relationships. Empirically, they contend that persons who exhibit low levels of assertiveness develop negative schema that see others as unpredictable and uncaring, that view the self as so unlovable and imperfect that strict emotional control must be exerted, and that perceive subjugation to the other as necessary for relationship maintenance. Their assertiveness schema assessment instrument demonstrates good psychometric integrity and identifies four factors: outer emotional support, functional personal abilities, interpersonal management, and affective personal ability (Vagos & Pereira, 2010).

The direct modification of irrational thinking has been an important component of assertiveness training programmes since the early 1970s, but "rational relabeling" is most effective when intervention also engineers successful behaviour changes that reinforce the new rational thoughts (see Rakos, 1991).

### ***Social perception skills***

Accurate perception and empathic role-taking are cognitive skills and components of "emotional intelligence" (Burgoon & Bacue, 2003). Nonassertive individuals are deficient in accurate perceptual skills, evidencing less sensitivity to situational cues, misjudgment of others' emotional reactions, and misinterpretation of prevailing social norms, especially with requests of low or moderate reasonableness (see Rakos, 1991, 2006). The legitimate rights of all participants are most difficult to determine in ambiguous contexts, requiring refined conceptual skills that can assess situational considerations, make appropriate reasonableness determinations, and synthesise the resulting increase in positive and negative thoughts into adaptive, accurate discriminations. Distorted judgments of circumstances may be a prime contributor to a decision to behave nonassertively. When norms are clear, however, perception of assertive rights is more salient; for example, female police officers who view sexual harassment as a policy violation are more likely to judge harassment actions as severe and address the issue through assertiveness (Chaiyavej & Morash, 2009).

Empathic role taking is necessary to understand the viewpoint of the other person, which allows the asserter to predict the impact of an assertion on the recipient (an antecedent obligation) and develop an empathic statement, and then search for a mutually acceptable compromise (subsequent obligations) (Rakos, 1991). The superior social evaluation of the empathic assertion relative to the standard one highlights the importance of empathic role taking in conflict resolution. Key components of this skill are the discrimination of the cues that indicate empathic responses will facilitate the interaction and recognising when to use them (see Rakos, 2006 for review).

### ***Interpersonal problem-solving skills***

The systematic problem-solving skills necessary for social competence (Meichenbaum et al., 1981; Trower, 1982) are deficient in a variety of clinical populations (Schroeder & Rakos, 1983). These skills include problem recognition and acceptance, problem definition and goal setting, generation of potential response alternatives, decision-making (assessment of alternatives in terms of likely outcomes), and solution implementation and evaluation (D’Zurilla & Nezu, 2010). In general, assertive and nonassertive persons generate a similar number of potential response options but nonassertive individuals have difficulty recognising the problem and choosing an option (see Rakos, 2006).

Problem-solving skills play a critical role in the assertion behaviour chain. The antecedent obligations are involved in problem definition and assessment (determining the rights of all participants and whether assertion is the preferred option). The subsequent obligation to seek a mutually acceptable compromise is largely dependent on the ability to generate alternative solutions. Because these features contribute to conceptual complexity, problem-solving skills may provide the means through which the former attribute can be operationalised and trained.

### ***Self-monitoring skills***

Responsible assertion is based on an accurate perception of the circumstances: a situation appropriate for assertion must be distinguished from other social ones and acquire the properties of a discriminative stimulus. This learned cue is comprised of the person’s reactions to the situation and will prompt the early behaviours in the assertion chain, i.e., the antecedent obligations. In effect, the assertive person attends to his/her reactions and discriminates those suggesting assertion might be appropriate.

The self-monitored cues can be behaviours, emotions, and/or cognitions (Rakos & Schroeder, 1980). Behavioural cues include actions that are indirect, hostile or avoidant, such as hints, phony excuses, excessive apologies withdrawal, aggression, passive-aggression, or submission. Emotional cues include frustration, resentment, shame, guilt, anger, depression, and upset. Cognitive cues are seen in excessive ruminations and self-statements that blame or denigrate the self and others, rationalise the unimportance of the issue, and are generally affiliative (negative) or irrational. When these behavioural, emotional, and cognitive reactions are produced in response to a social conflict, they are the primary signals that assertion could be considered.

Assertion, however, is performed much less often than it is considered (e.g., Hyers, 2007), a finding compatible with research indicating that self-evaluations of assertiveness correlate poorly with external assessments of the skill. People underestimate the extent to which they are either dominant or submissive in assertive situations (Leising, Rehbein, & Sporberg, 2006), with only 35% demonstrating accurate self-evaluation of assertiveness (Leising, Rehbein, & Sporberg, 2007). In business negotiations, over 55% of under- and over-assertive persons believed others saw them as appropriately assertive (Ames & Wazlawek, 2014) and approximately 40% of those who emit appropriate assertive behavior believe others view their actions as over-assertive. This error in discrimination gets communicated to the negotiating counterpart, who is likely to use

disapproval, hurt etc. in a manipulative manner, particularly when strong relational concerns are present (Ames & Wazlawek, 2014). A similar situation may be present in leadership contexts, where most coworkers and supervisors are seen to be either over-assertive or under-assertive (Ames & Flynn, 2007; Ames, 2008b). Furthermore, self-ratings of assertiveness can be misjudged on a group level: two immigrant groups in Israel scored similarly to each other and lower than nonimmigrants on a self-report measure, but both immigrant communities judged themselves to be as assertive as the nonimmigrants and more assertive than the other immigrant group (Korem, Horenczyk, & Tatar, 2012). Thus, interventions targets for training accurate self-monitoring skills should include both an awareness of actual competencies in past conflict situations and the ability to discriminate the cues suggesting assertion may be indicated.

## THE SOCIAL VALIDITY OF CONFLICT ASSERTION

Technical proficiency, immediate outcome, cost-benefit, and social validity were discussed earlier as four assertion outcome criteria. A skilled assertion that meets social and cultural norms nevertheless may still fail to produce desired short-term outcomes or enhance the long-term stability of a relationship. Because these risks are inherent to assertion, the social reaction to it becomes a critical factor influencing the decision whether to behave assertively in the present situation and in the future as well.

### General findings

Both observers and recipients of assertions judge standard assertion (expression of the assertive right without the inclusion of obligations) to be more socially competent, but less likeable, than nonassertive behaviour, and to be at least as potent as, and more favourably evaluated than, aggressive behaviour (Rakos, 2006). The social acceptance of a standard assertion can be increased by inclusion of obligations, as discussed above, and also by more extensive and broader interaction with the asserter as will occur naturally in most ongoing relationships. Thus, individuals who emit positive assertions (e.g., offering help, expressing compliments or thanks), general conversational comments, and task-oriented interactions along with standard assertions are viewed as more likeable and competent than persons exhibiting standard assertion alone (see Rakos, 1991). For instance, Kern and Paquette (1992) found that college students' evaluations of their roommates' likeability and social competence was significantly correlated with the roommates' level of conflict assertion ability.

The improved evaluation of assertiveness when accompanied by empathic elaborations and/or broader contextual experience offers asserters in continuing relationships confidence that their assertion can be successful and appropriate. For example, Nichols, Graber, Brooks-Gunn, and Bovin (2006) found that sixth graders from an urban school overwhelmingly employed a "simple 'no'" strategy when engaging in smoking refusal but relied more on stating one's position and generating alternatives when refusing to go along with a shoplifting invitation. However, junior high school raters judged the "simple 'no'" response in both the smoking and shoplifting situations as less effective than more reasoned explanations, probably because such instances of adolescent peer

pressure typically involve continuing relationships (Nichols, Birnel, Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Bovin, 2010). Expressing the obligations is consistent with social expectations and thereby enhances the potency of the assertion (Wilson et al., 2003).

The conclusion that empathic assertion is judged more favourably than standard assertion and comparable to nonassertion receives support from recent research suggesting that a “moderate” level of assertiveness, which typically corresponds most closely to the empathic–assertive response, is more effective than aggressive or “over-assertive” responses in balancing goal attainment with relationship maintenance. Lee (2014) found that children’s assertiveness was positively correlated with peer acceptance when the asserter demonstrated high social interest: “[conflict] assertions may provide peer acceptance if the asserter shows consideration for other children’s feelings” (p. 921). Similarly, condom use was most likely among adolescent couples who exhibited moderate assertiveness, as opposed to low or high levels (Schmid et al., 2015). This curvilinear relationship suggests that the constant negotiation and self-advocacy of highly assertive individuals may elicit resistance or emotional interference. “In couples with modest levels of assertiveness, balancing negotiation and positive interaction may have led to a less threatening environment, where condom use could be discussed and implemented without threatening individual autonomy or relationship intimacy” (p. 98). Ames and Flynn (2007) also found a curvilinear relationship between perception of leadership effectiveness and assertiveness among MBA students evaluating coworkers and supervisors. Using a definition of assertion that included elements of aggressive behaviour, they found that both high and low levels of assertiveness were associated with lower ratings of leadership skills, including judgments of current effectiveness and future leadership success. “Thus, highly assertive leaders tended to be ineffective largely because they failed to get along, whereas relatively unassertive leaders tended to be ineffective largely because they failed to get things done” (p. 383).

Even in situations of acquaintance sexual aggression, many women emit “diplomatic” assertions in response to verbal coercion and then escalate to more forceful assertions when the coercion becomes physical. The tendency to resist initially with a moderate assertion is particularly strong among women who harbour strong relationship expectations (trust, respect, affection, etc.), suggesting they predict that a moderate assertion may produce successful short-term and longer term outcomes (Macy, Nurius, & Norris, 2006). The authors note that “the balancing of social relationship concerns against safety and well-being concerns” (p. 497) might be an appropriate target of intervention programmes.

Even empathic assertions, however, are judged less positively when they are perceived to be overreactions to reasonable requests or to cause harm to the other person (see Rakos, 2006). And at times, recipients of appropriate empathic assertions may react negatively, highlighting the notion that assertion always involves some amount of risk; for example, patients’ assertive behaviour in the service of shared treatment planning is not rated positively by physicians (Hamann et al., 2011).

## **Gender**

Conflict assertion generally has been seen as a powerful tool for women to challenge sexism. Nevertheless, many women writers contend that behaving assertively entails

significantly greater risks for females than for males despite the failure of more than 30 studies published in the 1970s and 1980s to confirm such a bias (see Gambrill, 1995; Rakos, 1991; Wilson & Gallois, 1993, for extensive discussions).

This gender research primarily was conducted with American college students in contexts that established arbitrary social interactions at a time when the notion of questioning authority was common and assertiveness was trendy. The handful of studies that appeared in the 1990s strongly indicate that conflict assertion *is* riskier for women than for men. More recently, Williams and Tiedens' (2016) meta-analysis found that "explicit dominance" (e.g., behaviour change request, expressing unpopular opinion) compromised a woman's likeability but not perceived competence compared to a man. However, men and women did not differ in likeability when exhibiting "implicit dominance," which involves nonverbal and paralinguistic ways of influencing the other person. These data are consistent with the *social rules* governing conflict assertion by women – but not by men – that emphasise obligation behaviours and even submission (Wilson and Gallois, 1993).

Despite relying on obligations, women still expect empathic assertion to result in more problematic long-term consequences than do men (Zollo et al., 1985), and recent research supports that concern. In the work environment, for example, women expect assertive self-advocacy in a job interview to result in significantly greater "backlash" than do men (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010), and female medical residents believe their gender impedes their ability to direct patient care, leading them to select less assertive options for handling hypothetical clinical situations (Bartels, Goetz, Ward, & Carnes, 2008). Women in a superior organisational position elicit in the men they supervise a sense of threat and increased counter-assertiveness, especially if the woman is seen to be power-hungry and acting in self-interest (Netchaeva, Kouchaki, & Sheppard, 2015). Women who promote themselves in a direct and confident manner decrease their social attractiveness (Rudman, 1998) and are perceived as less socially skilled than males who engage in similar behaviour (Rudman & Glick, 1999). These devaluations are in response to socially dominant behaviours (e.g., competitiveness) rather than to demonstrations of competence. Women can, however, temper unfavourable judgments by meeting general expectations of communality (e.g., exhibiting warmth, sensitivity, and caring; Rudman & Glick, 2001) and by discriminating where such behaviour is valued (e.g., outcome-oriented businesspeople, see Rakos 2006).

Thus, women, to a much greater degree than men, are expected to assert themselves in a rule-consistent manner, especially when the situation activates the stereotype of the caring, nurturing female (Tinsley, Cheldelin, Schneider, & Amanatullah, 2009), by, for example, relying on obligations to resolve conflict (Wilson et al., 2003) or advocating for another rather than herself when bargaining competitively (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). To accomplish this, women must discriminate gender-based social rules and integrate self-interest with a warm and communal interpersonal style. These skills are considerably more sophisticated and complex than the relatively straightforward response that characterises effective assertion by males (Carli, 2001). For Rudman & Glick (2001), this means women must be "bilingual" – simultaneously competent and nice. The greater demands and risks women face constrain their assertion and result in significant real-world consequences such as salary and promotion disadvantages (Babcock & Laschever, 2003; Wade, 2001). Women ask for

less than men when negotiating starting salary and make fewer requests related to working conditions, and those that they do make are more likely to involve home rather than job concerns (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Tinsley et al. (2009) provide a detailed set of “bilingual” behavioural prescriptions for “women at the bargaining table” that suggest accepting and using the core feminine stereotype to meet expectations while simultaneously working to reduce its activation and challenge the legitimacy of dichotomous gender roles. Adding to the demands women face, it is more important for them than for men to emit assertive responses consistently across time and settings (Yagil et al., 2006).

Given the historical devaluation of assertion by females (see Rakos, 1991, 2006), it is not surprising that women who adhere to a traditional view of gender roles are significantly less assertive than women who prefer being respected to being liked in a job interview (Mallet & Melchiori, 2014) or, more generally, who have embraced a more active, egalitarian social role (Curtin, Ward, Merriweather, & Caruthers, 2011; Hyers, 2007). Women who adopt a contemporary female role can make an informed decision about the value of assertion in a particular situation by understanding the gender biases of the recipient and the social rules that establish expectations (Gallois, 1994); given the modest increase (0.46 standard deviations) in assertiveness by women in the last third of the 20th century (Twenge, 2001), it appears that the cost-benefit value of assertion is slowly increasing for women.

### ***Response classes***

The studies assessing the perception of various response classes of standard assertion have produced conflicting data: in some studies, behaviour change requests are rated as most socially acceptable, while expressing unpopular opinions is judged most favourably, especially when the asserter is a friend rather than a stranger. On the other hand, refusals by strangers are judged more positively than refusals by friends or behaviour change requests by either. Friends, as part of an ongoing relationship that includes a wide variety of experiences, can accept a difference of opinion without explanation, compromise, or empathy, but expect a refusal of a request to include elaborations (see Rakos, 1991, for details). These data, then, support empathic assertion as a primary strategy for resolving conflicts in continuing relationships.

### ***Level of assertiveness***

Socially competent persons judge assertive responses to be more likeable, effective, and appropriate than aggressive and nonassertive ones, but nonassertive persons, who expect more negative outcomes from assertion, view such behaviour relatively unfavourably. However, when nonassertive persons have the opportunity to evaluate a spectrum of behaviour that is broader than a single interaction, their evaluation of the asserter is similar to that of assertive persons (see Rakos, 1991, 2006). Nonassertive persons, with a lower level of conceptual complexity, improve their judgment of conflict assertion when it is portrayed concretely and in concert with other responses that have clear social acceptability.



## **Cultural values**

The activism, pragmatism, rationality, and ethical relativism that legitimise assertion embody middle-class, American, Caucasian male values (Wine, 1981). Thus, the specific behaviours and attitudes fostered by this ideology will not be congruent with the cultural assumptions of all societies or ethnic groups. In the US, for example, African Americans perceive assertive behaviour by an African American as more aggressive than similar behaviour emitted by a white person, and value aggressive and standard assertive behaviour more, and empathic assertion less, than do whites (see Rakos, 1991, for summary).

Racial discomfort in dealing with assertion is exemplified by findings that white observers felt more intimidated by either style of assertion when emitted by an African American than by a white and judged the empathic assertion more positively than the standard assertion when the asserter was white but not when he was African American (Hrop & Rakos, 1985). Absent newer data, these findings suggest training goals for blacks asserting to whites might place greater emphasis on strategies to foster awareness of, and then to decrease, whites' discomfort with black assertiveness. African American judges, on the other hand, had relatively unfavourable perceptions of both styles of assertion when performed by a white as compared to a black, judging the behaviour to be more aggressive. They perceived empathic assertion by whites to blacks as less positive than standard assertion in the same context, but reversed their judgment for black-to-black interactions, in which the obligations significantly enhanced the evaluation of assertion. Therefore, different training goals for assertion to African Americans may be indicated: standard assertion for white asserters, empathic assertion for black asserters. The continuing evolution and importance of race relations in the US in the past 30 years suggests that updated data could provide even firmer treatment guidelines.

Generalisations about the appropriateness of assertive response styles for members of diverse cultural and ethnic groups must be made cautiously. Japanese, Malaysian, and Filipino adults (Niikura, 1999), Asian-American adults (Zane, Sue, Hu, & Kwon, 1991), and Turkish adolescents (Mehmet, 2003) were found to be less likely to engage in conflict assertion than their Western counterparts. Nevertheless, assertion that accommodates cultural norms is an accepted communication style in a wide range of societies (e.g., the Igbo in Nigeria; Onyeizugbo, 2003). Further, sensitivity to cultural values that are communitarian and tradition-bound can form the basis of successful intervention with a wide array of ethnic groups (see Fodor, 1992; Wood & Mallinckrodt, 1990) and non-Western cultures, as detailed earlier. A novel and idealistic application across cultures is Dwairy's (2004) proposal that training Israeli Palestinian-Arabs in conflict assertion skills could help them coexist more harmoniously within the individualistically oriented Israeli milieu, particularly if a companion intervention helped Israelis to understand the communitarian foundation of Palestinian society.

## **CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS**

Recent assertiveness training research aimed at empowering seniors and assisted living residents, international students at university, and women in the workplace was

reviewed briefly earlier. A fourth focus is sexual assertiveness, which has commanded by far the most interest.

## **Sexual assertiveness**

Investigators have focused on two sexual assertions: insistence on condom use, a behaviour change request, and refusal of, or limit setting with, aggressive or coercive sexual behaviours.

**Condom use assertiveness.** Sexual assertiveness is a key factor in increasing condom use. Adolescents who communicate directly about condom use are more likely to use them, especially when they talked successfully in the past about condom use and developed strong efficacy beliefs in their ability to insist on use (Widman, Noar, Choukas-Bradley, & Francis, 2014). Adolescents' condom use is correlated with a high level of individual assertiveness but with a moderate level of total "couples assertiveness" that fosters shared control and open discussion (Schmid et al., 2015). Women who unambiguously insist on condom use have greater self-efficacy beliefs in their condom assertion skills, emit more self-instructions to be condom assertive, and believe such behaviour will strengthen the relationship (Wright, Randall, & Hayes, 2012). Sexual assertiveness for condom use predicts unprotected sex in men and women, with lower levels of condom use assertiveness related to greater sexual victimisation (Morokoff et al., 2009). Stoner et al. (2008) also found that greater sexual assertiveness in women is related to a lesser history of sexual victimisation and to an intention to use condoms that is strong enough to withstand intoxication. Morokoff et al. suggest that sexual assertiveness training could be a valuable addition to victimisation prevention efforts, especially for assault and abuse survivors.

**Coercion resistance skills.** Low levels of sexual assertiveness consistently are related to sexual victimisation (Franz, DiLillo, & Gervais, 2016; Livingston, Testa, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2007; Walker, Messman-Moore, & Ward, 2011; Zerubavell & Messman-Moore, 2013) and revictimisation (Katz, May, Sorensen, & DeTosta, 2010; Kearns & Calhoun, 2010; Kelly, Orchowski, & Gidycz, 2016; Livingston et al., 2007). The lower sexual assertiveness of women victims has been linked to fear of sexual powerlessness and emotional dysregulation (Zerubavell & Messman-Moore, 2013), social anxiety (Schry & White, 2013), excessive body self-surveillance (Franz et al., 2016), traditional femininity ideologies (Curtin et al., 2011), and positive relationship expectations (e.g., trust, respect, affection) (Macy et al., 2006). Interestingly, while high sexual assertiveness is clearly adaptive, women who possess the skill are more apt to blame the victim of a sexual assault who initially behaves unassertively, even if she subsequently escalates her resistance to verbal and physical refusal behaviours (Rusinko, Bradley, & Miller, 2010). The authors point out this may have implications for jury selection in cases involving sexual assault, as a victim-juror may be predisposed to blame the assaulted woman for being victimised. In terms of treatment issues, they suggest highly assertive sexual assault victims may embrace a greater amount of responsibility for the attack and experience greater self-blame and guilt.

The consistency with which low levels of sexual assertiveness skills are correlated with sexual victimisation suggests that assertiveness training should be included in prevention and intervention packages (e.g., Senn, Braksmajer, Hutchins,

& Carey, 2017). Recently, two sexual assertiveness training programmes underwent randomised controlled investigations. Simpson Rowe, Jouriles, McDonald, Platt, and Gomez (2012) evaluated the Dating Assertiveness Training Experience (DATE) programme for teaching young women sexual resistance skills. Compared to the placebo group, college women who completed DATE were less likely to be victims of sexual assault in the following 12 weeks and more assertive in responding to an attacker. Simpson Rowe, Jouriles, and McDonald (2015) investigated the My Voice, My Choice (MVMC) programme with urban, mostly Hispanic, high school girls and found that it too reduced reports of sexual victimisation in the following 12-week period; among girls with greater prior victimisation, a population the authors note is particularly resistant to intervention, MVMC reduced the risk of psychological distress and victimisation (e.g., being threatened, verbally abused, or gossiped about). Finally, the recently developed Sexual Assertiveness Questionnaire (Loshek & Terrell, 2015) may prove useful in intervention programmes; it assesses skills in initiating and communicating about desired sex, refusing unwanted sex, and communicating risk factors and previous sexual experience.

## CONCLUSION

Assertion is a situation-specific social skill that is particularly useful for conflict resolution. It, along with its training procedures, has settled into a comfortable role in a wide range of settings. As the rapid changes of globalisation and socioeconomic development (cf. Santos et al., 2017) bring people of diverse cultures into closer contact with each other, increasing numbers have concluded that their society's long-term interests are served when its members are skilled in assertiveness, with its contemporary egalitarian social philosophy that encourages responsible action to challenge the interpersonal, social, cultural, and legal barriers that prevent fair sharing of power and resources.

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# Interacting in task groups

*Arjaan Wit*

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HERE ARE SEVERAL RELATED reasons for members of a task group to communicate with one another. Imagine a number of students and faculty members, who have volunteered to participate in a committee to update the current curriculum. Before they can plan any specific actions, they first have to arrive at a common understanding of their task. If they differ among themselves in their interpretation of the group task, as is often the case, the divergence in cognitions should be resolved by mutually exchanging pieces of information. The first part of this chapter discusses how communication affects the process of *cognitive tuning* to arrive at a common understanding of the group task.

A group cannot successfully complete a task unless its members reach agreement about the division of the work that has to be carried out. Group members may realise that their common and private interests coincide with respect to successful completion of the group task, but all of them may nevertheless feel tempted to act in their private interest by, for example, leaving some unpleasant work to fellow group members. The second part of this chapter elaborates on the role of communication in the process of *tuning common and private interests*.

Cognitive tuning and tuning of interests are two basic processes in task groups (Wilke & Meertens, 1994). In both tuning processes, communicating group members exert strong pressures on one another to consider the cognitions and interests that they have in common. Although essential for successful completion of the group task, strong normative conformity pressure to arrive at a common understanding of the task

may have its drawbacks when it comes to innovative thinking. At the end of the first part of this chapter we will discuss some preventive measures that can be taken to weaken dysfunctional normative conformity pressures. In the process of tuning of interests, by contrast, normative pressures on group members to consider their common interests cannot be strong enough. As we will see at the end of the second part of this chapter, groups often take additional normative measures to counteract group members' temptation to free ride on fellow members' cooperative efforts.

## COGNITIVE TUNING

Newly formed task groups or existing groups faced with a new task can only formulate solutions after a common understanding of the task is achieved. There are three basic modalities of cognitive tuning towards a commonly shared frame of reference (Moscovici & Doise, 1994; for an overview, see Martin & Hewstone, 2008) namely normalisation, conformity and innovation. *Normalisation* occurs when there is no a-priori shared interpretation of the group task. When the task is very ambiguous and fluid, group members mutually and gradually converge on a common normative frame of reference. *Conformity* assumes prior normalisation since it involves the attempts of a majority of the group members to maintain their socially anchored representation of the task by putting pressure on deviating individuals to go along, or risk being rejected by the majority. When a persisting minority of deviates tries to introduce a new frame of reference, an explicit cognitive conflict is created. *Innovation* occurs when this cognitive conflict is resolved through persuasion of members of the majority by the minority.

The three modalities of cognitive tuning embody increasing levels of cognitive conflict in a task group. The following three sections will describe some classic studies on the role of communication in group members' attempts to form, maintain and change their common frame of reference, respectively. These studies are often cited as starting points for more recent research on cognitive tuning processes in task groups. To illustrate some implications of the research findings, we will use the example of the educational committee.

### Normalisation

Although all of the members of the committee may share the conviction that the current curriculum needs an update, their participation in the committee may initially feel like a leap in the dark to (some of) them. How will they arrive at a common frame of reference when there is not yet an *a priori* shared interpretation of the group task?

In a very literal sense, darkness has been employed by Sherif (1936) in a classic series of experiments on the formation of a shared representation of an ambiguous task. Sherif made use of the so-called autokinetic effect, a compelling optical illusion to a person who stares at a tiny light bulb, that is presented in an otherwise completely darkened room. Even though the light is in fact stationary, after watching it for a minute or two it appears to move, due to (subconscious) eye movements and neural processes in the eyes of the perceiver. The illusion occurs when the room is pitch dark

and when experimental participants are unfamiliar with the room's size so that they lack any physical standard against which to compare the position of the dot of light. Their task is to estimate the apparent movement of the light after each of a number of exposures.

Sherif's first series of studies investigated the formation of a personal frame of reference. Participants were run in isolation and there was no opportunity to communicate. It appeared that a participant's initial responses varied widely from one exposure to the next, but with repeated exposures, a participant's responses gradually converged on a single estimate. This single value that each participant eventually arrived at, differed widely across participants, suggesting that each participant built up a stable personal frame of reference to judge subsequent task stimuli.

In Sherif's second series of studies, inexperienced participants were placed together in the pitch-dark room and were allowed to communicate with one another. It appeared that, like in the first series of studies, participants' individual estimates showed a pattern of extreme initial variability. However, as a result of mutual adjustment between group members' estimates in the process of communicating, participants' responses soon converged on a single group estimate. These group estimates differed widely across groups, suggesting that each of the groups developed its own frame of reference. The question arises as to why some groups converged on a high, while other groups converged on a low, group estimate. To address the role of the content of the communication, in some studies Sherif paid experimental confederates, acting as if they were regular fellow group members, to offer extremely high (or low) estimates. In response to these extreme estimates given by the confederates, the naive group members drastically increased (or decreased) their estimates to converge on a high (or low) group estimate. In subsequent studies (e.g., MacNeil & Sherif, 1976) it was observed that, once such a high (or low) group estimate had been established, it acquired a life of its own as a group norm. When the experimenter removed the confederates from the group after a number of trials and replaced them with new naive participants, the artificially high or low group norm still continued to affect the group's judgements in subsequent trials.

In the above studies, the naive inexperienced participants felt very unsure about the correctness of their own estimates. In the absence of any communication with fellow participants in the first series of studies, the internal cognitive conflict about the correctness of their own estimates had to be resolved by the individual participant him or herself. In the second series of studies, the possibility to communicate with fellow group members helped participants to resolve their internal cognitive conflict. Participants were so uncertain about their own initial responses that they gave much weight to the estimates expressed by their fellow group members. As a result, they developed a common understanding of the task and a common response; a group estimate.

In a subsequent study, a much stronger cognitive conflict was experienced by the participants, not merely at an intra-personal level (as in the above-mentioned studies) but also at an interpersonal level. It appeared that participants who had first been exposed to a number of trials in isolation before they were placed in a group were less willing to adjust their own initial estimates to those of their fellow group members. Many of the participants stuck to their personal way of responding, that they had developed in isolation before they entered the group. As a result, the progress of cognitive tuning towards a socially anchored norm, i.e., a single group estimate, took much



more time and was far less complete than when no personal way of responding had been previously established.

The strongest interpersonal cognitive conflict was felt by participants in yet another study. After having naive inexperienced participants respond to repeated trials in separate groups so that a socially anchored local group norm had been developed within each group, Sherif took individuals from these separate groups and created new groups for a next series of exposures. Unlike completely inexperienced participants or participants who had already built up a personal norm in isolation before entering a group, these participants were least easily influenced by the fellow members of their present, newly created group. They persisted in the norm that they had developed by communicating with fellow members of their previous group.

Taken together, Sherif's studies suggest that once task ambiguity has been cognitively resolved by the formation of an internalised frame of reference, group members attach less weight to new perspectives, which may then be seen as discrepant from one's own frame of reference. These results imply that the communicative process of cognitive tuning towards a commonly shared frame of reference depends on group members' previous experiences. For example, if (some of the) members enter the educational committee with well-developed ideas about the task, which may differ widely from one member to another due to previous normalisation in other social settings (such as student meetings or faculty meetings), the formation of a common frame of reference will not be easily achieved. This is very likely to happen, since one usually does not recruit naive inexperienced candidates to participate in advisory committees. When (some) members stick to their previously developed, socially anchored frame of reference, the committee should find ways to resolve potential cognitive conflicts between the members of the task group. In the early stages of task group development, socialisation processes involve active communicative strategies. When more experienced group members disclose personal information about their previous work, less experienced group members will more and more identify with their work habits and core values (e.g., Kramer, 1994; also see Chapter 7 for further discussion of self-disclosure). The opportunity to engage in reciprocal self-disclosure of ideas and concerns facilitates social identification with fellow group members and the development of a common frame of reference.

Under these conditions of prior normalisation, the question arises as to whether a group member who is being faced with a number of fellow group members advocating a discrepant perspective that does not seem correct will go along or stick to their previously developed, socially anchored frame of reference (Teboul, 1997). This group member may be displaying attitudes or behaviours that have gained them personal acceptance in other groups to which they belong. In a newly formed group, the person may be met with disapproval. What happens if such an individual is being faced with a discrepant majority?

## **Conformity pressures from a majority**

How will a group member respond upon learning that his or her personal frame of reference, established by previous experience, differs from the one held by the majority of the fellow members of the present group?

The classic experimental paradigm for studying this issue has been developed by Asch (1952), who asked small groups of participants to make a series of relatively simple judgements. Their task was to state publicly and in the same fixed order, which of three comparison lines matched a fourth 'target' line in length. The correct answer was obvious. When making these simple judgements in isolation, participants made no mistakes. In the typical group experiment, only one of the group members was a naive participant, who had to respond next to last in the row after hearing the responses of the preceding group members, who (unknown to the naive participant) were all confederates of the experimenter. The group judged a series of stimulus sets and on many of these (the so-called 'critical' trials) the confederates had been instructed to agree on a clearly incorrect response. By having the confederates advocate a clearly incorrect response, Asch assessed an individual group member's willingness to conform to a majority when this individual could be completely certain of being right and that the majority was wrong. Being faced with a unanimous majority, who offered an obviously incorrect answer, created a strong intra- and inter-personal cognitive conflict for the naive participant. This participant became puzzled about the discrepancy between personal judgment and the unanimous judgment of all of the fellow group members. Should the person comply with the unanimous majority of the present group or stick to their internalised frame of reference? It appeared that only 25 per cent of the naive participants showed no conformity at all and remained independent of the social pressure from the majority throughout the session. Only a few participants conformed on all of the critical trials to the blatantly incorrect judgement of the majority. However, 33 per cent of all participants conformed to the clearly incorrect majority position on more than half of the critical trials.

What can be learned from these results? On the one hand, these results demonstrate the impact of majority influence. One out of every three naive participants solved the cognitive conflict by adjusting their own response to the incorrect responses of the majority on many (but not all) of the critical trials. On the other hand, the same results demonstrate that conformity in a group is not easily achieved when group members are strongly convinced that they themselves are right and that the majority of their fellow group members are wrong. At least one out of every four naive participants remained completely independent from the majority pressure, whereas two-thirds of all naive participants remained independent on more than half of the critical trials. Note that such a reluctance to conform to the judgements of fellow group members was also observed in Sherif's studies, by participants who had previously developed a socially anchored frame of reference before they entered their present task group.

The case of one (naive participant) against all other group members (confederates) is a special case, however. Whereas a lone individual will have a hard time resisting the pressure of the majority since their view can be dismissed as a personal idiosyncrasy, the presence of some fellow dissenters in the group may cast doubt on the majority's view. In follow-up studies, Asch (1955) instructed one of the confederates to give the correct response on some of the critical trials. When the naive participant found out that he or she was not alone in disagreeing with the clearly incorrect majority, conformity rates were much lower. In yet another variation, Asch arranged for one confederate to disagree with the majority, but also to disagree with the (correct) answer of the naive participant. It appeared that even the presence of such a fellow deviate who did not agree with the majority nor with the participant made it easier

for a naive participant to express a personal viewpoint during the group discussion and to withstand pressures from the majority. Apparently, the cognitive conflict of being faced with a unanimous majority is more intense (and, as a result, elicits more conformity) than the cognitive conflict of being faced with a non-unanimous majority.

Subsequent research by Asch revealed that naive participants were less willing to go along with the majority, when they were not required to state their judgements publicly but were allowed to state their judgements privately in writing. Thus, conformity to a majority position does not necessarily reflect a participant's true opinion. Indeed, in private post-experimental interviews (away from the group), participants who had publicly agreed with their fellow group members in the group session, pointed out that they did not believe that the others were correct, but that they themselves did not want to appear different. Their anxiety about appearing different was not unrealistic. In a reversal of the above-described studies, Asch (1952) replaced the confederates with naive participants, so that there was a majority of naive participants facing one confederate who gave incorrect judgements. Under these conditions, the naive participants expressed strong confidence in the correctness of their majority position and exposed the persisting deviate to amusement and scorn.

There is a strong relationship between non-conformity and rejection by fellow group members (Schachter, 1951; Levine & Kerr, 2007). Throughout group discussions, communication directed towards disagreeing group members tends to increase over time in order to put pressure on these deviants to conform to the majority. At a later stage of the discussion, the amount of communication towards deviants decreases, either because initial deviants yield to the majority pressure or because the majority gives up trying to influence a persisting deviant. In the latter case, the deviant is literally ex-communicated.

Reviewing the above classic studies and many other studies that used a large variety of tasks (ranging from perceptual tasks to attitude tasks), Wheeler (1991; for an overview see Wheelan, 2010) concludes that the need to communicate in a group increases when the issue has more relevance for the group and when group members feel the need to maintain a congenial group atmosphere. Furthermore, pressures to communicate in the direction of a specific group member are stronger when the perceived likelihood that communication will change that person in the desired direction is greater. Communication with an unyielding deviate will eventually stop.

Applied to the process of cognitive tuning in the educational committee, these studies suggest that its members may feel compelled to conform to the opinions of the majority of their present task group, i.e., the committee. Learning that a majority of the committee has reached agreement about their understanding of the task that differs from one's own understanding may lead the individual to doubt whether his or her personal views are valid and whether he or she will be liked as a group member. With increasing group cohesion or when the topic of discussion has more relevance for the committee, it will be harder for a deviant to withstand the majority's conformity pressures. Resistance to majority pressure is more likely, however, when there is still another group member advocating a perspective that differs from the one held by the majority. Whereas a single dissenter's arguments can be dismissed as personal idiosyncrasies, more than one dissenter in the group may cast doubt on the validity of the majority's perspective. In the next paragraph, we will elaborate on the potential innovative impact of such a few persisting dissenters.

## Innovative pressures from a minority

Members of a minority who challenge the prevailing group norm by maintaining their own discrepant views in a consistent and confident way may not only successfully withstand conformity pressures of the majority, but may also have innovative impact on the group. Consistency in the responses of the minority in the face of majority opposition (and sometimes even ridicule) may be considered by the members of the majority as a sign of self-confidence and commitment to a coherent idea and thereby focus their attention on the minority's line of reasoning. Herein lies the potential of minority influence. It can purposely create cognitive conflict and cast doubt and uncertainty about the prevailing group norm, exploiting most group members' dislike of cognitive conflict and their need for uniformity. When the cognitive conflict cannot be resolved by mutual convergence (as participants did in Sherif's autokinetic effect studies), it may be solved either by excommunicating the deviant minority (as in Asch's and Schachter's studies) or by an attitudinal shift of members of the majority in the direction of the minority.

Effective minority influence has been demonstrated in a classic series of ingenious studies by Moscovici, Lage and Naffrechoux (1969). Groups of six individuals were shown a series of turquoise (blue-green) slides, which varied in brightness. The participants' task was to judge the colour of the slides and to announce judgements aloud. When the group consisted of six naive participants, 99 per cent of all participants labelled the slides as blue. By instructing two confederates in the six-person groups to advocate an unusual response, i.e., by labelling the slides as green, Moscovici and his co-workers were able to assess naive participants' willingness to go along with a discrepant minority. It was unlikely that the unusual responses by these confederates would be dismissed as blatantly incorrect, as had been the case in Asch's studies, since the colour perception task faced participants with more ambiguity about the correct response than Asch's line matching tasks. The results showed that when the judgements of the two confederates were consistent, both over time and across themselves, the four naive participants eventually described the slide more often as green (8 per cent of all responses given by the naive participants were green) than when the judgements of the two confederates were inconsistent, i.e., sometimes labelling the slides as blue, sometimes as green (resulting in only 1 per cent of all responses being green). Thus, it appears that a consistent minority may exert innovative influence, whereas an inconsistent minority may have virtually no impact on the group.

Although naive participants in the six-person groups were more likely to agree publicly with the unusual colour judgements when these were made by a majority (four confederates labelling the slides as green) than when these were made by a consistent minority (two confederates labelling the slides as green), their private beliefs were influenced more deeply by minority influence than by majority influence. From private interviews (away from the group) after the group sessions, it appeared that participants who had followed the minority's suggestion that the slides were green had a stronger belief that the slides were green than participants who had yielded to a majority labelling these slides as green. These results were conceptually replicated with various other tasks, such as discussion tasks (Maass & Clark, 1984; Nemeth & Goncalo, 2011). Several studies show that naive participants' *private* beliefs are more

strongly affected by minority influence than by majority influence. When naive participants can express their opinion at the end of the discussion in private, they tend to agree more often with the minority. However, they tend to agree more often with the majority when they have to express their opinion publicly in the presence of fellow group members.

Taken together, majority influence appears to be particularly effective in eliciting public compliance, whereas group members' private beliefs are more strongly affected by minority influence (DeVries, DeDreu, Gordijn, & Schuurman, 1996; Gordijn, DeVries, & DeDreu, 2002). These results suggest that a small subgroup within the educational committee may create a cognitive conflict by demonstrating a consistent and confident behavioural style in expressing a discrepant perspective. This subgroup may be able to introduce a new frame of reference. Its innovative impact may not be visible right away, however. Minority influence may not immediately come to the surface during plenary meetings, but only in the absence of the majority of the committee members, for example, during private discussions between individuals after a plenary meeting (Pearce, Stevenson, & Porter, 1986). In order to enhance its innovative impact, a minority should encourage group members who have been privately persuaded by the minority's arguments, to publicly support the new frame of reference. To increase the size of the minority (and thereby its impact), the minority should convince individual converts that some fellow committee members have also privately expressed their support for the minority position. The assumed presence of fellow dissenters makes it less threatening for individual converts to publicly adhere to the minority position during a follow-up plenary committee meeting.

## Informational versus normative pressures

The preceding sections have dealt with cognitive tuning processes in groups in which there exists either a broad range of perspectives or in which a majority or minority favours one particular perspective. The three associated modalities of cognitive tuning, i.e., normalisation, conformity and innovation, respectively, can be described in terms of two basic social pressures in groups: informational pressure and normative pressure (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991; Nemeth & Goncalo, 2011).

*Informational* pressure is based on group members' tendency to rely upon fellow group members to acquire accurate information to form an appropriate frame of reference in an ambiguous task environment. Open communication may induce group members to converge on a common frame of reference or social norm. This process of normalisation has been observed in Sherif's groups of inexperienced participants who were literally put in the dark and lacked any standard against which to compare the position of the dot of light. Internalisation of such a socially anchored frame of reference may result in individual group members attaching less weight to new, discrepant perspectives, but it does not immunise them since group members not only rely on others to acquire accurate information, but also to acquire their approval.

When faced with a majority holding a discrepant perspective, individual group members may yield to *normative* pressures of a majority to reward conforming group members and reject persisting deviates. A comparison between Asch's and Sherif's research findings suggests, however, that conformity in the interest of being liked as

a group member has less powerful ramifications than conformity that results from viewing fellow group members for the purpose of gaining accurate information. Many of Asch's participants, who were confident that their own frame of reference was correct and that the fellow group members were wrong (no informational social pressure), publicly conformed to the local majority norm because they were afraid to be seen as different. Their compliance persisted only as long as they felt normative pressure. Once outside the group, they were more likely to express their private beliefs. By contrast, a local group norm that had been established through communication between inexperienced naive participants in Sherif's studies (on the basis of their informational needs to arrive at an accurate representation of ambiguous task stimuli), acquired a life of its own and tended to persist even in the absence of fellow group members with whom the norm had previously been developed.

Not only a majority, but also a consistent minority may induce individual group members to shift their opinion. Particularly when the task environment leaves some room for different interpretations (Moscovici et al., 1969), a minority's discrepant perspective cannot easily be dismissed as blatantly incorrect. Since minorities lack the numerical advantage of majorities and their positions are often quite unpopular, minorities cannot exert normative pressure on individual members of the majority. By intentionally raising doubt about the validity of the prevailing opinion of the majority, minorities may instead set the stage for *informational* social influence. To be effective, arguments supporting the minority position must be communicated skilfully, i.e., in a persuasive (see Chapter 10) and assertive, but non-aggressive way (see Chapter 11). In addition, minorities should evoke elaborate discussions in the group. Such discussions are less likely to be initiated by members supporting the majority opinion. When the content of the minority's persuasive arguments eventually becomes clear, minorities may induce a real change in group members' private beliefs.

Following this line of reasoning, Nemeth (1992; Nemeth & Goncalo, 2011) argues that majority influence may induce a fixation in thought, because it focuses group members mainly on the normative requirement of conformity. The fear of being rejected by the majority of one's group impedes creative and divergent thinking. By contrast, given a minority's inability to exert normative pressure, minority influence relies on informational pressure. The cognitive conflict evoked by a persistent minority is likely to promote careful consideration of the reasons for the apparent discrepancy. Nemeth and Kwan (1987) demonstrated that group members did not only express more, but also more divergent and original, ideas in response to a discrepant minority than group members who were exposed to a discrepant majority. Thus, a dissenting minority appears to stimulate creativity and openness in the exchange of information rather than adaptation and fixation.

Although normative and informational pressures can be distinguished conceptually, they are closely related in communication processes. Normative pressures can inhibit informational pressures by determining what information gets exchanged in a task group. During discussions group members may be so concerned with receiving social approval from their peers (rather than with careful evaluation of the available information) that some information never gets expressed. As a result, they tend to discuss information that they assume to share in common and fail to mention distinguishing pieces of information that are known only to single individuals within the task group (Stasser & Titus, 1985; Stasser, 1992; Gigone, 2010), or information

that might contradict an emerging group consensus. In its most extreme form, normative pressures may lead to premature concurrence-seeking in decision-making groups ('groupthink'). Failure to take relevant alternative perspectives into account may result in serious policy disasters (Janis, 1982). Given the importance of open-mindedness to alternative perspectives at various stages of task completion, task groups should find ways to row against the current of normative pressures. The next section will elaborate on some formal techniques to push group members past the bounds of restrictive thinking along the lines of the prevailing local group norm.

## Overcoming dysfunctional normative pressures

How can premature concurrence-seeking and biased information exchange be avoided? *Brainstorming* may stimulate group members to generate divergent ideas (Osborn, 1957). Group members receive instructions from a group facilitator, who introduces several rules to encourage group members to express as many ideas as possible within a certain time interval. Group members should not screen their own ideas. In order to generate even more ideas, they are encouraged to piggyback on ideas expressed by their fellow group members. One person records all the expressed ideas and presents the list to the group as rapidly as possible, without discussion, clarification or comment. Evaluation of one's own and others' ideas has to be postponed.

In a meta-analytic review of many studies, Mullen, Johnson and Salas (1991) concluded that, in spite of the popularity of interactive brainstorming and common beliefs about its efficacy, there is little empirical evidence that groups that follow this procedure generate more ideas of superior quality than individuals working separately. On the contrary, separate individuals may produce even more and better ideas than the same individuals, acting as members of an interactive brainstorming group (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987; Paulus, Larey, & Ortega, 1995; Nijstad & Stroebe, 2006; Nijstad, 2009). One of the reasons why conventional interactive brainstorming groups fall short in producing creative ideas seems to be that group members, despite the instruction not to evaluate one another's contributions, fear negative evaluations from their fellow group members. Normative conformity pressures are often too strong to freely express one's idiosyncratic ideas. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that members of a conventional interactive brainstorming group tend to converge on similar *amounts* of idea expressions. This convergence appears to be biased in the direction of the least productive group members (Paulus & Dzindolet, 1993). Real group interaction leads to mutual matching that normalises a low performance level. How can these drawbacks be prevented?

In order to overcome these dysfunctional normative pressures, a modification of the traditional face-to-face brainstorming method has been developed. The so-called Nominal Group Technique (NGT) involves a process with two formally distinct stages (Delbecq, VanDeVen, & Gustafson, 1975). In the first or elicitation stage, individual group members work separately, generating alternative perspectives on the issue at hand. In order to minimise normative pressures, group members are not required to express their ideas aloud in the presence of the fellow group members, but write their ideas down. This so-called brain writing technique (Dugosh, Paulus, Roland, & Yang, 2000) may prove effective, taking into account Asch's research findings that normative conformity pressures can be weakened when group members are not required to

express their opinions publicly, but are allowed to state them privately in writing. The second or evaluation stage involves the collective listing and evaluation of the perspectives that have been generated during the first stage. In a series of studies by VanDeVen and Delbecq (1974) to compare NGT with conventional interactive brainstorming techniques, NGT was found to produce superior results. This suggests that interaction and communication between members of brainstorming groups may be most useful if individual group members have first generated ideas separately and thereafter get additional social stimulation of other members' ideas.

Some groups may install a so-called 'devil's advocate' to evoke discussion about alternative perspectives. In order to promote the examination of both supporting and detracting evidence, one group member presents any information that may lead to the disqualification of the prevailing frame of reference (Herbert & Estes, 1977). Unlike the lone dissenter in Asch's studies, this dissenting group member's popularity in the group is not harmed since this person is formally installed to play that role. Moreover, the role may be shifted regularly from one group member to another. The cognitive conflict created by having one group member disagree consistently with the majority position sets the stage for informational social influence, as in the case of minority influence. Severe cognitive stress should be avoided, however, by instructing the devil's advocate to carefully present arguments in a low-key, non-threatening manner.

Yet another technique to inhibit dysfunctional normative conformity pressures may be to arrange that members of the group meet in *separate subgroups*, which will each develop their own frame of reference (Wheeler & Janis, 1980). The presence of two subgroups in a subsequent combined meeting may elicit discussion and critical examination of the reasons for the differences between the perspectives that have been developed within each of the subgroups. If the subgroups eventually come to agreement, which may not be easily achieved (cf. Sherif's research findings, suggesting less convergence to a common group opinion in the case of prior normalisation), it is less likely that any important considerations will be overlooked or ignored. The common frame of reference on which the subgroups eventually come to agree may then be adopted with more confidence than if only a single group had worked on it.

Although normative conformity pressures can be dysfunctional and may produce erroneous group judgements (cf. Asch's research findings and Janis' studies on 'groupthink'), one should acknowledge the potential benefits of normative pressure to ensure mutual social control. Mutual control becomes increasingly important when group members are motivated to act in their own way. As long as they are merely concerned with tuning their cognitions, group members' motivation to act in their own way may be relatively weak: they may publicly conform to the local group norm, despite keeping strong private reservations about its correctness (as in Asch's studies). In later stages of task completion, however, group members may become increasingly concerned with their private positions and interests. When the division of labour becomes an issue, for instance, the costs of giving in to the group (i.e., living up to normative expectations to contribute as much as possible to promote group success) may be more tangible than the costs of conformity in the process of cognitive tuning. To save themselves costly personal contributions, some of the group members may feel tempted to leave unpleasant work to fellow members. As we will see in the next section, the tuning of interests requires stronger normative pressures to complete the group task successfully.



## TUNING OF INTERESTS

Once a common cognitive frame of reference has been developed, group members have to reach agreement about the division of labour to actually complete the group task. The division of labour may give rise to a conflict between common and private interests. Groups have to ensure that members' common and private interests are properly tuned, because the unrestrained pursuit of private interests will cause the whole group to fail or fall apart. Communication plays a crucial role in this process of tuning of conflicting interests.

### Entwining of common and private interests

Since group members' outcomes do not depend solely upon their own performance but also on the performance of fellow group members, members of a task group are mutually interdependent. Two basic types of interdependence can be distinguished, i.e., positive and negative interdependence (Deutsch, 1949).

To the extent that one group member's successful performance directly promotes the interests of fellow group members, group members are *positively interdependent*. As far as their private interests coincide, group members will be motivated to cooperate to serve their common interest. Cooperation requires coordinated action. For example, it is in the common interest of all members of the educational committee that each of them submits proposals to change the curriculum before a certain deadline, so that all individual proposals can be assembled and sent to all the members of the committee before the next meeting. Group members' private interests coincide since it is in nobody's private interest to be late with submitting one's proposals. Coordination requires clear communication (e.g., about submission deadlines) to structure the interaction process in such a way that group members optimally combine their contributions. If the group falls short in optimally combining its members' contributions, the group suffers from so-called 'coordination losses'. In the next section we will elaborate on this type of productivity loss.

By contrast, group members are *negatively interdependent* to the extent that a gain by one group member entails a loss by other group members. Usually, the distribution of benefits and costs among group members increases the salience of this type of interdependence. For example, when the educational committee has to elect a chairperson, a candidate can only achieve personal success at the expense of other group members. Since only one of them can be installed, the election may create a competitive atmosphere between members of the committee. To give another example of conflicting interests: It may be in the students' best interest to increase the number of seminars and tutorials in the curriculum, whereas faculty members of the committee may advocate student self-tuition in order to not increase their own teaching load. Students can only achieve success if the faculty members give in. As long as problems arising from negative interdependence remain unsolved, the resulting competition within the group may pose a serious threat to group productivity.

The above dichotomy is an oversimplification, however, since pure positive and pure negative interdependence are rare. The *mixture of positive and negative interdependence* in almost any task group evokes a motivation to cooperate (group success

can only be achieved by cooperating with fellow group members) as well as a motivation to act in a self-interested way (what is to be gained by one group member in the division of benefits and costs can often only be obtained at the expense of fellow group members). Even when the motivation to act in a self-interested way seems to prevail, as in the election of a chairperson or in the final phrasing of the committee's recommendations, opposing parties should communicate to serve their common interest. In an attempt to resolve the conflict of interests between the parties, they may start negotiating and bargaining (see Chapter 13). In this chapter we focus on such so-called mixed motive task situations, in which the motivation to cooperate prevails. But even under predominantly cooperative circumstances, group members' self-interest may lead them to consciously or subconsciously reduce their personal contributions to the group and take advantage of fellow group members' cooperative efforts to achieve group success. Reduced individual contributions in task groups reflect the second type of productivity loss, namely 'motivation losses' (Steiner, 1972; Kerr, 1983). Before we elaborate on group members' communicative attempts to overcome motivation losses, we will first address the issue of coordination losses.

## Coordination losses

To the extent that group members are positively interdependent, they are eager to contribute to their common interest since there is no incentive for any of them to refrain from contributing. Cooperation requires good coordination. Group interactions need to be structured in such a way that members optimally combine their efforts. Coordination losses occur when the group falls short in optimally combining its members' efforts. The behavioural requirements may not be immediately clear to all group members. Some tasks, for instance, require simultaneity in group members' efforts. A group whose members are properly tuned to focus simultaneously on one and the same part of the task performs better than a group in which individual contributions are less well tuned in time (Tschan, 1995). Communication is essential to make sure that everyone is aware of what has been achieved so far and to ensure that people will make further contributions that are compatible. Successful committees, compared to those that fail, stimulate task relevant communication by focusing their members' attention on simultaneity in submitting individual proposals, evaluating these proposals, reaching agreement upon one particular course of action and its subsequent implementation and evaluation.

The completion of a group task will not always benefit from simultaneity in group members' contributions, however. In interactive brainstorming groups, for example, it would be unproductive if all participants were to express their ideas aloud at the same time. While one group member speaks, other group members have to keep silent. Group members have to wait for others to express their own ideas. This type of coordination loss, which is called 'production blocking' (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987; Nijstad, 2009), may hinder group members in presenting or even remembering their own ideas. One way to prevent production blocking in the generation of ideas is the Nominal Group Technique discussed earlier. Another way is electronic brainstorming, in which individuals are exposed to ideas from others on their computer screen as they generate their own ideas. Like in the NGT, the absence of face-to-face interaction in electronic

brainstorming may prove particularly fruitful in larger task groups (DeRosa, Smith, & Hantula, 2007). Unfortunately, group members rarely show much interest in planning the coordination process. Yet, controlling the process by communicating about how to properly sequence group members' contributions has strong positive effects on group productivity.

## Motivation losses

Even if the processes in task groups are so well organised that virtually all losses due to faulty coordination are eliminated, group productivity might still suffer from motivation losses. Motivation losses occur because task groups are seldom characterised by pure positive interdependence, but almost always involve a mixture of positive and negative interdependence (Baron & Kerr, 2003). The conflict between common and private interests lays the ground for motivation losses, reflecting the conscious or subconscious tendency to decrease one's personal share in the collective burden by letting one's fellow group members do the work.

Motivation losses are more likely if group members can take advantage of circumstances in which their own contribution to the group product is hardly identifiable (such as in large groups) while they still share in the collective benefits of group success. When motivation losses are more or less subconscious, the decrease of individual contributions to the group is termed 'social loafing'. When group members deliberately let others do the work, we speak of 'free riding' (Kerr, 1983). A very likely reaction in response to the (assumed) presence of free riders in the group is to reduce one's own efforts, too, rather than to take the risk of being exploited (being the 'sucker').

The scientific study on productivity losses in task groups started with studies by Ringelmann (1913; see Kravitz & Martin, 1986), who had young men pull a rope, either alone or in groups of varying size. Participants working alone pulled with an average force of 63 kg, participants working in dyads pulled with a force of 118 kg (i.e., an average of 59 kg per person), participants working in triads pulled with a force of 106 kg (i.e., an average of 53 kg per person), while eight-person groups pulled with an average of 31 kg per person. Thus, the average individual performance decreased with increasing group size. To estimate the relative impact of motivation losses in the total productivity loss, Ingham, Levinger, Graves and Peckham (1974) employed an experimental method that eliminated all coordination losses (i.e., productivity losses due to faulty coordination, such as a lack of simultaneity of the muscular contractions of the individuals). Ingham et al. blindfolded the rope pulling participant and contrived that the participant was ahead of any other participants on the rope, closest to the gauge to measure the performance. In actuality, there were no other people pulling on the rope. In this way, Ingham et al. assessed the performance of a naive participant, who believed himself or herself to be part of a group. It appeared that, as the apparent group size increased, the individual performance of the naive participant declined. This suggests that group members are less motivated to do their ultimate best when the size of their (imagined) group increases (see also Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979). Subsequent research has shown that motivation losses also occur in cognitive and perceptual group tasks (Jackson & Williams, 1985; Petty, Harkins, & Williams, 1980; for overviews, see Wilke & Meertens, 1994; Parks & Sanna, 1999).

## Normative pressures to prevent motivation losses

Skilful communication may help to overcome motivation losses since it sets the stage for normative social pressure on group members to contribute their fair share (or even: as much as they can). Communicating to simply get better acquainted with one's fellow group members is not sufficient, however (Dawes, McTavish, & Shaklee, 1977). So, what might be relevant topics to discuss?

In the first place, communication may facilitate group members' understanding of the extent to which they are positively interdependent. When their attention becomes focused on their common interests, group members may come to understand that mutual cooperation is preferable to mutual non-cooperation. Thus, communication may help them to agree on mutual cooperation as a shared goal (Hargie, 2017). In this process, posing and answering *open* questions about their ideas and concerns may help group members to arrive at a common understanding of their positive interdependence. Open questions may encourage group members to explore the broad variety of unique and shared motives amongst group members to cooperate. However, it is rather risky to cooperate unless you can really count on your fellow group members to cooperate. If others cannot be trusted, those who cooperate run the risk of being 'the sucker'. Therefore, the second important function of communication is to reduce group members' uncertainty about fellow group members' actual contributions. Shared cooperative goals and mutual trust are the two key-concepts in Pruitt and Kimmels' (1977) Goal-Expectation theory about cooperation in mixed motive situations. Group members who share a cooperative goal *and* expect fellow group members to cooperate may eventually establish a cooperative group norm (see also Kramer, 1999).

Two group norms are of particular importance, namely the commitment norm and the norm of equity or reciprocity. The *commitment* norm prescribes that group members should actually carry out those actions which they have publicly promised to perform. In revealing each group member's answer to a simple closed yes-no question 'So we can really count on your contribution?', communication may present an opportunity for group members to establish mutual commitment to cooperate as a binding social contract (Orbell, Dawes, & Van der Kragt, 1988). In the process of tuning of common and private interests, questions become more closed and leading. The communication process changes from exchanging information to get better acquainted with fellow group members into one of promoting compliance with normative expectations within the group (see Chapter 4 for further discussion of questioning).

The *equity norm* prescribes that the rewards of group performance should be in proportion to group members' individual contributions. When all group members have an equal share in the collective outcomes of group success, as often is the case in task groups that provide a common good, the equity norm prescribes that all of them should exert equal amounts of effort. The equity norm may both encourage and discourage cooperation in task groups, however. When a group member learns that fellow group members exert more effort, personal failure to work as hard as these others would violate the equity norm. Equity considerations may then induce this person to cooperate, since free riding would violate the equity norm. However, if the same group member learns that fellow group members are free riding upon their cooperative effort, the most likely response would simply be to cease cooperating oneself. Few group members will endure the inequitable 'sucker' role in their task group.

A cooperation-inducing strategy, based upon the equity norm, may be to start cooperating and just keep cooperating as long as fellow group members cooperate; whenever fellow group members act uncooperatively, also refrain from cooperation. Group members who employ this so-called reciprocal 'Tit-for-Tat' strategy (Axelrod, 1984) communicate that they are willing to cooperate as long as fellow group members will do the same.

Research findings showing that normative pressures to conform to group norms are stronger in cohesive groups (Wheeler, 1991) suggest that the above-discussed cooperative norms are stronger when the salience of a common group membership is high. Communication in groups appears to enhance feelings of being a part of the group and creates a sense of group identity or group cohesion (Orbell et al., 1988). Communication among group members in mixed motive situations indeed tends to focus on the normative requirement of cooperation and on how angry the group will be towards group members who do not take their fair share of the collective burden. Furthermore, the more group members feel part of their group, the less strongly they distinguish between their common and private interests (Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Tyler & Blader, 2000). Reciprocal self-disclosure may again play an important role in the process by which members of a group develop a common frame of reference (cognitive tuning) and a common identity (see Chapter 7). Sharing personal information may help group members to establish mutual bonds. Members who strongly identify with their group are also more likely to perceive fellow group members in generally favourable terms, as being trustworthy and cooperative. Such favourable attributions may lay the ground for trust in the cooperative intentions of fellow group members to promote the common interest. To be successful as a task group, however, cooperative intentions are not enough. Intentions must be transformed into actions.

## **Additional measures to strengthen functional normative pressures**

Even under these normative pressures to cooperate, a task group remains vulnerable to motivation losses of (some of) its members. If only one of the group members refrains from cooperating, this 'bad apple' may elicit non-cooperative responses from fellow group members who may feel justified to do so on the basis of the equity/reciprocity norm. Reciprocal cooperation is not easily established in task groups with more than two members. Many studies suggest that cooperation declines as groups become larger (Kerr, 1983). Other factors inhibiting the evolution of cooperation in large task groups may be the perceived efficacy of one's own contribution, the extent to which one's own contribution is identifiable and can be evaluated and the extent to which one feels responsible for the achievement of the common interest.

A second reason for task groups' vulnerability to motivation losses is that the beneficial effects of enhanced group identification on individuals' willingness to conform to cooperative group norms may be weakened by subordinate group boundaries (Kramer & Brewer, 1984; Wit & Kerr, 2002). For example, members of the educational committee may refrain from taking their fair share of the work to be done because they may be more concerned with subordinate interests of increasing

the benefits and lowering the costs of one's particular subgroup (students or staff) than with work that has to be done in the interest of the committee as a whole. In contrast to the suggestion made earlier in this chapter, that subgroup formation may create a sense of fruitful competition in the creative process of generating a wide variety of new perspectives and solutions for existing problems ('Which subgroup will come up with the best ideas?'), subgroup formation may yield negative effects when it comes to carrying the collective burden of the actual implementation of these solutions.

Therefore, communicative attempts to promote cooperation often have to be combined with additional measures. Since cooperative behaviour is the result of normative pressures to serve the common interest, cooperation can be further promoted by enhancing the salience of cooperative norms and/or increasing the severity of social sanctions for non-cooperation. Several lines of research confirm this assumption. First, enforcement of any social norm requires the ability to monitor inputs and outcomes so that norm violations can be detected. Social loafing (more or less consciously hiding in the crowd) and free riding (its deliberate counterpart, when one expects that fellow group members will do the necessary work) are less likely to occur when identification and evaluation of one's own contribution are more likely. Group members appear to be very sensitive to the risk of being detected as an under-performing group member (Harkins & Jackson, 1985; Harkins, 2006). As a result, higher levels of cooperation are achieved when group members have to make their contributions publicly than when their contributions remain unidentifiable (cf. Asch's findings, suggesting that participants are more likely to comply with the local group norms when they have to state their opinions publicly than when they are allowed to express their opinions in the absence of any social control by their fellow group members). Record keeping, for instance, allows group members to check whether each of them does their fair share of the work. It promotes social control that encourages group members to conform to cooperative norms.

Second, a group may increase social control over its members by the use of reinforcements, i.e., selective incentives to reward cooperators or to punish non-cooperators. In interpersonal communication, reinforcement may take many forms (see Chapter 4), verbal (words of praise, encouragement versus disapproval, criticism) as well as non-verbal (facial expressions, body language, gestures). Positive reinforcements such as praise and promises yield more beneficial effects than negative reinforcements, such as threats, since the latter communicate that fellow group members cannot be trusted to be internally motivated to cooperate (Irwin, Mulder, & Simpson, 2014; Mulder, VanDijk, DeCremer, & Wilke, 2006; Van Lange, Rockenbach & Yamagishi, 2014, 2017). However, even promises may arouse reactance and prove counter-effective if group members perceive the rewards as an attempt to bribe them (Wit & Wilke, 1990).

Third, when group members learn that soft interventions do not suffice to ensure satisfactory levels of cooperation and fairness in individuals' share in the collective burden, they are quite willing to ask some of the (cooperative) group members to employ their communication and persuasion skills and strategies (see Chapter 10) to promote organisational effectiveness (Klandermans, 1992; Hargie, Dickson, & Tourish, 2004). In its most extreme form, group members may hand their decisional freedom over to a leader who makes decisions on behalf of all of them (DeCremer & VanKnippenberg, 2003; Rutte & Wilke, 1984; VanVugt & DeCremer, 2002).

## OVERVIEW

By communicating, members of a task group exert strong normative pressure on one another to consider the cognitions and interests that they have in common. However, in the process of cognitive tuning, normative pressure is a double-sided sword. On the one hand, normative pressures lead group members to converge on a common understanding of the task, necessary to achieve group success. On the other hand, normative pressures make group members so concerned with receiving social approval from their peers, that innovative perspectives that might contradict the emerging group consensus never get expressed. Since premature concurrence-seeking constitutes a serious threat to group success, some formalised communication techniques (like the Nominal Group Technique, brain writing or installing a devil's advocate) may be employed so that important alternative perspectives are less likely to be overlooked.

When group members are tuning their interests, normative pressures to consider common interests cannot be strong enough. Normative expectations that all group members will contribute their fair share of the collective burden may promote cooperation, but may at the same time increase the temptation for some of them to free ride upon other's cooperative efforts. Therefore, task groups often take additional measures to sanction non-cooperation.

Preventing or overcoming productivity losses is a continuous concern for task groups. Even if group members realise that time and energy must be devoted to finding effective solutions to these threats to their common interest, many of them may prefer not to become involved in the activities necessary to actually implement these solutions and leave this task to (one or some of the) cooperative fellow group members.

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## Negotiating

*Colleen E. Mills*

Negotiation is the process of arriving at commitment to a course of action in cases in which the parties entered the conversation without consensus – or, alternatively, in which neither party had the power to impose a decision.

(Greenhalgh & Lewicki, 2015, p. 465)

### INTRODUCING NEGOTIATION

**N**EGOTIATION IS A TYPE of communication we often engage in without necessarily realising we are doing so (Hodgson, 1994). In its various forms, negotiation contributes to most aspects of daily life, providing a familiar mechanism by which agreements are reached and decisions made, both trivial and significant (Low, 2009). It is important for the simple reason that individuals, groups, organisations, and societies, while pursuing differing priorities, are inevitably interdependent and negotiation provides a means to manage this interdependence.

In our personal lives we are constantly negotiating this interdependence. Decisions such as who picks up the children from school today, which colour the house gets repainted, or who is cooking dinner tonight can involve negotiation. Similarly, in our professional lives, deciding when we take our annual leave, particularly if we work as a member of a team, how many new staff can be recruited for our department, or which products are to be withdrawn from production can involve negotiations with colleagues and line managers.

Scholars have typically viewed negotiation as a special form of conflict resolution where two (i.e., bilateral negotiation) or more (i.e., multilateral negotiation) parties with differing interests collaborate in a process designed to create a mutually acceptable agreement. This process commonly occurs when important decisions need to be made. In some professions, such as the police and the military where the consequences of not resolving the conflict their members encounter can be extreme (e.g., loss

of life), negotiation is treated as a specialist activity. Specialist teams are assembled and trained to negotiate surrender in armed conflict situations and peaceful resolution of building occupations and street barricades, and to save lives in threatened suicides and hostage situations.

At an inter-business and market level, negotiation is considered to be a process of critical importance (Åge & Eklinder-Frick, 2017, p. 525). This is because profitability and long-term relationships with suppliers, distributors, and customers can depend on the quality and outcome of negotiation processes (Rognes, 1995; Brooks & Rose, 2004; Sharland, 2001; Thomas, Thomas, Manrodt, & Rutner, 2013). Increasingly, firms appreciate negotiations that produce acceptable benefits for both parties (i.e., win-win outcomes) are the only reasonable option if a positive long-term relationship between negotiating parties is to be achieved (Hargie, 2017). Such relationships bring so many positive benefits, including lower costs in doing business, greater commitment and trust between negotiating parties, effective communication, and, ultimately, competitive advantage (Day, 1995), that a company would be foolish not to seek to create and maintain them. These considerations explain why trained negotiators are employed to conduct important commercial negotiations and communication skills feature as required or desirable skills in many corporate job descriptions.

At a national level, countries negotiate free trade agreements, ceasefires, and military alliance treaties that make a difference to global economics and world peace. At this level, negotiations are not only significant because of their potential to shape everyone's lives but because they have additional challenges due to the need for sophisticated levels of political and intercultural competence.

Given that negotiation in various forms can occur across all levels of human activity and that high levels of specialist skill are required in some situations, it is not surprising that there is a plethora of approaches and models of negotiation that could be included in this chapter on negotiation. Indeed, there is such a vast literature on both (Lim, Tost, & Wade-Benzoni, 2007) that a single chapter could not possibly present a comprehensive analysis of them, let alone the entire negotiation literature, which is massive, fragmented, and constantly growing (Lande, 2017). For these reasons, this chapter takes a more measured approach. First, it examines the process of negotiating in general terms. It then looks more closely at some of the ways negotiation is conceptualised and the collection of joint decision-making communication processes to which negotiation belongs. A selection of individual and social variables that shape negotiation and a cross-section of the negotiation models are then explored. Lastly, this chapter uses these considerations as the foundation for a summative discussion of one way our understanding of the highly contingent and relational negotiation process could be advanced. In doing so, it argues that negotiation is inevitably relational and that only when this fact is given precedence in theory and practice will we move beyond limiting conceptions and restrictive theories and models of this highly contingent and important decision-making process.

## THE PROCESS OF NEGOTIATION

According to Keough (2017), negotiation is “an interactive process between interdependent parties in an attempt to produce a joint decision” (p. 1). This simple definition

differs from many others that include reference to conflict and conflict resolution. In its simplicity, Keough's definition accommodates the possibility that parties engaged in negotiation are not in conflict with each other but simply share a common problem that requires collaborative action (Low, 2009). Definitions that draw attention to the need for creative collaborative action rather than the cause or desired outcome of negotiation provide the latitude to treat the quality of the process as an outcome. When process is given precedence in this way, all parties' interests become important, the significance of conflict gets downplayed, and the outcomes become a natural consequence of the means of engagement.

The persistent focus on conflict in the negotiation literature appears to be a consequence of the types of negotiations that have been studied. Many focus on wage negotiations where conflicting positions and priorities are almost inevitable. In these sorts of negotiations all parties retain authority over the final decision and have a right of veto. This distinguishes negotiation from some other types of communication used to make decisions (e.g., arbitration) where the final authority lies with an external party.

Also entangled in many views of negotiation is the notion that differences breed conflict. In fact, one could easily be forgiven for thinking that negotiation as a field of study is founded on a combative conception of relationships where there is only one defensible position (i.e., combatant) that each participant can take and that the objective is to see which party can perform best in a contest to dominate the decision-making process. The seminal publication by Walton and McKersie (1965) popularised the term "distributive bargaining", describing this win-lose negotiation process in contrast to "integrative bargaining", the win-win alternative (Barge, 2009). These dichotomous but interlinked terms have become foundational in negotiation courses in a wide variety of disciplines, despite different views on what they refer to. For some scholars they refer to two different mindsets while for others they describe the actions taken by negotiators or the overall approach to negotiation. For Walton and McKersie (1965) they refer to structure, while for Sebenius (2015) they are intertwined.

While it may be useful for pedagogical purposes to conceptually disentangle these processes, they are inherently linked in both theory and in practice, especially in situations in which information is asymmetrically held, which occur frequently.

(p. 341)

What is clear is that they are value-laden terms with integrative negotiations being seen to follow a more contemporary ethos (i.e., collaboration) than distributive (i.e., competitive) negotiations (Sebenius, 2015). Distributive bargainers "are considered old school, greedy, and unenlightened" (Batra, 2017, p. 34). In reality, both distributive and integrative actions are taken in most negotiation situations.

When common views of negotiation are synthesised and considered alongside empirical evidence of what happens in practice in negotiations, dichotomies are not particularly useful (Lande, 2015; Sebenius, 2015). Negotiation is a very contingent, sometimes iterative, always dynamic, collaborative decision-making process involving at least two parties who believe the other party or parties can provide something they seek. Its aim is to achieve a mutually acceptable decision. In this regard, negotiation has much in common with bargaining and mediation, two other forms of communication

that, like negotiation, require participants to employ assertion and argumentation in order to gain a mutually acceptable outcome. All three types of communication occur when parties with a common need for agreement and a desire to gain something from each other choose to engage to satisfy that desire (Hofstede, 2001, p. 435).

Typically, this engagement is not an arbitrary process. Rather, it is structured cycles of offer and counter-offer, acceptance and rejection that continue until a mutually acceptable outcome is jointly achieved. This means that negotiation, in its most general sense, has six key components. These are:

- 1 At least two parties.
- 2 A limited resource or conflict of interest.
- 3 An agreement to collaborate to resolve 2 (above).
- 4 Engagement between parties or their proxies.
- 5 A process of offers and counter-offers.
- 6 An outcome that is jointly constructed.

Personally, professionally, societally, and globally people need each other and negotiation provides one means for resolving the conflicts of interest that emerge as a consequence of this interdependence. The resolution of conflict, however, does not occur in a vacuum. The characteristics of individual actors, the social structure of the situation (e.g., dyad, team, multi-team), and the wider socio-cultural and socio-political contexts need to be taken into account because these all influence the aspirations, expectations, and ways parties approach and enact the negotiation process. McKersie and Walton (2015) remind us that we should also look beyond what happens at the negotiation table, to the pre-negotiation and decision implementation stages of what they call the “negotiation value chain” (McKersie & Walton, 2015, p. 497). These stages together with the layers of embeddedness within the engagement stage of the process ensure that negotiation is not only a highly complex type of communication but can be fruitfully studied from many different disciplinary and ontological positions. The very rich and diverse negotiation literature encompasses a wide array of conceptualisations,

models and theories of negotiation, specialist terms, and a plethora of practical guides that attest to this diversity of position.

## CONCEPTUALISING NEGOTIATION

The variety of ways negotiation is conceptualised correspond to the different ways human nature is portrayed by the various disciplines that study negotiation. The following sections briefly describe some of the more common conceptualisations.

### The self-interest perspective

As previously noted, the notion of conflict is commonly included in definitions of negotiation (e.g., Keough, 2017). In fact, for some scholars, conflict is still treated as negotiation’s *raison d’être*: without conflict, negotiation would not be necessary. This has much to do with assumptions of the centrality and pervasiveness of instrumental

rationality (Fowers, 2010) in portrayals of human nature. Many scholars as well as negotiators themselves (Ingerson et al., 2015) believe that humans are fundamentally self-interested (Ghoshal, 2005) and are motivated to satisfy this self-interest above any considerations of community and the welfare of others. Such views need to be interrogated for cultural bias, however, as they are not necessarily consistent with how negotiation is approached across the world. There are other less individualistic and instrumental ways of conceptualising negotiation (e.g., Low, 2009) that suggest more is occurring in negotiation than the pursuit of each party's agenda. The following sections highlight some of the perspectives that can extend our view of negotiation.

### **A discourse analysis perspective**

The second way negotiation can be conceptualised is from a discourse analysis perspective. Seen from this descriptive perspective, negotiation is not simply a form of communication that uses language to structure a process for decision-making between parties with different interests. Negotiation is talk-in-action. From this perspective, the language used by the negotiating parties to achieve mutually acceptable decisions provides a range of agencies. By analysing negotiation texts scholars reveal these agencies. For example, such analyses can show the way language encodes ideas and facilitates their exchange and also contributes to problem identification, identity management, and relationship development (Putnam, 2010).

Three types of discourse analysis have typically been applied to the language of negotiation: conversational analysis, pragmatics, and rhetorical analysis (Putnam, 2005). Conversation analysis examines how the micro-processes of talk, like changing tones, turn-taking and pauses, position the negotiator and assert their identity as they make moves, such as offers and counter-offers, during a negotiation. Pragmatics takes a less micro focus to look at how acts like making a promise express commitment, asking a question makes a request, and using inclusive pronouns express solidarity and build relationships, and how these contribute to the overall negotiation process. Rhetorical analysis looks at how broadly based language patterns like phrases, claims, arguments, and metaphors or the plots, characterisation, and settings of narratives convey symbolic meaning and persuade (Putnam, 2005). Together, these sorts of discourse analytic approaches show how language constructs negotiation while linking it to "macro political, legal, and organizational processes" (Putnam, 2005, p. 26) and thus the context.

### **The game theory perspective**

The third perspective from which we can approach negotiation is the game theory perspective (in economics) and the theory of social situations (in psychology). This highly prescriptive approach to negotiation, which developed from Von Neumann and Morgenstern (1944)'s classical work, uses a mathematical approach to model rational strategic choices. It is founded on the assumption that negotiators behave rationally (Peleckis, 2015) and, when faced with choices, will select the choice that provides the optimal utility for them. This approach, which originally focused on zero sum



negotiations, is illustrated by the famous game *Prisoner's Dilemma* where two players (criminals) choose from a matrix of possible choices, each with an associated payoff. If neither confesses to the crime they jointly committed both go free, gaining the same amount of utility from the strategy of not confessing. If one or both players change their strategy (i.e., confess) then the utility for each player changes accordingly.

## **The decision-analytic perspective**

Howard Raiffa's (1982) publication *The Art and Science of Negotiation* heralded a new era in negotiation. Its decision-analytic approach, which is both description and prescription, offered an alternative to game theory (Tsay & Bazerman, 2009). It allowed negotiators to understand how people actually behave in negotiations, rather than how they should behave, if they "were smarter, thought harder, were more consistent, were all-knowing" (Raiffa 1982, p. 21). While offering prescriptions, Raiffa also advocated for research that would allow a negotiator to gain knowledge about the other party rather than assuming this party will behave rationally. His work therefore played a valuable role in offering a bridge between prescriptive and descriptive negotiation scholars (Tsay & Bazerman, 2009) and inspired researchers to begin identifying the systematic ways in which negotiators deviate from rationality. The relative positiveness of risk frames was found to influence negotiators (Neale & Bazerman, 1985; Bazerman, Magliozzi, & Neale 1985), as did the most easily accessible as opposed to the most salient information (Neale, 1984).

## **The principled negotiation perspective**

This perspective can be traced back to Fisher and Ury's (1981) *Getting to Yes*, which sought to distinguish principled negotiation (integrative) from positional (distributive) negotiation. Positional approaches involve hard-nosed tactics that allow one party to assert its priorities ahead of those of the other party (Barge, 2009) in ways that maximise the chance this party will "win" the negotiation. In contrast, principled negotiation involves each party using tactics that acknowledge the other party's needs and make it possible to negotiate win-win solutions. Models of negotiation that embody a principled perspective involve separating the people from the problem so both parties can work on the problem together rather than "playing" the person. This is achieved by turning attention on to interests rather than positions, encouraging multiple solutions to be identified, and then assessing these using objective standards. Doing this privileges the process of negotiation; something captured by a comment Roger Fisher reportedly made often – "the product is the process" (Ury, 2013, p. 138).

## **TYPES OF JOINT DECISION-MAKING COMMUNICATION**

According to Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim (1994), there are four basic strategies for coping with conflict: contending, avoiding, problem solving, and yielding. Negotiation is one of several types of communication that employ a decision-making strategy. Other

forms of decision-making communication, like bargaining, are sometimes conflated with negotiation and the terms used interchangeably. The following section distinguishes between negotiation, bargaining, and these other forms of communication while highlighting the features they have in common.

*Bargaining* is the first sort of communication that falls in to the category of joint decision-making processes with negotiation. In fact, some scholars treat bargaining and negotiation as terms referring to the same process (Keough, 2017) but increasingly, as a more collaborative view of negotiation is promulgated, they have been differentiated to reflect the competitive nature of bargaining (Keough, 2017). Bargaining assumes parties have opposing positions and that each party's tactics will be informed by a desire to satisfy as many of its objectives as possible. Bargaining therefore does not inherently assume a win-win outcome is the objective of the decision-making process. Parties tend to open with a position that they progressively modify according to the concessions they gain from the other party. Ideally, each party wants to retain or achieve those things they hold most valuable while relinquishing things they place little value on.

*Mediation* is the second process in the category of decision-making communication processes. This is a facilitated, non-coercive, and non-binding type of communication, that uses a third party – the mediator – to manage the process of reaching an agreed solution (i.e., called a settlement in industrial situations) or to confirm an impasse has occurred. Typically, mediation is chosen when there is a longstanding or complex dispute, or antagonism has prevented the parties' efforts from achieving a resolution or, alternatively, when the parties judge that mediation will achieve a better resolution (Bercovitch, 1992).

The third type of decision-making communication is *arbitration*. This is a judicial process in which the negotiating parties relinquish their decision-making authority and an external party makes the final decision. Unlike mediation, which also involves a third party, the settlement arrived at through arbitration is binding on all parties.

*Litigation*, the fourth type of decision-making process, also involves a judicial process and requires the parties to forgo their decision-making authority. This highly oppositional process involves one party taking legal action against another and, in so doing, it represents a process that does little to foster a constructive relationship between the parties.

Despite involving different processes, these four types of communication share core characteristics with negotiation. First, the parties that engage in each type of communication appreciate they have a conflict of interest or are dependent on another party for the achievement of their interests. Second, they engage each other in some sort of communication, either directly or through a third party. Third, there is the possibility of revision or compromise. Fourth, the parties are in a position to make offers and counter-offers. Fifth, the parties have the volition necessary to come to a joint decision and, finally, parties have mixed motives in that they are motivated to achieve their priorities but, at the same time, they are motivated to collaborate in doing so (Chertkoff & Esser, 1976). Processurally, negotiation and these related forms of communication also involve some degree of scoping, listening, sensemaking, sense-giving, tactics, and argumentation. The remainder of this section briefly describes these processes.

*Scoping* refers to preliminary information gathering about the problem or decision to be made in a negotiation process and what each party, including your own, may be seeking or the views they may be promoting.

*Listening* is an important part of both scoping and the actual negotiation process. How this listening occurs will depend on whether it is designed to provide information that will inform the tactics used or is motivated by a broader, genuine desire to develop a respectful appreciation of the other parties' points of view and needs. *Respectful listening* is a defining aspect of dialogue (Broome, 2009), a process that can enrich negotiation processes and ensure relationships are strengthened as a result of participating in a negotiation. What sets respectful listening apart from active listening is the respectful and undivided attention that it requires. If we look at how the Chinese character for listening is constructed we see that it embraces symbols for "ears", "eyes", "heart", "king", "solely", and "fully", which together suggest listening involves not only the ears, but also the eyes and full heart, and treating the other party with the respect that should be afforded to a very important person. These features define respectful listening (for further discussion of listening, see Chapter 8).

*Sensemaking and sensegiving* Sensemaking is the ongoing process of making experience meaningful (Weick, 1995; Mills, 2005, 2009). It is an iterative process involving bracketing off experiences from the ongoing stream of experience and retrospectively determining their meaning and then acting upon this meaning. It informs the process of sensegiving (Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, & Humphries, 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1981), the process of sharing sense with the purpose of influencing the meaning of others "towards a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Negotiators engage in both processes as part of the preparation for, and their ongoing involvement in, negotiation.

*Tactics* used in negotiations can vary considerably, but questioning, threats, promises, and bluffs are common. All tactics need to be understood within the individual attributes of those involved as well as within the wider context of the argumentation patterns being used and the social and cultural norms that prevail in the negotiation context, shaping expectations and introducing constraints. Like so many human processes once we look at the elements we identify as comprising them, we realise it is impossible to appreciate any one element without also appreciating how it articulates with all the others. Tactics, for example need to be understood within the argumentation patterns practised by participating individuals and the way these are endorsed (or not) by social norms and mores, and societal ethics. The particular context in which a negotiation is occurring will also modify these influences. Family negotiations, for example, are likely to look and sound and be conducted in a very different manner to workplace negotiations. Similarly, in mediation, mediators have been found to use press tactics when there is high hostility and suggestive tactics when hostility is low (Lim & Carnevale, 1990).

According to Lax and Sebenius (1986), negotiation is "a process of potentially opportunistic interaction" (p. 11). This interaction provides an opportunity to exploit others by using tactics that create misperceptions such as not disclosing all relevant information, declaring incorrect bottom lines, or exaggerating offers. Such tactics can raise reputational concerns for some negotiators, with the possibility of damage to their reputations deterring them from using questionable or unethical tactics. Leary and Kowalski (1990) suggest negotiators will take more care selecting tactics if the impression they project is instrumental in the negotiation process or important to them. Ma and Parks' (2012) experimental study confirmed that negotiators do consider their reputations when judging the acceptability of questionable tactics. This was

particularly the case for powerful female negotiators who found questionable tactics less acceptable than powerless negotiators of either sex.

*Argumentation* has been defined as:

a verbal and social activity of reason aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader, by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify (or refute) the standpoint before a rational judge.

(Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Snoeck Henkemans, 1996, p. 5)

Argumentation is an important part of negotiation processes because negotiators do not just exchange offers; they also share the reasons that support these offers, and these will vary considerably according to the negotiation context. In situations such as arbitration, formal protocols determine the sorts of arguments that can and cannot be made. Amgoud and Vesic (2012, p. 960) propose that such an argumentation-based decision process requires the following steps:

- 1 Constructing arguments *in favour/against* statements (pertaining to beliefs or options)
- 2 Evaluating the strength of each argument
- 3 Determining the different conflicts among arguments
- 4 Evaluating the acceptability of the arguments
- 5 Comparing decisions on the basis of the “accepted” arguments.

## **IMPORTANT INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCES ON NEGOTIATION IN PRACTICE**

Key considerations in any negotiation process are the attributes individual negotiators bring to a negotiation process. The most widely studied are demographic attributes. This section will explore five influential and inter-related attributes: gender, cognitive bias, motivation, emotion, and negotiation styles.

### **Gender**

There is considerable literature on the influence of gender on negotiation (for reviews, see Kennedy & Kray, 2015; Kray & Babcock, 2006; Mazei et al., 2015). Historically, much of the literature treated gender as an individual background variable alongside age, intelligence, spirituality, race, and nationality. In a review of 25 years of literature, Kolb (2009) found that the notion that gender is a stable property that distinguishes men from women persists despite growing recognition of its social and situated construction. She found the literature continues to look to gender to explain negotiation differences between men and women; a state of affairs that some scholars argue downplays the influence of social variables and puts the responsibility for improving negotiation on the individual (e.g., Kolb, 2009; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Kolb (2009), however, notes

that there has been a move to avoid explicitly addressing gender differences between negotiators and look instead at the social and institutional processes in a negotiation that can activate gendered behaviour. She examines the literature that addresses how people come to the negotiation table, how cultural expectations influence what happens at the table, and how the negotiation plays out, as the foundation for her argument that a more systemic approach to negotiation is needed to make negotiation a more level playing field for women. She argues that if attention is paid to the negotiated order, this will open up the possibility of changing “structures, practices, policies, and procedures that have the potential to *undo gender* [Kolb’s italics]” in negotiations.

While there is no doubt gender can profoundly influence both negotiation processes and its outcomes (Eriksson & Sandberg, 2012; Kray & Babcock, 2006), our understanding is certainly changing from the early days when research on negotiation and gender focused on defining differences. We know now that the task or job being studied has a strong influence on the findings of studies (Mazei et al., 2015; Stuhlmacher & Linaberry, 2013). Gender is known to have a more significant effect in negotiation studies in contexts that are linked to one sex or where one sex’s stereotypic skills are considered the norm (Ridgeway, 2011) such as in finance, firefighting, or engineering, or in negotiations like salary determinations. In these sorts of contexts women are more likely to be confronted by double binds than in other less masculine sectors or types of negotiation (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). In situations where gender role congruity is low, gender outcomes were likely to be attenuated (Mazei et al., 2015).

The most common double bind pertains to the choice between being competitive or accommodating (i.e., nice). Women can find it daunting trying to navigate the right balance between the two poles of this double bind. Do they seek to be seen as competent and agential or warm and communally focused? Kolb (2013) suggests the answer lies in privileging the larger purpose of the task – “what is needed in the moment to get work done” (p. 130). This, she proposes, allows a female negotiator to avoid dichotomising stylistic and role choices. This is important because otherwise there is a very real danger of creating a hierarchy of competencies that devalues feminine ways of operating and prevents any serious consideration of why such double binds exist.

Empirical studies, however, continue to show that women are judged differently to men who exhibit the same behaviour. For example, Bowles, Babcock, and Lai (2007) found that participants asked to read interview notes for job candidates perceived the women candidates who sought to negotiate for additional considerations (e.g., higher salary) as more demanding and less nice than the men who made the same requests.

Research is also confirming that cultural differences exist in the way masculine and feminine negotiation behaviours are perceived in different cultures (Shan, Keller, & Imai, 2016). In an interesting cross-cultural comparison, Shan et al. (2016) showed how Chinese negotiators categorised competitive goals and behaviours in business-customer and business-to-business negotiations as feminine whereas counterparts in the United States categorised competitive goals and behaviour as masculine.

## **Cognitive biases in negotiation**

It is interesting to observe the degree to which negotiation is treated as a rational process, structured by logic, argumentation, and strategy, despite evidence to suggest negotia-

tion is influenced by a range of cognitive biases. Five biases that have been identified as affecting individual decision-making have been studied in relation to negotiation. These are the anchoring, the overconfidence, the framing, the status quo, and the self-serving biases. Other biases identified as affecting individual decision-making (e.g., use of judgment heuristics, Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) can also apply in multi-party situations like negotiation, adding further subjectivity to the process (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

The negotiation literature identifies five additional biases: the fixed-pie error, the incompatibility error, the intergroup bias, the relationship bias, and the toughness bias, as well as acknowledging that cognitive biases play out differently across cultures and emotional mood. (For further details, see the review by Caputo, 2013). Some of the most significant of these cognitive biases are a consequence of the lack of information and motivational issues. People are not necessarily motivated to secure sufficient information to make sound judgements.

Negotiators are influenced by both positive and negative framings of risk (Tsay & Bazerman, 2009). What is interesting is that there is mounting evidence that these frames can be actively manipulated to achieve different negotiation outcomes. Kray and Haselhuhn (2007) provide an excellent illustration. Prior to a negotiation, participants were required to read material that either discussed how negotiation behaviour can be improved or how negotiation capability is immutable. Those whose implicit negotiation beliefs were exposed to the incremental theory condition outperformed those who were not; a finding consistent with cognitive appraisal theory, which suggests mental reframing can modify attitudes and behaviour (Lazarus & Alfert, 1964).

## Motivation

The individual's motivations when engaging in negotiation are often either implicitly or explicitly portrayed as self-interested (Ingerson, DeTienne, & Liljenquist, 2015); exhibiting "instrumental rationality" (Fowers, 2010). The prevalence of this portrayal often results in the expectation that self-interest will prevail rather than merely be a possibility in a negotiation. This inference of actuality rather than possibility is referred to as the "fallacy accident", a fallacy that was first described by Aristotle. In making this assumption, negotiators overlook the possibility that individuals can be motivated to behave altruistically in negotiations (Kohn 1990; Batson 1991, 1998) or have a strongly communal orientation that causes them to see negotiation from a relational perspective and motivates them "to understand and advance the welfare of others" (Ingerson et al., 2015, p. 37).

## Emotion

Rational perspectives and experimental research dominated negotiation research until the early 1990s when scholars (e.g., Barry & Oliver, 1996; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993) began to question the lack of attention being paid to emotion. Studies of emotion and negotiation have since flourished to the point where now emotion is accepted as a key intrapersonal predictor of negotiation behaviour as well as an interpersonal consequence of negotiation. In fact, negotiators' emotions are understood to influence all

stages in a dyadic negotiation from the decision to negotiate to the decision to comply with the settlement (Barry & Oliver, 1996).

## Negotiation styles

Individuals (and collectives) have negotiation styles that are supported by and express a set of values and associated beliefs. For instance, business owners can have a belief that a good negotiation is one where they “leave nothing on the table”. In other words, they get the maximum gain for the minimum investment, an outcome that sits well with the commercial principle that one should try to get the most one can from the minimum financial outlay. Such a belief would align with a style that might be termed “hard nosed” – determined, uncompromising, and persistent.

One way in which styles of conflict management such as this have been presented involves two orthogonal motivational dimensions: a self-orientation (assertive) and an other-orientation (cooperative). Using these Thomas and Kilmann (1974) defined five styles: avoidant (low self-concern and low other concern), competing (high self-concern and low other concern), collaborating (high self-concern and high other-concern), accommodating (low self-concern and high other concern), and compromising (moderate self-concern and moderate other-concern). This model allows negotiators to predict the style another party will exhibit according to the degree to which this party values the relationship they have with them and the substance of the negotiation. This model has the advantage that it draws attention to the relational nature of negotiation and the different ways in which relationship can be factored into the interpersonal dynamics that occur when negotiating parties interact.

## IMPORTANT SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON NEGOTIATION IN PRACTICE

As previously noted, negotiations occur within a wider social context. The nature of this context and the various parties’ standing within this context will have an effect on the way they engage with each other. For instance, negotiations between individuals from the same professional background are likely to differ from cross-professional negotiations because these social contexts affect the knowledge exchanged, the structure of the interpersonal engagement that occurs, and the criteria used to evaluate this engagement. This is an important point. While we talk about individual and social influences on negotiation, inevitably they are entangled because of the dialectic relationship between self and social (see Bakhtin, 1981 [1975], 1984 [1963]); the words we say are inevitably “social”, they do not belong to the individual. Bakhtin (1981 [1975]) proposes:

All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions.

(p. 293)

## The relationship between negotiating parties

While a negotiation can be treated as a single event, it also needs to be understood within the context of the relationships between the parties involved. For instance, the parties may be very familiar with each other as a consequence of a history of interaction or from repeatedly engaging in negotiations. The degree to which the parties have previously engaged with each other defines the stage and often the quality of their relationship. Ongoing engagement will affect the levels of mutual knowledge and trust they have developed and shape the way they come together in negotiation.

In interpersonal relationships six stages of development have been identified. These stages are dynamic and are marked by tensions. Research has identified three tensions: *autonomy versus connection*, *novelty versus predictability*, and *openness versus closedness* (Baxter, 1988, 1990, Baxter & Simon, 1993). These tensions are shaped by negotiation and at the same time play out during negotiation processes between negotiating individuals and also between the groups they belong to.

Relationship stage and quality shape the expectations each party has about how the other party will behave. Unions and employers, for example often meet to negotiate conditions of employment, annual wage adjustments, and resolve disputes. Frequent encounters can lead to the institutionalisation of negotiation routines. These routines may be highly formal or relatively casual and flexible, depending upon the degree to which they are prescribed by professional authorities or industrial legislation. Protocols and procedures set by professional associations, industrial agencies, and governments can dictate how relationships are enacted in the process of negotiating. For instance, “good faith” negotiation or bargaining may be defined by a country’s industrial relations legislation. *Bad faith negotiation* refers to negotiations where one party does not harbour a genuine desire to achieve a mutually agreeable outcome but pretends this is the case. Political scientists have developed an “inherent bad faith model” of information processing to refer to intractable bad faith that exists between states with oppositional stances on substantive issues of mutual concern (e.g., Israel and Hamas, or North Korea and the USA) (for further discussion of relational communication, see Chapter 15).

## Culture effects

Cultures are distinguished by norms, which are manifestations of underlying values and beliefs (Schein, 1990). These norms influence negotiators’ behaviour and cognition by shaping personal values and beliefs but also the culturally based institutions and protocols that structure negotiation processes and how outcomes are evaluated. Where once geographic location was used as a proxy for culture (Lin et al., 2007), this is becoming less appropriate as people become more mobile, societies more multicultural, and businesses more global. The increasingly heterogeneous nature of societies worldwide as well of the ready access people have to each other because of digital media and improved transportation mean cultural diversity is likely to be an influence at some level in all negotiations. When one party’s cultural institutions and protocols predominate in a negotiation, tensions can be generated that compromise negotiations. Not surprisingly, culture is often presented as a source of conflict, particularly in the



intercultural communication literature where there is a long tradition of studying conflict in terms of Hofstede's individualism–collectivism duality (Lin et al., 2007, p. 238).

Cultural effects have been identified in terms of dimensions that contribute to individualism–collectivism (i.e., the priority given to individual compared to group objectives) as well as in terms of other dimensions described by Hofstede, such as power distance (i.e., the level of deference shown to authority) and tightness–looseness (i.e., the level of specificity associated with situational norms). According to Hofstede (2001, p. 435), cultural dimensions influence the following aspects of negotiation:

- 1 Decision-making structures
- 2 The distribution of decision-making power
- 3 Reasons for trusting or distrusting the behaviour of the other party
- 4 The emotional needs of those negotiating.

Difficulties in negotiation processes are commonly reported in international business (Morris et al., 1998). These difficulties are frequently attributed to different styles of negotiation and ways of approaching conflict (Adler, 1986; Adler & Graham, 1989; Hofstede, 1991; Maddox, 1993). Both make it hard for the different parties to “read” each other. For example, the meaning of silence varies across cultural groups. Where Americans may take silence in a negotiation process to be a sign of consent, the Asians present may not intend their silence to be interpreted in this way.

Cultures can differ in terms of which styles tend to be favoured. Individualistic cultures are characterised by values that are often linked to competitive styles while the values of more collectivistic cultures are typically linked with more collaborative and possibly accommodating styles, which place priority on developing and maintaining a relationship with other parties. Not surprisingly, the avoiding and competing styles are considered most likely to interfere with intercultural negotiations (Morris et al., 1998). Ting-Toomey (1988) proposes that collectivism is most aligned with indirect communication and avoidance of conflict while individualism is aligned with direct communication and a competing approach to resolving conflict. The empirical evidence supporting these proposals is not strong, however. Leung (1988), for example, found there was no relationship between scores for individualism and collectivism and behaviours when dealing with conflict. Many commentators would not be surprised by this finding as there is widespread agreement that single dimension analyses provide an inadequate base from which to predict intercultural behaviour. Many other dimensions contribute to the way cultural groups behave, such as the way the group sees strangers, how intimate group members consider they need to feel before engaging with another group, the level of unpredictability members can tolerate, whether the group has established protocols for dealing with outsiders (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992), and the importance placed on face management (see the conflict face-negotiation theory, Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2004).

While the literature on culture and negotiation is burgeoning, Bülow and Kumar (2011) point out that within this literature there are issues regarding the relevance of national culture, conflicting findings, imprecise use of terminology, and essentialism, suggesting it is wise to approach it with caution. The majority of studies that examine negotiation, communication, and culture are cross-cultural comparisons (e.g., Shan et al., 2016) rather than studies of interactional dynamics at the level of the individual (Bülow &

Kumar, 2011). The growing number of studies that do grapple with interpersonal dynamics in intercultural negotiations are beginning to provide a more nuanced and contextualised view of how cultural effects are amplified or reduced in negotiations. These studies are moving the field away from the dominant subjectivist paradigm, which has emphasised values and trans-situational goals (Gelfand, Lun, Lyons, & Shteynberg, 2011), to a more descriptive norm approach that addresses individually held perceptions of culture (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Shteynberg, Gelfand, & Kim, 2009).

This approach assumes individuals assess the values, beliefs, and behaviours that operate in their socio-cultural context and act in negotiations in accordance with their perceptions even though they are not necessarily those they hold personally (Gelfand et al., 2011). In doing so, they reinforce the descriptive norms or their perceptions of these. This perspective has significant implications for intercultural negotiation research. It means that the data required in order to understand the intercultural negotiator's behaviour needs to address their perceptions of descriptive norms and not personal behavioural preferences (Gelfand et al., 2011) or actual behaviour. This is being borne out by findings from studies such as Hashimoto and Yamagishi (2009) and Zou et al. (2009) that have found dissociation between personally held cultural values and outsiders' perceptions of their cultural values. What is clear is that cultural stereotypes do not provide a sound foundation for planning and conducting negotiations in culturally diverse contexts. An understanding of descriptive norms is much more useful because of its focus at the level of the individual.

This line of research is suggesting the competent intercultural negotiator will have a finely nuanced understanding of the descriptive norms of their own culture as well as those for the cultures represented at the negotiating table. This understanding will allow them to appreciate the dynamics of engagement (Gelfand et al., 2011) as well as moderate their own behaviour in ways that increase the chances they can achieve their personal goals and foster constructive intercultural relationships (Li & Hong, 2001). It is important to appreciate, however, that the ingroup–outgroup mix in a negotiation is important. This is highlighted in studies of bicultural interactants who have been found to switch between descriptive norms according to which of their two cultural groups they are interacting with (Chao, Zhang, & Chui, 2010; Zou et al., 2009). Cultural artifacts like national dress and flags and whether a person is representing their cultural group can also activate descriptive cultural norms (Gelfand et al., 2011). Overall, it seems intercultural negotiators must carefully scope negotiations in terms of the cultural composition, descriptive norms, and contextual factors that act as cultural amplifiers as these will strongly influence the negotiator's behaviour at the negotiation table.

## **A SELECTION OF THEORIES AND MODELS OF NEGOTIATION**

There is a wide variety of theories and models of negotiation, each reflecting the priorities of their discipline and respective originators and how agency, the nature of relationships between negotiating parties, and outcomes are conceptualised. At one level they are useful tools, at another each provides just a partial view of the experience of negotiation because inevitably every negotiation is unique and contingent on the “who, what, why, how and when” of a particular situation. This section addresses

a selection of theories and models of negotiation to allow the reader to appreciate the ways negotiation can be portrayed. It is important to appreciate, however, that not one model will stack up as a comprehensive framework for explaining reality in practice. Nothing can replace a holistic approach to negotiation that captures the idiosyncrasies of a particular situation.

*Structural theories* of negotiation focus on power and how empowering elements are distributed across negotiating parties. These theories are indexed to the assumption that the party with the greatest power gets to dictate the outcome (i.e., win the negotiation), something that does not always play out in practice, however.

In contrast to structural models, *strategic theories* attend to the moves each party takes, treating negotiation as a tactical process requiring negotiating parties to make a series of moves. These moves are likened to a game plan, designed to manoeuvre the party into a position where the other parties will cooperate rather than defect and its objectives will be realised. This sort of analysis is founded on the assumption that each negotiating party has the power of veto. Walton and McKersie's (1965) famous Model of Social Negotiations can be classified as essentially a strategic model. This model treats negotiation as a special case of "social negotiation" by focusing on the relationships between "complex social units" that make up interdependent "systems of activity". The authors describe four *separate* systems: those concerned with distributive bargaining, integrative bargaining, attitudinal structuring, and intra-organisational bargaining.

The first three systems address relationships between negotiating groups while the fourth focuses on the relationships within each group. As noted earlier in this chapter, the distributive system of negotiation frames the relationship between negotiating parties as competitive. Together they are engaged in a zero game process where one party can achieve its objective at the expense of the other. In contrast, the integrative system frames the relationship between negotiating parties as collaborative. Attitudinal structuring focuses on the "bonds" between negotiating parties, for example, the trust relations between labour and management (Katz, 2015). Finally, the intra-organisational system of negotiating refers to the agreement that exists within an organisation, recognising that internal consensual relationships are necessary to allow the organisation to be united in the face of negotiations with external parties.

Walton and McKersie's (1965) model has exerted a huge influence on negotiation theory but it is not without its critics (e.g., Anthony, 1977; Morley, 1992). Anthony (1977) argues that all bargaining where a representative for each party is used is distributive bargaining, but concedes that these negotiators may choose to take either a competitive or a more cooperative approach. He also proposes that "attitudinal structuring" is not a separate system of activities, but a set of tactics that can be employed when a collaborative approach is taken. Finally, he also considers that intra-organisational bargaining is not a separate bargaining system in the same way as the other three systems. Certainly, when the role of trust in negotiations is considered (See Katz, 2015), it is possible to appreciate how Walton and McKersie's (1965) four systems of activity interact with each other. When trust is low between parties such as labour and management, for example, distributive processes are more likely to prevail. This is because integrative processes are hard to undertake in a low-trust environment (Katz, 2015). Integrative processes are also difficult when the trust within one or other negotiating party is low.

*Process theories* assume the negotiating parties start from different points and through a process of concessions gradually converge to a point of agreement (for a review, see Vetschera, 2013). Hagglng involves this sort of process. The two main types of communication process models, stage and episodic have been described (Holmes, 1992; Koeszegi & Vetschera, 2010; Weingart & Olekalns, 2004). Stage models propose a sequence of distinct stages, each with a particular focus, and set of communication acts. Episodic process models divide negotiation processes into separate episodes, each characterised by one type of activity. Any given negotiation might be distinguished by a quite distinctive set of episodes to another.

*Situational models* are the negotiation models that are possibly the most useful as they have been developed for particular negotiation contexts like hostage or intercultural negotiations. This section looks at *hostage negotiation models* as an example of situations models of negotiation. The fateful incident, known as the “Munich Massacre”, which occurred at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich saw 22 people die following the seizure of 11 Israeli hostages by the Palestinian terrorist group “Black September”. The lack of negotiation and tragic outcome in this case promoted the development of negotiation techniques that could be employed to reduce the chance of loss of life in these situations (Soskis & Van Zandt, 1986). “Negotiate first” has become a much more common strategy as a result. In the USA, for example, specialised hostage negotiation teams were developed, each with a designated negotiator, tactical assault team, command structure, and support personnel (Grub, 2010).

Hostage negotiation models include Hammer and Rogan’s (1997) SAFE model, Taylor’s (2002) Cylindrical Model of Crisis negotiation, and Vecchi’s Behavioural Influence Staircase Model (BISM) (Vecchi, 2009; Vecchi, Van Hasselt, & Romano, 2005). These models focus on negotiators’ techniques and strategies rather than the traits and skills that allow them to enact these techniques and strategies effectively (Grub, 2010).

## **A WAY TO ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF NEGOTIATION**

While the interdependence of negotiators is always acknowledged in the way negotiation is described, negotiation scholars have largely ignored the history of the relationship between negotiating parties (Curhan, Elfenbein, & Eisenkraft, 2010; Herbst & Schwarz, 2011; Patton & Balakrishnan, 2010; Thomas et al., 2013). The focus has been on discrete, isolated encounters that treat negotiating parties as strangers rather than parties to an existing relationship. This is surprising given that many studies of negotiation have been located in fields like international relations and of industrial relations where ongoing relationship management is a central concern. The result is a negotiation literature where the relational perspective is under developed; the impact of history on negotiation strategy expectations is not well researched (Thomas, Manrodt, & Eastman, 2015) and outcomes are not typically assessed in terms of their relational effects even though there is a recognised need to pay more attention to these (Gelfand et al., 2006). Collaborative tactics that serve to nurture relations are not as commonly discussed as ones that serve the party’s self-interest. Similarly, while pre-negotiation information gathering (i.e., scoping) and listening at the negotiation table

are acknowledged parts of the negotiation process, the value of dialogue, the special form of communication that is defined by its commitment to creating and maintaining constructive relations, is seldom addressed in the negotiation literature.

A focus on dialogue and the creation of constructive dialogic spaces would have many benefits. Not only would it contribute to the movement away from a distributive perspective, it would provide a constructive measure of the quality of the negotiation process and could well reduce the need for mediation, arbitration, and litigation when making decisions and resolving conflict between parties.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has looked at negotiation through a necessarily selective set of lenses. In doing so, it has reaffirmed that negotiation needs to be understood as a highly contingent process that is simultaneously influenced by and a key influence of individual, social, and societal circumstances. It has observed that the commonly espoused definitions of negotiation seem fixated on negotiation's role as a process for resolving conflict. Certainly, it is used to resolve conflict but this should not mean it must be defined so unequivocally in terms of conflict and its resolution. Definitions need to also take cognisance of the fact that negotiators may not be "in conflict" but rather have come together to craft a viable solution to a shared problem that they cannot resolve alone. The emphasis on conflict can obscure the possibility that both parties are committed to achieving the best solution to a problem that cannot be resolved without compromising the interests of the other. Furthermore, consideration needs to be given to the possibility or even desirability that the collaborative action occurring in the process of dealing with such dilemmas could lead to a solution neither anticipated. In such circumstances, negotiation has the potential to be a creative and highly generative process.

In various ways, this chapter has sought to remind the reader that negotiation, like all communication, is inevitably relational. It argues that only when this fact is given precedence in theory and practice will our understanding of negotiation move beyond limiting conceptions, theories, and models to a holistic appreciation of this highly contingent and important decision-making process. It proposes that the chance to do this would be enhanced if dialogue was given centre stage in the way engagement between negotiators is conceptualised. This is because dialogue is simultaneously a unique process and an outcome that is underpinned by a commitment to create and sustain constructive relationships rather than short-term zero gain outcomes secured at the expense of relationships. It does this through a variety of strategies but, most significantly, by engaging in respectful listening – a powerful type of communication in its own right.

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# Mentoring and coaching

*Bob Garvey*

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HIS CHAPTER EXPLORES THE nature and form of both mentoring and coaching as communication processes. It unpicks the arguments found in the literature and speculates about the future direction of mentoring and coaching.

According to many writers (Clutterbuck, 1992; Eby et al., 2007; Garvey, 1994; Lean, 1983; Starr, 2014), mentoring is as 'old as the hills'. The original 'Mentor' was a character in Homer's *The Odyssey*. However, many more modern writers (Anderson and Lucasse Shannon, 1988/1995; Brounstein, 2000; Starr, 2014; Tickle, 1993) uncritically draw on the poem, perhaps to give historical credibility to their arguments about mentoring. They rarely consider the sometimes negative or the confusing elements in the poem and, arguably at least, draw on romanticised notions of the past. This neglect may include, for example, the violence within the original story (Garvey and Megginson, 2004), the failure of the original mentor (Colley, 2002), the cross-gender issues (Harquail and Blake, 1993) or the male-dominated stereotypes within the story (Colley, 2002).

In other cultures, mentoring's origins are also linked to an ancient past. In India for example, mentoring is linked to the ancient tradition of guru-shishya parampara (Venkatesan, 2017).

It seems more likely that mentoring as we know in the West at least today can be tracked to eighteenth century France. Here, Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambrai and later tutor to Louis XIV's heir presented mentoring as an educational process (Clarke, 1984) based on experimental learning and one to one dialogue. During the eighteenth century, Fénelon

clearly influenced others, for example, Caraccioli (1760) in *The True Mentor*, Rousseau (1762) in his book *Emile*, Honoria (1793/6) in three volumes entitled *The Female Mentor*. Additionally, Lord Byron used the term ‘mentor’ in three poems where he described mentor as ‘stern’ and ‘flexible’, and Lord Chesterfield in his letters to his son referred to mentor as ‘friendly’, suggesting that a mentor may have different personas.

Similar to mentoring, some (McDermott and Jago, 2005; Zeus and Skiffington, 2000) claim that coaching is derived from prehistory, suggesting that early peoples ‘must have’ helped each other to improve in hunting and stone throwing skills! These associations place coaching as a training activity aimed at improving performance.

Other coaching writers (Brock, 2012; Hughes, 2003; de Haan, 2008; Brunner, 1998) link coaching to Ancient Greece arguing that coaching is a Socratic Method, while others (Brock, 2012; Starr, 2002) suggest that coaching is derived from sport. Brock (2012) argues that coaching has many antecedents which lead back to the nineteenth century. These include: Philosophy; Biology (Neuroscience); Anthropology; Linguistics; Psychology; Sociology; Education and Economics. Wildflower (2013) argues that the notion behind coaching started with the nineteenth century author and political reformer, Samuel Smiles. However, the word ‘coaching’ was first employed in the English language in print and in relation to a ‘helping’ activity in 1849 in Thackery’s novel, *Pendennis*. Thackery used the term to describe a process of helping students at Oxford University to improve their grades in examinations – another performative association.

Similar to the ‘old as the hills’ claims of mentoring writers, coaching writers also make ancient links (de Haan, 2008). Both groups probably do this to establish some sort of historical lineage and therefore, credibility. The word ‘mentoring’ was mainly found in educational treatise of the eighteenth century, whereas the word ‘coaching’ was used in the popular press throughout the nineteenth century.

Since these beginnings, both coaching and mentoring are growing phenomena across many different sectors of society, cultures and countries (see for example, Gray et al., 2016). The purpose to which they are put varies considerably but the skills and processes they employ are similar.

Within business related coaching, there is a strong drive towards professionalisation and in the final section of this chapter, this is explored. Mentoring, on the other hand, remains a largely voluntary activity. Both are found in various forms in:

- Manufacturing, retail and petro-chemical industries
- The health sector
- Airline, tourism and leisure industries
- Financial services
- Educational institutions
- Public sector and government sectors
- Charities, not for profit and social sectors
- The armed and emergency services
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social enterprises.

Modern mentoring is a social phenomenon that can be tracked to the late 1980s. It was linked to a rethinking of organisational and business strategy where ideas such as the ‘knowledge-creating company’ (Nonaka, 1991) were influencing business organisations and in wider society, what was considered as a ‘learning society’ where there

was a need to 'celebrate the qualities of being open to new ideas, listening to as well as expressing perspectives, reflecting on and enquiring into solutions to new dilemmas, co-operating in the practice of change and critically reviewing it' (Ranson, 1992, p. 75).

Coaching started to emerge in commercial life around 2000, a 'new' activity for the new millennium perhaps? Coaching seemed to develop in two main ways. The first was an extension of the 'knowledge-creating company' idea and the second, as a process to enhance business performance. Coaching activity came under heavy scrutiny from psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors by about 2005 and, arguable at least, the psychological industry's influences persist today.

The growth of mentoring and coaching activities over the last 10 years or so has been considerable. In 2012, for example, the UK Government provided £1.9M for the 'Get Mentoring Project' in order to develop 15,000 business mentors to support entrepreneurs in small business. The Penna Report (2014) on 'Talent Management' states that 70% of Fortune 500 companies have mentoring arrangements and during 2015, Youth Business International (YBI) supported 19,463 entrepreneurs with 11,213 active volunteer mentors in 42 countries. (<http://www.youthbusiness.org/>).

According to The Bresser Global Survey of Coaching (2008/9) and the Bresser European Survey of Coaching, there was an estimated 43,000–45,000 business coaches operating worldwide. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) 'Resourcing and Talent Planning' report (2015) showed a steady increase from 2008 in both coaching and mentoring activity among their surveyed organisations and the CIPD's 'Learning and Development' survey (2015) states that 75% of organisations surveyed employ coaching and mentoring to support learning and development with 13% more planning to introduce coaching or mentoring.

So, both coaching and mentoring activities appear to be on the increase around the world.

### **DEFINITIONAL ISSUES**

As shown by Garvey (2011), one way to think about coaching and mentoring is through a lens of discourses. There are a number of these within the coaching and mentoring literature. Western (2012) argues that there are four main discourses in coaching and mentoring. These are the:

- Soul guide discourse
- Psy expert discourse
- Managerial discourse
- Network coaching discourse.

### **The soul guide**

This is found in a range of social and historical settings and it positions the coach or mentor with the questions of 'what makes for a 'good life for this individual and how to journey towards it and how to face loss and ultimately how to face death' (Western 2012, p. 132).

## **The Psy expert discourse**

Garvey (2011) suggests that this discourse is found in both mentoring and coaching but treated differently in each. In coaching the Psy expert is a dominant discourse, with psychologists calling themselves 'coaching psychologists' they have deeply influenced practice and are the main group calling for professionalisation. Western (2012) argues that the Psy expert discourse is a product of modernity where the scientific or objectivist mindset dominates – 'Coaching like therapy is clearly a psychological process' (Zeus and Skiffington, 2002, p. 10). The Psy expert discourse has a strong focus on performance (in its many guises) and emphasises changes in behaviour and the improvement of skills.

Within mentoring, Garvey (2011) argues that psychology is employed to build theory and not to inform practice or professionalisation.

## **Managerial discourse**

Garvey and Williamson (2002) argue that a dominating discourse in organisations is managerialist and therefore, with much coaching and mentoring taking place within organisational settings, the managerial discourse is dominant. It is a reductionist discourse which values simplicity, practicality and objectivity. However, Western (2012) contends that whilst managerialism has brought gains, it has also created difficulties, the main one being the obsessive desire to measure. Western (2012, p. 187) notes that the soul guide and the Psy expert discourses work with the 'inner self and outer self' whilst the managerial discourse is about the 'person-in-role' and is concerned with performance within that role.

## **Network coaching discourse**

Scandura et al. (1996); Garvey and Alred (2001); Higgins and Kram (2001); Kram and Chandler (2005); and Bozionelos and Wang (2006) have all discussed mentoring as a potential developmental network. Western (2012) argues that this is the new and emerging form of coaching. The network refers to the complex web of relationships and connections an individual may have within our new and emerging interconnected and interdependent world. This positions an individual in an organisation within a 'system' and this notion is spawning new business forms. These forms mostly employ technology and the business focus strives to make a social contribution that is sustainable and ethical.

Western (2012) suggests that these discourses are found in many different coaching and mentoring contexts, for example, coaching and mentoring sessions, the academic and practitioner literature, and they can be observed in websites, blogs, training courses and conferences.

It also seems that there are examples of distinct 'camps' within coaching and mentoring practice (see Gibb and Hill, 2006). This makes finding a common definition difficult simply because there are so many. It is interesting to note that Clutterbuck, one of the most prolific and respected writers on coaching and mentoring in the last

20 years, has changed his views on the meaning of coaching and mentoring. Together with Megginson, a writer and researcher of similar standing, they acknowledged that 'We have recently produced a model that demonstrates how practitioners in both fields have tried to claim the facilitative end of the developmental spectrum for themselves, while denigrating the other by placing it at the directive end. We argue that this strategy is futile [...] we have been as guilty as many other writers of engaging in these shenanigans' (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2005, p. 14).

It is useful to examine a series of definitions from a discourse point of view.

Mentoring is a one-to-one, non-judgemental relationship in which an individual voluntarily gives time to support and encourage another. This is typically developed at a time of transition in the mentee's life, and lasts for a significant and sustained period of time.

(Active Community Unit, Home Office, UK)

This definition has the community in mind and emphasises 'non-judgemental', 'voluntary', 'support' and 'encourage' as behaviours and qualities within the relationship. It raises the issue of transition, commonly associated with mentoring, and suggests that mentoring is developmental over time. This definition positions mentoring within a context and therefore it is a guiding and almost instructional statement.

In taking another definition from the social sector of mentoring, we find a different emphasis.

...support, assistance, advocacy or guidance given by one person to another in order to achieve an objective or several objectives over a period of time.

(SOVA)

SOVA is a UK-based voluntary organisation that works within communities to help strengthen communities and reduce crime. This definition emphasises certain activities and functions but also adds the concept of objectives, arguably drawn from the managerial discourse.

Zey (1984, p. 7), in the USA, defines a mentor as:

a person who oversees the career and development of another person usually a junior, through teaching, counselling, providing psychological support, protecting, and at times promoting and sponsoring. The mentor may perform any or all of the above functions during the mentor relationship.

This definition is different to the previous two as it places the mentor in a power position as they 'oversee', someone 'junior' and the mentor clearly performs some specific functions to achieve career progression. This view of mentoring relates to Clutterbuck's (2007) idea that there are two main models of mentoring – the USA's 'career sponsorship' model and the European 'developmental' model. It is also interesting to note that Zey considers a key function of mentoring is to 'provide psychological support'. Kram (1983, p. 616) states that mentoring performs a 'psychosocial function' as the mentee is socialised into a specific social context and develops self-insight and psychological wellbeing.



In Table 14.1 Clutterbuck and Megginson (1999, p. 140) show a variety of culturally led discourses in mentoring. Clearly, different purposes, underpinned by different definitions, create different narratives, which in turn create different dominant discourses, all of which, influence practice.

In coaching, there is also an array of definitions. For example: 'The art of facilitating the unleashing of people's potential to reach meaningful, important objectives' (Rosinski, 2004, p. 4). Here, Rosinski argues that 'objectives' are a main focus and further suggests that 'Coaching is oriented toward concrete impact and results' (p. 4). This discourse is clearly aimed to appeal to the business world. The use of the words 'meaningful, important' could be either linked to the coachee or equally to what is meaningful to the coach or even the host organisation. The use of 'meaningful' linked to the coachee is a very common discourse in coaching texts as the coaching process is associated with the coachee's agenda. The use of 'unleashing' suggests that the person is in some kind of captivity and that the coach is offering to 'enable(s) coachees'. Enabling gives power to the coach. Rosinski implies this when he states, 'Great coaches often have a vision of what that potential might be' (p. 4).

In this second example, the emphasis is on a conversation between two people.

... coaching is a conversation or a series of conversations, one person has with another. The person who is the coach intends to produce a conversation that will benefit the other person (the coachee) in a way that relates to the coachee's learning and progress. Coaching conversation might happen in many different ways in many different environments.

(Starr, 2008, p. 4)

The use of the expression 'coach intends' suggests that the conversation is led by the coach and therefore, as before, the power is with the coach. However, like the last, the coachee's agenda is positioned as central to the conversation. In this definition, the context of the conversation is variable. The emphasis on the coach and the idea that coaching is for the coachee's own good, implies a kind of patronage on behalf of the coach. There is a curious paradox here, which is common in coaching definitions, with coaching being positioned as about the coachee's agenda but the coach has the power to change things despite being agenda-less.

In this third definition, we find a different emphasis.

Coaching is a pragmatic approach to helping people manage their acquisition or improvement of skills.

(Clutterbuck, 1998, p. 19)

The emphasis here is on the 'pragmatic' acquisition of skills which places coaching within the management discourse of 'utility' and 'performative' knowledge (Lyotard, 1984).

All the definitions presented above emphasise four elements as follows:

- 1 The function of the mentor or coach
- 2 The mentee/coachee's expectations
- 3 The purpose for mentoring and coaching
- 4 The context of the mentoring and coaching.

**Table 14.1** Characteristic approaches to executive mentoring by country

<i>Country</i>	<i>Goals</i>	<i>Style of relationship</i>	<i>Features in scheme</i>
USA	Sponsorship Promoting career	Paternalistic	Senior director taking up cause of younger high flyer
France	Insight Analysis of life purpose	Commitment to sharing values	Scheme created outside companies
Netherlands	Mutual support Learning Networking	Informal; Egalitarian Peer mentoring Universal	Recognising benefits for mentor and mentee Personal and professional
Sweden	Perpetuate culture	Share understanding Exchange knowledge	Strong sponsorship from HR and CEO
Britain	Insight Learning Support	Individualistic; Charismatic mentor shares insights and challenges mentee	Ad hoc Diversity of opportunities

## **The function**

The function of the coach or mentor is to facilitate a conversation by using skills such as counselling, listening and questioning. The coach or the mentor possesses personal qualities which contribute to the relationship so that the experience of coaching or mentoring is helpful, supportive and guiding.

## **Expectations**

The expectations of the mentee or coachee are often implied but often it is either about performance improvement or learning and development. It is sometimes difficult to know who the client is as it could be the coachee or mentee, the commissioner of the services or a manager. A central assumption is that the intervention will be helpful and will achieve something. The concept of 'power' is underplayed and this is perhaps a false assumption in that all the definitions presented above have elements of power within them and this power is, by implication, either with the commissioning organisation or the coach or mentor.

## **Purpose**

Some definitions raise the issue of objectives and often place these with the coachee or mentee. This is despite the sponsors having a clear purpose for investing in the coaching or mentoring activity. These purposes can be learning and development, but they can also be linked to performance improvement, change, career progression, gaining employment and in some cases, compliance (but this is never stated) with social norming.

## **Contexts**

Many definitions are not context specific and, like the purpose and expectations elements, offer contextual information by implication. However, different contexts, as discussed earlier, produce different discourses and as a result, if a coaching or mentoring arrangement is to be successful, the definition needs to relate to the discourse of the context for which it is intended.

## **So what?**

The challenges of the competitive context in the modern world, dominated by the capitalist doctrine, give rise to discourses that offer a variety of versions of the 'real world'. These discourses influence and affect all of us socially and economically. How we respond to these 'worlds' in moments will depend on the dominant narrative and the way this is interpreted through the dominant discourse – the ways in which people talk to each other. If, for example, the narrative is dominated by the pragmatic manager or is dominated by the 'technical' perspective, decisions will be made against the pragmatic

or technical backdrop and any alternative perspective may not be considered. This is not to denigrate the pragmatic perspective; this can often be very helpful but it may not offer the best opportunity for learning because the lens through which ideas are examined is unitary rather than pluralist. This will result in alternative options.

## COACHING AND MENTORING DYADS

Both mentoring and coaching are dyadic partnerships. Simmel's (1950) seminal theoretical sociological work on the nature of the dyad is helpful in understanding mentoring and coaching relationships. Whilst not writing directly about coaching or mentoring, Georg Simmel, writing in the late nineteenth century, offered insight into the special nature of paired relationships. In recent times, the nature and form of the relationship between coach and coachee, mentor and mentee has become of interest to scholars. De Haan (2008) for example, suggests that the quality of the relationship in coaching is vital to its successful outcomes, Levinson et al. (1978) stress the importance and value of good relationships within mentoring and McAuley (2003) highlights the challenges of power within mentoring relationships.

Exploring these relationship 'elements', Simmel (1950) suggests that 'two' is the maximum number of people needed for the security of a 'secret'. The term 'secret' may have been used by the translator of Simmel's work and could perhaps be replaced by the word 'confidentiality'. Many writers (MacLennan, 1995; Clutterbuck and Megginson, 1999; Grodzki and Allen, 2005; Megginson et al., 2006) on coaching and mentoring argue that confidentiality is fundamental to the success of both coaching and mentoring relationships. According to Simmel, the element of 'secrecy' creates a mutual dependency within the relationship as members of the dyad, potentially at least, bond together in their confidential relationship. Simmel (1950) adds, that if another person is added to the dyad to make three people, the social structure fundamentally alters, changing the nature of the relationship as the 'secret' becomes shared with three people. Additionally, if one person drops out of the relationship of three, the group ends but the dyad can survive in the remaining two people.

More recent writings on both mentoring and coaching regard 'dependency' as a problem and something to be avoided (Sosik and Godshalk, 2005; Merrick and Stokes, 2008) but Carden (1990) reframes 'dependency' as 'mutually beneficial' and therefore it is not necessarily a bad thing. Simmel's 'secret' in the dyad could also be viewed in coaching and mentoring dyads as 'trust' (see for example, Du Toit, 2014; McCarthy, 2014) and 'commitment' (see for example, McCarthy, 2014; Connor and Pokora, 2012). These two elements are written about extensively in coaching and mentoring texts as important elements in the function of the coaching and mentoring dyad. How far these elements are 'dependency' and how far they are 'mutually beneficial' is hard to determine. Perhaps dependency has the potential to be both positive and negative but within the contexts of coaching and mentoring, this may be a temporary state due to the main purpose of coaching and mentoring being the development of independence and autonomy.

According to Simmel, the sense of the inevitable end in a dyad has the potential to lead to either greater dependency or a lack of trust due to the inherent risk of the relationship closing down. However, the risk of the end can also have the effect of bringing the pair closer together in a sense of uniqueness. In the coaching and mentoring

literature, endings are rarely discussed. There are a few exceptions. McCarthy (2014, p. 17) for example, suggests that a mentoring relationship may end because it has fulfilled its purpose and that commercial coaching tends to have a 'finite life span' due to the economics found with coaching. Clutterbuck and Megginson (2004) devote a whole chapter to endings in mentoring relationships. They suggest, in their research-based chapter, that 'winding up', a clear ending, is preferable to a 'winding down', a slow declining ending and that the communication process for ending should start from the beginning and be constantly reviewed through the course of the relationship.

Simmel (1950) suggests that a dyadic relationship may also come to an end as a result of the conversation becoming trivialised. He suggests that if the initial expectations are of the relationship failing to materialise, the content of the conversation can become of little consequence. He also suggests that triviality can also enter the relationship if there is too much contact between the pair. In short, the pair or one of the pair may run out of things to say and get bored! Therefore, the 'content' of conversation within a dyad can be measured by its rarity or uniqueness so that continued renewal and stimulation within the dyad is important for its sustainability (Simmel, 1950). Neilson and Eisenbach (2003) found in their mentoring research that renewal through regular feedback about the relationship within the relationship was a significant contributor to successful outcomes.

According to Simmel (1950), there is potential for great intimacy within dyads where the dyadic form provides the ingredients for a deep friendship, with an inbuilt tendency for intimacy and mutual dependence. He makes it clear that this is not necessarily due to the 'content' of the conversations but to its unique shared quality. Intimacy exists 'if the "internal" side of the relation is felt to be essential; if its whole affective structure is based on what each of the two participants give or show only to the one other person and to nobody else' (Simmel, 1950, p. 126).

Many modern mentoring writers raise the issue of intimacy (Levinson et al., 1978; Torrance, 1984; Bennetts, 1995, 1996; Hurley and Fagenson-Eland, 1996; Scandura et al., 1996; Hale, 2000; Samier 2000; Friday et al., 2004). Here, intimacy is discussed as both an important and positive element of a mentoring relationship and also as a potential source of difficulties and abuse. Within the coaching literature, any discussion of 'intimacy' is virtually absent.

It appears therefore, that there is some resonance between Simmel's writings of the early twentieth century and the modern discourses of both mentoring and coaching. There are also differences. For example, Simmel's qualitative descriptions of friendship, intimacy and mutuality are found in modern writings on mentoring but they are not commonly approached within the coaching literature. This may be to do with the different social contexts in which mentoring and coaching sometimes take place. For example, mentoring is mainly voluntary and coaching, in industrialised countries at least, is mostly a paid activity and, arguably, payment may alter the nature of the dyad.

## PROCESSES AND MODELS IN MENTORING

Mentoring conversations can often be facilitated by the mentor who employs a process model. One such model is the 'three stage process'. This was derived from Egan's (1994) skilled helper framework and applied to mentoring by Alred and Garvey (2010). Essentially it is a simple conversational framework which contains much complexity in its

operation. The process is: Exploration; New Understanding; Action. The theory of the framework is that through appropriate exploration, new understanding is gained and then actions can be considered in relation to the understanding.

The first-stage has various strategies, for example, the mentor needs to take the lead to open the discussion, he or she needs to build rapport, pay attention to the relationship and develop it. The mentor intends to help the mentee to clarify their aims, objectives and discuss ground-rules of the relationship in order to establish and voice mutual expectations. In this 'exploration' stage, the mentor needs to provide support and encouragement and may employ open questions, use summary, active listening and develop an agenda. The boundary between 'Exploration' and 'New Understanding' is often marked with the use of a summary. Here the mentor may invite the mentee to summarise, or summarise for the mentee to check understanding. This stage may be repeated several times within a conversation or over the duration of the relationship.

The typical questions and prompts asked by the mentor in the first stage might be:

What would you like to talk about today?

Tell me about your experience of...

Let's explore this issue some more.

You've said very little about X, but that seems to be central to the issue we are discussing.

What I understand you to be saying is...(paraphrase/summarise). Does that seem right?

Shall we start by recapping on our last meeting?

(Alred & Garvey, 2010, p. 45)

In the second stage, the mentor will have other strategies. These will include offering support as well as challenge aimed at developing ideas and testing the new understanding. It may be that the mentor will offer feedback, challenge and make use of open as well as closed questions to establish clarity and mutual understanding. It is during this stage that a mentor may share their experience through storytelling and, if appropriate, offer advice or suggestions to help the mentee make a decision. The mentor may also provide appropriate information and may also help the mentee to consider any further development needs and how to access any additional support.

The typical questions and prompts asked by the mentor in the second stage might be:

The way you're talking now reminds me of the time I ...

Now that doing X looks like a viable option, there is some useful information I could share with you.

You've shown real commitment in the situation, but there are also things you've done that you regret. Is that a fair comment?

What are your options here and what, for instance, might be the consequences of doing X?

What is there to learn here, what's the most important thing to work on, now that you're seeing the situation differently?

Well done, that feels like a breakthrough.

(Alred and Garvey, 2010 p. 51)

In the third stage, the mentor employs further strategies to help the mentee move forward. This may include a close examination of any options for action for the mentee and consideration of the consequences of such action. This can involve visualisation techniques, the use of metaphors and scenario planning. The mentor will also attend to the relationship and assist the mentee to make an action plan. The methods a mentor may make use of could be:

- Encouraging new ideas and exploring actions creatively
- Helping in decisions and problem solving
- Establishing ways that the mentee can monitor and review progress for themselves

The typical questions and prompts asked by the mentor in the third stage might be:

- Let's look at the pros and cons of this option.
- How can I help you do this? Perhaps a demonstration of X would help.
- Now that you've decided to do Y, is there anything you need to do first?
- Let's spend some time talking about the mentoring itself, as we agreed to review after three months.
- It is important you have a clear idea of how you will assess your own progress and success. Do you have any thoughts about that?

(Alred and Garvey, 2010 p. 55)

The whole process rarely moves in a straight line from stage one to stage three. More often the conversation moves about between all the stages. For some inexperienced mentors, there can be a temptation to get to the action as quickly as possible but often the quality and the commitment to the action is dependent on the quality of stages one and two.

Summarising regularly can help to establish the boundaries between each stage and move the conversation either on or back into the previous stage. The three-stage process can be viewed as a map of mentoring. A map shows the way and helps to plan a route and it can also help mentees to find where they are if they are lost! The metaphor of a map can relate to an individual session or as a map for the whole relationship. It can be helpful for the mentor and mentee to share the process within the relationship so that both understand what is happening and in doing this the mentoring pair have a language or a shorthand to talk about their relationship.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the three-stage process is that, with practice, it becomes very natural and does not seem like an intrusive technique.

## **PROCESSES AND MODELS IN COACHING**

The most commonly used model in coaching is the GROW model. It is also among the most criticised! The letters stand for:

- Goal
- Reality
- Options
- Will or Wrap-up.

A central feature of GROW is its goal orientation. At the start the coach may establish, like a mentor, some ground rules in discussion with their coachee. The next intent is to help the coachee establish a goal. This may be for the session but it could also be for the longer term. The goal is then tested by exploring the Reality of the situation. The coach may ask for example, 'How realistic is your goal?' This may moderate or help to develop the goal. Having established the Goal, the coach will help the coachee to explore the Options that they have to help them achieve the goal. Once this is done and agreed, the coach will help test the coachee's motivation or Will to achieve and help them to develop an action plan to achieve the goal.

The key skills are very similar to those that a mentor may use: listening, questioning and using summary in various ways. A key difference between coaching and mentoring, in theory at least, is that the coach does not offer advice or make suggestions. How far this is practicable in the heat of a conversation is difficult to determine.

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN MENTORING AND COACHING

The key communication skills shared by both coaching and mentoring are:

- Goals
- Listening
- Questioning
- Advice
- Conversation.

However, and very curiously, how these skills are employed and the views taken on them by other writers on the subject can create clear distinctions between coaching and mentoring as well as highlight the similarities of the two activities!

### Goals

In the context of performance coaching particularly, goals have status. There is a strongly established norm that working with goals is at the core of effective coaching. Some (Downey, 2001; Whitmore, 2002; Berg and Szabó, 2005; Grant, 2006) argue that goals are the very essence of coaching. Goal theory relates to the social psychology literature on leadership and motivation (Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004; Steers and Shapiro, 2004; Locke, 1996) where studies highlight the relevance of goals in enabling achievements. The suggestion being that goals give direction and spur action (see Chapter 1). In Downey (2014) we find an example of goal setting as follows (Downey refers to the coachee as 'Player'):

*Coach:* So what is your longer-term goal for your time management?

*Player:* If I could get to a position within the next month, where I am saving three hours a week, processing less paper and getting the weekly reports out on time, that would be just great.

(Downey, 2014 p. 185)



In common with Downey, Whitmore (2009), an advocate of the GROW model, illustrates the use of goals in the extract from a coaching conversation below (Mike is the coach and Joe is the coachee):

*Mike:* Let's look long term for a moment. What is the purpose of getting fitter for you?

*Joe:* I'm just feeling lousy about myself and my work is suffering. I want to feel good again

*Mike:* Fine. How fit would you like to be by when?

*Joe:* I would like to lose 15 pounds or so, and within a few months be able to not only run upstairs and for the train without getting out of breath but to actually enjoy running.

(Whitmore, 2009 p. 65)

These two examples are used by Downey and Whitmore to illustrate the importance of goal setting and to highlight the coach's skill in enabling the goal to be articulated. However, it seems a little strange that they also advocate that the coachee holds the agenda whilst at the same time, emphasising the coach's skill.

There is a counter view that 'goals' are not necessarily everyone's preoccupation and those that do not subscribe to the dominant discourse of 'goals' still have a sense of direction and intent in their work and lives (Garvey et al., 2014). Ibarra and Linebak (2005) argue that goals are not central to transformation, but a strong focus on an issue is what makes a difference, and Spreier et al. (2006) make a full-frontal attack on goal setting by highlighting the destructive potential of goal-oriented overachievers. Making use of an example from the legal profession, Spreier et al. point out that heavily driven and goal-oriented leaders don't listen, ride rough-shod over people, fail to create consensus and tend to be one-dimensional in their thinking. A further example of the destructive effect of goals may be seen in the collapse of Enron in the USA. Here the ruthless and unethical pursuit of profit drove the company to bankruptcy and arguably, the same could be attributed to the 2008 banking crisis.

So it is not clear cut. What is clear is that the advocacy of goals is stronger in the books on coaching than it is on equivalent mentoring books. Here the emphasis is on the mentee's dream (Caruso, 1996).

## Listening

The literature on both coaching and mentoring is rich in comment about listening. All recognise listening as a vital part of the dyadic communication. Rogers (2016) makes a distinction between just listening and 'authentic listening'. She suggests that there are three levels of listening. The first level is where the coach is more concerned with thinking about the next question they might ask than listening to what the client is saying. In the second level the coach is concentrating on the client, they have rapport and there is listening for 'underlying meanings'. It is a helpful process but almost mechanical. Level three listening is listening with emotion. It is as if the coach is in flow with the client. According to Clutterbuck (2004), a mentor is a listener by definition and he gives mentors the main role of 'listener' (for further information on listening, see Chapter 8).

## Questioning

Mentoring and coaching writers and practitioners agree that questions form a vital part in the dyadic developmental process. In both mentoring and coaching 'open' questions are valued and achieve a status above other types of questioning. Open questions contribute to achieving the 'holy grail' of both mentoring and coaching – a non-directive and developmental orientation to the discussions as opposed to directive and deficit orientations. These elements form the essence of what many writers consider both coaching and mentoring to be. The assumption made in relation to non-directiveness is that the mentee or coachee best develops autonomy (the main aim) by working their own issues out through discussion. The assumption made by coaching and mentoring writers is that 'directiveness' maintains control over the coachee/mentee and helps to create unhealthy dependency as outlined above. The 'developmental' orientation assumes that the coachee/mentee is their own expert in their life and work and the mentor/coach's job is to facilitate and help organise this internal knowledge. On the other hand, a 'directiveness' orientation means that the coach or mentor assumes the coachee or mentee does not know and therefore they require 'teaching', 'advice' or 'training'. These points are discussed further later in the chapter. Alred and Garvey (2010) suggest that closed questions also play an important role in mentoring activity because they help to establish clarity and precision in the discussion (for further information on questioning, see Chapter 4).

## Advice

Advice giving is a controversial topic between mentoring and coaching writers and it appears that there are distinct 'camps'. Gibb and Hill (2006) suggest that these camps are akin to tribalism in their disdain for one another. Clutterbuck and Megginson (2005, p. 15–17) offer a list of quotes entitled 'coaches on coaching', 'mentors on mentoring', 'mentors on coaching' and 'coaches on mentoring'. They suggest that each different writer positions their own particular view of either coaching or mentoring as distinctive while criticising the other positions. In relation to advice giving, an example is found in Rosinski (2004, p. 5):

Although leaders can act as coaches, I have found that this role is often confused with mentoring. Coaches act as facilitators. Mentors give advice and expert recommendations.

Coaches listen, ask questions, and enable coachees to discover for themselves what is right for them. Mentors talk about their own personal experience, assuming this is relevant for the mentees.

Therefore, within the coaching literature, advice is generally seen as inappropriate because advice assumes a 'deficit' and, at times, 'directive' orientation. Instead, a coach may ask: 'What have you done already to resolve this issue?'

Within mentoring, advice is viewed as being dependent on the situation and context. In mentoring research, Malcolm (1995, p. 5) found that mentees entered with an expectation of some 'advice, guidance and encouragement' and Goldsmith (2004)

observed that if the mentor was perceived as experienced and expert by their mentee, advice was seen as helpful, appropriate, useful and expected. Another finding from three pieces of research (Pudlinski, 2002; Waring, 2005; Heritage and Sefi, 1992) noted that advice was not well received by the mentee if the advice was not mutually recognised as desirable or the mentee is not prepared to receive it. Therefore, expectations and context are important and Garvey and Alred (2010) suggest that expectations need to be discussed and developed into the ground-rules of a mentoring relationship. These 'rules' also need to be regularly monitored and reviewed because they change through time (see Garvey, 1994a).

## Conversation

In essence, both mentoring and coaching could be described as a conversation with a purpose. Garvey et al. (2014) argue that mentoring and coaching conversations are non-linear and could be understood as a dance. In the following example, the mentee talks about his promotion and the changing relationship with his manager. The mentor and mentee have talked before and know each other well. They both share knowledge of each other and the organisation who employs them both and this becomes significant as the conversation progresses. They employ the three-stage process, as outlined above and there are repetitions, restatements of themes and variations in pace and the balance of support and challenge within the conversation.

## EXTRACT FROM A LIVE MENTORING CONVERSATION

*Mentor:* Can I take you back to this week, and the start of your new job. Usually, I know what's happening in your working life, and I usually know what's happening in your personal life, because you're very chatty – you share a lot. But this week, it's a big new beginning and you've said how you would have liked your boss to show some interest. I wonder if you could say a bit more about that. It seems like a quiet start...

*Mentee:* Yes, a quiet start...um...previously, he's been very supportive, but this week he's been very busy with other things, with another colleague actually. He says you have to manage him (laughter). When I was in charge of the last area, he would leave me to get on with it and I would feed him information from time to time. But this new job is different.

[The mentor intuitively senses that there is an issue to be explored. He leads gently.]

*Mentor:* It sounds like there is something you want from him?

[The mentee is challenged to move in this direction and brings the conversation onto a well-trodden issue.]

*Mentee:* Er...I think I would like more information...I think there's this other issue which comes up...that he suffers from 'last minute-ism', in time management, and you know

what I'm like with time management. You know, if it's not in the diary three months ahead, I find difficulty with it really. For example, there is a very important meeting today that I was just told about on Wednesday. Well, I'm sorry, there's no way I can go to it...(laughter)...so there's that issue.

[The mentor follows by opening up the issue.]

*Mentor:* That's his style...

*Mentee:* Yes, yes...worries me a touch...

*Mentor:* Really? He is somebody you are having to work to...yes...and that's a problem for you...?

*Mentee:* Yes, generally he's very good, the 'last minuteism', it gets a bit close for comfort, and personally I find that very difficult. I like a more planned future.

[The mentor maintains momentum by offering a suggestion.]

*Mentor:* You're usually very upfront with people. Have you thought about going to see him to discuss it?

[After some hesitation, the mentee stays in step.]

*Mentee:* I think I should, although...I've not really thought about it...(pause)...I think...(pause)...yes, I do need to go and see him and say, 'That meeting was important and you knew it was coming up, would it have been possible to have let me know more in advance?' With a lot of things, the administrator has put in place some of these dates and we now have them. And I think he needs to learn some of that...

[The mentor now moves the focus from the manager to the mentee/manager relationship.]

*Mentor:* This issue has come more to the fore this year with the shift to your new role as director. It's something to do with the last job being less important than the new one and here you are with a high profile. And it means you've got a different sort of relationship with him.

*Mentee:* Well, it's bigger business, it's worth a lot of money, in the picture of things, the last job is worth peanuts really, actually, in financial terms, whereas this one is worth a lot of money to the organisation.

*Mentor:* So the stakes are higher?

*Mentee:* Absolutely.

[The mentor holds the line.]

*Mentor:* This relationship with your boss is perhaps more important than it's been before...is it?

[The mentee begins to look at things differently.]

*Mentee:* I think it is. (Pause) I just wonder, just sometimes, I wonder whether it's me that's got the problem with this time management business...um...

*Mentor:* It's bit of a running joke, isn't it...?

*Mentee:* It is really. (Laughter)

[The mentor stays with the theme, leading the conversation and challenging.]

*Mentor:* I have a simple man's diary...(laughter)...you...have a different sort of diary...

*Mentee:* Absolutely...absolutely, (laughter)...and you seem to survive all right (laughter)...um...

*Mentor:* So is that another issue...?

[The conversation takes a significant turn.]

*Mentee:* I don't know...but I wonder if, personally, it's a bit of an obsession. I think the busier you are the more you need to be organized. My view of time is...(pause) fundamentally,...Well...it's a negotiable thing and something around which you have choice...but I don't think everyone sees it like that (laughter)...

*Mentor:* Well...?

*Mentee:* I don't think he sees it like that. I think he feels he has a right to my time on request.

[The mentor seems to feel that this is a significant moment so, rather than probe further, he feels it is time for some consolidation through summary.]

*Mentor:* Interesting, I'm conscious that we've been talking for some time...I wonder if it would be useful for you to summarise...

[The mentee, to his surprise, is given responsibility to lead.]

*Mentee:* You want me to do that?

*Mentor:* You start and I'll chip in...

*Mentee:* All right...well, I suppose the first thing is the issue of the past, what went on then, but I don't...that's gone now, that was tense but I got out of that responsibility...so in a sense that was quite satisfying. But it wasn't like frying pan to fire, it's a new thing opening up. What I have now in terms of budget well that's a bit nerve racking. And then there's...(pause)...then there's the time management issue...um...which is...I'm not sure whether it's my problem or his. Either way, we've got to sort it out. And I think that's probably the key issue. When people are busy you've got to sort out some sort of organisation around that.

[The mentor takes back the lead and the conversation becomes steps towards action.]

*Mentor:* So when we take this further, we'll pick up these issues. You're in the early, very early stages, the first days of the new responsibility...

*Mentee:* Yes.

*Mentor:* And working on the relationship with your line manager is a priority...

*Mentee:* Yes, I think it is, I think you're right, and I think I shall tackle that...although, I've always got on well with him...

*Mentor:* Yes.

*Mentee:* I don't have a problem with that. Because the stakes are a bit higher, the relationship is likely to be a bit closer.

[The mentor reflects back the mentee's words.]

*Mentor:* On the other side there's what you've described as being obsessive about time management. Perhaps it will be helpful to explore that more, so that you can get clearer about it, and that may help you with your manager.

*Mentee:* Yes, because it does create tensions. Last minute things create tensions for me, because my sense of responsibility says I should be doing that, and my sense of time management... which is 'my time and we negotiate' – thinks – I'm not going to be there because I've already made previous arrangements. So that's complicated. Feelings of guilt, I suppose (laughter) are around.

[The conversation is coming to an end. The mentor ensures they end as a pair, looking ahead to the next conversation.]

*Mentor:* So we've explored what the new responsibility is like and two issues, one to do with your line manager and one more personal. I wonder if that is a suitable place to stop.

*Mentee:* I think it is. I mean, what's it done for me is draw out this time management issue which...(pause)...I think it does have the potential to be significant and it does have to be resolved. Before we started this, I didn't really know where we were going to go. There was a concern there and I think I've clarified what that concern is.

*Mentor:* Can we agree to pick that up next time?

*Mentee:* Yes, that will be useful.

(Garvey et al., 2014, pp. 119–122)

## DISCUSSION OF EXAMPLE

There are probably two stories running in this conversation. One story is about planning and organisation and the other is a sophisticated underlying story which involves weighing issues of autonomy and independence against compliance and interdependence between the mentee's manager and the mentee. Given that the financial stakes are quite high, these stories offer challenges and problems not only for the mentee and the manager, but the organisation as well. The mentor is working hard to help the mentee make sense of these issues.

This is an example of a non-linear conversation within a specific context. The conversation starts in a 'social' way and considers 'tactical', 'technical', and 'strategic' issues quite quickly. The new role has prompted the mentee to revisit issues he has addressed before. In this case it is time management. The idea that he is 'obsessed' with

planning and time issues is new and, by holding the space, the mentor enables the mentee to move towards some self-insight. The mentee came to the discussion without any real sense as to how the talk was going to go but the insights found in the conversation lead to clarification and a commitment to action. In a linear model of conversation, the mentor could have offered advice but, with a complex subject like time management, advice would be inappropriate. The mentee provided the content and the mentor facilitated a process enabling the mentee to look at the issues from different angles. The mentor prompted the mentee to take risks, and this led to him voicing a criticism of his manager and at the same time, admitting to an 'obsession'.

The second story line about the culture of the organisation clearly influences the behaviour and values of those who lead. Therefore, 'last minuteism' is a cultural norm which is at odds with the mentee's behaviour. The 'self-insight' gained may eventually lead to some kind of behavioural change for the mentee in relation to time.

The request from the mentor for the mentee to summarise is felt as a challenge by the mentee to lead the process and explore the content of the conversation. The mentee is not only learning about specific issues but also about the nature of the non-linear conversation. He is learning to learn, and what he has learned is of considerable value both to himself and to his organisation in terms of collaborative working and adjustments in behaviour towards others. The conversation also contributes to the mentee's mental stability through the examination of the meanings the mentee attributes to his behaviour and the behaviour of others and so Kram's (1983) 'psychosocial' function of mentoring is performed.

## THE RESEARCH AGENDA OF COACHING AND MENTORING

As has already been raised in the chapter, coaching and mentoring activities have grown steadily for a number of years but despite this, the research base for coaching is light and the research base for mentoring is dominated by a particular approach to research. Garvey et al. (2014) suggest that there are two main archetypes of research in mentoring and coaching research. Mentoring has a longer research history, going back to the 1970s, than coaching and its research archetype is largely positivistic and tends to address disadvantage in areas of work, education and social mobility. It is often grounded in established theory, much of which is drawn from early mentoring researchers; for example, Kathy Kram's work from the late 1970s through to early 1990s is positioned as seminal and often used to underpin any theoretical position offered in the research. It is concerned with examining relationships between variables and using analytical or inferential statistics to test hypotheses. This inevitably leads to the use of questionnaires designed to survey a large sample.

Much of this research comes from a university research community and is focussed on addressing other researchers and is peer-reviewed. In this sense it is research for other researchers. The mentoring archetype seeks to explore and control intervening variables and privileges statistical information over meaning. The research tends to be clear about its limitations whilst remaining incurious about the nature of the relationships it is researching and it only ever lightly touches any implications for practice. These studies are often described as being 'based on past research' and the findings tend to be cumulative by building on (or contradicting) other previous

contributions. A common feature in the mentoring archetype is ‘snapshot in time’ type research and there are often calls for more longitudinal studies.

In coaching research, Grant (2005) points out that the first published research appeared in 1937 and he shows that between then and 2003, a grand total of 131 publications of coaching-specific papers were published and of these, only 55 were empirical studies. The remaining 76 were uncontrolled groups or case studies. However, according to Garvey et al. (2014) despite this, there is a developing coaching archetype of research. In the first part of the new millennium, coaching research tended to privilege ‘business impact’ and target, in contrast to mentoring research, coaching practitioners or buyers of coaching services. The research agenda was dominated by ‘Return on Investment’ (RoI) research to demonstrate the monetary value of coaching and the authors tended to be coaching consultants. Alongside the RoI methods, other research tended towards evaluation research with a strong focus on practical effects rather than social science understanding. The research was often published in practitioner journals and rarely found in peer-reviewed publications. The main purpose of coaching research was to extend and develop the use of coaching by promoting its value and business benefits. The philosophical underpinning was mainly managerialist, pragmatic and lengths were taken to present the ‘reasonableness’ of the research.

Stern and Stout-Rostron (2013) suggested that they detected a change in the focus of coaching research. By employing the proposals generated by the International Coaching Research Forum (ICRF), they identified 16 areas of research covered by 100 proposals. These areas were:

(PM = found in Psy expert and managerial discourses)

- 1 Coach education – PM
- 2 Coaching relationship – PM
- 3 Coaching outcomes – PM
- 4 Coaching in organisations – PM
- 5 Coaches’ characteristics – PM
- 6 Coaching process – PM
- 7 Research methods in coaching
- 8 Supervision – PM
- 9 The coaching business – PM
- 10 Coaching vs other helping activities
- 11 Geographic regions and coaching
- 12 Peer coaching – PM
- 13 Contracting – PM
- 14 Coachee readiness – PM
- 15 Assessment of coaching skills – PM
- 16 Impact of coaching on society.

(Adapted from Stern and Stout-Rostron [2013, p. 77])

It needs to be taken into account that these proposals are linked to a call for papers from a specific organisation and there could therefore have been pressure on the researcher to come up with something a bit different in order to gain acceptance. Additionally, these headings reflect the agendas of professional bodies, which seems to be Stern and



Stout-Rostron's agenda: 'Continuing research on coaching is critical if we are to build the knowledge-base necessary to professionalize coaching...' (Stern and Stout-Rostron, 2013).

The professionalisation agenda in coaching is, arguably at least, based on Western's (2012) 'Psy expert' and 'Managerial' (see Gray et al., 2016) discourses, and a glance at the 16 areas in the above list suggests that at least 12 of the 16 fall into these discourses. Additionally, in a recent general search using the data base, Business Source Premier for the period 2003–2015 there were 124 publications in journals of all types linking coaching and ROI of which 22 were peer-reviewed articles, or put another way, approximately 10 per year. This is set against 37 mentoring articles of all types which link mentoring and ROI of which six were peer-reviewed in the same period or approximately three per year. The conclusion is that the practitioner and ROI orientation continues but the shift is a movement towards research to support professionalisation and that the coaching research archetype includes a strong focus on business relevance and pragmatic enhancement of practice as the declared purpose of the research. An evaluative approach dominates with 'insider' accounts by those with an interest in coaching. There is a tendency in this archetype to privilege summaries and provide examples from practice rather than detailed research protocols. Small numbers of respondents are employed in the studies and the data is mainly gathered via interviews. The potential sources of bias are not considered and links to other studies are rarely made. The research does not tend to build or contribute to other studies but tends to be isolated cases.

In conclusion, there is still a need for debate among academics and practitioners alike as to what actually constitutes useful and relevant research. In mentoring, the positivist tradition in research could develop by:

- Including more longitudinal studies and employing quasi-experimental methods.
- Exploring impacts on other stakeholders within the mentoring process, for example, mentors and sponsors.
- Developing the literature base beyond Kathy Kram's functions and phases into alternative frameworks and models.
- Exploring the nature and form of the mentoring interaction.
- Paying more attention to practice and less on the production of elegant theory.
- Developing more case study research.
- Drawing on coaching's experience of evaluation models.

(Tucker, 2005; Parker-Wilkins, 2006)

In coaching research, more could be done to develop:

- The frameworks for good quality case-study research.
- Research aimed at understanding the various processes in use by coaches.
- More positivistic research in line with mentoring studies. Smither et al. (2003) have demonstrated that this is desirable but it would require researchers to conduct:
  - A typology of coaching inputs and outputs.
  - Studies employing the protocols of positivism.

- More longitudinal studies and employ quasi-experimental methods.
- The nature and form of the coaching interaction.
- Impacts on other stakeholders within the coaching process, for example, coachees and sponsors.

Finally, an integration of positivist and professional traditions in both coaching and mentoring research is desirable and an approach which pays attention to the best in both in a mixed methodological approach seems to offer many opportunities. Additionally, there is value in comparing and contrasting coaching and mentoring interventions within a range of contexts.

### **THE PROFESSIONALISATION AGENDA**

Within the coaching world there are very strong moves to create a profession. Within the mentoring world, there are some moves to professionalise but these are not so great. Perhaps this is because mentoring still tends to be voluntary and coaching tends to be a paid activity. The professionalisation agenda has led to the establishment of several 'Professional Associations'. Many of these have created competency frameworks and a range of qualifications and ethical guidelines for both mentors and coaches. How far these practices are helpful and appropriate is open to critical debate; see, for example, Garvey (2014; 2016). Universities in the UK have been developing programmes for coaches and mentors steadily for approximately 20 years and the demand seems constant.

### **THE FUTURE?**

Mentoring activity, in the contexts of education and young people engaging in entrepreneurial work, is on the increase internationally. For example, Youth Business International supports a network of approximately 18,000 voluntary mentors around the world and is still counting. Coaching, particularly executive coaching appears to be stable or perhaps in decline. However, there is evidence (Ridler, 2016) that managers within companies are now developing their skills as coaches themselves and becoming 'internal' coaches. New forms of coaching are also emerging, for example, community coaching is starting to develop in a number of locations around the world.

Whatever the trends, the appetite among people for dedicated one to one conversation appears to be insatiable.

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# Relational communication<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

**A**LTHOUGH SUCH CHAPTERS AS this routinely begin with a justification suggesting that relationships are an important part of life, the fact is really quite self-evident. Relationships define who we are and they are a fundamental and undeniably integrative force in our existence (Berscheid & Regan, 2016). Relationships create and develop our sense of self (Duck, 2011), offer social support in times of need (Argyle, 2013), provide subtle bases for interpersonal persuasion (Sahlstein, 2006), and create bulwarks of defence against the intrusions of daily hassles and unforeseen emergencies (Heller & Rook, 2001). The existence of good quality relationships enhances people's social identity (Weiss, 1974), health prospects (Berg & Upchurch, 2007), likelihood of surviving major life events (Badr, Smith, Goldstein, & Gomez, 2015), expectations of leading a satisfying life (Argyle, 2013), and ability to endure horrible experiences (Zerach, Solomon, Horesh & Ein-Dor, 2013). Relationships therefore can nowadays be taken for granted as a major influence in life. In short, relationships matter and we all *know* that they do.

It is nevertheless surprisingly difficult to define what 'relating' involves and hence *a fortiori* very hard to define what can be good or bad or skilful or unskilful about it. In order to set up a consideration of the nature of relationship skill it is therefore first necessary to give some thought to the nature of the goals or purposes of relating. Once that is established it is then possible to consider what might be done to achieve those goals and purposes in a 'better' or 'skilled' way.



## SOME GOALS AND PURPOSES OF RELATIONSHIPS

The first issue concerns the purposes for which people might enter relationships, such that one can then assess whether their goals are achieved. Without such an assessment one cannot set standards by which successful or skilful achievement of those purposes could be known or measured.

Weiss (1974) laid out some principles for judging the needs that are satisfied in relationships in the West. He proposed that there are seven provisions of relationships and one could assume that the ability to serve these goals would count as skilled. This should be so not only from the point of view of self-fulfillment but also, more subtly, as the sense of fulfillment is judged by others. The latter is an important issue for assessments of skill, which can be viewed as an inherent characteristic or else as an attribution made by outsiders (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Such judgments can come from outside observers as well as being made when persons assess their own satisfaction and so view themselves as successful and skilled performers of relationships.

Weiss proposed the following seven provisions:

- 1 Belonging and a sense of reliable alliance. The sense that others are available to support one in times of need is an important feeling for people and it creates a sense of membership in a stable context. To the degree that such a sense of belonging is established and conveyed in relationships, then the person has been skilful in fulfilling this need. Many studies have used the extent and depth of a person's membership community as a measure of the person's skill in relating (see Graham, 2010).
- 2 Emotional integration and stability. Derived in part from Festinger's (1954) considerations about social comparison, this provision asserts that people seek a sounding board for their emotional responses to life's eventualities. The commentary provided by others is a needed overtone to one's own personal reactions. In assessing skill in relation to this provision, therefore, some expressiveness of emotions is presumed.
- 3 Opportunities for communication about self. Weiss supposed that people have a desire to talk about themselves and expose elements of their experience and condition. A skilled relater should be one who does this in appropriate ways, neither too much nor too little. (See Chapter 7 for further discussion of self-disclosure.)
- 4 Provision of assistance and physical support. Given that most models of social support unequivocally suppose that physical and emotional support are requirements of relationships, it is not surprising that Weiss placed emphasis on this self-evident provision of relationships. It might be possible to assess a person's abilities in relationships according to the extent to which the person is successful in eliciting delivery of such support.
- 5 Reassurance of worth and value. Weiss assumes that people have a desire to evaluate themselves positively and to be reassured that they are valuable members of the community in which they exist. Again, this sort of provision could be readily assessed as a measure of the success of a relationship and indeed the skills of establishing it help to develop personal wholeness or stability of self-esteem and increase trust (Tourish & Hargie, 2009).

- 6 Opportunity to help others. Weiss regarded this as a separate provision but it might also be seen as a sub component of other components. For example, provision of assistance and physical support can be a way of satisfying a need to help others and thereby maintain one's own and others' views of a person as helpful. However, the voluntary expression of support for others and the provision of help are known to be a rewarding and self-fulfilling experience for both recipient and donor (Hobfoll, 2004) and are clearly more readily available to the extent that the person has skilfully sustained a network of relationships.
- 7 Personality support. Seen in terms of traditional views of personality, this provision simply means that actions of friendship and closeness represent the supporting of a person's personality needs and values, an assumption that has been foundational in relationship research for several decades (Byrne, 1961, 1971, 1997; Levinger, 1964; Tharp, 1963). Personality support is distinct from reassurance of worth and value in that personality support is accomplished through *verification* of one's existing identity or 'rhetorical vision' of the way the world works (Duck, 2011). The reassurance of worth and value is based on the *enhancement* or *positive evaluation* of that identity (Tourish & Hargie, 2009).

Such individual provisions are fundamental explanations for the existence of relationships and each offers a way to assess the success or skill of an individual in relating. Yet as Simmel (1950) noted, any couple tends to judge satisfaction not only relative to internal feelings that the participants have about their own relationship but also against cultural and normative standards against which success or failure may be assessed. Couples from the 19th century might judge their personal relationship as satisfying in ways that would horrify couples in the 21st century, giving preference to the dominance of the husband over the wife and to an assessment that the judgment of the husband about the relationship amounted to a final truth about its status, for example.

Although a couple may be satisfied with the internal dynamics of their relationship, therefore, some relating of outcomes to social norms might be expected as a legitimate judgment of the skill of their performance. The modern '*Cosmopolitan* questions' about the relative performances in their relationship compared to norms of 'Ten essential behaviours in relationships' or '15 things your relationship needs' might contribute to a couple's overall satisfaction with their relationship. Indeed, many couples now compare their sexual performance and experience with such standards before judging that they are sexually normal (Sprecher et al., 2005). Such activities and feelings suffice to indicate that the individual analysis of one's own performance is not a final judgment about satisfaction in the relationship. Hence the judgment of skill in a relationship does not rest with the couple alone but also with their performance relative to some societal norms. Likewise, an individual's behaviour may be judged skilful or unskilful from different vantage points.

Weiss's provisions then may apply only in the ideal but they are a recognisable standard that is used by (and which is derived from) Western standards for skill and performance levels. These standards are included in much research without acknowledgment of their power or of the fact that they are culturally tainted. Yet researchers judge the partners' satisfaction with a relationship partly in relation to such norms. Skill in relationships must, however, be measured against the existence of norms within a particular society rather than judged simply in terms of the claims of relational participants.

As Montgomery (1988) taught us, the communicative standards applied to assessments of 'quality' in relationships have their roots in a society's assumptions about 'personality' and the role of relationships in fulfilling self in relation to communicative standards. Not only this, but outsiders may apply socially relevant norms of assessment to the behaviours observed in relationships. As Davis (1983) has powerfully noted, even the sexual behaviours in an intimate partnership are subject to the evaluative – and moralising – commentary of others at times. Hence the issue of the relationships between judgments of 'skill' and actual relationship behaviours is somewhat complex even if one can properly acknowledge the limits on the categories of behaviours to be included.

In order to advance our case, therefore, it is necessary to know something about the behaviours regarded as basic to relating in order to discuss standards for their skilled performance.

## BEHAVIOURS, THOUGHTS, AND RELATING

Some have sought to define relationships in terms of the underlying patterns of behaviour that occur between interactants. For example, Hinde (1981) defined a relationship as 'a series of interactions between two individuals known to each other' (p. 2). Hinde used a set of eight criteria for describing relationships and distinguishing them from otherwise unconnected interaction series, these eight being:

- 1 *Content of interactions*: the things that the partners do together.
- 2 *Diversity of interactions*: those relationships that are multiplex are more likely to be closer and more intimate than those which involve only one type of activity, such as customer-server relationships of service.
- 3 *Qualities of interactions*: involving such assessments as intensity of interaction, content of discourse, sensitivity of one partner to the behaviours of the other.
- 4 *Relative frequency and patterning of interactions*: for example, the sequencing in negative and positive responses to a partner.
- 5 *Reciprocity vs. complementarity*: relationships are different if an action evokes a similar – reciprocal – response, such as 'Hi' to a previous 'Hi', rather than a different but supplementary – complementary – one, such as an answer to a question. Some interactions require reciprocity, as in the courteous greeting rituals that are a mark of skill in most superficially polite interactions, whereas others require complementarity, and people are not skilful unless they recognise and use this difference.
- 6 *Intimacy*: different sorts of relationships differ in the amounts of touch and verbal intrusion into the other's psychological space that are appropriate.
- 7 *Interpersonal perception*: individuals in different sorts of relationships vary in degree of balance between their perceptions of each other. Satisfying relationships occur successfully only when the perceptions of one partner with another are appropriately meshed.
- 8 *Commitment*: degrees of commitment not only to the relationship and to the partner but to the likelihood of future interactions can differentiate relationships.

It is clear from the delineation of these categories that there is a host of ways in which they could be relevant to consideration of skill in relating, and we will consider them more closely below. At this point it is sufficient to note that variation within these categories – and difference in performance from the expectations associated with each of them – could be critical in the determination that a person is a skilled relater. Inappropriate levels of commitment, intimacy, or sought frequency of interaction could register someone as over-intrusive rather than intimate, or as inappropriately distant rather than friendly and open.

It rapidly becomes apparent however that patterning of interaction is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for labeling action as ‘relating’. Some form of psychological interdependence is clearly necessary as an adjunct to behavioural interdependence, whether measured in terms of perceived common fate or mutual interest or concern over the outcomes of the other (for example, whether they are equitable and satisfying). Some scholars have noted that relationships exist in the absence of repeated or frequent interaction, whether through the influence of long distance (Sahlstein, 2006) or because of estrangement of some sort (as between parent and errant children), or through death (Worden, 2008). Some have argued that relationships are partly mentalistic concepts and that the difference between a string of interaction and a relationship lies in the parties’ conceptualisation of those interactions (Duck, 2011). Indeed, some have pointed to the negative consequences of people’s mere thoughts about relationships, such that they could lead to charges of harassment or stalking when one person believes that the relationship exists in a form that the other partner does not see or agree to (Fox & Warber, 2014).

Sigman (1991) noted that people exercise various means to continue the mental element of their relationship in the face of absence or lack of interaction. ‘Relationships are “larger” than the physical presence or interactional accessibility of the participants’ (p. 108). Sigman thus successfully explains how relationships may be continuous despite periods of separation. The discontinuous aspects of social relationships are managed by using Relational Continuity Constructional Units (RCCUs) – practices that partners use before, during, or after an absence and which function to construct the continuity of the relationship during periods of absence or separation. Sigman divides RCCUs into three types:

- 1 *Prospective units* are those behaviours that relationship partners perform before physical separation and ‘define the meaning and duration of the impending separation and of the likely return’ (Sigman, 1991, p. 112). Examples are farewells, setting agenda for future meetings, and the use of tie signs or tokens of relationships, such as the offer of engagement rings, or ‘spoons’ (objects left behind and which indicate a likely return, such as a toothbrush left in a lover’s bathroom).
- 2 *Introspective units* represent the relationship’s continuity during periods of absence and are exemplified by photographs of the partner on a desk at work or a greeting card pinned to a personal space.
- 3 *Retrospective units* mark the ending of a period of relational separation and can be seen in conversations that allow the partners to ‘catch-up’ on what happened to each other during the period of absence, such as end of day debriefing or catch up conversations (Galvin, Braithwaite, & Bylund, 2015).

In this context, then, it is notable that skilled behaviours in relationships are not necessarily connected to the present alone and so it becomes critical to Hinde's definition that relational communication is joint discourse that points to *past* and *potential* interaction. In this definition, a relationship emerges from interaction, but is not reducible to it and is more than the sum of its parts. In other words, a relationship is created on the basis of a combination of behavioural skills, but this synthesis exceeds those behaviours. Skilled performance is likewise tied not only to the present performance but also to management of future expectations. Thus, relational communication is behaviour that not only develops interactors' shared history but also suggests future interaction. In the following section, we will review various types of relational communication and discuss the value of viewing these behaviours as skills, given the need to consider management not only of behaviour but of expectations and continuity. The distinction between behavioural and psychological factors points us to the difference that might be made in assessments between outsiders (limited to the actual behavioural and to mere inferences about the psychological interior) and insiders (who have access to the psychological as well as to the behavioural) in assessing skill as a performance or as an attribute.

## SKILLS AND THE QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

The *New Webster's Dictionary* defines skill as 'the ability to do something well' (see Chapter 1 for a full discussion of definitional issues in the concept of skill). A chapter on relational communication for a book on communication skills therefore must include discussion of relationship behaviours (doing something), the bases of communicative quality (well), and the relation between the two, since not all relational skills are necessarily intentionally communicative. This chapter will identify some skilled behaviours seen as fundamental to successful social relationships and will then consider themes historically understood as quality communication in the scholarship on relationships. These identifications provide the basis for considering 'skill' in relationships. There is both a performance element (based perhaps on skilful application of relevant rules) and an experiential element here (since satisfaction must imply some skilled ability to extract outcomes desired by the individual reporter). Overlaying both, however, is a strategic element indicating that the ability to make choices between competing or inconsistent rules itself amounts to a skill.

### Skills and rules

The first focus must be on whether the very communication of the existence of relationships is a first sign of skill. It is a truism of western culture that the number of friends that a person can claim is seen as a measure of social success and the implicit rule to *demonstrate* connectedness is a powerful one. Where popularity was once demonstrated annually by public display of holiday-season cards received, it is now daily presented on one's Facebook profile, an implicit measure of social worth (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). The very ability to 'attract' others is treated as significant and a measure of skill and social value. In like manner, the ending of relationships

is treated with pity and negativity such that there are no 'successful divorces' only 'failed marriages' (Rollie & Duck, 2006). Ending of close relationships is stigmatic for their participants and is generally treated with remorse and disapprobation. Hence the existence of numbers of relationships is not sufficient to apply a label of skill but rather the implicit rule requires a demonstrated capacity to work and sustain those relationships. Accordingly, the emphasis in the scholarship taking this line has fallen on the micro behaviours that are used skilfully to demonstrate warmth and openness in relationships, beginning with the nonverbal and later extending to strategic success in the long term.

A skilled relational performance is first connected with needs and provisions that we outlined earlier, as well as with the ability to fulfill the requirements of social prototypes of relating. Davis and Todd (1985) listed the paradigm case features of friendship and noted that such performances as acceptance, respect, trust, and spontaneity were necessary prerequisites of friendship. Hence the ability to perform the behaviours associated with such features is a necessary skill and raises the question of the means by which such features are communicated.

The catalogue of behaviours that are counted as skilled here is quite large and covers a considerable range of activities, some of which are clearly 'relational' while some are less clearly connected to relationship activity and more obviously associated with smooth but simple social interaction. Argyle (1967) originally observed many (individually expressive) skills of social interaction that essentially convey attention, warmth, and friendliness, and without whose presence the continuance of a relationship may be jeopardised. Familiar examples are eye contact, gaze, smiles, nods, and open postures (Argyle, 1967) but the contribution of these behaviours to the establishment and growth of relationships seems to be 'hygienic' rather than substantial. Herzberg (1966) differentiated hygienic factors in organisational contexts from motivational factors. Motivational factors made workers work harder; hygienic factors did not, but their absence made people work less hard (examples were such things as adequate heating and lighting, whereas motivational factors were pay and respect from supervisors). In like fashion some of the above nonverbal behaviours seem destined to have effects only in the breach, and to damage the prospects for intimacy when they are absent without substantially increasing them when present (Emmers-Sommer, 2004). Nonetheless the ability to perform such behaviours at all will count as skilled, and hence as a prerequisite of skilled relational behaviour in the above senses.

In addition to such micro behaviours, a larger issue is connected with strategic skills of recognition of the rules of certain situations. Argyle's later work explored the designation of social situations and the appropriateness of attendance to the prerequisites of such designation (see Chapter 2). For example, a skilful relationship with a friend requires recognition of the rule to tell the truth and be open about one's emotional state, so that one expresses warmth or affection and provides emotional support (Argyle & Henderson, 1984). Argyle and Henderson (1985, p. 82) later broadened the notion of rules to relationships in general and concluded that

Rules are a very useful guide to many aspects of socially skilled behaviour. We have taken as one criterion of relationship rules whether or not [the breaking of them] results in disruption of a relationship. Social skills are commonly

identified by a comparison of the performances of successful and unsuccessful practitioners. The concepts of rules and skill thus have a good deal of overlap.

It was however also apparent that some relationships could survive rule breaking. Furthermore, there were important variations in rules depending on the specific relationship involved, not only across cultures but also within groups, as a function of the needs that are supposed to be fulfilled by the relationships in each case. For example, family life and work relationships are expected in Japan to fulfill some of the needs fulfilled by friendship in the West (Argyle & Henderson, 1985, p. 84).

Given the strengths and relevance of the rules approach to skill in relationships, one must ask a number of questions in order to position the problems raised by the above comments in relation to the general value of a rules approach to skills. It is clear that there can be different layers of individually focused rules, some of which prescribe specific actions in particular circumstances (e.g., 'Smile when you greet someone') and yet others which are of a higher and more abstract order ('Be tolerant of friends'). It is also clear that judgments are required about the sets of rules to apply in particular circumstances, and whether it is, for example, more important to expect a smile from a friend at each new encounter or to tolerate their bad moods. Such judgments indicate that a skill rests not only on the application of specific rules but on the ability to make wise assessments of the relative importance of applying the rule and ignoring it or supplanting it with some other rule. In short, knowledge of the rules is necessary but not sufficient to warrant a judgment of skilled relational communication. Perception of situational awareness/parsing of situations or even an awareness of cultural and situational norms is an asset that has power only when used with strategic good sense. Larger goals of relating can supplant the micro-performances expected of individuals that would otherwise be regarded as personally skilful, just as social norms about relational conduct within an organisation could be different from those available in a culture more broadly or in society outside the organisation.

Such larger skills of relating might indicate successful affective management on top of the micro behaviours and there is sometimes a tension between relating effectively (for example, assertively) and relating skilfully (for example, politely). Clearly integration of goals and needs is a big issue in skill and the ability to deploy specific tactical skills in a situation is a lower order analysis. Some critics have therefore asked whether skill resides in the ability to adjust and adapt to situations or in the recognition that a specific rule applies to the relationship presently under consideration.

Spitzberg (1993) noted that the ability to adapt to rules is itself a skill and indicates that an individual's competence may be understood as an ability (to perform well) or a quality (an attribution made by observers). Competence has three roles in relationships. First, it has a direct role that facilitates development and management of relationships (skill = success of outcomes). Second, competence mediates how others respond to an actor's behaviour, so managing the *appearance* of competence is important. (This is one reason why we hear so much about spin doctors these days). Third, competence is a self-inference that affects motivation.

Important theoretical and practical issues flow from these observations. If, on the one hand, primary individual competence is an ability to make choices between options then there is a dialectics of motives (for example, politeness versus assertiveness; communality versus instrumentality; adaptation versus control – the issue of when to

adapt to the situation and when to be self – attention to short-term versus long-term objectives; the decision to show openness versus closedness/privacy). If, on the other hand, primary individual competence is an attribution by observers, then there is a dialectics of attributions (context-facilitated versus context-impaired; self-deception versus alter-deception; predictability versus novelty; success versus obsolescence – where one can have too much of a good thing or where repetition of a behaviour becomes adaptively unskilled).

## Judging relationship skill

Montgomery (1988) argued that our judgments about relational quality are based on ideal standards for an individual's relational communication. These standards are located in particular contexts: they can be based on cultural ideologies, shared relational meanings, or individual idiosyncrasies. While not universal, these ideals (for individuals) do have an *a priori* nature in that these cultural, relational, and personal interactional codes form the basis for particular social behaviour. That is, our judgments about the skilfulness of one person's relational behaviour are based on its correspondence with ideal relational standards, or scripts.

In actual interaction, the criteria for judging quality communication are pluralistic; cultural, social, and individual criteria all bear on the assessment of communicative quality. For example, Oswald (2000) demonstrated that the ritual performance of the wedding ceremony (cultural), interactions with other wedding guests (social), and personal understandings about commitment (individual) all contributed to the quality of lesbian, bisexual, and gay family members' experiences at weddings. In their discussion of inappropriate relationships, Duck and VanderVoort (2002) presented the negotiation of cultural and relational codes for 'competent but inappropriate' relational behaviour along a continuum from unconventional, notable, scandalous, to forbidden. This scheme suggests that when criteria for quality relationships conflict, relational behaviour is based on the relative weight that relational partners give to general cultural and personal relational standards, as for example, in a couple that practices sadomasochism.

While standards for the quality of relational communication serve as yardsticks to measure the valence of relationships, scholars also attest that these standards render social relations recognisable and meaningful in a more global sense. Caughlin (2003) observes that people understand their relationships (and judge their quality) by comparing them to relational norms. Vallerand (2012) echoed that ideal standards for close relationships serve these interpretive and evaluative functions for relationship members, adding that they also serve an adaptive function: when relational scripts do not match the relationship itself, they serve as guidelines for change. Furthermore, Holmberg, Lomore, Takacs, and Price (2011) propose that in romantic relationships when partners' personal scripts for enacting and interpreting romantic relationships correspond to normative scripts, couples experience greater relational well-being. These studies suggest that because we understand our relationships on the basis of ideal standards, our understanding of relationships is inextricably bound to our perceptions of their quality.

To deal with such questions one must reflect on the matter of judgment of quality within a culture. This requires us to explore relationships at the macro-level and



consider how they knock against larger social structures that unobtrusively influence daily existence or deal with the innumerable ways in which everyday social encounters make our experience for us (Wood & Duck, 2006). In different ways theorists have focused on the means by which social relationships reflect larger social forces and so embody the ways in which ‘society’ is experienced at the mundane level of experience. Society is of course made up of the individuals who inhabit its interactions. Thus, if society has a face, then it is in the faces that attend our daily interactions with each other and constrain or empower certain forms of social action and experience. It is the specific interactions within the relationships of everyday life that therefore embody and manage our connection with ‘society’ as a larger concept (Duck & McMahan, 2017). Inevitably such specific interactions confirm, reinforce, and enact skills while simultaneously offering immediate admonishment of infractions of social norms. ‘Skill’ is reinforced and applauded while a lack of skill is reproached and discouraged through such immediate interactions.

## Communicative standards

Montgomery (1988) identifies three values implicit in relationship scholarship that serve as standards for quality and hence obliquely as bases for judgments of skill: positivity, intimacy, and control. While Montgomery’s arguments were made 30 years ago, these assumptions still remain implicit in the majority of relationship studies today. Montgomery goes on to note that competence in relationships is judged in terms of the same criteria of positivity, intimacy, and control. They must of course be understood as having a number of components, stressing the positive in relationships and the elicitation of positive experiences from others, but also being grounded in general psychological tendencies (in the West at least) to achieve self-fulfillment through relationships.

*Positivity.* The relationship scholarship demonstrates an overwhelming prosocial bias mostly indicated through the sorts of research with which we opened this chapter and which regards positivity as the main signal of relational engagement and success (Acitelli, Duck, & West, 2000). There is growing evidence on the importance of positive relationships at work (Mills, Fleck, & Kozikowski, 2013), but there is also growing research on the ‘dark side’ of relationships (Olson, Baiocchi-Wagner, Kratzer, & Symonds, 2012) which demonstrates an increasing turn from the field’s predominant focus on the prosocial nature of relationships. While these studies increasingly represent the negative side of relationships, they serve to reinforce the relational ideal of positivity. On the other hand, Montgomery and Baxter (2013) have made compelling arguments for the importance of both centrifugal and centripetal relational forces, suggesting that centrifugal forces, such as closedness (privacy), change, and autonomy (independence), also have value for relationships.

All the same, the recognition that there are two sides to relationships that are always present together in experience simply shifts the focus of discussions of ‘relational skill’ from the performance of those behaviours that are rated positively and towards the issue of the management of the competing negative and positive forces that can be guaranteed to be present in all relationships. Rather than focusing on positivity, then, the development of recent scholarship is to note the importance of the daily management of the different elements of relationships as well as the contribution

of different forms of 'community' in which the management can be practised and held to account (Fritz & Omdahl, 2006).

*Intimacy.* As is evident from the reports reviewed so far, and from many other sources (e.g., Hendrick & Hendrick, 2001) the – perhaps one-sided – assumption is that successful and skilled enactment of relationships revolves around the establishment, increase, and maintenance of intimacy (Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva, & Fix, 2004). Indeed, the title of the Hendrick sourcebook is *Close Relationships*. It appears to be heretical against this prevailing trend to suggest that skilled relational communication could involve successful maintenance of distance or non-intimacy, despite Delia's (1980) telling observation that by far the majority of our interpersonal relationships not only are distant but persistently remain so. Kirkpatrick, Foley, and Duck (2006) note that relationships at work can embody several different and competing goals; the relational goal of intimacy may be unadvisable in a context dedicated primarily to achieving extra-relational tasks. Here, team-playing can be seen as an important criterion of skill which would not be similarly applied to relationships based on intimacy. The bias in assessments of relationship skill in terms of an intimacy assumption must nevertheless be acknowledged.

*Power/Control.* Most assessments of relationships assume that self-control and power over others are desirable features of relational life (Lovaglia & Lucas, 2006). Dominance is a trait preferred to submission and authority is preferred to subservience. Problems in relationships at work are assumed to exist when equality of power shifts in friendly roles with the promotion of one friend over the other, for example (Belbin, 2012).

As Montgomery (1988) has argued, then, any judgment of the goodness, skill, or quality of a relationship is not a neutrally founded judgment. It essentially holds relational activity up against a cultural or contextual standard through which 'quality' of relationships is established. There are no inherently good ways to conduct a relationship; indeed, cultures and contexts differ widely on the performance that is judged to be appropriate and skilled (Montgomery, 1988). Hence any discussion of the 'skilled' performance of relationships necessarily nods towards the existence of cultural and situational norms and standards that apply in one's assessment of relationships. These might not apply to assessment of relationship quality in other cultural or situational contexts. Skill at work or in organisational settings where hierarchies of power are formally operated (Lovaglia & Lucas, 2006) does not necessarily equate to skill in interpersonal relationships within the family, for example. Brisk and authoritative behaviour in one setting may be 'skilled' where soft, warm, and intimate behaviours would be judged 'skilful' in the other (Lovaglia & Lucas, 2006). Hence judgments about the skilled conduct of relationships must be tempered by the recognition that such judgments are embedded in the acceptance of a cultural and contextual standard for judging both the nature of the relationship between participants and the performance of relationally relevant activities as well as the outcomes from relationships that are regarded as positive or appropriate in the circumstances.

Ultimately the reduction of relationships to a set of skills performable by individuals is both useful and misleading. Is the 'skill' to be found in a list of performable behaviours or is it found in the ability to adapt and to act in ways not obviously predicted and forced by the situation? Is the truly skilled performer one who follows the rules or who shows ability to adapt, change, and modify those general rules?

More significantly for our following discussion, can one person ever be judged as 'skilled' in the absence of knowledge about the interaction partner and his or her behaviour? For the entirety of its existence, the research on relationships has been criticised for attending to the actions, feelings, and reports of only one person in the relationship (Byrne, 1971; Perlman & Duck, 2018). In like manner, it seems rather limiting to focus on the mechanical behaviours of only one person in a pair and to judge the person as 'skilled' or 'unskilled' without making any assessment of the appropriateness of their activities to the attitudes, feelings, and responses of the other person present.

## **SKILL AND THE COORDINATED DANCE OF INTERACTION**

The issues that we have now reached, therefore, concern the matter of whether 1) skill is vested in performance or in strategy; 2) whether its existence is established by outsiders or not; 3) the degree to which it depends on or reflects personal or relational or cultural norms; 4) the extent to which judgments of 'skill' can be divorced from the essentially paired, interactive, and hence dualistic nature of social intercourse, where one person's behaviour is not assessed in isolation but by reference to responsiveness to others' activities and initiatives.

One important and perhaps hidden issue here is that in everyday life communication, interactants do not consciously measure things out as skill when they interact with others, whereas Communication Theorists who focus on skills not only do so but also isolate it from other activities in order to study it. If everyday folk measure anything at all, it is the degree to which they feel connected and understood in their interactions (Duck & McMahan, 2017). On this view, if listeners can relate to another's narrative because it makes them *feel* something, anything, then they feel more connected to speakers and identify with them. It is about understanding both similar and dissimilar experiences. If one can tell a very good story about a horrific car accident (Secklin, 2001), a speaker can induce thoughts and feelings about the particulars in a way that the listeners never thought of before. The narrator has extended the listeners' rational imagination and capacity for emotions in one shot. Such stories connect people in ways that other forms of communication do not. In essence, narrative connects people by evoking feelings that bond. Hence skilful narration is important to the evocations of mental connection that form the basis of successful relating. This bonding through communication indicates that skill is not just an individual property but one that connects.

This latter issue is perhaps the most significant in conceptualising relational skill. Conversation, narrative, and interpersonal communication are, after all, essentially a waltz rather than a solo, and so skill must be judged in everyday coordination rather than just in isolated performance or expression. An undoubted element of true conversations is their collaborative performances, through improvisation, and the responsiveness of each person to the partner's inputs. In this sense, narrative improvisation is unrehearsed, connective communication that takes place in real time. We are deemed to possess relational skills if the other's expectations are, for the most part, satisfied by narratives and communications that facilitate satisfaction or reinforcement of relational expectations. The ability to continue working/dancing together in known connections depends on the two parties understanding and taking-for-granted

the boundaries *and predictabilities* of their joint enterprise. Hence at this level, skill is inseparable from the personal reinforcement of mental bonds through the shared meaning of actions in relationships. Real-life performance and the situation of performance are often overlooked by theorists as they strive to define a superordinate essence of skill. All the same, the \*absence\* of skill is important because when interpersonal skills are present, we mostly note it afterwards upon reflection ('That was a good chat', 'I really enjoyed talking with her/him'). When the skills are absent, we do notice immediately. We become frustrated at the specific misunderstandings, miscommunications, and confusion – at best; at worst, resentment and dysfunction result, after a certain amount of time.

The essence seems to be that skill is not an inherent quality but is contextualised by a number of variables which are missed when skill is treated as an abstraction and in isolation from actual everyday occurrences, experiences, and – most important – expectations. It is only if relating is understood as synchronic but also essentially future-oriented that it can truly be analysed. It is a mistake to take a 'snapshot' of relational skill at a single point in time, rather than understanding standards for skilled relational behaviour as unfolding over time, with especial reference to the future.

However, although this is, in essence, a view that we have analysed in the preceding elements of the chapter, it cannot suffice – as our last point above suggests. Only one essence of skill is the behaviour of individuals, but as Bochner, Ellis, and Tillman-Healey (1997) point out elsewhere, narrative, like skill, is a relational process. A small body of narrative inquiry conceives of narrative relationally. Storytelling at this level is about how audience members and/or relational partners negotiate the story itself and/or the history and future 'reality' of their relationship together. Thus, inquiry that views narrative as a relational process focuses on the *storytelling*, both as an act of *performance*, or way of 'doing' relationships, and as a collaborative process of joint storytelling between relational partners.

For example, in the context of relationship skills, although the giving of a Christmas gift to a lover may be seen (and intended) as a skilled performance of relating, the partner may see its intended effect as negative. Secklin (2001), for instance, reports her recognition of the implications for the relationship when her partner gave her a vacuum cleaner for Christmas. The partner was being 'skilled' from his own point of view in that he remembered the day and gave a gift. From Secklin's point of view, however, he was also indicating his view of the future form of the relationship and the role that he expected her to play in it. A skilled giver of gifts recognises not what he or she wants the partner to have but rather understands the very thing that the partner would value and appreciate.

Real-life performance and the situation of performance thus seem to be important moderators of judgments about skill. Skill is not an inherent quality but is contextualised by a number of variables which are missed when skill is treated as an abstraction and in isolation from actual occurrences. Thus, while the concept of ideal standards (whether cultural, relational, or personal) is useful, it is insufficient for understanding relational skill. By itself, this perspective does not account for a mechanism that allows for change in the fundamental structure of relational values (Duck & McMahan, 2017).

The relationships scholarship shows that our understanding of relationships should indeed be located within the recognition of the force of living social practice and its pointing to the future. While relationships take place on the levels of cultural

ideologies and individual idiosyncrasies, the relationships research most clearly illustrates the transformative power of social practice at the relational level. In essence, social practices transform the context of meaning in which specific acts are performed and, particularly, they moderate an understanding of the personal value of any given activity. They illustrate the importance of locating judgments of 'skill' within an implied relational future and partnered compositions of the meaning of behaviours.

Bochner et al. (1997) explain that relational partners' accounts of their behaviour serves not only to legitimise it, but also to construct the terms by which relational behaviour can be judged. Duck (2011, p. 19) explains:

Engagement in interpersonal communication [re]calls forth speakers' daily lives to other people for evaluation (whether appreciation, accountability, or rebuke). By the same conversational means, people are able to evaluate their rhetorical visions of life, of other people, of themselves, and of a host of other things that have been variously called personality, meaning systems, or culture.

Performance is an alternative to structure as the basis for relational signification. Hence, we advocate co-performance as an alternative to skill as the basis for relational signification. In other words, we claim that the notion of skill in relating has fallen prey to the same flaw present in the relational research as a whole – reliance on the reports and examination of the responses of one person in the dyad. By focusing on co-performance, we emphasise the fact that relationships and all forms of social behaviour are founded on the notion of (at least) two interactants. Accordingly, it is necessary to be aware of things other than the feelings of one person that are 'present' in any interaction that is located relationally – i.e., in a flow of history and future (Duck, 2011).

Unlike the synchronic skill paradigm, co-performance is rooted in a diachronic futurity of relationships that accounts for both their shared past and their unfolding. Our earlier discussion of Hinde (1981) indicated that relational communication is joint discourse that points to *past* and *potential* interaction. In this definition, relationship emerges from past co-performance (history), but also indicates future form/expectations. Relationships are continually recreated through this process of play, where the old and new collide and collude. In other words, and simply put, relationships are projected improvisations based on past performances and understandings but are not limited by them. Skill in this context is an ability to use history and implied futures as a basis for extending beyond the present.

## OVERVIEW AND IDEAS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

The above concerns bring us back to some issues noted at the beginning and focused on the matter of whether skill is appropriately sited in micro-behaviours or macro-action. We began the chapter by indicating the general human needs that relationships satisfy and hence, by implication, we assumed that individual goals would be counted as skilful. We have ended up somewhere else: namely, that relationship skills cannot be judged only in terms of personal satisfaction, but rather in terms of the fulfillment of jointly, dyadically specified goals.

In addition, we have asked whether assessments of ‘skill’ properly attach to short-term or long-term elements of relational communication. Equally relevant is the issue of whether relationships (especially long-term relationships) are to be seen as inherent or instrumental, such that skill should be assessed relative to ‘warm and fuzzy’ qualities or to specific outcomes. A third issue of relevance to judgments of skill focuses on the strategic versus the routine aspects of relating. Much has recently been made of the non-strategic mundane and ordinary behaviours of relationships (Dainton, 2000; Rossetto, 2015) and the removal of emphasis on strategic activity renders the consideration of pedestrian and apparently insignificant (even phatic) activity much more relevant to judgments of skill. A fourth consideration is whether relational skill can be taught, and a final issue concerns the definition of incompetence and its impact on the health status of the person in ways relevant to the conditions with which we opened the chapter. We will now take these in turn.

### **Long-term or short-term relating as the basis for assessing skill**

Given that personal norms of creditable performance are not sufficient to judge the success of a relationship and that social norms about skill may be differently applied, one must make a further distinction between types of relationships for which an assessment of skill or lack of skill may be applied: the long-term versus short-term distinction. It is important to note that the goals of (and hence measures of satisfaction with skill in) long-term and short-term relationships are different. Short-term relationships are judged successful when there is an easy rapport, when first impressions are favourable, and when liking is evoked from someone who did not have any reason to feel it before, being a stranger (Argyle & Henderson, 1985). Long-term relationships require more than this and are found to require deep similarity and management of established intimacy and of long-term commitment as well as development of significant trust in a variety of contexts and relative to a range of concerns, as well other things (Duck, 2011).

The distinction in the research between short-term and long-term relationships readily suggests, therefore, that different skills and criteria for skilfulness apply in different cases. We have already considered the specific case of long-term strategic overlay (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009) on the dialectics of (in)competence for example, but there are many other cases where the confusion of short- and long-term goals – and hence of short- and long-term criteria for skilfulness – are quite markedly different. For example, a person who is shy but capable of intimacy might be judged incompetent in one sort of relationship but not in another (Bradshaw, 2006). Hence the notion of skill is not a simple reference to personal ability but to a person-situation interaction at the very least (see Chapter 2).

The issue of skill also implies an ability of two kinds of observers, both external reviewers and participants, to differentiate the goals and requirements of short- and long-term relationships. Stated more precisely, it implies a distinction and a requirement to partition the variance that is contributed by the two different viewpoints. The research on long-term relationships suggests strongly that an underlay of similarity of

attitudes is a prerequisite of successful long-term relationships and that different skills might underlie short-term relationships (Duck, 2011; Perlman & Duck, 2018). Such similarity may be judged differently by insiders and outsiders because they have available to them different sorts of information about internal states. One obvious difference lies in the knowledge of private relational history and the fact that whereas similarity of underlying ‘rhetorical vision’ (personal view of the world) is essential to the success of the relationships on the enduring future (Duck, 2011); in short-term relationships, the basis of the relationship may be independent of such history and could depend only on the fulfillment of instrumental needs and goals which are specific and perhaps even time-limited (Tourish & Hargie, 2009).

What is the parallelism between long-term and short-term relationships? Perhaps short-term relationships work best if they mimic the goals and styles of long-term ones, but, given that they most often have time-limited objectives and are strictly performative in character, this mimicry may not matter. ‘Uses’ of long-term relationships as an analogy for deciding what short-term relationships should be offering might point to the errors in too simple a conclusion about the extension of one type of relationship skill to another. It could be argued that short-term relationships are successful to the extent that they may be able to mimic the effects and styles of long-term relationships but this is actually questionable and the two sorts may better be seen as related but independent forms. Thus, for example, the fact (Duck & McMahan, 2017) that long-term relationships are based on trust and intimacy might be heard as a clarion call for all those seeking successful short-term relationships to imitate such features, but it is also apparent that short-term relationships can be quite successful without such features being present.

Hence a primary restriction on the notion of relationships as skilled performances relates to the distinction between long-term and short-term relationships. In the workplace or organisational context, one can see relationships as closer in form to short-term than to long-term relationships and so different criteria for skill and success in outcome should be applied (Kirkpatrick et al., 2006). Kirkpatrick, Foley, and Duck (2006) suggested that those who are often construed as ‘difficult’ people are not difficult in themselves, but in relation to others; relational difficulty sits instead in the multiple competing roles that individuals enact. Incompetence, then, is not a matter of personal or performative *deficiency*, but instead a problem of performative *excess*. That is, it is difficult to navigate continually shifting criteria for skill as they emerge through interaction. For example, as individuals are rewarded in relationships, they come to expect increasing rewards. Because criteria for skilled performance are realised within those performances themselves, skilfulness is a moving target. Incompetence is not the lack of competence, but a function of the generativity of relational skill.

## **Are relationships intrinsic or instrumental in purpose?**

One difference between long- and short-term relationships is that the former are normally expected to fluctuate in outcomes as time and experience change. In the case of short-term relationships, there is an expectation of immediate gratification and major signs of ultimate homogeneity or else a move towards dissolution. Where a short-term partner may leave the relationship if rewards are not immediately positively balanced against costs, a long-term partner might be more willing to sustain the relationship in

the face of (temporary) difficulty, on the grounds that the immediate rewards are not the point. The larger questions, then, are whether relationships are inherent/intrinsic or instrumental and how the answer to this first question affects the idea of skill. It has long been argued in the relationship field that relationships should not be reduced to a calculus of profits and losses but have instead some inherent and intrinsic self-referent qualities that make them desirable in and of themselves (Wright, 1985). Although some wiseacre once said that ‘Sincerity is the key to successful relationships and if you can fake sincerity then you have got it made’, the emphasis falls here on such an instrumental use of the features of long-term relationships that the claim makes us instantly aware of the merits of Wright’s point.

The ability to create and sustain shared meaning systems is the basis for relationship maintenance in the long term (Duck, 2011) and so should be accounted in the assessment of ‘skilled performance’ in any longer term association whether strategically or routinely sustained (see next section). In this case the situation may be complicated in that it is not only that competent communicative performance creates and sustains relationships, but also that relational communication allows us to create shared ideals about relationships and ‘relationshiping’. This allows us to maintain the same conceptual scheme, but flip from an outcome-based to a process-based model of competent relationships.

An emphasis on skilled performance for relationships suggests an instrumentality that may not apply successfully to long-term relationships. The ability to achieve goals and to derive specific satisfaction from relationships may be more valuable as a perspective from which to understand short-term relationships where goals are more specific and limited than is true of long-term relationships whose strategic maintenance may require the forgoing of a specific instrumental personal goal at this moment in order to sustain the relationship in the long term in intrinsic form.

### **Routine versus strategic aspects of maintenance and relating**

Throughout the chapter we have followed the predominant emphasis of the relationship scholarship in stressing the importance of cognition, awareness, and strategic action in relationships. However, recent research has focused also on the everyday routine and mundane performances that surround relationships (Dainton, 2000; Rossetto, 2015). The issue that arises in assessing skill, then, is whether the relationship is constituted by the skills or whether skills are necessary but not sufficient for relationship formation and maintenance. The matter is complicated by the fact that performance of relationships requires certain necessary mechanical skills such as the performance of warmth, acceptance, and friendliness (Argyle & Henderson, 1985) and, in some cases, intimacy, exclusivity, and trust (Duck & McMahan, 2017) but that these are not necessarily skills that are transferable from relationship to relationship or situation to situation. In intimate or romantic long-term relationships, exclusivity is more relevant and important than in short-term business relationships or in friendships, for example, and so the features that characterise skilled performance of exclusivity cannot be readily generalised from one relationship form to another.



Furthermore, communication is not skill-based alone – at least not as ‘skill’ is normally understood and represented – and cannot be essentialised in different relationship forms. It is more naturally routinised in the activities of daily life that make up particular relationship forms. Everyday life conduct of conversation can itself be skilled but does not typically register in the scholarship because the focus there is too often only on the unfamiliar and extraordinary cases of intimacy growth that grab attention in the abstracting services. We tend to neglect the everyday patterns that matter in the continuing relationships that research ultimately seeks to explain.

The skills that are required in relationships in the short-term do not necessarily translate simply into those required in long-term relationships. In short-term relationships, for example, a person can be ‘skilled’ by reason of the person’s ability to complete relevant tasks and to sustain whatever basis of familiarity is necessary for that to be accomplished. In long-term relationships, however, such basic requirements must be overlaid with a strategy devoted to the long-term maintenance of the relationship despite short-term costs. Given the variable nature of long-term experience of any kind, the skills of long-term discretion weighed against immediate valour, for example, may make a person better able to handle the inevitable instabilities and ups-and-downs of relationships even over and above any short-term skills necessary to handle brief conflict.

Translations from maintenance of long-term to maintenance of short-term relationships are therefore not that easy because the implied, and in some cases the explicit, goals are different. The maintenance of a successful short-term business relationship may be different from the goals that confront people in long-term relationships. Even in organisations and business relationships these goals could be specified in different ways. Hence the ways in which ‘skill’ might be characterised in short- and long-term relationships could be quite radically different, depending on whether one sees the maintenance of the relationship as a goal or not, relative to other (relational?) tasks.

## **Can relational skill be taught?**

Underlying most considerations of ‘skill’ is the implicit question of whether skilled conduct of relationships can be taught (Argyle, 1967). Deeper than this, however, is a question of whether 50-year-old discourses on skill are still informative in the present day. One has to recognise that the situation of skill within shifting cultural norms and changing social mores must be considered as subject to significant changes. Yet in common language the notion of ‘relating’ runs counter to any sense of strategic management or, worse, manipulation. The essence of common-sense notions of relating is founded in genuineness and spontaneity rather than manipulative or strategically managed actions. In short, the goals of it are perceived to be more in line with those of longer term relationships and there is suspicion of disingenuity in those people who are able to produce immediate or decontextualised disclosures and openness, particularly where there are power differences between speaker and listener (Cline, 2003).

A further twist to this dilemma is provided by the observation that some of the mechanical ‘social skills’ are taken to be a barrier to the authenticity and ‘true

communication' that is preferred in this society. The mechanical production of smiles, nods, and other encouragements or signals of interest is presumed to mask an underlying lack of interest in the comments of the speaker, and hence to fail the test of authenticity. Although clearly this is not always the case, the fact that psychotherapists are taught to manage these cues to warmth and intimacy as part of their professional training can be seen to show that the point cuts both ways (Mallinckrodt, 2001). It does indeed mask professional distance but simultaneously has the effect of encouraging the speaker to continue to disclose and explore experiences within the safety of the [relatively artificial] therapeutic context. Hence an appearance of warmth in the listener can, even if masking some other feelings, lead to benefits for the speaker and to a sense of being accepted (cf. Weiss' provisions discussed earlier). However, it is probable that the sense of acceptance is tested against things other than the immediate nonverbal behaviours associated with one short interaction. Hence the standard for assessing skill is once more a long-term one. It is insufficiently clear at this point whether these long-term skills can be trained in the ways in which shorter term ones may be.

### **If we know 'skill' then what is incompetence?**

As we have suggested above, incompetence is not just the lack of competence: there is more going on when that label is applied. The obvious point is that an attribution of lack of skill is a way of pointing to deficiencies in performance as judged from the cultural, contextual, and situational performance of the relationship as it is normally embodied in the culture (see Chapter 2). However, our points above also suggest that the context for assessment provides different outcomes of judgments depending on whether the relationship is seen as primarily instrumental, short-term, and routine, for instance. To label someone as unskilled is to refer to a cultural and situational context as well as to denounce them in some way.

In a broader context, Kirkpatrick et al. (2006) have noted that many terms that appear to characterise someone actually make attributions instead: that is to say, they do not identify an inherent personal characteristic so much as they place a person in a social category whose operation cannot be understood apart from the social context and the perceiver. For example, a 'shy' person cannot be shy in the absence of other people and a 'difficult' one does not demonstrate difficulty alone. Thus, difficulty and lack of relational skill are essentially terms that require the incorporation or imagining of other people. The perception of a person as a 'difficult person' is based on a set of assumptions about the ultimate goal of a work relationship (namely the achievement of extra-relational tasks).

The consequences of skilled and unskilled performance are therefore hard to pin down until one decides what level of skill (in the sense of what domain of skill) one is interested in. The ability to sustain long-term relationships that are genuine and open is most likely the aspect of relating that is tied to long-term health issues noted in the opening paragraph of the chapter, although of course people who are lonely and isolated may be lacking the short-term skills that bring them to relationships in the first place. Whatever the health implications of relationships, the basic skills of connection of individuals to society are central to both health and social success.

**NOTE**

- 1 A previous version of this chapter, upon which this revision is based, was written by Megan Foley and Steve Duck. Megan Foley is presently Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

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# The employment interview

*Rob Millar and Anne Tracey*

## INTRODUCTION

**D**ESPITE CONSIDERABLE CRITICISM OVER the past half-century, the use of the interview as a central element in the employment selection and recruitment process remains popular (Anderson, Salgado, & Hulsheger, 2010; Dipboye, Macan, & Shahani-Denning, 2012; Macan, 2009; Oostrom, Melchers, Ingold, & Kleinmann, 2016; Roth & Huffcutt, 2013; Frieder, Van Iddekinge, & Raymark, 2016). Given that effective selection and recruitment is vital for the fitness and future survival of an organisation (Latham & Sue-Chan, 1998) and the common usage of the interview method, it seems imperative that effective employment interviewing develops from a base of sound understanding and competent deployment of strategies and skills.

Before embarking on our exploration, it will be helpful to set out briefly what is meant by the term 'employment interview'. McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt and Maurer (1994, p. 599) defined it as 'a selection procedure designed to predict future job performance on the basis of applicants' oral responses to oral enquiries'. The idea of a face-to-face encounter has been captured in many recent representations of the interview where an emphasis has been placed on social interaction or social exchange processes (Huffcutt, Van Iddekinge, & Roth, 2011; Levashina, Hartwell, Morgeson, & Campion, 2014; Wilhelmy, Kleinmann, Konig, Melchers, & Truxillo, 2016). Taking this perspective, Levashina et al. (2014) define the employment interview, 'as a personally interactive process of one or more people asking questions orally to another person and evaluating the answers for the purpose of determining the qualifications of that person in order to make employment decisions' (p. 242). In addition to the

selection of potential candidates, increasing emphasis has been placed on the importance of the recruiting function whereby prospective applicants need to be attracted to, or persuaded to join, the organisation by providing accurate job-relevant information and by encouraging them to take up offers of employment (Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Farago, Zide, & Shahani-Denning, 2013). Here the interview also serves as a means of marketing the organisation (Farago et al., 2013).

The main features of the emerging perspective emphasise the social, interpersonal nature of the employment interview, point to the importance of 'skills related to social effectiveness' (Ingold, Kleinmann, Koenig, Melchers, & Van Iddekinge, 2015, p. 389), specify the participants and their main goals (which differ) and indicate the nature of the information required by each because the interview is a means of exchanging information (Dipboye et al., 2012). Further, through personal interaction interviewers and interviewees form judgements of each other and are both influenced by first impressions (Barrick, Swider, & Stewart, 2010; Dipboye et al., 2012; Swider, Barrick, & Harris, 2016) often formulated 'based on a thin slice of observable behaviour' (Mast, Bangerter, Bulliard, & Aerni, 2011, p. 199). The employment interview's popularity may derive from the belief that employers have to meet potential employees face-to-face and that this meeting will enable them to make valid assessments of their suitability for the position (Smith & George, 1992) and the organisation. Likewise, potential candidates may be afforded opportunities to show their skills and qualities and to also judge the suitability of the job and organisation if they are offered a job (Farago et al., 2015).

Employment interviewing, as a means of carrying out recruitment and selection functions, is essentially different from other main techniques primarily because of the substantial and unique dependence on interpersonal communication processes (Swider et al., 2016). It follows that the employment interview, being viewed as a particular type of social interaction, may be better understood through the application of generic social interaction models (e.g. Millar, Crute, & Hargie, 1992), specific employment interview models (Huffcutt et al., 2011) or in terms of key interpersonal skills (Hargie, 2017) relevant to the employment interview context. Of course, interpersonal skills and strategies contribute to goal attainment of interviewers *and* applicants who are engaged in a reciprocal social relationship and hence each perspective warrants consideration.

## THE INTERVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE

In terms of the definitions previously cited, interviewers, by way of social interaction, attempt to achieve their intended goals: that is, to make successful predictions of job/organisation suitability across a range of applicants (the selection function) and to ensure that sought after applicants take up offers to join the organisation (recruitment function). It is incumbent upon interviewers to make considered choices pertaining to the type of interview(s) to be employed and the use of appropriate interpersonal skills and strategies, which together enhance the likelihood of the employment interview achieving its selection and/or recruitment objectives.

Analysing employment interviews as social encounters, Stevens (1998) confirmed that they can be viewed as moving through a number of sequential scenes, originally labelled by Tullar (1989) as greeting and establishing rapport, interviewer questioning, applicant questioning and disengagement. The precise nature of the communication

skills required is dictated by the purpose of the interview (selection or recruitment), which strongly indicates the type of interview format adopted, and as a consequence the amount of freedom and discretion afforded the interviewer varies.

## **Interview structure**

One of the major dimensions along which interviews can be differentiated relates to their degree of structure. Millar et al. (1992, p. 111) suggested that the main structuring criteria 'relate to the degree of interviewer flexibility with respect to the content of the interview, what is included, how it is sampled, in what sequence and how much freedom is offered to interviewees with respect to their answers (i.e. open ended or multiple choice formats)'. Campion, Palmer and Campion (1997, p. 656) defined structure very broadly as 'any enhancement of the interview that is intended to increase psychometric properties by increasing standardisation or otherwise assisting the interviewer in determining what questions to ask and how to evaluate responses'. As a consequence of their extensive literature review, Campion et al. identified 15 components of structure representative of two main categories: the actual content of the interview and evaluation of the content. Derived from empirical research Chapman and Zweig (2005) proposed a taxonomy of interview structure factors which represented content and evaluation components. The content factors were the extent to which questions were job-related (question sophistication), were asked to all candidates in the same order (question consistency) and rapport building. There was one factor which related to evaluation standardisation and the use of numerical rating procedures. Interview characteristics could vary along each of these factors from high to low resulting in many different forms of interview. Efforts have been made to combine question structuring with response evaluation structuring, producing five levels of structure, subsequently reduced to three levels of structure, high, medium and low (Huffcutt, Culbertson & Weyhrauch, 2013).

Although considering interviews to be either structured or unstructured presents a considerable oversimplification of the situation, adopting a simple categorical approach may serve to organise a discussion of the main types of employment interview.

## **Structured interviews as selection tools**

The development of the structured selection interview emanated from attempts to design an interview in such a way as to reduce the possible influence of individual biases and errors on interviewer decisions. All major publications have reported significant increases in both the reliability and validity of more highly structured approaches (Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Dipboye et al., 2012; Farago et al., 2013; Huffcutt et al., 2001; Judge, Higgins, & Cable, 2000; Levashina et al., 2014; Seijts & Kyei-Poku, 2010; Swider, et al., 2016). According to Dipboye et al. (2012, p. 333), 'The psychometric superiority of structured interviews is not in dispute'.

As stated earlier, interview structuring may take many forms. Two of Chapman and Zweig's (2005) structuring factors are specifically related to the question content

of the interview. It is commonly agreed that all questions should be derived from a current job analysis, making all questions highly job-related (Campion et al., 1994; Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995) and increasingly sophisticated (Chapman & Zweig, 2005). Gollub-Williamson, Campion, Malos, Roehling and Campion (1997, p. 901) purport that this leads to 'increased content validity and reduces reliance on idiosyncratic beliefs about job requirements and reduces the likelihood of bias'. Furthermore, in keeping with Chapman and Zweig's (2005) second factor, question consistency, all job-related questions should be presented in a completely standardised manner, where they are asked of all candidates using the same wording and invariant sequence. Campion et al. (1997) suggest that adopting standardised procedures serves to increase interview reliability (both internal consistency and interrater) and might ease the comparison between candidates and therefore improve validity.

Considerable effort has been expended on developing particular types of job-related questions for use in the highly structured selection interview context. As a result, two main types of questions have been developed, those that focus on past experience and those that orient the candidate towards the future. Each is hypothesised to possess predictive qualities as the former is based on the assumption that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour, and the latter is based on the assumption that goals or intentions are the best predictor of future behaviour (Campion et al., 1994). The two main question types have been characteristic of two related structured interviewing approaches, namely the future-based 'situational interview' (Latham, 1989; Latham, Saari, Pursell, & Campion, 1980) and the past-based 'patterned behaviour description interview' (Janz, 1989). Both approaches base the interview on a series of questions derived from job analyses and therefore the level of job-relatedness of the question content is high which may contribute to enhanced face, content and predictive validity (Seijts & Kyei-Poku, 2010) and perceptions of procedural fairness (Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Day & Carroll, 2003; Seijts & Kyei-Poku, 2010).

In essence, the two approaches ask candidates to state either what they did do or what they would do when presented with pre-determined work-based scenarios. Van Der Zee, Bakker and Bakker (2002) found that interviewers reported employing hypothetical type questions least often closely followed by past behaviour-oriented questions. Indeed, it may be that past behaviour-based questions are preferable when selecting for highly complex jobs (Huffcutt, Conway, Roth & Klehe, 2004). However, rather than representing alternative types of questions, Levashina et al. (2014) point out that they may function better as complementary approaches as each tends to measure different relevant constructs. So, including both types of questions may increase criterion-related validity of the interview.

As well as considering job complexity it may be useful to be selective in terms of choosing which approach to adopt based on the type of applicant being considered. Where an applicant has little or no past work experience to draw upon then it might be more appropriate to use the situational interview approach, whereas in the converse situation, an interview which demands either reflection back to previous work experience or speculation forward to hypothetical scenarios, both are possible (Campion et al., 1997; Gilliland & Steiner, 1999).

In the most highly structured format, interviewers are prohibited from engaging in any prompting, probing or elaboration questioning (Huffcutt et al., 2013) but are simply required to present the primary questions and may, if necessary, only repeat the

question for the candidate. Levashina et al. (2014, p. 271) note that ‘controlling probing may be a defining element of structured interviews’. However, Van Der Zee et al. (2002) found only a minority of their interviewers (20%) engaged in no follow-up questioning, and Levashina et al. (2014) noted no probing was employed to the same extent as limited probing in structured interviews. Due to the dearth of research examining the impact and use of probing in structured interviews, suggestions remain imprudent. However, with structured interviews it may be possible to relax the degree of control and to permit a limited but agreed number of pre-planned follow-ups worded in the same manner; for example, within the interpersonal communication field probes may be employed to seek further clarification, elaboration, explanation or justification and hence offer a greater challenge to applicants (Hargie, 2017). This tactic may be particularly helpful for candidates who are shy or find it difficult to fully articulate themselves. The employment of so-called neutral probes and elaborations, such as, ‘Go on’, ‘Could you say a bit more about that?’ or ‘Could you give me an example of...?’ (Campion et al., 1997) may reduce information deficiencies yet not introduce irrelevant material. As a consequence, the use of probing may lead to the accumulation of higher quality relevant information on which to base hiring decisions.

Within the highly structured approach, interviewers are required to employ highly structured rating procedures, facilitated by the use of specially designed rating scales provided for each interview question (Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Dipboye et al., 2012; Huffcutt et al., 2013; Macan, 2009). The rating scales constructed to ‘score’ the applicants’ responses should be behaviourally anchored scales with the anchor points identified through discussion with personnel and job experts. Completing specific rating scales for each question may serve to reduce the cognitive overload demanded of interviewers, reduce biases (Reilly, Bocketti, Maser, & Wenner, 2006) and the impact of initial impressions on ratings of candidates (Swider et al., 2016). The gains for reliability and validity by using multiple ratings are strongly endorsed by Conway, Kako and Goodman (1995) and Levashina et al. (2014).

The evidence to date provides strong support for the content and predictive validity of structured interviews in the selection process (Day & Carroll, 2003; Dipboye et al., 2012; Levashina et al., 2014). Recently questions have been asked concerning why structured interviews are predictive of job performance. It has been hypothesised that structured interviews are effective in predicting job performance because they measure aspects of cognitive ability and/or personality and this mediates the relationship. But the evidence suggests the relationships are modest at best (Ingold et al., 2015; Jansen et al., 2013; Roth & Huffcutt, 2013). However, there is recent evidence to suggest that the extent to which applicants can ‘read’ the interview situation and decipher the evaluation criteria for performance is linked to better ratings in the interview and more effective performance on the job (Oostrom et al., 2016). The ability to recognise and adapt to situational demands may be very job-relevant in particular occupational contexts.

Structured approaches were developed to counteract human errors inherent in the selection process and to guard against infringing legal guidelines pertaining to fair employment practice and reducing the likelihood of litigation (Levashina et al., 2014). Attention has been focused on the reaction of applicants to their experience of structured interviewing with respect to feelings of being treated fairly (Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Farago et al., 2013). As Seijts and Kyei-Poku (2010) found, the use of structured

interviews resulted in ‘higher perceptions of procedural fairness’ (p. 443) and tended ‘to make individuals “feel good” about the manner in which hiring decisions are made’ (p. 445). This feeling of positivity on completion of the interview is extremely important, especially when the outcome is negative, because, ‘an unhappy applicant might retaliate against the organisation with negative publicity or, worse, a costly lawsuit’ (Farago et al., 2013, p. 237). In a culture of litigation, it would be ‘unwise not to use structured interviews’ (Levashina et al., 2014, p. 278).

Given the interpersonal nature of interviews, whether structured or not, opportunities arise for participants to construct impressions of each other (Dipboye et al., 2012; Roulin, Bangerter, & Levashina, 2014). As well as applicants seeking to influence interviewers, interviewers likewise attempt to influence the perceptions of applicants (Wilhelmy et al., 2016). Interviewers behave in ways that send signals to applicants with the intention of creating positive impressions of the organisation, the job and of themselves. The consequences of creating positive impressions enhance the selection and recruitment process for the organisation.

A common belief about interviewers is that they tend to make selection decisions very early in the interview process. Indeed, this is one reason for advising applicants to try to make a good first impression because initial impressions are related to ‘interviewer evaluations... and even predicted later employment decisions’ (Barrick et al., 2010, p. 1169). However, recent research has suggested that interviewers who make very quick decisions ‘may be the exception rather than the norm’ (Frieder et al., 2016, p. 242). The majority of interview decisions tend to occur much later in the interview or on completion (Frieder et al., 2016). Where quick decisions are made, candidates who begin slowly but improve as the interview proceeds are at a considerable disadvantage when compared to those who start well but tail off. Either way organisations are losing ‘good’ candidates or are recruiting less than suitable people. Deferring decisions has clear benefits for both parties, and using highly structured interviews where interviewers ask every candidate the same job-related questions, and who then rate candidates on each of these questions using structured scales, appears ‘to discourage quick decisions’ (Frieder et al., 2016, p. 223). By adopting a highly structured approach with sophisticated interview questions, the impact of initial impressions on interview judgements can be reduced over time but not eliminated (Swider et al., 2016).

Finally, there is evidence to suggest that highly structured interviews serve to reduce major group differences to negligible levels (Dipboye et al., 2012). Levashina et al. (2014, p. 255) conclude that ‘structure reduces the impact of different biasing factors on interview ratings’. Indeed after reviewing studies examining the effects of gender differences, Macan (2009, p. 210) asserted the ‘need for greater interview structure’. The use of behaviourally based evaluation scales, one feature of highly structured formats (Chapman & Zweig, 2005), has served to reduce bias when interviewing candidates with disability (Reilly et al., 2006) and those described as overweight (Kutcher & Bragger, 2004).

## **Unstructured interviews as a selection tool**

Despite the robust evidence supporting the use of structured interviews in the selection process, the unstructured interview format has been reported as a very popular

approach for personnel selection (Dipboye et al., 2012; Seijts & Kyei-Poku, 2010; Simola, Tagger, & Smith, 2007; Tsai, Chen, Chen, & Tseng, 2016; Van Der Zee et al., 2002). The unstructured interview tends to devolve considerable power and freedom to interviewers to make important procedural decisions concerning the conduct of the interview itself and subsequent evaluations of information communicated. Such discretion is favoured by interviewers, as is maintaining the informal social contact with applicants (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004).

One of the more central aspects of interview conduct concerns the role of interviewer-led questions (Stevens, 1998). According to Campion et al. (1997) the derivation of questions employed in typical unstructured interviews is likely to be focused on personality traits or self-descriptions, traditional open-ended questions inviting candidates to talk about themselves and their strengths and weaknesses, attitudes or opinions or indeed about anything the interviewer thinks is relevant, based on intuition or 'gut feelings' (Harris & Eder, 1999, p. 390). Van Der Zee et al. (2002) found that 34.5% of interviewers said they were free to ask anything they wanted to and a further 49% selected questions flexibly from a prepared list of topics. Low structure interviews typically resemble an 'open conversation' (Farago et al., 2013, p. 226), where topics may be loosely specified along with pre-prepared sample questions (Huffcutt et al., 2013). However, low structure interviews do afford candidates ample opportunity to express themselves, present their credentials and argue their case to the full by way of a free-flowing social conversation.

Unstructured interviews specify no standardisation of questioning sequence but rather delegate such control to the interviewer's discretion. In addition, it is usual for interviewers to be given complete freedom to decide whether follow up, probing or elaboration type questions are required or not (Campion et al., 1997; Conzelmann & Keye, 2014; Dipboye et al., 2012). Stevens (1998) reported that 55% of interviewers' questions were categorised as 'secondary follow-up probes' and Van Der Zee et al. (2002) found that non-standardised follow up questioning was employed by 78.2% of interviewers. Such flexibility is typical of semi-structured interviews where topics can be explored more fully or not followed up at all as deemed appropriate by the interviewer on a candidate-by-candidate basis (Conzelmann & Keye, 2014). Given that follow-ups are intended to clarify initial responses by candidates to interviewer questions (Hargie, 2017) their use in the employment interview may serve a very important function in removing confusion and, as a consequence, developing greater understanding and improving accuracy of information gathered (Levashina et al., 2014). (See Chapter 4 for a further discussion of the skill of questioning.)

Turning to the process of evaluating the responses elicited, unstructured interviews typically conclude with overall or global impressions being recorded. Van Der Zee et al. (2002) reported that 89% of their interviewers did not utilise any rating scales for evaluating responses, and an overall global rating approach was adopted by 64%. Low structure interviews typically require a global judgement to be made or several judgements to be recorded on simple scales on completion of the interview (Huffcutt et al., 2013).

A further common feature of unstructured (and many structured) interviews is a less formal 'meet-and-greet' phase (Swider et al., 2016, p. 625). Chapman and Zweig (2005) called this initial interaction 'rapport building' and they regard it as a crucial phase of the interview, especially when beginning a social encounter with a stranger.



Through these early casual conversations interviewers are able to establish common ground by engaging in small-talk (Farago et al., 2013), can settle the applicant down (Dipboye et al., 2012) and start to create important impressions of trustworthiness (Klotz, Da Motta Veiga, Buckley, & Gavin, 2013) and warmth (Farago et al., 2016). The potential benefits of including a rapport building component appear to be an improved social interaction, a more candid exchange of information (Swider et al., 2016) and enhanced perceptions of having been treated fairly (Farago et al., 2013).

When considering the effectiveness of unstructured interviews in the selection process the literature reports inferior validity when compared to more highly structured formats (Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Dipboye et al., 2012; Huffcutt et al., 2013; Levashina et al., 2014). There are a number of reasons for the poorer psychometric properties of unstructured interview formats as a means of selecting job applicants. The inconsistent use and variable sequencing of primary questions and follow-ups about topics, which may not be job-relevant, conspire to reduce both reliability and validity of the procedure. Assessments made by unstructured techniques are more likely to focus on general mental ability, background credentials (educational and work histories), personality traits (such as agreeableness), social and communication skills and physical attributes, some of which are poor predictors of job performance (Huffcutt et al., 2001; Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002). However, interviewers using low structure formats do make trait assessments (for example, conscientiousness and emotional stability) and these subjective assessments are related to their evaluations of applicant suitability (Van Dam, 2003). Interviewers need to be acutely aware of the immense difficulties in making accurate assessments of candidate personality, and of the pitfalls in making subsequent inferences from trait judgements to job performance (Barrick et al., 2000; Van Dam, 2003).

A major consequence of using unstructured interview formats, which also may help to explain their poor psychometric properties, is the increased likelihood of introducing errors or, what Campion et al. (1997) describe as 'contamination'. Through rapport building, interviewers are exposed to candidates where initial impressions are formed which have been shown to relate to later candidate ratings and selection decisions (Swider et al., 2016). Barrick et al. (2010, p. 1171) conclude that, 'the "fast and frugal" judgements that emerge at the start of an interview matter when interviewers are making a selection recommendation'. Because interviewers can ask a broad range of questions, which may or may not be job-related, in any order they wish, with all or some responses probed further, the information base upon which decisions could be made varies substantially and susceptibility to biases increases (Levashina et al., 2014). It is also possible that during initial informal exchanges interviewers may formulate positive (or negative) impressions of candidates that lead to very quick, premature decisions based on minimal amounts of relevant information. Interestingly there is evidence to suggest that interviewers make quicker decisions about applicants who perform well or poorly compared to those who do neither (Frieder et al., 2016). Selection decisions made on such 'thin slices' (Mast et al., 2011, p. 199) of information are likely to be highly unreliable, resulting in interviewers either hiring the wrong candidate or rejecting the right candidate. Nonetheless, according to Chapman and Zweig (2005, p. 698), 'Untrained interviewers conducting unstructured interviews are brimming with confidence about their ability to predict future job performance'.

Where interviews are largely unregulated and interviewers are permitted to engage in a rapport-building stage, and to ask whatever questions they wish, the potential for interviewer biases to influence judgements arises. Major reviews have referred to the possible occurrence of stereotypical bias related to gender, race, age, disability, obesity and pregnancy (Dipboye et al., 2012; Levashina et al., 2014; Macan, 2009; Morgeson, Reider, Campion, & Bull, 2008). Although difficult to generalise findings, the recent trends appear to suggest minimal effects due to group differences. Because many selection decisions are made by individual interviewers, trends may say little about individual behaviours so vigilance is recommended.

### **Structured interviews as recruiting tools**

Although, as indicated above, structured approaches have demonstrated superior levels of reliability and validity with respect to selection decisions, they are viewed as less effective in meeting the recruitment outcome (Levashina et al., 2014). As Goodale (1989, p. 320) observed, 'highly structured interviews can appear to the applicant a bit like an interrogation, and may place too much emphasis on the *selection* objective at the expense of the *attraction* objective'. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that highly structured approaches tend to decrease the attractiveness of organisations for candidates (Chapman & Rowe, 2001, 2002; Chapman & Zweig, 2005). Candidates tend to rate highly structured interviews as a negative or invasive experience which in turn produces adverse views of the process and the organisation. Such candidates are therefore less likely to accept job offers and are more likely to paint an unsatisfactory image of the company to others (Farago et al., 2013).

### **Unstructured interviews as recruitment tools**

The belief that using highly structured interview formats may harm an organisation's ability to recruit has been one of the reasons offered by personnel for resisting their inclusion (Van Der Zee et al., 2002) and for preferring a less structured approach (Levashina et al., 2014). The evidence to date suggests that interviews with less structure seem to be more suited to achieving the recruitment function (Chapman & Rowe, 2001, 2002). It is crucial that candidates feel that they have been treated fairly, which is more likely when low structure interviews are employed (Farago et al., 2013). It is possible that the more free-flowing conversational nature of unstructured interview formats, together with rapport building, creates a reaction in applicants that provides them with a greater sense of having had a chance to 'sell' themselves, of having been listened to, and determines a more positive reaction to the experience (Swider et al., 2016). When unstructured interview formats are employed and interviewers demonstrate warmth and trustworthiness, applicants tend to rate the organisation, the interviewer and the interview more positively and indicate a greater willingness to accept any job offers that may ensue. This, in turn, enhances the organisation's reputation, attracts more future applicants and reduces the likelihood of lawsuits (Klotz et al., 2013). Therefore, in considering the psychometric qualities of interviews in the employment context, it seems crucial to do so with clarity of purpose to the fore.

## Employment interviews as selection *and* recruitment tools

The extent to which employment interviews are able to meet both selection and recruitment functions seems more complex and somewhat conflicting. The drive towards greater psychometric qualities through higher levels of structuring serves the selection function admirably but may influence the recruitment function in a quite contrary manner. However, there have been some suggestions that highly structured interviews do not assess all pertinent constructs in the selection process. For example, estimates of counterproductive work-relevant traits seem better achieved by adopting less structured interview formats (Blackman & Funder, 2002). Similarly, accurate assessment of person–environment fit constructs has been viewed as more likely by using less structured interview formats (Cable & Judge, 1997; Judge et al., 2000).

What seems to be the case is that choosing to adopt either a highly structured or an unstructured interview format will fail to meet some of the objectives of employment interviewing. In order to offer the best compromise, where predictive validity for selection can be adequate (or optimal) and applicant reactions mainly positive, greater flexibility of approach is necessary. This necessitates the integration of some characteristics of unstructured interviews into the standardised format of structured interviews. The outcome may result in an interview that ‘flows more like a conversation’. (Fargo et al., 2013, p. 226). For example, through a rapport building, meet-and-greet stage, prior to formal questioning, the rigid standardisation of administration can be reduced, thereby allowing candidates more opportunity to demonstrate their qualities and ‘sell themselves’ while allowing interviewers opportunities to witness the interpersonal skills of individuals interacting with a stranger. Although this stage may introduce potential bias the importance of attracting applicants suggests the risks may be worthwhile (Swider et al., 2016).

It may also be possible to modify the behaviour of interviewers within structured interviews. The introduction of variety with respect to question format has been suggested (Campion et al., 1997; Levashina et al., 2014). As long as different types of questions (for example, future-oriented and past behaviour types) have adequate validity, a range of questions offer variety for both participants. Further, the qualities demonstrated by the interviewer towards the candidate may also exert a positive influence. Applicants who perceive interviewers as trustworthy (Klotz et al., 2013) or warm (Fargo et al., 2013) are more likely to believe that they have been treated fairly and that the organisation is a just place to work, even if they are unsuccessful themselves. These modifications may soften the impression of rigid structuring, increase perceptions of fairness and reduce negative candidate (and interviewer) reactions (Posthuma et al., 2002). One possibility would be to construct an interview with three distinct stages; initially a meet-and-greet or rapport building stage characterised by a free-flowing conversation to put the applicant at ease, followed by a structured interview ‘during which the interviewer conveys warm behaviours’ (Fargo et al., 2013, p. 237). Finally, stage three finishes the interview by offering applicants a chance to engage in further natural conversation and/or ask any questions they may have. This model comes with a health warning and cautions against a completely unregulated beginning and ending due to the dangers of irrelevant and biasing information influencing selection decisions. The inclusion of rapport building needs to be carefully planned if contamination is to be minimised (Levashina et al., 2014).

An alternative is to carry out more than one interview, each with its own specific purpose. Even with selection in mind there may be a case for at least two interviews, each carried out for different purposes (Chapman & Rowe, 2001). For example, Blackman and Funder (2002) suggest that employers should initially screen applicants using a more structured interview format for predicting future job-performance and, for those who are successful at this stage, add a second unstructured interview to estimate their job-related personality attributes, including counterproductive traits.

There have also been suggestions for separating the selection and recruitment functions and offering two employment interviews, each adopting differing levels of interview structure (Chapman & Rowe, 2001). Kohn and Dipboye (1998, p. 839) suggest using two interviews, 'one designed strictly for prediction and the other designed to allow an informal question-and-answer session to meet the needs of applicants'.

Whatever type of interview format has been utilised it is always important to consider the disengagement scene (Stevens, 1998) or closure of the interview. The nature of selection interviews, where decisions have not yet been formally taken about the suitability of the candidate for the job, requires a cautious closure. It would seem important that this phase of the interview should acknowledge the effort invested and participation by the interviewee in the interview, yet this must be achieved in a 'neutral' way so as not to raise expectations (Dipboye, 1992). Conventional practice typically allows applicants the opportunity to ask questions at this stage, although highly structured approaches recommend that this be carried out in a separate interview with a personnel representative to ensure that only job-related information is considered for the purposes of reaching a selection decision (Campion et al., 1988). In somewhat less structured methods, applicant questions may be regarded as an important source of information and exert a positive influence on candidate impressions (Burns & Morehead, 1991).

In summary, the role of selection interviewers requires them to assume substantial responsibility for convening and conducting the interview. Therefore, it is vital that they are knowledgeable of interview tactics and skilled in the utilisation of interpersonal communication skills. Effective interviewers need to focus attention on both the technical qualities of their procedures and on the social context in which candidate recruitment and selection take place. The extent to which objectives are attained is not simply a function of interviewer competence but will also be significantly influenced by the effectiveness of applicants in playing out their role. It is to this aspect that we now turn.

## THE APPLICANT'S PERSPECTIVE

Given that the employment interview remains the most widely used recruitment tool (Howard & Ferris, 1996; Silvester & Chapman, 1996) it is, for applicants, an inescapable part of the route to future employment. As a result of the information gained during personal interaction with each applicant, interviewers make decisions about the person best suited to the available post (Shannon & Stark, 2003). It has been shown that what applicants do and say in an interview has an impact on interviewer's ratings (Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Young & Kacmar, 1998). Therefore, it is understandable that individuals will want to use the opportunity and the time allotted to them in the interview to create as positive an impression as possible.

The employment interview remains the most popular and widely used recruitment tool despite the array of selection tools available (e.g. Frauendorfer & Schmid Mast, 2015). Recruiters believe that better decisions can be made through face-to-face contact rather than relying solely on biographical information or test scores (Gatewood, Field, & Barrick, 2011). While the intention of employers is to hire the right person for the job, Barrick, Shaffer and DeGrassi (2009) remind us that, 'the image a candidate portrays in the job interview may not accurately reflect the candidate's true self, and, as some employers ultimately discover, what they see in the interview may not be what they get on the job' (p. 1394). Hence, the impressions created through the 'extensive' use of tactics in the interview situation, if not assessed accurately, can lead to poor recruitment decisions (Roulin et al., 2014). Therefore, if the successful outcome of job interviews depends upon the quality of candidates *and* the quality of recruiters, then impression management (IM) and its role in employment decisions is a useful debate to engage in. Here, we begin by reviewing the applicant's role in impression management.

## Impression management in the employment interview

Nowhere are self-presentation or IM strategies more prevalent than in the employment interview (Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002; Levashina & Campion, 2007). Applicants modify their verbal and non-verbal behaviour to make a positive impression (Barrick et al., 2009; Steven & Kristof, 1995); and interviewers decisions are affected by how the candidate presents him- or herself (Roulin et al., 2014, 2015). Given that it is *what* the job applicant says and *how* they say it that is of significance, it is understandable that the use of verbal *and* non-verbal tactics to create favourable impressions have received much attention in research.

Impression management can be summarised, for example, as *honest* and *deceptive* (see Schneider, Powell, & Roulin, 2015). When candidates present themselves 'honestly' in an interview, they are providing genuine information; those who 'consciously distort' the information they provide are being 'deceptive' (Swider, Barrick, Harris, & Stoverink, 2011). In a substantial study of 119 mock employment interviews, Schneider et al. (2015) attempted to discover more about the micro and macro-level behavioural cues that are indicators of deceptive IM. In this investigation, Schneider et al. adopted Levashina and Campion's (2007) taxonomy of deceptive IM behaviours, including *slight image creation*, *extensive image creation*, *image protection* and *deceptive ingratiation*. Before considering the results of research, these behaviours are outlined.

### Describing deceptive IM behaviours

In keeping with Delery and Kacmar's (1998) assertive, self-focused tactics of self-promotion, entitlements and enhancements, *slight image creation* is concerned with embellishing, tailoring and giving significance to events in order to enhance their importance. Similarly, *extensive image creation* is recognised as constructing, inventing stories and exaggerations. *Image protection* is reminiscent of the defensive tactics outlined by Ellis et al. (2002) that are designed to save face or

bolster an individual's image. To protect image, unfavourable information may be omitted (Schneider et al., 2015). That is, where *image* is under threat in an interview, applicants will offer *excuses* (claim no responsibility for a negative outcome), use *justifications* (accept responsibility but diminish the negative aspects) or *apologies* (accept responsibility and acknowledge the need for restitution). The tactic of *deceptive ingratiation* corresponds with other-focused assertive strategies, in which ingratiation tactics, such as expressing insincere beliefs and values, are utilised by applicants when they wish to cultivate interpersonal liking and attraction between themselves and the interviewer (Chen, Lee, & Yeh, 2008). These can include *opinion conformity* (expressing opinions, beliefs or values that are thought to match those of the interviewer); and *other enhancement* (praising or flattering the interviewer in order to raise their self-esteem) (Ellis et al., 2002).

### ***IM behaviour: Insights gained through research***

Important, informative and somewhat surprising results emerged in the study by Schneider et al. (2015) that may be useful for interviewer training (discussed later). Deception in the interview situation is indicated through 'restrained facial behaviour' that includes less smiling; also, in 'unrestrained verbal behaviour' where there are more 'speaking errors and less silences'. An unexpected result also emerged in that deceptive interviewees 'gave off a general impression of being less anxious' (Schneider et al., 2015, p. 187). In relation to the latter finding, perhaps the conditions of the study contributed to less 'applicant' anxiety. That is, preparation of interviewees was thorough, a job description provided, a real job interview simulated with consultants as interviewers and monetary reward to perform well. While the study was authentic and well planned, interviewees knew their performances were not being judged for an actual job. However, despite the researchers' acknowledged limitations of the study (i.e. mock interviews with students; low reliability on some cues), the results are insightful. Notably, the complexity of deception in the interview was highlighted, for example, the 'talkative' applicant may be viewed as performing well and hence perceived positively – such is the difficulty for decision makers to interpret cues accurately.

Earlier, the results from a meta-analysis combining 116 studies by De Paulo et al. (2003) helped to illuminate indicators of deceit. Regarding micro-cues, liars spoke less, were repetitious and provided less detail overall; in addition, liars had dilated pupils and raised their chins more often. For macro-cues, the indicators were that liars were less co-operative, more nervous, uncertain and tending to be less logical (De Paulo et al., 2003).

Important to consider here also are the results of a Swiss study carried out by Roulin et al. (2014) in relation to deception where 164 applicants in recruiting agencies were interviewed by professional interviewers for *actual* jobs. In this case (interviews for actual jobs), Roulin et al. indicated that the data collected mirrors what happens in face-to-face interactions where recruiters assess and form perceptions of applicants regarding for example their qualities or their level of honesty. The researchers found a new factor concerning deceptive IM. That is, the rate of deceptive ingratiation, image protection and slight and extensive image creation was lower than that reported in

previous studies, for example, that of Levashina and Campion (2007). To help explain the reduction in the use of deceptive IM in the study, Roulin et al. highlighted the type or quality of applicants as a factor – that is – experienced applicants with a job history to draw on compared to students or recent graduates.

If recruiters are influenced or convinced by the ‘deceptive’ tactics employed, they may discover – as Barrick et al. (2009) have alluded to – the person who turns up to take up the post is not the person with the skills, competencies, qualities or personal attributes necessary for the role. Hence, for the employer, the investment of time, effort and energy, not to mention the costs involved in the process of hiring someone, could be a fruitless, yet expensive exercise. As Schneider et al. (2015, p. 189) cautioned: ‘the limited ability of interviewers to detect deceit poses an issue for organisations’. (See Chapter 3 for a further discussion of deception cues)

To the applicant who gains a post through the ‘successful’ use of IM tactics and strategies in the interview, the following questions might be posed:

- What is it like to be faced with the responsibilities of a role in the workplace that has been achieved through deception?
- What is the outcome in the circumstances of working in a post that turns out to be highly challenging – flourishing or floundering?
- What is the impact or knock on effect for fellow employees, the company or organisation?

In considering IM strategies and tactics, the discussion turns to look at verbal and non-verbal behaviours and the role in decision-making. First, non-verbal tactics.

## Non-verbal IM behaviour

The need to know, understand and raise awareness of non-verbal behaviour and its potential impact on communication, including the job interview, is critically important (see Kostic & Chadee, 2015). To enlighten readers on how applicants’ non-verbal behaviour can influence recruiters, Frauendorfer and Schmid Mast (2015) draw on existing research and theories to illustrate. For example, *salience hypothesis* suggests that specific non-verbal cues may help to highlight (or make more salient) the differences in applicants. Essentially, in a group of applicants who have a similar ability to respond to interview questions, non-verbal behaviour becomes important in the final decision as it helps to differentiate between similar individuals. This would mean, however, that recruiters need to know and understand non-verbal behaviour. *Reinforcement theory* suggests that employers have made their decision at the outset of the interview and as such reinforce this first impression of the applicant throughout. However, reinforcement may work in an alternative way – in other words, at the start of the interaction, the interviewer may form an impression based on the *salient* non-verbal behaviour of the applicant and reinforce that behaviour in the course of the interview. Thirdly, *immediacy hypothesis* refers to non-verbal immediacy behaviour including eye contact, smiling, hand gestures and interpersonal distance. Engaging in such behaviours can generate a positive effect in the recruiter and consequently a positive evaluation of the applicant.

While research has shown that applicants' non-verbal behaviour can have a positive impact on job interview outcomes, it is important also to comment on verbal responses and the response of recruiters to verbal IM tactics.

### *Verbal IM behaviour*

As noted above, candidates presenting themselves for interview can engage in IM behaviours in an honest/truthful way or a deceptive way (Roulin et al., 2014, 2015). According to Millar and Gallagher (1997) the advantage in adopting, for example, self-focused tactics is that, 'applicants can focus the direction of their interviews' content on areas which will allow them to excel, hence creating as positive an impression as possible' (p. 399). Perhaps this explains Stevens and Kristof's (1995) finding that applicants use positive self-focused tactics (self-promotion) more frequently than other impression management tactics and supports the assertion by Gilmore and Ferris (1989) and Kacmar, Delery and Ferris (1992) that self-promotion produces positive outcomes in the interview situation. For example, Kristof-Brown, Barrick and Franke (2002) found that self-promoting behaviours led interviewers to see applicants as a good fit and potentially more hireable. Given that interviewers attempt to assess the degree of fit between the applicant and the organisation (Wade and Kinicki, 1997), applicants who cultivate the perception that there is congruence between their values and that of the organisation will be more likely to receive job offers (Cable and Judge, 1997).

The impression management tactics selected by applicants in the interview situation are influenced by a range of personal determinants such as personality traits (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002), verbal aggressiveness (Lamunde, Scudder, & Simmons, 2003), self-esteem (Delery & Kacmar, 1998), gender (DuBrin, 1994; Kacmar & Carlson, 1994) and cultural background (Sarangi, 1994). For example, while extroverted and agreeable candidates will engage in strategies of self-promotion and positive non-verbal cues (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002), verbally aggressive candidates utilise self-enhancement or entitlement tactics (Lamunde et al., 2003). Entitlements, however, are less likely to be utilised by candidates with higher self-esteem (Delery & Kacmar, 1998).

In addition, the findings of Ellis et al. (2002) show that the type of question posed by the interviewer impacts on the type of impression management tactic selected. For example, the use of self-promotion is more likely in response to experience-based questions (e.g. 'Tell us about a time...') rather than situational-based questions (e.g. 'Suppose you were.... How would you address this situation?'). In this case, situational-based questions incurred more ingratiation tactics, particularly opinion conformity.

Candidates should be aware that the overuse of self-promotion tactics can 'back-fire'. The evidence indicates that interviewers may regard those who overindulge in such tactics as disingenuous (Eder & Harris, 1999; Gilmore, Stevens, Harrell-Cook, & Ferris, 1999). In particular, Kacmar and Carlson (1999) warn applicants against the use of other-focused impression management tactics because such tactics receive lower ratings than self-focused tactics in the interview situation. Highlighting the importance of what is said in the interview, Silvester (1997) found that successful candidates were those who made stable and personal attributions for previous negative events, whereas less successful candidates used defensive tactics in the same situation.



*The impact of impression management on fairness in the employment interview*

Consideration needs to be given to whether successful execution of impression management tactics could lead to unfairness in employment interview outcomes. Commenting on the harmful consequences of impression management, Ralston and Kirkwood (1999) argued that deceitful or inaccurate information that is intended to mislead interviewers can undermine the value of the interview. On one hand, self-promoting behaviours could be regarded as harmless and positive when they represent a true picture of the applicant's nature and character. At the other end of the continuum, attempts to create an impression through deceit will have negative consequences. For example, feigning motivation, other-directedness or interpersonal attraction, unless spotted by the interviewer, will lead to error in the selection process. While they may not be setting out to deceive, by engaging in these tactics, the applicant portrays the appropriate image for the post and if they are appointed on the basis of their performance, the behaviour may lead to an error in interviewer judgement (Anderson, 1991). In order to increase fairness in employment interviews, Rosenfeld (1997, p. 804) suggested that impression management tactics that are 'deceptive, manipulative and insincere' need to be 'detected, minimized and discounted'. The paradox is that, while image building is an inherent part of the interview process and is to some extent a requirement for success, it is necessary for interviewers to be sensitive to self-presentation tactics if they are to make sound judgements about candidates who attend for interview.

## **MEDIATORS AND INFLUENCES ON THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW AND EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS**

The employment interview as a method of selection and recruitment provides an applicant with the opportunity to interact personally with a potential employer and, based on their experience of the interview, make decisions about the company. However, many factors impact upon this experience and can have an influence on the process and outcome for the interviewee. These include personal characteristics such as personality (e.g. Cook, Vance, & Spectre, 2000), physical appearance (e.g. Polinko & Popovich, 2001; Seiter & Sandry, 2003) and speech styles (e.g. Ayres, Keereetaweep, Chen, & Edwards, 1998; Cargile, 1997, 2000; Parton, Siltanen, Hosman, & Langenderfer, 2002). The impact of each of these factors on applicants' experiences in employment interviews is now considered.

### **Personal characteristics**

Before candidates present themselves for interview, recruiters already have established a 'picture' of the individual from the information available to them, usually by way of the application form and/or curriculum vitae. The interview itself is the opportunity for candidates to present themselves in person to the recruiter. Many personal factors of the candidate are then 'visible' and under the scrutiny of the interviewer. It is these factors and their influence on the employment interview that we now turn to, including personality, physical appearance, speech styles and confident communication.

## **Personality**

In terms of personality attributes and the workplace, Sackett and Walmsley (2014) posed the question: ‘what types of attributes do employers seek to evaluate in interviews when considering applicants?’ (p. 538). The researchers discovered that, in terms of workforce readiness, conscientiousness and agreeableness were considered important and these are included in the attributes employers focus on in the interview situation (Sackett & Walmsley, 2014). The authors go on to advise that since such attributes are rated as ‘important for and predictive of successful performance... applicants would do well to develop and emphasize these characteristics in the job search process’ (Sackett & Walmsley, 2000, p. 546). In earlier studies, Cook et al. (2000, p. 880) endorsed the notion that indeed ‘personality characteristics of the interviewee play an important role in the evaluation of the interviewee’s performance and the outcomes of the interview’. Personality characteristics such as Type A/achievement, extraversion and internal locus of control were associated with positive interview performance and outcome (Cook et al., 2000). Likewise, Anderson, Silvester, Cunningham-Snell and Haddleton (1999) found that interviewer ratings of candidate personality in graduate recruitment interviews had an influence on outcome decisions. In relation to non-verbal behaviour and personality, more agreeable applicants express more positive non-verbal behaviour such as smiling and eye-contact during an interview (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002).

Similar to Sackett and Walmsley’s (2004) investigation, Caldwell and Burger (1998) utilised the ‘Big Five’ personality markers (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness) and found a link between personality and the likelihood of being employed. While Sackett and Walmsley (2014) found conscientiousness and agreeableness as important attributes for success regardless of the status of the job, Frauendorfer and Schmid Mast (2015) remind us that extraversion and conscientiousness have been shown to predict job performance, therefore ‘it might be crucial for the recruiter to know how highly extraverted and conscientious applicants express those traits nonverbally’ (p. 226).

Applicants perform better when interviewers exhibit a ‘warm personality’ (Liden, Martin, & Parsons, 1993). That is, as a consequence of positive non-verbal interviewer behaviour (head nods, smiling), applicants make a better impression and receive higher ratings. Perhaps a warm reception and being in the presence of interviewers who have the ability to put an applicant at ease can help change the entire interview process and outcome in terms of how an applicant ‘performs’ and whether or not they decide to join the company. For example, Papadopoulou, Ineson and Williams (1996) indicated that applicants perceived interviewers who were willing to provide information as ‘warm and thoughtful’. In turn, it was the provision of information about the job and the company that influenced applicants’ decisions to take up a job offer.

## **Physical appearance**

Physical appearance has an impact on hiring decisions (Seiter & Sandry, 2003; Shannon & Stark, 2003; Timming, Nickson, Re, & Perrett, 2017), in that recruiters make decisions about candidates based on appearance. In this respect, two aspects, body decoration and obesity factors, seem to be important.

## ***Body decoration***

A recent study by Timming et al. (2017), examined the effects of body art on the hireability ratings with 60 male and 60 female participants. In keeping with previous research (e.g. Shepperd & Kwavnick, 1999), Timming et al. found that 'visible body art' has a negative impact on hireability. In particular, body art (i.e. tattoos or piercings) can reduce chances of being hired. However, the study showed that chances of being hired depend on whether the post is 'customer-facing' or 'non-customer facing'. That is, the negative impact of body art on hireability is lessened in the non-customer facing posts.

Earlier, Shepperd and Kwavnick (1999) pointed out that body piercing (and tattoos) may be viewed as symbols of rebellion or recklessness. Even the most trivial of cues (a small piece of jewellery, such as an earring) or body piercing (especially nose rings) may disadvantage candidates through being rated as less sociable, trustworthy and hireable (Seiter & Sandry, 2003). Furthermore, perceptions of males with jewellery may be more negative than those of females (Workman & Johnson, 1994), a finding that concurs with Timming et al. (2017) who suggested that modifications to the body may carry more stigma and be more detrimental to the hireability of men than women, regardless of the gender of the assessor.

How an applicant's image is regarded and evaluated can depend on the attitude of the recruiter. Referring to non-work-related factors (e.g. personal appearance) that are evaluated in the interview, Shannon and Stark (2003, p. 614) stated that: 'If the interviewer has any previously acquired dispositions to evaluate certain characteristics with a positive or negative bias, these acquired dispositions, or attitudes, could influence the interviewer's overall evaluation of the applicant'.

Perhaps the increasing popularity of piercings will lead to more acceptability in the workplace and applicants choosing certain image markers will be less disadvantaged since, as expressed by Gorham, Cohen and Morris (1999, p. 282), 'Fashion changes over time as do attire rules and expectations'. Arguably, employers who do not revise their policies on personal image and dress codes may risk losing potentially excellent employees. Meanwhile, the indications are that candidates in the process of seeking employment should be aware of the expectations of recruiters in terms of dress code and appearance so that they can avoid the negative consequences of lower ratings in the interview – or make choices about which firms to apply to.

## ***Obesity factors and the job interview***

The belief or perception that overweight or obese people are responsible for their condition (De Jong, 1980) could help to explain why overweight applicants are often rejected for jobs. Pingitore, Dugoni, Tindale, & Spring (1994) found interview ratings for obese (versus non-obese) applicants were more likely to be unfavourable, particularly if the interviewer (male or female) was conscious of their own body. Polinko and Popovich (2001, p. 906) suggested that, 'obesity discrimination may occur, first, from the lack of fit between the expectation of an overweight individual's abilities and second, the perceived reality of the job's requirements in terms of skills and abilities'. Perhaps interviewer training needs to ensure that those responsible for recruiting are aware and up to date with legislation relating to discrimination in employment interviews.

To investigate how average or overweight people are assessed or rated as employable, Finkelstein, Frautschy Demuth and Sweeney (2007) employed 751, 18–21 male and female psychology students as raters (114 of whom have previous hiring experience). Within the scope of the study that assessed weight, level of job qualifications and type of job with hireability, four female overweight ‘applicants’ (actors) were rated. Finkelstein et al. (2007) suggested that overweight interviewees fare less well in the job market but acknowledged the limitations of the study and urged that the issues continue to be taken seriously:

‘we highly encourage researchers and practitioners to collaborate to tackle obesity discrimination theoretically and empirically, to continue the examination of moderators and mediators, and to take this issue seriously in the workplace’ (p. 220).

### **Speech styles and communication apprehension**

In the highly evaluative conditions of the employment interview, competence in communicating has a bearing on how applicants are perceived by the interviewer. Specifically, perceptions of communication ability are influenced by factors such as non-standard accents and style and confidence levels of the candidate. In relation to non-standard accents, Cargile (2000, p. 172) stated that ‘language attitudes research has consistently demonstrated that individuals with non-standard accents are judged to be less suitable for high-status jobs and more suitable for low-status jobs’. Despite this expectation, Cargile (1997, 2000) found that Chinese-accented and Anglo-American speakers were rated equally suitable for a (technical) job, and the lack of discrimination was particularly evident for one high-status job in particular – information systems trainee. However, Chinese-accented speakers were judged less suitable for posts in human resources.

In terms of speech styles, powerful versus powerless speech was examined by Parton et al. (2002). Professional (and undergraduate) respondents evaluated interviewees’ dynamism, social attractiveness, superiority, control over self, control over others and employability. Evidence suggested that those with a powerful speech style were rated more favourably (competent and employable), particularly by professionals. Parton et al. (2002, p. 154) argued that as ‘impression formation is vital to interview success’ interviewees should receive training in verbal presentation including powerful speech.

Such training may also be helpful to those who have difficulty in communicating due to anxiety. That said, when Feeney, McCarthy and Goffin (2015) investigated applicant anxiety, females exhibited higher levels of five types of anxiety (appearance, behavioural, communication, performance and social) than their male counterparts. However, in the interview situation, interviewers rated males and females similarly in terms of anxiety levels. In keeping with Sex-linked Anxiety Coping Theory (SCT), despite high anxiety, females coped better in the interview situation and were able to mask their anxiety.

The findings of Feeney et al. (2015) are important as applicants who are unable to demonstrate characteristics that are rated highly in the interview situation (e.g. confidence, fluency, controlled energy and body language) due to high

communication apprehension (CA), may indeed be disadvantaged (Ayres et al., 1998). High CAs talk less, have reduced eye contact, are less fluent and ask fewer questions compared to low CAs, hence they may be judged as ineffective communicators and consequently unsuitable for the job. If, as Ayres et al. (1998) found, high CAs think about and prepare differently for interviews from their low CA counterparts, perhaps training for high CA types would help to minimise the impact of communication apprehension in critical situations such as the employment interview and help applicants to strengthen their communication skills. Within applicant training, consideration could be given to coping strategies – Problem, Emotion and Avoidance-Oriented – to raise awareness and support those who need tools to improve their ability to perform well in the interview situation (McCarthy & Goffin, 2005; Feeney et al., 2015).

## **THE EXPERIENCES OF SPECIFIC GROUPS IN THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW**

Research in employment interviews has addressed the experiences of specific groups, such as candidates with disabilities and applicants from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Consideration of such groups is warranted here as research findings relating to interview outcomes are inconsistent.

### **Applicants with disabilities**

Difficulties in employment interviews still persist for people with disabilities. While some research has shown that those with a disability are viewed as less employable than those without a disability (e.g. Bricout & Bentley, 2000; Gouvier, Steiner, Jackson, Schlater, & Rain, 1991; Ravaud, Madiot, & Ville, 1992), others have found that disabled applicants have been rated equal or better than their non-disabled counterparts (e.g. Bell & Klein, 2001; Marchioro & Bartels, 1994; Nordstrom, Huffaker, & Williams, 1998). For example, Bordieri, Drehmer and Taylor (1997) demonstrated that, regardless of being equally qualified, an employee with depression would be less likely to be recommended for promotion, while Rumrill, Millington, Webb, & Cook (1998) found that applicants with insulin-dependent diabetes would be rated similar to other applicants when rated by rehabilitation counsellors.

That little has changed for the disabled applicant in terms of discrimination was confirmed by Duckett (2000) when he stated: 'discrimination in employment interviews is very much apparent in the experiences of disabled people' (p. 1034). When he interviewed disabled applicants about their experiences of employment interviews, he found that they described the process in terms of a 'struggle' or 'battle' with the 'odds stacked against them'.

Building on the approach taken by Duckett, Vedeler (2013) investigated American (n=14) and Norwegian (n=15) applicants' stories of how disability is dealt with in job interviews. Interestingly, three types of stories were documented in the findings – discrimination, uncertainty and recognition. In summary, hiring procedures lack 'inclusive discourse (and practice)' around disability (discrimination and uncertainty);

however, some employers do not discriminate between disabled and non-disabled persons (recognition).

The phenomenon of positive bias towards those with disabilities has also been explained earlier by Marchioro and Bartels (1994) who qualified their finding that no differences were found in attitudes to disabled or non-disabled job interviewees, in terms of social appropriateness. That is, in their desire to provide socially acceptable answers, participants may have 'overcompensated' for negative attitudes towards disabled candidates by giving higher ratings. Similarly, Bell and Klein (2001) suggested that the 'norm to be kind' theory could explain the positively biased outcome for disabled applicants. As they stated: 'This norm suggests that one should never do anything that would be unpleasant to persons with a disability' (p. 238).

Examining the factors that led to interviewers' hiring decisions for applicants with and without disabilities, Hayes and Macan (1997) found that similar factors were used to determine outcomes with both groups (i.e. pre-interview impression, attractiveness, likeability, qualifications, self-presentation, employability). In particular, employability seemed important in decision making about both sets of applicants. However, for the disabled group pre-interview impressions were significantly related to perceptions of self-presentation in the interview. That is, how a disabled person presents themselves on paper and in person in the interview relate to interviewers' post-interview evaluations. For instance, Wright and Multon (1995) identified the positive influence of candidate nonverbal communication skills for ratings of traits related to employability, such as assertiveness.

In competing for jobs, candidates with disabilities may be tempted to withhold information that they perceive as potentially damaging to their chances of success in an employment interview. However, discussing disabilities during the interview could contribute to relationship building (Vedeler, 2013) and hence lead to more positive impressions (Dipboye, 1992), and improve the likelihood of being selected for the post (Macan & Hayes, 1995). Therefore, educating an interviewer about the nature of a disability through open and honest discussion may be potentially more beneficial than nondisclosure. In the light of this, the indications by Arvonio, Cull and Marini (1997) that applicants are likely to provide information about their disability in job applications and during job interviews is a step in the right direction and may improve the selection process for both interviewers and interviewees. The need for employer training in disability awareness is essential (Vedeler, 2013).

## **Race and ethnicity**

The findings of studies investigating the experiences of racial groups in employment interviews are varied. For example, in a meta-analysis of 31 studies, Huffcutt and Roth (1998) found that ratings for both Black and Hispanic applicants were only marginally lower than those for white applicants. Additionally, the more highly structured the interview, the lower the group differences. Similarly, Collins and Gleaves (1998) found no differences for Blacks and Whites on measures of personality structure and mean scores on agreeableness and conscientiousness. While studies show a lack of racial bias in hiring decisions, prejudice against minority groups still exists (Frazer & Wiersma, 2001). Beraugh (2013) highlighted two earlier studies by Newman and

Lyon (2009) that warrant comment here. The studies examined the recruitment of minorities and women and the wording of advertisements. In the first instance, employers' efforts to reduce adverse impact on minorities through recruiting procedures can in fact have an adverse impact (i.e. fewer minority groups hired). That is, recruitment based on demographics can induce many applications from minorities who are not qualified for the advertised post. Secondly, attributes highlighted in the advertisement (e.g. smart, conscientious) did not result in adverse impact. Finally, Newman and Lyon (2009) found that the rate of applications from minority students was high, indicating perhaps that they perceive success in the interview situation as harder to come by than that of non-minority applicants.

In a previous study assessing promotion potential across race and gender, Landau (1995) found that Blacks and Asians were rated lower than Whites, and females were rated lower than males. Hence, interviewer/interviewee racial similarity influenced interview outcomes. In addition, Goldberg (2003) showed that racial similarity (but not age or gender) had a significant effect on applicants' evaluations of the recruiters.

## INTERVIEWER TRAINING

Further training for interviewers is necessary in identifying and recognising the use of IM tactics (e.g. Roulin et al., 2014); and in disability (Duckett, 2000; Vedeler, 2013). Given that the recruiter plays a critical role in the process and outcomes in employment interviews, it is important that human resource managers or those involved in selecting or promoting should receive training. Interviewing is a cognitively demanding process requiring interviewers to self-regulate (monitor thoughts and actions) (Nordstrom, 1996). Therefore, it would seem likely that the more prepared interviewers are for the task, the better they will execute it. Training can have a positive effect on recruiters' perceptions of their interpersonal effectiveness (Connerley, 1997) and on analyses of their conduct (Stevens, 1998). In support of interviewer training, Roulin et al. (2014) caution that 'interviewers may be prone to overconfidence in their judgements and may thus (wrongly) believe they can easily "see through the applicant"' (p. 160). In addition, it is important to note that behavioural and situational questions can help interviewers to detect honest and deceptive applicant impression management.

The power and influence of recruiter behaviour on applicants' perceptions has been demonstrated. Recruiter behaviour impacts on perceptions of the organisation and attractiveness of the job (Larsen & Phillips, 2002; Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998), and on decisions about whether to accept a job offer (Goltz & Giannantonio, 1995). However, more than any other aspect of the interview (e.g. structure or focus) recruiter behaviour influences applicants' perceptions of the employer (Ralston & Brady, 1994; Turban & Dougherty, 1992). Training could ensure that recruiters are aware of the impact of their behaviour on job applicants and perhaps help them to become more fully informed about procedures and issues pertinent to employment interviews, including impression management, discrimination and legislation.

It has been suggested that providing interviewers with training may contribute to enhanced interview validity, because trained interviewers tend to make better use of their interview time by asking more relevant and discerning, and less irrelevant,

tangential or potentially discriminatory questions, which in turn elicits more high-quality information upon which more sound judgements can be based (Gollub-Williamson et al., 1997; Stevens, 1998). In addition, it seems important that interviewers learn to utilise selection and recruitment procedures and methods correctly, whatever system is adopted (Huffcutt & Woehr, 1999).

Looking at impression management, Harris and Eder (1999, p. 385) suggest that 'Even intelligent, critical interviewers can be duly influenced by applicants who display impression management behaviour'. However, Howard and Ferris (1996) support the notion that training could help interviewers to distinguish between insincere and genuine applicants. Perhaps Rosenfeld's (1997) suggestion of interviewer training in tactical and strategic impression management would help achieve this goal. That is, if interviewers placed more importance on strategic impression management (i.e. candidate's work history, abilities and achievements that relate to characteristics such as credibility, competence and trustworthiness) rather than on instant short-term tactics used by candidates to create a positive image (smiling and eye-contact etc.), it would help recruiters to make fairer decisions. As such, if the interview focused on an applicant's account of themselves to determine their suitability for the job, interviewers' decisions would be less distorted. Additionally, it has been suggested that job-related questions and probes about past and future performance may help to create a balance and help interviewers to overcome applicants' overzealous use of impression management tactics (Buckley & Weitzel, 1989).

Duckett (2000) suggests that in terms of making judgements about applicants with disabilities, interviewers require training that would help to increase their knowledge about disabilities and disability legislation. Training could also help to develop positive attitudes towards applicants with disabilities and help interviewers' comfort levels with disabled people, given that perceived interviewer discomfort has been found to exacerbate anxiety and nervousness on the part of disabled people (Duckett, 2000). It is important also that training should address interviewers' 'acquired dispositions' or 'attitudes' (as highlighted by Shannon & Stark, 2003) that impact on interview outcomes.

## LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES

Finally, a brief comment is required on legal and ethical issues as they relate to employment interviewing.

Considerable and increasing focus has been placed on the extent to which recruitment and selection procedures have complied with legal requirements.

As Williams, Schaffer and Ellis (2013, p. 401) state, 'Organizations that use unfair selection practices are held accountable by legal requirements to avoid discrimination in hiring.' Issues appear to be related to two aspects of employment interviewing. First, the extent to which candidates are treated the same as all other applicants, with no discriminatory intent or disparate treatment. Second, the extent to which applicants are regarded similarly to other comparison groups with no disparate impact (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Gollub-Williamson et al., 1997). Although specific findings are sparse, those published have indicated that interview procedures that display characteristics of a structured approach tend to be more related to successful court rulings in favour



of employers (Saks & McCarthy, 2006; Williams et al., 2013). In keeping with procedural justice literature, those aspects of employment interviewing that increase the chances of defeating a legal challenge are principally to do with its job-relatedness, objectivity, question type and structure (preferably situational or behaviour description), rating criteria and response scales and using trained interviewers. Second, standardisation and consistency of the administration processes which provide strong guidelines and minimal discretion to interviewers is also significant in the eyes of judges (Gilliland, 1993; Gollub-Williamson et al., 1997). In conclusion, empirical findings suggest that structuring the interview might reduce the chances of litigation being sought and enhance the ability to withstand legal challenge in court (Terpstra, Mohamed & Kethley, 1999; Williams et al., 2013).

Despite the drive to enhance validity related to the selection function and improve the chances of successfully defending against litigation, the employment interview, as experienced by applicants also requires attention from an ethical point of view. Issues of openness, self-disclosure and invasion of privacy constitute important sources of ethical questions. A major function of interviewers is to collect as much relevant applicant information as possible prior to making selection decisions. However, what comprises relevant and non-discriminatory information must be carefully considered lest interviewers infringe not only the individual rights of applicants but the law. It is here that careful structuring approaches, described earlier, may be invaluable in focusing on job-related domains and preventing interviewers from straying into highly subjective and potentially biasing areas.

The use of illegal questioning may be widespread with the most common topic areas being criminal record, age and disabilities (Poteet, 1984; Wilson, 1991). Less common areas related to marital/family status, religion, sex, national origin and race. The inclusion of discriminatory questions in the interview may have an adverse impact on applicants who perceive them as unfair or 'out of order' (Saks & McCarthy, 2006). As a consequence, these perceptions severely damage the recruitment function of the interview where applicants develop negative views of the interviewer, interview and organisation (Saks & McCarthy, 2006). Such questions, whether legal or not, are regarded by applicants as an invasion of their privacy and may result in intentions to pursue litigation (Ababneh & Al-Waqfi, 2016). So it is clear that organisations should, 'eliminate any questions that might be perceived by job applicants as unfair, invasive, and discriminatory' (Saks & McCarthy, 2006, p. 187).

Collecting sensitive and potentially discriminatory information may be a necessary component of the recruiting and selection process and may be required for management purposes. It will be essential that information recorded on race, disabilities, gender or marital status of applicants is 'collected after the initial hiring decision is made or collected in a way that does not impact the hiring decision' (Ababneh & Al-Waqfi, 2016, p. 410). In any event information of this nature should never be made available to anyone who may be involved in making the final decision, to hire or not to hire.

The extent to which applicants assert themselves and feel that they have been permitted to provide what they regard as salient personal information may also be crucially dependent on the power relationships in the situation. Generally speaking, the distribution of power in selection interviews is not equal, with the greater power residing with the interviewer. This may be particularly evident where highly structured

procedures are employed, whereby applicants are required to respond to interviewer-initiated questions, choose from interviewer provided response alternatives and at no point be permitted to put any of their personal questions to the interviewer. Under such conditions applicants may be more likely to feel aggrieved and more inclined to consider litigation (Williams et al., 2013). As Fletcher (1992) noted, 'Inevitably, where there is power there lies the potential for its abuse and hence for unethical behaviour that violates the rights of the individual.' Interviewers who, inadvertently or not, treat applicants in ways that would be detrimental to their performance by inducing states of discomfort, lowered self-esteem, stress or anger are behaving in an unethical fashion. This, ultimately, will prove to be counter-productive in the sense that applicants will be unable to display their potential qualities, will be unimpressed with the organisation's representative and may be less likely to accept offers of employment and seek redress in the courts.

## OVERVIEW

This chapter presented research pertaining to the employment interview as a specific example of a complex social interaction governed by a number of rules and regulations to which participants are expected to conform, and which seeks to serve the dual purpose of recruitment and selection. The focus of the material initially dealt with the employment interview from the interviewer's perspective, setting out the issues relating to the various approaches found to be relevant for practice. This was followed by a similar focus on the role played by the applicant in the employment interview, particularly the influence of impression management. Finally, a brief consideration was given to additional influential factors, the issue of training and selected legal and ethical issues as they related to the employment interview context.

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# The Cognitive Interview

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE COGNITIVE INTERVIEW (OR CI) is one of the most exciting developments in forensic psychology in the last 30 years. The CI is a method that comprises a series of memory retrieval techniques, designed to increase the amount of information that can be obtained from an eyewitness. It can therefore help investigators obtain more complete and accurate reports from interviewees. The CI was initially developed by the psychologists Ed Geiselman (University of California, Los Angeles) and Ron Fisher (Florida International University) in 1984 as a response to the many requests they received from police officers and legal professionals for a method of improving witness interviews. It is based upon well-known psychological principles of how individuals remember and retrieve information. Police detectives trained to use this technique enabled witnesses to produce over 40% more valid information than detectives using their traditional interviewing techniques (see Memon, Meissner, & Fraser, 2010 for a recent meta-analysis of research). Furthermore, university students using this new procedure obtained more information from witnesses than did experienced police officers that interviewed in their normal way (see Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Memon & Koehnken, 1992; Memon & Higham, 1999, for reviews).

Memon et al. (2010) identified 65 studies in their study-space and meta-analysis. This in-depth analysis of research included laboratory-based experimental studies as well as studies conducted in the field using real-life witnesses and police officers trained in the CI technique. This chapter will provide a critical review of research on the CI and will highlight methodological and theoretical issues. Practical issues and implications for future research will be considered. Before describing

the procedure and reviewing the empirical research, it is useful to understand *why* a procedure such as the CI is necessary.

## **WHAT LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COGNITIVE INTERVIEW?**

The ability to obtain full and accurate information is critical in an investigation – it may determine whether or not a case is solved, yet the eyewitness literature reveals that such recall is difficult to achieve because of the cognitive and social factors that can influence recall accuracy (for reviews, see Bruck & Ceci, 1999; Memon, Vrij, & Bull, 2003). The Cognitive Interview arose out of a need to examine ways of improving witness memory (cognitive factors) as well as addressing some of the social factors that can impact on the quality of the report obtained from a witness.

In an analysis of the techniques used by untrained police officers in Florida, Fisher, Geiselman & Raymond (1987) suggested that there existed some fundamental problems in the conduct of interviews that were leading to ineffective communication and poor memory performance. Fisher et al. (1987) documented several characteristics of the ‘standard police interview’ among which were constant interruptions (when an eyewitness was giving an account), excessive use of question-answer format and inappropriate sequencing of questions. George (1991) studied the techniques typically used by untrained officers in London and found a remarkably similar pattern among that group. This led to the characterisation of a ‘standard police interview’ as being one of poor quality and stressed the need for an alternative procedure for interviewing witnesses (see Kebbell, Milne, & Wagstaff, 2001, for a more recent analysis of the standard interview). In recent years, guidelines have been set out detailing the procedures that should be followed by professionals who interview witnesses (e.g. Ministry of Justice, 2011; Scottish Executive, 2011). However, the focus has tended to be on child interviews while there is much room for improving the quality of investigative interviews with adult witnesses (Clark & Milne, 2001; Gudjonsson, 2003).

The CI represents the alliance of two fields of study: Cognition and Communication. The original version drew heavily upon what psychologists know about the way in which we remember things. Revisions of the procedure focused more heavily on the practical considerations for managing a social interaction and this was led by a desire to improve communication in police interviews and alleviate some of the problems described above. Obviously the ‘cognitive’ and ‘communication’ components work in tandem (see also Memon & Stevenage, 1996, Memon & Higham, 1999). However, for the purposes of describing the procedure as it has been depicted in the published literature, the ‘cognitive’ and ‘communication’ components will be outlined separately.

## **WHAT IS THE COGNITIVE INTERVIEW?**

### **The original procedure: the ‘cognitive’ components**

The ‘cognitive’ part of the CI relies upon two theoretical principles. Firstly, that a retrieval cue is effective to the extent that there is overlap between the encoded information and the

retrieval cue (Flexser & Tulving, 1978) and that reinstatement of the original encoding context increases the accessibility of stored information (Tulving & Thomson's Encoding Specificity Hypothesis, 1973). The second theoretical perspective that influenced the development of the CI was the Multiple Trace Theory (Bower, 1967). This suggests that rather than having memories of discrete and unconnected incidents, our memories are made up of a network of associations and consequently, there are several means by which a memory could be cued. It follows from this that information not accessible with one technique may be accessible with another (Tulving, 1974).

## Context reinstatement

The first technique is for the interviewee to mentally reconstruct the physical and personal context that existed at the time of the crime. Although this is not an easy task, the interviewer can help witnesses by asking them to form an *image* or *impression* of the environmental aspects of the original scene (e.g. the location of objects in a room), to comment on their emotional reactions and feelings (surprise, anger, etc.) at the time and to describe any sounds, smells and physical conditions (hot, humid, smoky, etc.) that were present. It is important that the instructions are given slowly and deliberately with pauses. The following is an example of how the instructions to reinstate context were administered in a study where adult witnesses were interviewed about a photography session (Memon, Wark, Holley, Bull, & Koehnken, 1997):

*Interviewer:* First of all I'd like you to think back to that day. Picture the room in your head as if you were back there ... Can you see it? (*pause for reply*) Think about who was there (*pause*) How you were feeling (*pause*) What you could see (*pause*) What you could hear (*pause*) If you could smell anything (*pause*). Now I want you to tell me as much as you can about what happened when you came to get your photograph taken.

## Report everything

A second technique is to ask the interviewee to *report everything*. This may well facilitate the recall of additional information, perhaps by shifting criteria for reporting information. For instance, witnesses are encouraged to report in full without screening out anything they consider to be irrelevant or for which they have only partial recall (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992). The instruction to 'report everything' was used as follows in a study where the witnesses were 6- and 7-year-olds being interviewed about an eye-test (Memon, Cronin, Eaves, & Bull, 1993).

*Interviewer:* Just try and tell me what happened, as much as you can remember. If you cannot remember all of it, just tell me what you can. Even little things are important.

*Child:* We had this ... even little things?

*Interviewer:* Even little things.

An eyewitness who provides more details is also judged to be more credible both in an interview (see Odnot, Memon, La Rooy, & Millen, 2013) and in the courtroom

(Bell and Loftus, 1989), although the overall accuracy of these details rather than amount of information that is reported should be the major question. Accuracy of details is of great importance in cases where eyewitness evidence is the main source of evidence that is used to incriminate a suspect (Scheck, Neufeld, & Dwyer, 2000). Recent research suggests that the report everything instruction in combination with context reinstatement might be the most effective component of the CI (Milne & Bull, 2002; see also Memon et al., 2010).

## Change perspective

A third technique is to ask for recall from a variety of perspectives, for example from the perspective of another witness or the victim. Again, the aim is to increase the *amount* of detail elicited. However, there are several concerns about the use of the change perspective instruction, in particular the possibility that it could lead to fabricated details and confuse the witness, as illustrated by the following example taken from the Memon et al. (1993) child witness interviews about an eye-test (see also Boon & Noon, 1994, Roberts & Higham, 2002).

*Interviewer:* What I'd like you to try and do is imagine that you are the nurse and that you can see the room from where she was standing, by the wall chart. Just tell me what you can see.

*Child:* Umm ... Did you see the letters, can you see the letters good and I said yes and that's all she said to me.

Evidence obtained using this particular technique may not be easily accepted in legal procedures where it is likely to be seen as encouraging speculation (see Memon and Koehnken, 1992). Moreover, police officers who use the CI have tended not to use the change perspective instruction and have concerns that a witness could be misled when this instruction is applied (Kebbell and Wagstaff, 1996).

## Reverse order

The fourth technique instructs interviewees to make multiple retrieval attempts from different starting points, for example recalling an event from the end or the middle or from the most memorable point in time. Geiselman and Callot (1990) found that it was more effective to recall in forward order once followed by reverse order than to make two attempts to recall from the beginning. There is some doubt about whether young children can effectively use this technique as illustrated by the following example from Memon et al. (1993).

*Interviewer:* OK. What we are going to do now is tell the whole story backwards. Now the very last thing that you did is you went back up to your classroom.

*Child:* Well, I just walked back and nothing happened.

*Interviewer:* So what happened before you left the room to go back to your classroom?

*Child:* I'm not quite sure.

## **REVISIONS OF THE CI: THE ENHANCED COGNITIVE INTERVIEW (ECI) AND THE MODIFIED COGNITIVE INTERVIEW (MCI)**

The original version of the CI resulted in substantial gains (35%) in the amount of correct information that was elicited from eyewitnesses without any apparent increases in errors (e.g. Geiselman, Fisher, MacKinnon, & Holland, 1985). However, in order to be able to effectively implement the use of the 'cognitive' components of the CI, it is necessary to provide interviewers with the necessary social skills and communication strategies that are required in order to build rapport. As indicated earlier, research with police officers suggested this was something they lacked. The enhanced/modified version of the CI (ECI/MCI) (see Geiselman & Fisher, 1997) therefore included the following techniques:

### **Rapport building**

This is an attempt to get to know the witness a bit, clarify what the expectations are and generally put the person at ease. An important component of rapport building is for the interviewer to explicitly 'transfer control' by making it clear to interviewees that they are the ones in control because they are the ones that hold all the information. Part of transferring control is to give the witness time to think and respond.

### **Focused retrieval**

The interviewer facilitates eyewitnesses using *focused* memory techniques (to concentrate on mental images of the various parts of the event such as the suspect's face and use these images to guide recall). Fisher and Geiselman (1992) draw a distinction between conceptual image codes (an image stored as a concept or dictionary definition) and pictorial codes (the mental representation of an image). The notion is that images create dual codes or more meaningful elaborations (Paivio, 1971). The 'imaging' part of the CI usually occurs in the questioning phase of the interview and assumes that the witness has effectively recreated the context in which an event occurred. The instruction could take the following form: 'concentrate on the picture you have in your mind of the suspect, focus on the face and describe it.' In order to effectively engage the interviewee in focused retrieval, the interviewer needs to speak slowly and clearly, pausing at appropriate points to allow the interviewee time to create an image and respond.

### **Interviewee compatible questioning**

Finally, the timing of the interviewer's questions is critical (deemed interviewee compatible questioning). Questions should be guided by the interviewee's pattern of recall rather than adhering to a rigid protocol. For example, if an interviewee is describing



a suspect's clothing, the interviewer should not switch the line of questioning to the actions of the suspect.

## **TESTING THE CI IN THE LAB: AN EFFECTIVE CONTROL GROUP**

In laboratory studies, the CI is often compared with a procedure known as the structured interview (SI) where the quality of training in communication and questioning techniques is comparable to the CI procedure but does not include the cognitive mnemonics. The training of the structured group follows a procedure that is recommended to professionals who interview children (Ministry of Justice, 2011; Scottish Executive, 2011). That is, the SI includes techniques such as open-ended questions, rapport-building and active listening. It is important to include an effective control group to examine to what extent any beneficial CI effects are due to the cognitive mnemonics or basic interviewing skills.

Koehnken, Schimmossek, Aschermann and Höfer (1995) were one of the first to demonstrate the superiority of the CI compared to a SI. The SI group in their studies received training of comparable quality and length to the CI group in basic communication skills. In addition, training of the CI group involved the use of various cognitive mnemonics. The event in question was a blood donation interviewees either watched or read about. The CI elicited more correct and confabulated (made-up) details than the SI. Notwithstanding the increase in confabulations, the accuracy rates did not differ significantly (86% for the SI and 84% for the CI).

Mantwill, Koehnken and Aschermann (1995) studied experienced and non-experienced blood donors and questioned them about a blood donation with the CI or the SI. Including experienced donors allowed them to study how the CI affects the recall of highly familiar events. The CI yielded more correct details as well as errors, but importantly, the accuracy rates were similar (80% for the CI and 81% for the SI). The CI was as effective for familiar as it was for unfamiliar events, suggesting that it is suitable for individuals who have experienced repeated victimisation, such as victims of domestic violence or child abuse.

So far, the evidence suggests that the CI effects are due to the use of the cognitive techniques rather than merely a result of enhanced communication. Memon, Wark, Holley, Bull and Koehnken (1997) examined whether the beneficial CI effect (enhanced recall with stable accuracy) is due to enhanced retrieval techniques or improved interviewer-interviewee communication by carefully matching the experimental and control group. The SI in their study resembled the enhanced CI more closely than the SI used in the Koehnken study due to a greater emphasis on 'transfer of control'. They interviewed children about a magic show with the CI or SI after a 2- or 12-day delay. Similarly to previous research findings, after 2 days, the CI led to a large increase in correct details and a small increase in errors. However, at the second retrieval attempt, 12 days later, children interviewed earlier with the SI reported more correct information in the questioning phase than those interviewed with the CI. The findings highlight the need to research how to best conduct repeated interviews.

To summarise, the SI closely follows the CI, in that it includes the same communication improvement techniques. It is also closely modelled on the National Guidance Achieving Best Evidence (2011). It is therefore an ideal comparison, which allows

control for superior interviewing skills. Lab studies have found that the CI yields significantly more correct details but also more errors and sometimes confabulations. Researchers and practitioners need to be aware that an increase in quantity may lead to a drop in quality. Importantly, the CI produced a greater increase in correct details than in errors.

## Field tests of the CI

To date there have been only limited field tests of the Cognitive Interview. The first was conducted by Fisher, Geiselman and Amador (1989) with Miami police detectives. The study examined the use of the ECI by trained and untrained officers when questioning real-life victims and interviewees. The pre-training phase of the study involved the collection of tape recordings of interviews from a sample of detectives using their usual standard techniques. Half of the group then underwent ECI training over four 60-minute sessions. During this time, they were given an overview of the procedure and the general psychological principles of cognition, training in specific interviewing techniques, communication techniques and advice on the temporal sequencing of the CI. After the fourth training session each detective tape recorded a practice interview in the field and received individual feedback from the psychologists on the quality of the interview. The detectives then followed the ECI procedure or 'standard interview' procedure during the course of their interviews with real interviewees over a period of time. The findings revealed that trained detectives elicited 47% more information after training and significantly more information than detectives not trained in ECI.

The results of the first CI field study were promising. Six of the seven detectives who were trained improved significantly. However, given the relatively small sample size it is questionable how representative the trained group was. The officers were selected for training rather than being randomly assigned to conditions and this is of some concern especially in light of evidence that police officers may not be so open to the use of new techniques (Memon, Milne, Holley, Bull, & Koehnken, 1994b; Memon, Bull, & Smith, 1995). Finally, there was no trained control group in this field study and data is not provided on the techniques used by interviewers (see Memon & Stevenage, 1996).

Clifford and George (1996) tested 28 experienced British police officers, who were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: CI; conversation management; CI and conversation management; and a no training control group. Conversation management is a procedure that resembles the SI described earlier and includes training in planning the interview, listening skills, conversational styles, question types and summarising. Prior to training each participant provided a tape recording of an interview they had conducted with a real-life interviewee or victim. Following training each police officer tape-recorded three more interviews with victims or interviewees of street crimes. The tape recordings were transcribed and evaluated. The results showed that the CI elicited significantly more information than the standard police interview (14% more than the no training control group). A before and after training comparison showed an increase of 55%. There were no significant differences between conversation management and the untrained control, in fact the conversation management group fared worse.

More recent field research by Colomb, Ginet, Wright, Demarchi and Sadler (2013) examined the effectiveness of the ECI with 27 military police officers from the brigade of Gardanne (France) and compared it to a Standard Police Interview (SPI) or a Structured Interview (SI). Officers in the SPI group did not receive any instructions. Officers in the SI group received training in the social and communication components of the ECI (e.g. explain the aims and transfer control). Officers in the ECI group received the same training as the SI group plus training in cognitive mnemonics (e.g. report everything and mental context reinstatement). After the training the attitudes of officers were assessed. From the next day onwards interviews from officers were collected until 27 interviews from each condition were gathered. The types of crimes varied considerably, ranging from murder and domestic violence to fraud and road accidents. After all interviews were collected, post-attitudes were assessed. Overall, the ECI elicited significantly more forensically relevant information (approximately 50%) than both the SPI and SI, which did not differ. Evaluation of the attitude measures revealed that officers rated the usability, institutional acceptability and self-efficacy as high (all above the scale midpoint) for all interview tools. There was no significant difference in attitudes towards the different interview types. The ECI was particularly useful with victims.

The latest CI field study was conducted by Rivard, Fisher, Robertson and Mueller (2014) and used experienced investigators from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centre (FLETC). Witnesses were trainers at FLETC who were interviewed with the CI or a control interview about an interactive training meeting. Interviewees were not forewarned that they would be interviewed about the event at a later stage. The retention interval was 3 to 43 days. Interviewers received 2-days' training in the CI. In line with previous laboratory and field research, the CI elicited more relevant details from witnesses than the control interview (almost 80%) without differences in accuracy rates. The post-experience questionnaire revealed that overall officers expressed positive views towards the CI and they rated it as low in terms of cognitive load and not different compared to the control interview. Interviewers found most CI strategies effective and rated long pauses, not interrupting and asking the witness to complete a sketch as most effective. None of the interviewers reported any foreseeable barriers in implementing the CI in the field. Interviewers thought that the CI would be most useful for interviewing cooperative witnesses or victims, especially when questioned about a specific event but also uncooperative witnesses when questioned about specific facts.

At this point it is necessary to point out two things. Firstly, the success of the CI depends upon adequate training of interviewers in the techniques described above. It is not clear how much training is needed. Some studies report effects with relatively brief training. Fisher et al. (1989) report benefits after four 60-minute sessions, while George (1991) trained officers over 2 days. Memon et al. (1994b) trained officers over a more limited period of time (4 hours) and found this was insufficient to motivate officers to use the new techniques. Similarly, Dando, Wilcock and Milne (2009a) assessed British novice police officers' performance immediately after 2 days PEACE CI training and found that none of the officers applied the CI in its entirety and some components, such as free recall, rapport and explain, were used more frequently than others (e.g. mental context reinstatement and never guess instruction). Clearly, the effects of training are complex and depend not only on length of training, but quality of training, background of interviewer, attitudes towards training and so forth.

Finally, it should be noted that the CI relies upon a co-operative interviewee. It has not as yet been established how useful a CI would be in the case of an interviewee who does not wish to remember (e.g. in the case of a traumatised interviewee) or an interviewee who does not wish to communicate information to the interviewer (e.g. one that is likely to be a suspect). Only one study so far has used the CI in combination with the unanticipated questioning approach to successfully differentiate truthful from untruthful mock suspects (Sooniste, Granhag, Strömwall, & Vrij, 2015). Mock suspects were questioned about their intentions and the planning of the stated intention. With regards to answers about the planning of the event, the CI was superior in differentiating between truthful and deceitful suspects; however, this was not the case for responses regarding suspects' intentions. In line, with previous CI research with mock and real witnesses, the CI did elicit more details from mock suspects compared to a SI. However, it should be noted that mock suspects were university students and it is questionable how motivated they were to actually withhold information and the experimental scenario used is unlikely to have elicited the high-stake lies present in real-life suspect interrogations.

## The CI and child interviewees

Research has consistently shown that younger children (ages 6–7) will often recall *less* information than older children (ages 10–11) (see Saywitz, Lyon, & Goodman, 2017 for a review). Given that the primary aim of CI is to increase the *amount* of information retrieved it may be a most effective procedure to use with children.

In one of the earliest studies of the CI using children, Saywitz, Geiselman and Bornstein (1992) refined the procedure for children (7–8-year-olds and 10–11-year-olds). The to-be-remembered event was a game where children dressed up, interacted with and were photographed by a stranger. Note here the similarity to crimes that children often testify about in court, such as sexual abuse and trafficking. The CI significantly increased correct facts recalled across both age groups by 26%. In a second study, a 'practice session' was included to familiarise children with the CI techniques and to give feedback on their performance. The interviewers were experienced police officers who received written instructions and a 2-hour training session during which they were informed about child appropriate language, rapport building, interview preparation and procedure. The CI group received additional information on the use of the four original CI techniques. The standard interview group was instructed to use the techniques they would normally use. The CI led to more correct details being recalled (20% increase for the 8–9-year-olds and 44% for the 11–12-year-olds). Furthermore, collapsing across age levels, a practice CI prior to the main interview improved performance by an additional 25%. No increase in the amount of incorrect or confabulated details was observed. Thus, it may help to familiarise children with the CI before they are questioned about the event.

The Saywitz et al. study provides a powerful demonstration of the effectiveness of a CI with children over the age of 8 years. There are however several concerns. Firstly, the CI groups received training while the standard group did not. This may affect the motivation of the CI interviewers (Memon et al., 1994b). Secondly, while the CI practice group had an opportunity to practice and become familiar with the task of retrieval, the control group did not. Koehnken, Finger, Nitschke, Hofer and

Aschermann (1992) investigated the effectiveness of the enhanced CI with 51 9- and 10-year-old children who had been shown a short film. After a delay of 3 to 5 days, they were questioned by trained psychology students about the film using either the ECI or a SI. In this study great care was taken to ensure that the SI interviewers were trained in the same way as ECI interviewers save for using the special CI techniques. The ECI produced a 93% increase in the amount of correct information recalled compared to the control group. However, the number of confabulations increased too.

Memon et al. (1993) interviewed 32 6- and 7-year-olds about an eye test. The effectiveness of a CI was compared with that of a SI. After 1 and 6 weeks, children's recall was tested. There were no significant differences in the types of information elicited between each type of interview with the exception of information about locations of objects and people, which was significantly greater with the CI. This increase in location information was possibly a result of the language used to fulfil the context instructions (e.g. 'describe the room') rather than a direct product of memory improvement. Moreover, children had difficulty in understanding interviewer instructions to change perspective and to recall in reverse order such that they became confused about what was expected of them. This may have worked against the CI.

Verkampt and Ginet (2010) tried to isolate the effects of the individual CI components by creating different versions: full CI, CI without MRC, CI without report everything instruction, CI without change order mnemonic and CI without cued recall. Children's performance in the different CI conditions was compared to a SI. It was found that all variations of the CI yielded more correct information compared to the SI without a concomitant increase in errors or confabulations. Furthermore, the mnemonics seem to do the job they are supposed to do, that is when MRC was omitted children recalled less location details. Moreover, fewer person and action details were recalled when the report everything instruction and the cued recall were omitted. In line with Memon et al. (1993) findings, no benefit for the changed order mnemonic was observed.

Not all CI research with children has revealed promising results. For example, Memon, Cronin, Eaves and Bull (1994) have tested the effectiveness of the CI with younger children (aged 5–9 years). Each of the four mnemonic techniques of the CI (context, report everything, change order and change perspective) was compared with an instruction to 'try harder'. Prior to each interview there was a practice session in which each child described a familiar activity using one of the four CI techniques. There were no significant differences in correct recall or errors as a function of instruction, suggesting that the 'try harder' instruction could be as effective as each of the CI mnemonics. There were a number of interesting differences between the age groups, most notably that the younger children (5-year-olds) performed less well under the CI 'context reinstatement' and 'change perspective' conditions as compared to the 8-year-olds in the same conditions. A qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts suggested that the children did not fully understand all the techniques and had difficulty using the change perspective instruction. As Ornstein (1991) points out, a good interviewer should tailor the interview so that it takes into consideration the cognitive and linguistic capabilities of an individual child.

Milne and Bull (2002) examined the relative effectiveness of each of four original components of the CI mnemonics in three age groups: 5–6-year-olds, 8–9-year-olds and adults. The children were shown a video of an accident and 48 hours later the participants were interviewed with one of the following six techniques: MRC, change

order, change perspective, report everything, MRC and report everything or a control 'try harder' instruction. The only condition which elicited more recall than the control instruction was a combination of MRC and report everything mnemonic. Consistent with Memon et al. (1994a) none of the other CI techniques differed in the amount of recall elicited as compared to the try harder instruction.

Thus, research suggests that the CI can facilitate the amount of information reported by children. However, some studies have also found a concomitant increase in errors or confabulations. A meta-analysis by Memon et al. (2010) revealed that although the CI is effective with child witnesses, it does not enhance their accounts to the same extent as it does with adults. It is important to be aware that children may struggle with some CI components; such as the change order and change perspective mnemonic. However, this is not such a concern as these components rarely form part of the CI as it is used today. Care should be taken nevertheless in not putting pressure on children to report details they are uncertain of; this is best done by making sure that children are reminded of the ground rules (for example, that it is OK to say I don't know) throughout the interview.

## **The use of CI with vulnerable populations**

This section considers research that has examined whether the CI can aid the recall of vulnerable witnesses namely senior citizens, individuals with intellectual disabilities or autism and very young children.

### ***Older adults***

To date, only a handful of studies have examined the efficacy of the CI or a modified version of it with witnesses aged 60 and older and the research findings are mixed. Mello and Fisher (1996) and Prescott, Milne and Clark (2011) found the CI led to similar increases in correct recall when the participants were older adults. Similarly, Dornburg and McDaniel (2006) found that the CI effectively increased older adults' recall performance after a 3-week delay. Wright and Holliday (2007) used the Enhanced Cognitive Interview and a Modified Cognitive Interview (MCI) with older adults with and without cognitive impairment. Both groups' recall benefited significantly from the ECI and the MCI compared to a SI. Holliday et al. (2012) found that a modified version of the CI can not only enhance overall event recall in older adults, but also successfully protects against misinformation effects. Less encouraging findings were obtained by McMahon (2002). She found that the ECI was not more effective in eliciting information from older and younger participants compared to a SI.

The potential of the CI in aiding the recall of older adult witnesses should not be overlooked, however. Findings by Memon et al. (2010) indicated that older witnesses had the potential to benefit from the CI more than any other witness. Research by Gawrylowicz, Memon, Scoboria, Hope and Gabbert (2014) showed that a written version of the CI can equip older adults with transferable skills that benefit future memory recall. It may be the case that the way in which the CI is presented to the witness (i.e. in a face-to-face interview or using a self-administered format), their expectations and confidence could determine how well they use it.

### ***Individuals with intellectual disabilities***

One of the first studies to test the effectiveness of the CI with individuals with intellectual disabilities was carried out by Milne, Clare and Bull (1999). They interviewed participants with and without mild intellectual disabilities about a video recorded accident. Although participants with mild intellectual disabilities performed poorer overall, both groups recalled more information with the CI compared to a SI, with similar accuracy rates. Similarly, Clarke, Prescott and Milne (2013) showed that although mildly intellectually disabled participants were overall less accurate when recalling information about a simulated theft, the CI significantly increased recall of correct details in both groups, with stable accuracy. In fact, the mildly intellectually disabled group benefited more from the CI than those without an intellectual disability (the increase in correct details was circa 40% for adults with mild intellectual disabilities and 11% for the control group).

Children with intellectual disabilities could be considered particularly vulnerable (see Wissink, Van Vugt, Moonen, Stams, & Hendriks, 2015 for a review). Only three studies to date examined the performance of the CI with intellectually disabled children. Earlier work by Milne and Bull (1996, as cited in Robinson & McGuire, 2006) examined 7–10-year-old children with mild intellectual disabilities and found that the CI significantly increased recall of correct details of an event observed one day earlier without increasing errors or confabulations. Similarly, Price (1997) (as cited in Robinson & McGuire, 2006) found that the CI enhanced recall performance in mildly intellectually disabled children as well as making them less suggestible to misleading questions. The beneficial effect of the CI on the number of correct details might be due to intellectually disabled individuals' accessibility deficit; that is the information does exist but is not easily retrieved from memory (Glidden & Mar, 1978; Robinson & McGuire, 2006). The mnemonics of the CI consequently assist recall.

But not all research with mildly intellectually disabled children has found that the CI enhances recall of correct information without an accompanying increase in errors and/or confabulations. A more recent study by Robinson and McGuire (2006) interviewed children with and without mild intellectual disabilities matched for age and IQ (mean age 8 years and 9 months). All children recalled more correct, incorrect and confabulated details with the CI than with the standard interview. The CI did not reduce the effects of suggestive questions. It should be noted though, that accuracy rates were high in both interview groups (90% for the standard and 85% for the Cognitive Interview) and confabulations were generally very low (mean for standard interview = 0.58 and CI = 1.21). One possible explanation for increased errors, is that some CI mnemonics, such as the report everything instruction, might shift the report criterion of individuals to sacrifice quality for quantity. Children with intellectual disabilities might be more prone to this due to their increased susceptibility to demand characteristics.

### ***Individuals with autism***

Only one published study to date has examined the effectiveness of the CI with adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Maras and Bowler (2010) matched participants with and without ASD on age and verbal and performance IQ and tested their event recall with a CI or a SI. Intriguingly, the ASD group was significantly less accurate

when interviewed with the CI compared to the typical developed individuals. When interviewed with the SI there were no differences between groups in recall performance. These findings suggest that the CI is not a one-size-fits-all tool that is suitable for everyone and every purpose. Maras and Bowler (2010) suggest that individuals with ASD may not encode, store or retrieve contextual information surrounding an event in the same way typically developed individuals do. Consequently, mental context reinstatement might be less effective with this witness group and might even lead to an increase in reporting incorrect information. As with older adults, it may be the case that expectations concerning the CI have to be communicated very carefully to vulnerable groups.

### ***Very young children***

Holliday (2003a) has reported that children as young as 4 and 5 years old are able to use the Cognitive Interview instructions (context reinstatement, report everything and reverse order) and generate more details in free recall when the CI techniques are used. Furthermore, with the same age group Holliday and Albon (2004) report that a CI given after misinformation reduced children's reporting of misinformation at interview (see also Holliday, 2003b). The latter finding is consistent with Memon et al. (1996) who studied 8–9-year-olds, but is at odds with that of Hayes and Delamothe (1997) who found susceptibility to misinformation in children (ages 5–7 and 9–11 years) was unaffected by interview type. Perhaps the best advice to be given for now is that practitioners should always take care to keep their questions open-ended and convey the ground rules of an interview to avoid unintentionally mis/leading witnesses.

To summarise, most research with vulnerable individuals (older adults, adults and children with an intellectual disability and very young children) has revealed a beneficial CI effect. That is, the CI led to an increase in quantity without comprising accuracy. In some studies the CI even led to reduced suggestibility. At present, it seems fair to say that the CI is the best tool available to use with the most vulnerable witness groups. Having said this, it should be noted that the CI does not seem to be the best tool for individuals with ASD. More research is needed to examine how to best support individuals with ASD during investigative interviewing situations.

## **NEW DEVELOPMENTS**

Since the development of the CI nearly 30 years ago, new innovative interviewing tools have been developed and researched to counteract some of its limitations (Gawrylowicz & Memon, 2014). One major drawback of the CI is its time-consuming nature. Research has shown that police officers are reluctant to use all components of the CI, as they require more time from them than is actually available (Dando et al., 2008).

Despite its effectiveness, police officers seem to struggle with the mental reinstatement of context (MRC) technique (Clark & Milne, 2001). To address this issue, Dando et al. (2009b) developed and examined the sketch plan MRC (Sketch MRC). The benefit of the Sketch MRC over the original MRC is that it requires the witness to generate their own retrieval cues. The effect of this is threefold: less time consuming, less cognitive demands on the interviewer and more idiosyncratic retrieval cues for the



witness. The Sketch MRC initiates free recall by asking interviewees to draw a detailed sketch or plan of the witnessed event. Dando et al. (2009b) compared three CI interview conditions: MRC, Sketch MR and no MRC. Interviews containing the Sketch MRC were much shorter than those containing the standard MRC. Moreover, the Sketch MRC and the standard MRC groups provided more correct details and higher accuracy rates than the no MRC group, with no difference between the former two. Intriguingly, the Sketch MRC group recalled the least confabulations. The Sketch MCR appears to be especially beneficial for senior witness populations (Dando, 2013).

Another limitation of the CI is that it requires a trained interviewer to be present to conduct the CI on an individual basis. Given the nature of many crimes, such as traffic accidents and terrorist attacks, the number of witnesses and victims often outnumbers the number of officers at the scene. Gabbert, Hope and Fisher (2009) developed the Self-Administered Interview (SAI) to collect witness statements in a more time- and resource-efficient manner. The SAI is a pen-and-paper version of the CI and comes in the form of a booklet (see Gawrylowicz & Memon, 2014 for an overview). Mnemonics such as mental reinstatement of context and report everything instruction are provided in writing together with a layman's explanation as to why they are helpful. Further sections require the witness to provide a detailed perpetrator description under the provision of non-leading prompts and a sketch to gather spatial information. Moreover, questions about co-witnesses, vehicles involved and general viewing conditions are included. The SAI can be provided to witnesses and victims directly after the incident has happened, thereby minimising the likelihood that time-delay and misleading post-event information impede memory performance.

The SAI research findings have been promising and they are beginning to be used in police investigations in several countries. Laboratory studies showed that the SAI elicited more accurate details without lowering accuracy compared to simple free recall instructions (Gabbert et al., 2009; Gawrylowicz, Memon & Scoboria, 2014; Krix et al., 2016). Furthermore, the SAI seems to prevent forgetting and makes individuals' less susceptible to incorporating misleading information into their memory reports (Gabbert, Hope, Fisher, & Jamieson, 2012). Gawrylowicz et al. (2014) found that the superior SAI effect even transfers to new events for which the SAI is not used. Thus, it seems as if the SAI equips witnesses with transferable memory skills that they can use to completely and accurately recall future events. More recent research has tested the SAI under more ecologically valid conditions. Krix et al. (2016) tested recall performance with the SAI under stress and showed that it elicited accurate and complete accounts. This is an important finding, as it is likely that real witnesses and victims experience stress during and directly after having experienced a crime or accident.

The initial field trials with Greater Manchester Police have been completed and officers agreed that the SAI is a useful tool (Hope, Gabbert, & Fisher, 2011). An official training package in the usage and application of the SAI has now been developed for officers and the SAI has been adopted as an official force form (see Hope et al., 2011).

It is important to note, that the SAI should not replace a full CI, but that it should be seen as an additional tool that can be used to complement the CI. Furthermore, as yet only limited research has tested the SAI with vulnerable witness populations. Whereas Gawrylowicz et al. (2014) demonstrated that the SAI enhances memory recall in older adults, Maras, Mulcahy, Memon, Picariello and Bowler (2014) found that the SAI was not effective for witnesses with ASD. Vulnerable groups with limited

reading and writing skills, such as young children, people with intellectual disabilities and non-native speakers might also struggle with the SAI, although the sketch tool could be helpful. Future research should examine ways to make the SAI more accessible for populations with limited language proficiency.

## OVERVIEW

The Cognitive Interview (CI) emerges as probably the most exciting development in the field of eyewitness testimony in the last 30 years. It presents itself as a technique to facilitate recall, and initial tests show consistent gains in the amount of information that can be gathered from an interviewee with a CI. Over the years, studies of the CI have improved in design in that they have shown the CI can yield more correct information than interviews that contain the same structure and rapport building. One concern is that the CI can occasionally increase errors particularly when the witnesses are young. Obviously, the benefits of any innovative technique need to be carefully weighed up against any costs. In a forensic investigation an increase in the number of details could be especially helpful at the information gathering stage in providing new clues that could lead to a successful conviction. On the other hand, what if investigators are led up the wrong path? Thus, research which helps us understand precisely when and why the Cognitive Interview will be effective and yield forensically relevant information is valuable (see Roberts & Higham, 2002 for an example).

The majority of research with vulnerable individuals (older adults, adults and children with intellectual disabilities and very young children) has demonstrated that the CI helped them to report more information without having a detrimental effect on accuracy. However, the CI was not effective with individuals with ASD and even led to an increase in incorrect details reported (Maras & Bowler, 2010). It may be that the CI alone is not sufficient when working with vulnerable groups and additional techniques such as the use of drawing may be more accessible to these populations.

Further research is required on how the quality of the interviewer and effectiveness of CI training impacts on the quality of evidence. Training should be monitored over a reasonable period of time in order to assess the effects of feedback and experience in use of the CI techniques on interviewer performance. Practitioners are advised that a full training programme in Cognitive Interview together with follow-up training sessions be devised before the techniques are used in the field.

Recent developments have attempted to make the CI conform more to real-world forensic requirements, including time and resource constraints. Increasing globalisation and terrorist threats mean that intelligence needs to be gathered from witnesses quickly and efficiently. New tools that have been derived from the Cognitive Interview, such as the SAI, might be a step forward and future research is needed to test these tools in a variety of settings and with diverse witness populations.

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# The developmental counselling and therapy interview

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## INTRODUCTION

**H**ELPING PEOPLE TALK ABOUT their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in relation to important issues and develop knowledge and skills to work through these issues is a natural part of everyday life. Whether listening empathically to a friend who lost a loved one or assisting a child to understand math, we are oftentimes engaged in helping relationships.

Throughout our career lifespan, most of us will engage in professional helping encounters, and, as such, can benefit from obtaining a broader familiarity with counselling skills. In this chapter, we introduce a specific set of communication skills which can be used across various helping, business, and service-related occupations. These skills are drawn from *Developmental Counselling and Therapy* (DCT), a client-centred model of helping (Ivey, 2012; Ivey, Ivey, Myers, & Sweeney, 2005; Ivey & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2009) that is recognised as providing culturally sensitive skills that can be applied to interviewing, in ways that foster empathic counsellor-client alliances (e.g., Capuzzi & Gross, 2011; Dollarhide & Oliver, 2014; Goodrich & Shin, 2013). Additionally, DCT skills are supported by an extensive research/practice knowledge base (Ivey, 2012) and have solid neuroscience backup (Ivey & Daniels, 2016; Ivey, Ivey, & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2011; Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2018).

This chapter begins with a brief overview of DCT, its philosophical foundation and theoretical assumptions, the research and practice



findings that have informed its development, and the advancements in neuroscience research that provide a solid foundation for its premises and techniques.

This overview serves as a contextual backdrop for the remainder of the chapter, which defines and illustrates basic DCT linguistic constructs and practices that professionals can use in the immediacy of any helping interview to: (a) elicit and organise information clients share with us when they seek help, (b) inform our understanding of the unique ways clients perceive and work through their issues, (c) collaboratively develop helping approaches and strategies that are in tune with predominant ways clients have come to understand and participate in their life experiences, and (d) collaboratively engage with clients in a coconstructive process to expand their cognitive, affective, and behavioural options for addressing current and future issues.

## DEVELOPMENTAL COUNSELLING AND THERAPY

DCT is an integrative, culturally-sensitive theory of counselling and therapy that incorporates a multilevel interpretation of client experiences, ranging from encapsulated sensorimotor phenomena (within body) to individual and collective interactions within clients' wider social reality. DCT directly links developmental, coconstructive, and multicultural theories to practical skills interviewers can draw from to assess clients and to suggest specific actions to facilitate treatment tailored to their unique worldviews, multiple lived-experiences, relevant contexts, and current issues.

As an alternative theory of counselling and therapy that is holistic and nonpathological, DCT provides linguistically-based questioning strategies and classification systems that counsellors can use to understand the ways clients make sense of their world, the relevant systems within which they participate, their daily experiences, and the issues they face. As an integrative theory of counselling and therapy, DCT additionally offers a coherent integrative classification matrix that counsellors can use to organise traditional and contemporary counselling and interviewing approaches and strategies already familiar to them within a developmental framework. As such, DCT provides ways for interviewers to:

- access and assess the unique ways clients make sense of and work on their issues;
- engage in collaborative examinations of multiple perspectives that offer broader options to address these issues, with an emphasis on action within multiple layers of reality;
- introduce helping interventions that are tailored to the unique developmental and cultural needs of these clients; and
- help clients examine wider perspectives on their issues and engage in alternative options for change.

### Philosophical foundations

DCT is based on a synthesis of neo-Platonic philosophies, developmental theories (e.g., Hill & Rogers, 1964; Piaget, 1955) and constructivist thought (e.g., Gergen, 2009;

Mahoney, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986). This synthesis allows for a reinterpretation of the ways people construct their worldviews over time and in relation to the positions of connectedness, power, and influence they hold in their surrounding socio-cultural environments.

## Theoretical assumptions

DCT's primary theoretical assumption suggests that development is a spherical and recursive process. DCT rejects the traditional notion that development represents linear and hierarchical movement toward increasing levels of cognitive complexity. Rather, maturity is equated with cognitive, affective, and behavioural flexibility, wherein individuals have access to a wide range of cognitive and emotional resources. Helping expand client skills in accessing a greater range of perspectives can facilitate development and change.

Within this holistic perspective, DCT metaphorically transforms Piaget's idea that individuals sequentially move through stage-specific, cognitive-developmental levels over their life-span. DCT instead proposes that human growth and adaptation require a more fluid and repetitive movement within and between various cognitive-emotional styles as individuals face new developmental or situational tasks. The term cognitive-emotional, information-processing style is used to express the idea that individuals repeatedly move through various cognitive-emotional developmental ways of viewing the world as they try to make sense of their multiple life experiences, construct meaning, and act. The four information-processing styles identified by DCT are sensorimotor/elemental (experiencing), concrete/situational (doing), formal/reflective (examining), and dialectic/systemic (analysing).

DCT's second theoretical assumption suggests that development is a coconstructive phenomenon that occurs as a function of dialectic relationships among individuals, relationships, and wider environments. Within this postmodern perspective, individuals and significant others (e.g., partners, families, communities, social organisations, corporations, teachers, and counsellors), interact within a collective environment (Rigazio-DiGilio & Kang, 2015). As such, all connected individuals, relational systems, and institutions can be influenced by and influence all others. This wider view of client life spaces provides for numerous perspectives and points of intervention. It also identifies ways certain communications within social networks reinforce restraining or enhancing factors and influence the construction of client worldviews. Thus, while attending to individual issues, DCT also emphasises action in the wider community and seeks to foster client awareness about ways they are affected by and can adapt to and/or influence the multiplicity of realities within which they participate.

## Research/practice knowledge base

Box 18.1 summarises the 30-year research/practice backdrop that has informed the development and evolution of DCT and that supports the validity and utility of its constructs, strategies, and tools.

*Box 18.1* Research/practice knowledge base

DCT's extensive 30-year research/practice knowledge base is briefly outlined here.

- 1 DCT's information-processing styles were reliably identified by independent raters of client language, transcribed from interviews: (87% inter-rater reliability) (Rigazio-DiGilio & Ivey, 1990), and from partner/family language, transcribed in the same manner: (97% inter-rater reliability) (Speirs, 2006). Additional findings from both studies indicated that – in response to DCT's highly specific questioning strategies – participants used language that identified them as processing issues using each of the four information processing styles with a significantly high degree of predictive validity (98% for individual clients and 98.6% for partners/families).
- 2 A factor analytic study of over 1700 college students corroborated the reliability of DCT's information processing styles and found that individuals who approached the world from multiple perspectives tended to have fewer physiological and psychological symptoms (Heesacker, Rigazio-DiGilio, Prichard, & Ivey, 1995).
- 3 Systematic use of DCT's information-processing styles and questioning strategies has been found to help various client and nonclient populations explore their issues from multiple perspectives and to examine and implement broader options for change. Client populations have included: (a) adolescents diagnosed with substance use/abuse disorders (Boyer, 1996); (b) clients diagnosed with eating disorders (Weinstein, 1994), anxiety disorders, and major depressive disorders (Rigazio-DiGilio & Ivey, 1990); (c) children experiencing child abuse (Ivey & Ivey, 1990); (d) perpetrators of domestic violence (Rigazio-DiGilio & Lanza, 1999); (d) individuals working through spiritual bypass (Cashwell, Myers, & Shurts, 2004); (e) college students diagnosed with learning disabilities (Strehorn, 1998); and, (f) individuals addressing issues related to gay identity development (Marszalek, Cashwell, Dunn, & Jones, 2004), and sexual orientation (Pope, Mobley, & Myers, 2010).
- 4 Several works demonstrate the utility of using the developmental methodology at all stages of the life span to promote health and well-being (e.g., Ivey et al., 2005) and to inform various counselling approaches, including bibliotherapy and journaling (Myers, 1998), dream interpretation (Marszalek & Myers, 2006), and Adlerian approaches for dealing with early recollections (Sweeney, Myers, & Stephan, 2006).
- 5 Teachers matching cognitive-emotional styles of students have been found to effectively advance student learning (Brodhead, 1991). As well, DCT has proven successful in developing multilevel interview strategies and treatment plans in career counselling with college students examining their vocational identities (Mailler, 1991), in rehabilitation counselling,

with individuals recovering from physical accidents (Kenney & Law, 1991), in school counselling with children and adolescents (Myers, Shoffner, & Briggs, 2002), in teacher/counsellor consultations for children with special learning needs (Clemens, 2007), and in substance abuse relapse prevention (Clarke & Myers, 2012) and recovery (Lawson, Lambert, & Gressard, 2011) programmes.

- 6 Internationally, Fukuhara (1984), Tamase (e.g., Tamase & Rigazio-DiGilio, 1997), and Yamamoto (2001) have successfully applied DCT constructs in empirical and clinical trials in Japan, reporting significant positive outcomes, and Gonçalves (1988) found the DCT approach to be successful with clients diagnosed with agoraphobia in Portugal.

## Neuroscience connections

Counsellors can draw from advancements in neuroscience to more precisely understand the clients they serve, establish counselling alliances, and select culturally appropriate counselling strategies tailored toward addressing clients' immediate and long-term goals. While DCT posits the need for counsellors to listen empathically to clients' stories, join clients in their view of the world, and collaboratively work with them towards growth, development, and action, it is now possible to do so with the reassurance of an emerging scientific body of knowledge, as neuroscience findings reveal the benefits of these practices (Ivey & Daniels, 2016; Ivey et al., 2018).

The originator of DCT is recognised for his pioneering work to integrate neuroscience contributions to ongoing advancements in this model of counselling and therapy. Our interaction with clients changes their brain (and ours). In a not too distant future, psychotherapy will finally be regarded as an ideal way for nurturing nature (Gonçalves & Perrone-McGovern, 2014, p. 510).

At the heart of DCT practice is the concept of empathy. Empathy is based on the ability of counsellors to sustain attention, listen for understanding, and effectively communicate thoughts and feelings clients share with them. The role for counsellors is to engage in empathic dialogues that respond, reflect, and assist clients to explore various perspectives about their situations that have the potential to reveal new strategies and solutions. Expanding on the foundational work of Carl Rogers (1942) who hypothesised that empathy is the most powerful aspect of the counselling process, DCT practitioners enact a tailored approach to collaboration that is constantly calibrated on an empathic understanding of clients' idiosyncratic ways of making meaning. Over years of clinical practice and empirical investigation, empathy has consistently been validated as an important element for promoting client growth (Pedersen, Crethar, & Carlson, 2008). Recently, neuroscientific findings confirm the changes in neural schema that are evident in an empathic relationship (Decety & Jackson, 2004).

First, empirical research using fMRI found a relationship between the use of DCT's foundational skills of empathic attending and listening and the activation of specific regions of the brain that are related to cognitive and affective empathy (Anme et al., 2013). This research validates the importance of DCT's assumption that targeted

language and communication practices help to elicit intended cognitive and affective client reactions. The relationship between counsellors' focused language and questioning strategies and client responses is at the core of the DCT cultural exchange process.

Second, as empathy increases the brain begins to change in ways that facilitate the development of new conceptual skills. The concept of Theory of Mind is one such process that emerges during the DCT encounter. The Theory of Mind, or mentalising, as it is often referred to, is the ability to integrate both external and internal inputs to perceive the intentions, desires, beliefs, dispositions, and other mental states of ourselves and others (Spunt, 2013). The mentalising process affords us the ability to understand the cognitive and affective world of others more deeply and to appreciate that these constructions are different from our own. DCT counsellors rely on linguistic cues to apprehend sufficient information about client worldviews to mentalise their predominant frames of mind and the range of cognitive and affective flexibility they have with regards to the issues prompting treatment. DCT counsellors can then use this mentalising process to design culturally sensitive and individually tailored treatment plans with clients.

Third, emerging neuroscientific research helps to explain the power of empathy to change the ways in which counsellors and clients experience, understand, and interact in the immediacy of the therapeutic dialogue. For example, Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia (2010) have identified the role of the brain's mirror system in the empathic exchange. That is, as we attend to and listen to others, regions of our brain are activated which allow us to simultaneously understand others and to empathise – both cognitively and affectively – with them as they share their stories. A robust body of research now confirms that, as our mirror neurons increase throughout the therapeutic exchange, both counsellors and clients become more adept at perceiving and understanding one another's verbal and nonverbal communications. The connection between extensions in the brain's mirror system and increases in empathic therapeutic dialogues corroborates the relevance of the tailored, coconstructive, collaborative processes upon which DCT is based. These processes contribute to establishing empathic relationships, an essential ingredient for maintaining active engagement of both counsellors and clients throughout all aspects of counselling, from assessment, to treatment planning, implementation, evaluation, and beyond (Flückiger, Del Re, Wampold, Symonds, & Horvath, 2012). Thus, by implementing DCT tailoring strategies, counsellors improve their own ability to empathise with clients as well as the ability of clients to empathise with others.

## **DCT INTERVIEW FACTORS**

The centrality of empathic helping relationships and collaborative helping exchanges cannot be overstated. Over the past 40 years, empathy has been extensively studied in the context of counselling and therapy (e.g., Flückiger et al., 2012). Much of this research provides strong evidence that empathy is essential to establishing and sustaining: (a) therapeutic alliances, (b) consensual goals and plans, and (c) collaborative involvement in implementing plans toward successful treatment outcomes (Pedersen et al., 2008). These three factors – which are core to DCT – have been found to significantly contribute to increasing client retention rates, client involvement and investment, and successful treatment outcomes across most models and approaches and with

a broad array of clients (e.g., diverse cultural/multicultural identities, SES, geopolitical communities, treatment issues) (Norcross, 2011).

DCT strategies can be used at all stages of this counselling process to:

- ask specific questioning strategies that elicit clients' predominant cognitive-emotional, information-processing style within the natural language of the helping relationship; and
- apply various helping strategies that are tailored to facilitate individual client growth within and between different information-processing styles.

### **DCT linguistic and integrative practices**

The conceptual implications embedded in DCT's theoretical constructs are directly translated into linguistic strategies and classification systems that interviewers can draw from when engaged in helping interviews. We now define specific DCT constructs and explain the ways these can be directly translated in our work with those seeking assistance. The conceptual implications embedded in the constructs of information-processing styles and coconstructivism provide the framework for the application of developmental and communication theories to the helping interview.

### **DCT cognitive-emotional, information-processing styles**

The first step in a successful interview is for counsellors to apply effective communication skills to determine clients' predominant information-processing styles. Once determined, interviewers can employ receptive and expressive interpersonal skills that mirror clients' linguistic and cognitive-emotional frames of reference. The idea of matching our language style to that of the client is important (Decety, Norman, Berntson, & Cacioppo, 2012). When interviewers can identify clients' constructions and match their own language to these constructions, they will have maximum opportunity to join with them and help them learn expanded or alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Rigazio-DiGilio, 2002). By using strategies matched to clients' predominant styles, interviewers can accelerate the formation of the therapeutic alliance.

Box 18.2 provides descriptions of the major cognitive-emotional, information-processing styles, along with corresponding illustrations. DCT posits that all styles offer particular strengths and constraints and that higher is not necessarily better. The effective use of all four styles is valued and often the work of counsellors is to help clients access new perspectives generated by shifting to less accessed information-processing styles.

#### *Box 18.2* Cognitive-emotional, information-processing styles

Clients who rely on several styles access resources inherent in each to experience, understand, and act in their world. Those who predominantly rely on one style are generally constrained within the limits of that style. Those who haphazardly fluctuate among styles are generally constrained by ineffective

processing. Each style is described and illustrated below, along with corresponding types of affect, cognitions, and behaviours. Also provided are linguistic cues interviewers can use – in the immediacy of any interview – to monitor ways clients access elements within and across styles and to modify questioning strategies and helping interventions accordingly.

*Sensorimotor/elemental*

**AFFECT** Clients relying on this style tend to be dominated by sensory stimuli and affect, seeing minimal distinction between sensory input, cognitions, and emotions. Their emotions are sensory based and reactive. They experience the here-and-now directly and immediately.

**COGNITION** They show minimal capacity to coordinate sensory-based data in a coherent fashion. They can be random in their presentation of issues and concerns.

**BEHAVIOUR** They have difficulty taking effective action based on their beliefs or experiences.

**ILLUSTRATION** (tearful/overwhelmed) 'I'm confused. He just stopped breathing. I feel so lonely and lost. I don't know what to do.'

**LINGUISTIC CUES** Random, disorganised thoughts and emotions; random, chaotic, impulsive behaviours; and affect that tends to be inappropriate for the actual situation.

*Concrete/situational*

**AFFECT** Clients relying on this style can name and describe their emotions and those of others from one perspective, with minimal differentiation. They express emotions outwardly and are unlikely to recognise obvious emotions in others unless clearly made available to them.

**COGNITION** They are good story-tellers and can tell detailed stories – from their own perspective – about their lives and specific events and circumstances, including what happened to them and who said what to whom. There is minimal emphasis on evaluation or analysis. They can demonstrate if/then linear thinking, emphasising causality and predictability from a single perspective.

**BEHAVIOUR** They can control and describe broad-based, undifferentiated, outwardly focused affect, and are able to find ways to act predictably in their worlds.

**ILLUSTRATION** 'My partner died last week. The funeral was on Friday at Jones Funeral Home. There were over 100 people there. I was glad so many people came.'

**LINGUISTIC CUES** Specific linear descriptions of situations, events, and interactions; descriptions of feelings; if/then causal thinking.

*Formal/reflective*

**AFFECT** Clients relying on this style demonstrate awareness of the complexity of their feelings and can separate self from feelings to reflect on their emotions. While they can analyse patterns of feelings, they have difficulty experiencing their emotions directly.

**COGNITION** They can describe repeating patterns of affect, thoughts, and behaviours in themselves, in others, and across situations and are able to engage in an analysis of self and of situations they participate in. However, they have difficulty seeing constraints in these patterns.

**BEHAVIOUR** They can generalise their behaviours to adapt to novel situations. However, they have difficulty determining new behaviours, outside of their own patterns.

**ILLUSTRATION** 'We had a perfect relationship. We had learned ways to live with his prognosis and still enjoy one another. I am the type of person who cares a lot for the one I am with. I was able to deal positively with this whole situation.'

**LINGUISTIC CUES** Analysis of self and situation; seeing relationships among specific experiences and situations; intellectual observations and insights; reflecting on personal assumptions.

*Dialectic/systemic*

**AFFECT** Clients relying on this style offer a wide range of emotions and recognise that their emotions can change in relation to their context. They have difficulty experiencing their emotions directly in the immediacy of the here-and-now.

**COGNITION** They can operate on systems of knowledge and reflect on ways they arrive at their world views. They are aware that their evolving cognitions are coconstructed over time and in response to differing contexts and their positions within these contexts. They can challenge their own assumptions and integrations. Because they see flaws in virtually all reasoning processes, they involve themselves in deconstructions and reconstructions, with limited ability to stay within a predictable frame of reference.

**BEHAVIOUR** They can interact in their environment, accessing resources and influences within many contextual realms. They may become lost in their thought process and find it difficult to predictably interact.

**ILLUSTRATION** 'His dying process and death were complicated. First, I hurt a lot, but, on the other hand, the last several months were so awful that I am glad the pain is over – we were able to part in dignity and with love. I was shocked, but not surprised by our families' reactions. Some members seemed afraid of us. Some seemed angry at him for not attending to the genetic realities of his illness earlier on by changing his diet and getting more exercise. I understand that such choices are neglectful nowadays, but I cannot condone their behaviours or the ways these will affect our child. I'm not sure how I will remain part of their lives.'

**LINGUISTIC CUES** Reflections related to the wider context of influence; complex and multilevel thinking patterns, usually devoid of emotions; examinations, deconstructions, and reconstructions of rules, policies, and operations that are guiding or dominating the self or situation.

\* Linguistic cues drawn from the *Standard Cognitive-Emotional Developmental Classification System* (Ivey & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2005).



No matter what the issue – depression, vocational decisions, poverty, oppression, abuse, or other struggles – no two clients will talk about their concerns in the same way. Our task is to assess – by listening to linguistic cues – the ways clients are primarily processing their experiences and to match their language with appropriate cognitive, emotional, and behavioural questions, strategies, and tasks. The objective is to help them explore their issues where they are.

Implicit in DCT is the ability of interviewers to use a full repertoire of familiar communication strategies that correspond with each of the four processing styles so that they can:

- demonstrate empathy and make strong connections with clients within their predominant style;
- assist clients to expand the resources available within that style;
- invite clients to examine resources available within other, less utilised styles; and
- help clients master the resources within these less familiar styles.

Generally, clients seek assistance when they are depending on resources within their predominant style that are not in sync with developmental or environmental demands. Once we join with them within this style, we can assist them to expand their use of the resources within it. For example, a client may know ways to access various problem-solving skills (concrete) to deal with a simple demand, yet be unable to access a more comprehensive problem-solving repertoire for more complicated demands. Assisting this client to expand the use of problem-solving skills would promote an expanded use of their processing style.

Once clients fully explore their issues from the vantage points of their predominant style, they may want to explore these from other frames of reference associated with styles accessed less frequently. For example, a man who lived for years with an abusive partner may need to tell several stories about his experiences (concrete), and may need assistance to reorganise his life away from his partner (concrete). Once stories are told and a safe environment is established, he may wish to explore the deep emotions associated with his prior experiences (sensorimotor), or engage in dialogues through which he can analyse how significant others may have acknowledged or ignored the challenges and needs he faced, and the degree to which his connections with them facilitated or hindered his abilities to understand his needs and act to meet them (dialectic/systemic). Finally, it may be appropriate to work with him regarding the ways living through these traumatic experiences impacted his sense of self as well as his sense of self in relation to others (Rigazio-DiGilio & Kang, 2015) (formal).

Note in the preceding paragraph that comprehensive treatment programmes generally require counsellors to work with clients within and across several processing styles, communicating cognitive and affective empathy within each of these, a dialogic process that expands the ways clients understand, navigate, and/or influence their worlds. There is no ‘higher’ form of cognition or emotion in the DCT model. The primary goal is to expand the depth and breadth of understanding within each style as well as the multiple options revealed through this dialogic process.

## Facilitating cognitive, emotional, and behavioural development

Rather than merely matching treatment to clients' needs, DCT is concerned with helping clients discover themselves as living multiplicity. That is, clients need to tell their stories in multiple ways and may require multiple treatment modalities to cope with this complexity. DCT identifies two directions to promote client development.

*Horizontal development* occurs when we encourage clients to experience life in more depth using their primary style. For example, clients often need to grieve losses emotionally, whether these are failed examinations, the loss of a job, or a divorce. While emotional grieving can occur within all four styles, it is experienced more fully within the sensorimotor style. Horizontal developmental can be facilitated by using skilful communication tools to carefully phrase statements within this style, thereby assuring learning within a safe helping environment.

*Vertical development* occurs when clients shift their primary style. For example, we may work with clients who can effectively analyse their issues through formal or dialectic lenses. We may note, however, that their reliance on abstract discussions may inhibit their ability to engage in sensorimotor experiencing or concrete problem-solving to change their circumstances. Our task as helpers may be to encourage and linguistically support these clients to move vertically by phrasing questions and comments that help them to consider their issues from these under-utilised processing styles.

### DCT linguistic questioning strategies

DCT's linguistic questioning strategies, illustrated in Box 18.3, are used to:

- access and assess clients' predominant information-processing style;
- access and assess clients, ability to move within and between various other styles; and
- promote horizontal and vertical development.

(see Chapter 4 for further information on questioning)

#### *Box 18.3* DCT questioning sequence

##### **Phase I: Open-ended questions for preliminary assessment of client's predominant style**

1. What you would like to focus on today?
2. What occurs for you when you focus on the issues that prompted you to seek assistance?

**GOAL** Obtain client's story. Identify client's predominant style.

**TECHNIQUES** Use encouraging statements, paraphrasing, and reflection of feelings to bring out information with minimal impact on client's story. Get the story

as client constructs it. Summarise key facts (cognitive empathy) and feelings (affective empathy). Move toward mentalising.

**Phase II: DCT questioning sequence for assessment of client's access to other styles**

*Sensorimotor/elemental*

- 1 Could you think of one visual image that occurs to you when you think of the issue that prompted you to seek help?
- 2 What are you seeing? Hearing? Feeling? It will be helpful to locate the feeling in your body.

GOAL Elicit one example and ask what is being seen/heard/felt. Aim for here-and-now experiencing. Accept randomness.

TECHNIQUES Summarise key facts (cognitive empathy) and feelings (affective empathy). Move toward mentalising. You may want to ask 'What one thing stands out for you from this?'

*Concrete/situational*

- 1 Could you share a specific example of the issue?
- 2 Can you describe the feelings you had in this example?

GOAL Obtain a linear description of the example. Look for if/then, causal reasoning.

TECHNIQUES Ask 'What did s/he do? Say? What happened before? What happened next? What happened after?' Summarise key facts (cognitive empathy) and feelings (affective empathy). Move toward mentalising.

*Formal/reflective*

- 1 Does this happen in other situations? Is this a pattern for you?
- 2 Do you feel that way in other situations? Are these feelings a pattern for you?

GOAL Talk about repeating patterns of client and of similar examples.

TECHNIQUES Ask 'What do you say to yourself or aloud in these situations? Have you felt like that in other situations?' Reflect feelings and paraphrase as appropriate. Summarise key facts (cognitive empathy) and feelings (affective empathy). Move toward mentalising.

*Dialectic/systemic*

- 1 How do you organise all that you told me? What one thing stands out for you?
- 2 How many ways could you describe your feelings and how these changes?

**GOALS** To obtain an integrated summary of what has been said. To enable the client to see ways reality is coconstructed versus developed from a single view. To obtain different perspectives on the same situation and be aware that each is just one perspective. To note flaws in present constructions, constructions, or perspectives, and move to action.

**TECHNIQUES** As we move toward more complex reasoning, several options are open. Before using any of these, summarise what the client has been saying (cognitive empathy) and feeling (affective empathy) over the entire series of questions (mentalising).

- **INTEGRATION** How do you organise all that you told me? What one thing stands out for you?
- **COCONSTRUCTION** What rule were you (they) operating under? Where did that rule come from? How might someone else describe the situation? (Feelings can be examined using similar questions.)
- **MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES** How could we describe this from the point of view of another person/vantage point? How else might we put this altogether?
- **DECONSTRUCTION-RECONSTRUCTION AND ACTION** Can you notice any flaws in the reasoning or patterns of feelings above? How might you change the rules? Given these possibilities, what action might you take?

\* Abbreviated version of the Standard Cognitive-Emotional Developmental Interview (Ivey, Rigazio-DiGilio, & Ivey, 2005).

## EXAMPLE INTERVIEW<sup>1</sup>

This interview illustrates ways counsellors can use DCT's linguistic questioning strategies to facilitate client growth and understanding.

A mother comes for help because she is having many fights with her daughter who is about to leave home and enter college. The actual session, transcribed here, is abbreviated for clarity. Identifying data have been disguised to ensure confidentiality.

*Interviewer:* Lisa what would you like to talk about today?

*[This open-ended question helps to determine the processing style being used by the client to understand the issues promoting treatment.]*

*Lisa:* My daughter, Christine, and I have been having an immense number of fights lately. We always seem to argue and I find myself becoming really upset. It is her final year in school and she will be leaving home soon. I wanted us to separate smoothly and to remain close to each other.

*[Lisa presents her issues within the formal style. She talks about patterns between herself and her daughter. She reflects on herself and her own feelings.]*

*Interviewer:* So, you have been fighting a lot and you feel angry at yourself. What you really want is to remain close. What is the pattern you see emerging that is troubling you?

*[Interviewer reflects Lisa's feelings, paraphrases, initiates an empathic relationship, and follows with a formal question to further join with her.]*

*Lisa:* Ever since last summer we just seem to be on two different tracks. Before then, we have really been able to talk about anything and even enjoyed lots of things in common. Now it's just bicker, bicker, bicker.

*Interviewer:* You are noticing a big shift in the way you and Christine relate. Can you give me some specific examples of the type of arguments you are having with one another?

*[Interviewer vertically shifts Lisa from her formal perspective to a concrete style to examine the details of the situation.]*

*Lisa:* Sure, just last week we really had a big argument. She was going to the college admissions office and came down dressed up in jeans and a T-shirt. She looked awful.

*Interviewer:* She was in jeans and you didn't like it.

*[Interviewer paraphrases Lisa's comments within the concrete style and reinforces cognitive empathy.]*

*Lisa:* Right. Then I said to her, 'You can't go to an admissions interview dressed like that. You look terrible.' I guess I was too critical. Then she said that she was tired of me telling her what to do all the time. So, we argued a bit and I felt terrible.

*[Lisa offers concrete, descriptive details of the fight. The statement, 'I guess I was too critical' Lisa's shift of the concrete conversation to a formal self-reflection. While clients discuss their issues from multiple perspectives, one style generally predominates.]*

*Interviewer:* You felt terrible because of the argument?

*[Interviewer reflects Lisa's feeling, expanding the story horizontally by remaining within the concrete style. The question mark at the end indicates a raised tone of voice and an implied perception check, reflective of the Theory of Mind in action.]*

*Lisa:* Yes, but then she went upstairs and changed. She looked a lot better. But as she walked out, her eyes were flashing and angry.

*Interviewer:* Is that the type of thing that happens a lot? Is that typical of the pattern you spoke about before?

*[These are formal questions and, if successful, will lead Lisa to talk about the difficulty she is experiencing within the formal style. The movement back to formal, after gathering some concrete details, will help make the pattern analysis more meaningful.]*

*Lisa:* Yes, exactly. We have been having these little tiffs for about a year now. I just know that the situation makes me feel terrible and I can see that Christine feels badly as well. We have always been so close until this last year. Now she makes me so angry that sometimes I just want her to go and leave.

*[Although Lisa notes her angry feelings, she is not directly experiencing the emotion. Instead, she is commenting on the change in her relationship with Christine, so her comments represent a formal style.]*

*Interviewer:* I can sense your frustration and hurt. You want something to be different. Do you want to try an exercise in imagery and see what happens? These types of exercises have been helpful before in understanding complex situations.

*[Interviewer provides a summation and reflection of affective empathy, followed by a closed-ended question with information. This question invites Lisa to join in the process of deciding which intervention to use in the session. This illustrates DCT's belief that clients should have as much say as possible in the path of their own interview.]*

*Lisa:* OK, let's try one of these exercises again.

*Interviewer:* Lisa, I'd like you to sit back and relax (pauses while Lisa closes her eyes).

Now, you said you were feeling hurt by your constant fights with Christine. Could you focus on that feeling of hurt? (Pause) Can you locate that hurt in your body in some specific place? (*Lisa points to her heart.*) Now, Lisa, start with that feeling in your body and let your mind wander to whatever comes. (Pause) Can you get an image in your mind? What are you seeing?

[*Interviewer communicates affective empathy and uses a sensorimotor imaging exercise which we have found useful in helping clients discover their deeper feelings. As such techniques are often surprisingly powerful, counsellors should introduce these carefully and with a full sense of ethics.*]

*Lisa:* I am seeing Christine when she was two (tears) and remembering (pause) what she was like when she was an infant (more tears).

*Interviewer:* You seem to be feeling that sensation very deeply right now. What else are you aware of?

[*Interviewer reflects Lisa's feelings and provides an open invitation for her to go where she needs to.*]

*Lisa:* I really do care for her a lot – in fact so very much. I think maybe she cares for me too in much the same way. Could it be that we care so much that it's hard for us to separate?

[*Lisa moves away from the sensorimotor experience to formal reflection. With some clients, it may be important to help them stay focused within the sensorimotor style, but Lisa seems to have found a new insight which may be helpful for her to process within her predominant formal style. Having returned to sensorimotor experience, she recalls and relearns the importance of her relationship with Christine. With that awareness, she may be ready to take new action and find new behaviours that will better serve her and her daughter.*]

*Interviewer:* So, you feel that your caring for one another shows itself in the arguments you are having?

[*Interviewer applies the Theory of Mind reasoning and reflects Lisa's meaning. Lisa is finding that deeper meanings and feelings underlie the surface of the fights she is having with her daughter. The discussion has moved further into her primary formal style.*]

*Lisa:* I guess so. It seems strange to fight when one is close, but I guess that happens.

*Interviewer:* Let's go a bit further. Could you tell me a bit about what happened for you when you were Christine's age and you left home for college?

[*Interviewer introduces an open-ended question to examine possible parallels between the two situations. At one level this is concrete, as the interviewer is asking for specifics, but at another level it is formal and possibly even dialectic, as here she is searching for patterns of patterns and possible intergenerational issues.*]

*Lisa:* Well, it was different for me. My mom and I were close, but not so close as Christine and I. I guess being a single parent makes the two of us even closer.

[*Lisa responds within her formal style, noting the differences in meaning between the two situations. Comparisons and contrasts between situations are usually associated with formal reasoning.*]

*Interviewer:* So, the two situations are different. You feel closer to Christine than perhaps you did to your own mother. Could you go a bit farther with that?

*[Interviewer mentalises Lisa's meaning with an invitation to expand her analysis via an open-ended question.]*

*Lisa:* One thing occurs to me. My mom always said, 'Healthy birds fly away.' I wonder if I've been hanging on too much and maybe I'm more of the problem than I thought I was.

*[Lisa is beginning to draw on strengths from within her intergenerational family history. This represents a transition point from formal to dialectic processing.]*

*Interviewer:* So, in your family of origin, health is represented by the saying, 'Healthy birds fly away.' What meaning do you make of that? How do family factors relate to what's going on between you and Christine?

*[The focus changes from the individual to the family, an indicator of a shift to dialectic reasoning.]*

*Lisa:* I've got it. Christine and I really bonded after the divorce. Sometimes I depended on her too much. But, as mom said, it is the healthy ones who can leave home. I should be glad for my successes and maybe let go more easily.

*[By extending this dialectic exchange, Lisa is beginning to access less-utilised resources inherent in this processing style, which enhances her ability to see ways her difficulties with Christine are influenced by the family's developmental history. Simultaneously, she is discovering various ways learnings from her family of origin may be of help to her and her daughter during their own separation process.]*

*Interviewer:* That is great. It sounds like the situation is making more sense to you now. And, perhaps you can draw on the strengths of your mom's legacy to move nearer to beginning the steps towards resolution with your daughter.

## **DCT HELPING INTERVIEW ENVIRONMENTS**

DCT's connection with neuropsychology draws from its holistic perspective and connects counselling theory to actual regions of the brain. Empirical research confirms that while clients may rely on a preferred style to process and make sense of phenomena, they also can access resources in other styles with the appropriate focus of questioning (see Box 18.1). Further, recent neuroscientific findings about the role of mirror systems support the function of DCT's linguistic questioning strategies to examine client issues using resources inherent in their primary processing styles and then to create environments that facilitate their movement within and between other styles to explore multiple perspectives and manage broader options for change.

Neuroscientific research has further demonstrated that each DCT cognitive-emotional, information-processing style corresponds with specific areas and processes within the brain (Lane, 2008). While these processes generally occur in a holistic fashion (Hölzel et al., 2010; Jensen, 2005), unsurmountable and long-term stress can interrupt this holistic process and constrain the ways individuals experience, understand, and participate in their world. Brain-based process research has confirmed the efficacy of using DCT linguistic questioning strategies to provide opportunities for clients to explore their issues in ways that can optimise latent and emerging strengths and resources within various styles. Over time, these opportunities encourage clients to access under-utilised areas of the brain (e.g., engage in

sensorimotor experiences in the moment, tell concrete stories about their issues, reflect on patterns associated with their issues, and perceive their issues from broader historical and contextual lenses).

Actively engaging with clients to coconstruct environments fashioned to revisit previously constrained strengths and resources and to recognise less or unfamiliar strengths and resources is core to DCT's helping approach. It is this iterative process that brings cognitive and affective empathy and mentalising to the foreground of counsellor–client exchanges in ways that significantly contribute to the multiple potentialities for change. In these critical moments, myriad opportunities can be activated that empower clients to effectively access, connect, and utilise resources to understand and resolve their difficulties in a productive fashion. This is one way the DCT's techniques and methods associated with each of the interview environments (described below) can revitalise brain-based functioning and empower clients to develop new resources to understand and resolve their difficulties. This manner of coconstructing therapeutic environments is an essential component of DCT which helps to improve clients' holistic processing and to increase their sense of agency, confidence, and competence, thus revitalising their resilience and personal sense of power, as supported by in brain-based processes (Ivey et al., 2011).

As noted above, counsellors can engage in a coconstructive process of developing helping environments by using linguistic questioning strategies and familiar helping and counselling approaches/techniques that correspond to each style. Initially, they coconstruct helping environments that respond to clients' predominant style, advancing affective and cognitive empathy and accelerating the formation of the therapeutic alliance. As the helping relationship continues, counsellors and clients collaboratively coconstruct expanded environments that provide further opportunities for conversational discourse within other styles, wherein clients can enhance, expand, deconstruct, and reconstruct their prior perceptions of the issues that prompted treatment and can broaden their options for change.

DCT posits four basic counselling environments that correspond with each of the four processing styles.

### **Style 1: Environmental structuring for the sensorimotor/elemental style**

To coconstruct this environment, interviewers' direct sessions, extensively using communication skills. Examples of clients who predominantly rely on this style are individuals seen in inpatient psychiatric settings, correctional settings, and traditional one-to-one instructional or teaching settings. It also is true, however, that many other clients often will work within this style, for it is here that deeper emotional experience may be reached.

Several environmental structuring therapies and techniques are useful to clients needing to explore or master resources within this style. Directive psychiatry and counselling are characteristic. For example, in cases of trauma, such as rape or child abuse, helping interviewers coconstruct holding environments with sufficient structure and safety to handle the range of emotions that may arise during any session. Directive techniques such as relaxation training, body-oriented approaches,



such as dance and movement therapy, and experiential approaches such as Gestalt therapy may be appropriate.

## **Style 2: Coaching for the concrete/situational style**

To create this environment, interviewers balance attending and influencing skills and work with clients in a participative manner. The interviewer knows things that the client does not, and is willing to share these. Examples are vocational decision-making, assertiveness training, behavioural techniques, and reality therapy. Here, the helper builds on the present developmental capabilities of clients, and provide opportunities for them to enhance, expand, and practise these.

## **Style 3: Consulting for formal/reflective style**

To create this environment, helpers support clients' explorations of self and others across various situations by using attending skills and reflective questions. Nondirective and classic Rogerian counselling styles typify this environment. Within the formal/reflective style, techniques of Frankl's logotherapy, psychoanalytic methods, and narrative models may be used. Interpretations and reframes which help the client to examine patterns of self and situations also are germane to the consulting nature of this environment.

## **Style 4: Collaboration for dialectic/systemic style**

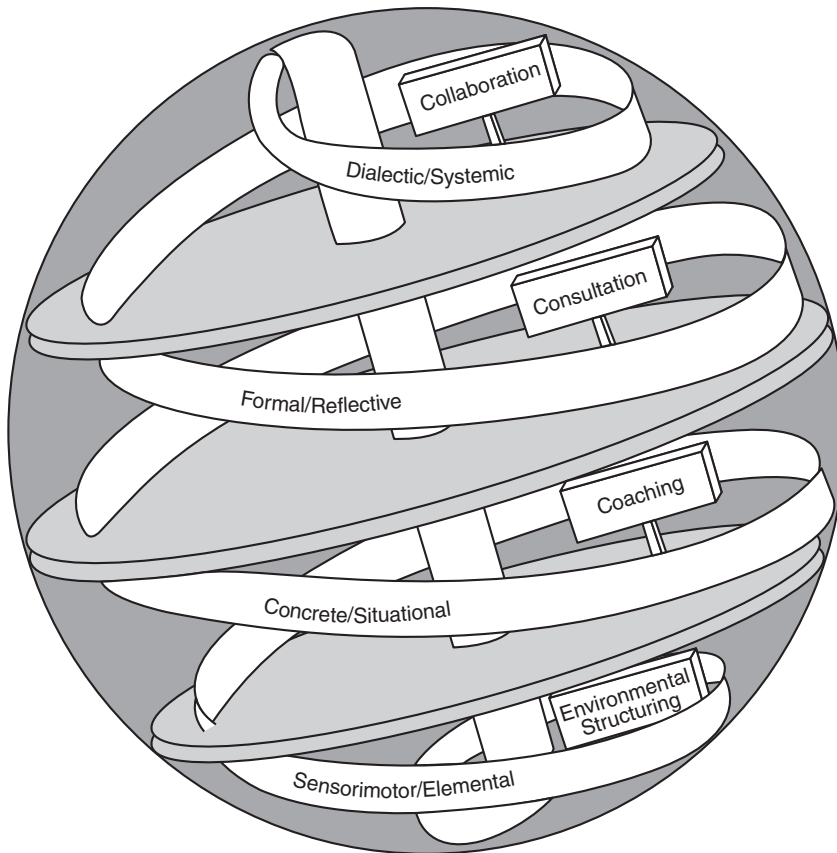
Here, helpers invite clients to develop their own goals and methods. Feminist counselling, multicultural counselling, and systemic counselling are prime examples of the approaches associated with this environment, all of which emphasise working with clients as co-equals in a mutual, collaborative partnership.

## **DCT classification matrix**

Figure 18.1 summarises the totality of DCT's assessment and treatment process in visual form. The DCT sphere provides a visual understanding of the complexity of human consciousness development and illustrates the multiple ways counsellors can draw from familiar and evolving helping approaches and strategies to design appropriate environments across all phases of the helping exchange.

Clients have the capacity to operate within all domains of the sphere. Looking at it holistically, the sphere provides the therapeutic underpinning for making decisions about how and when to introduce strategies from familiar counselling approaches to match (horizontal) and extend (vertical) clients' ways of understanding and addressing the issues that prompted them to engage in a helping relationship.

The sphere provides a broad map from which counsellors can work with clients to coconstruct helping environments that are matched to clients' predominant



**Illustrative theories, approaches, and techniques:**

**Style 1 – Environmental Structuring:** Body-oriented therapies (meditation, yoga) and here-and-now strategies (imagery, Gestalt empty chair, focusing)

**Style 2 – Coaching:** Concrete narratives/storytelling, assertiveness training, thought stopping, automatic thoughts inventory, skills training

**Style 3 – Consultation:** Reflection on any of the above, person-centred theory, psychodynamic theories, cognitive work

**Style 4 – Collaboration:** Multicultural counselling and therapy, feminist therapy, intergenerational family therapy, social action in community

**Figure 18.1** DCT Integrative Classification Matrix (DCT developmental sphere reprinted by permission of Lois T. Grady)

information-processing styles as they explore primary issues at hand. In addition to knowing clients' predominant style counsellors will need to understand how effectively clients' use the resources available within the styles they can access. DCT has identified three unique ways clients can navigate through the sphere. First, some clients will be well grounded in the perceptual frames and methods of constructing meaning and making interpretations which their predominant perspective provides. Some of these

people may be so comfortable with only using the resources of one style that they may have significant difficulty shifting to a new perspective within an alternative style (rigid movement within and among styles). Second, some clients are not well grounded in any of the four styles and use resources associated with all four, but in a rather haphazard manner (diffuse or chaotic movement within and among styles). Third, there are clients who have a strong mastery of the perceptual and communication skills found within each style and are cognisant of how and why they choose a strategy to interpret events (flexible movement within and among all styles). This latter type of client typifies the goal of DCT – to help clients knowingly access a variety of styles to experience, interpret, discuss, and act on their issues. It is because of the variety of client styles and the stated goal of DCT that counsellors must be comfortable operating within all four of the styles.

While the three ways of navigating within and across the four styles, as described above (i.e., rigid, diffuse, flexible) are common, most of us – and most of those we serve – do not simply operate within one information-processing style. An example of a client operating within multiple styles may illustrate the complexity of many clients. An older woman entering the job market for the first time may be operating within a confused sensorimotor style vocationally, and not have even the most elementary job-seeking skills. At the same time, she may have had a wide range of experience in volunteer work and may be a successful parent and ‘counsellor’ to her children and to the neighbourhood families. In these areas of her life, she may be thinking within a formal or even dialectic/systemic frame of reference. She may need concrete skills training as she practises for job interviews and prepares her résumé.

Thus, in a single interview it may be necessary to move through several different helping environments, depending on the issue being discussed. In relation to this woman, for the purposes of her vocational issues, it may be best to begin by using an environmental structuring environment to assist her in navigating through unfamiliar territory. It also may be necessary, however, to assist her within a consultation environment to facilitate her understanding of the job or career choices she wishes to pursue. It may also be necessary to assist her with the concrete skills of job searching and interviewing by coconstructing a coaching environment. As this client develops more confidence, knowledge, and experience, successful counselling may help her to examine her vocational identity from other styles. She may need to look at herself and her patterns of experience (consultation environment) and then analyse possible job discrimination for older women (collaboration environment). It also will likely be helpful to enable her to explore emotional experience of personal discrimination within the environmental structuring environment.

## **USING DCT WITHIN A MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

Where does the socio-cultural context end and the individual begin? This question is at the heart of the multiculturalism controversy, evident in literature on helping and interviewing. In the past, it was assumed that a helper, regardless of ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, and economic class, was objective and minimally biased. Helping was viewed as a neutral interaction and helpers were trained to discount their cultural preconceptions and to attend to the mastery of counselling

theory and practice. Unfortunately, this emphasis on the ‘technical’ aspects of the helping profession minimised the human/cultural aspects of our work. At best, it produced well-intentioned professionals who accepted that they were probably ineffective when working with clients of differing cultural backgrounds. At worst, it continued a type of cultural imperialism that further led to the alienation of many diverse client populations (Rigazio-DiGilio & Ivey, 1995; Ivey et al., 2005).

More recent models of helping are based on the knowledge that counselling is a multicultural exchange process (e.g., Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). These models place the technical skills of helping (i.e., communication skills, empathy skills, awareness of the knowledge base) in a subordinate position to understanding the importance of the individual, relational, and socio-cultural forces operating on the interview process. Implicit in this awareness is the need to recognise the ways our own cultural backgrounds enter the helping relationship and interact, with all biases intact, with the cultural backgrounds of the clients we work with (see Chapter 2 for further discussion of the importance of culture).

DCT posits that all counselling takes place in a cultural context. Our model of helping values the client’s own language, including all the culturally bound assumptions, frames of reference, and unique perspectives which clients use to make meaning of their world. Conversely our own helping language is extremely important. By posing questions and comments within specific styles we can help clients to examine issues from multiple perspectives while still maintaining a firm sense of self, rather than pushing clients into styles we tend to prefer and/or that do not respect the strengths and resources they have depended on to survive and thrive throughout their developmental journeys and multiple lived-experiences, and with regard to the positions of power and influence afforded them within the multiple contexts they face. As we are given verbal and nonverbal cues that clients are having trouble within a style, the developmentally appropriate response is to return to a style with which they are more comfortable.

DCT questioning strategies and sensitivity to the natural language clients use to process and communicate their feelings, thoughts, and interactions, intentionally stress the importance of cultural heritage and the role it plays in clients’ construction of their worlds (Rigazio-DiGilio & Kang, 2015). By allowing cultural influences to be accepted and used as elements of the interview process, DCT helps make meaning of the individual’s family, community, socio-cultural, and political context. Helping individuals learn to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality should be one of our primary goals as helpers (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2001).

## OVERVIEW

The effectiveness of the DCT model of helping is based on the careful application of a wide range of communication skills. By integrating developmental theory with interviewing skills, counsellors can fine tune treatment plans that address the natural changes clients experience over the course of their development and during the counselling relationship. DCT’s linguistic strategies and helping environments can be an important and useful addition to our practice as helpers. It does little good to

speak of complex and abstract ideas with a client working through a divorce who is tearful and confused and needs sensorimotor direction and support and later, concrete problem-solving skills.

At the heart of the ideas presented here is the importance of noting where clients we work with 'are at.' How are they thinking and feeling and how are they making sense of their world and the counselling exchange? Our ability to note the predominant information-processing style(s) clients are relying on to make sense of, approach, and participate within multiple life experiences – including the counselling exchange – will enable us to match our style and language to the idiosyncratic needs of our clients at any given moment.

The DCT questioning strategies presented here can enable us to help clients expand their thinking and emotion within each style or move to another style for further growth. The developmental framework reminds us that different clients need to work within different styles and helping environments throughout the course of an interview process and that the most helpful intervention will be geared to a style each client is comfortable working within. If our first helping environment does not work, shift to another environment that is aligned to the client's mode of making sense of and operating in the world.

Finally, DCT provides a helping model that is consistent with emerging advances in neuroscience and that recognises the importance of empathic interaction which optimises the cognitive and affective influences operating within and beyond the interview. The linguistic processes and multicultural sensitivities of DCT allow clients to explore their issues through their natural language and to maximise the cognitive, affective, and behavioural resources each information-processing style offers. This is the goal of DCT – that is to enable clients to be able to eventually help themselves (Ivey, 2001).

## NOTE

- 1 The interview maintains a copyright (2003) with Allen E. Ivey and Mary Bradford Ivey, and is used here with their permission.

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# Cognitive behavioural communication skills

Frank Wills

## INTRODUCTION

THE BEHAVIOURAL AND COGNITIVE approaches to human functioning have long historical roots in philosophies such as Scepticism and Stoicism (Ellis, 1973) but took a more precise form as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) from the 1970s onwards. CBT essentially aims to help clients recognise their patterns of thinking, feeling and acting and to experiment with them in order to find a new pattern that better facilitates their pursuit of life goals. Given that behavioural scepticism doubts whether it is possible to *know* what goes on in the human mind, it is perhaps surprising that the integration of the two approaches occurred – yet it did. The inherent distrust of explanations of thinking based on ‘self-report’ probably limited behavioural theory building so that CBT integration worked because as Rachman (1997) tellingly puts it, ‘cognitive therapy *is supplying content* to behaviour therapy’ (p. 18). During the 1980s the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) made the helpful distinction between ‘counselling’ and ‘using counselling skills’ (Reeves, 2012) – clarifying that counselling skills are used by helpers other than those with the role of counsellor. This chapter is based on the similar assumption that distinguishing between ‘Cognitive Behaviour Therapy’ and ‘using cognitive-behavioural communication skills’ is helpful in the dissemination of cognitive behavioural communication skills to a wider audience (Wills, 2015). Whilst there will be some focus on CBT, I will also suggest that the cognitive behavioural perspective can be helpful to those outside psychological therapy – echoing an earlier aspiration to *give psychology away* (Miller, 1969; Larson, 1984).

The chapter is structured around Gerard Egan’s (2013; Wosket, 2006) tripartite notion of exploration skills, understanding skills and action skills. Skilful exploration leads to skilful understanding and then to skilful action. Each section describes key skills with examples of work in a therapeutic and in another context. The skills described are assumed to be used alongside general therapy and counselling ‘micro-skills’ – especially listening skills – so well described by Allen Ivey (Ivey et al., 2014; and in this volume). CB communication skills are shown to be closely linked to related knowledge – e.g., cognitive specificity – and so may also be thought of as competencies.

## EXPLORATION: USING CB COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO EXPLORE SITUATIONS

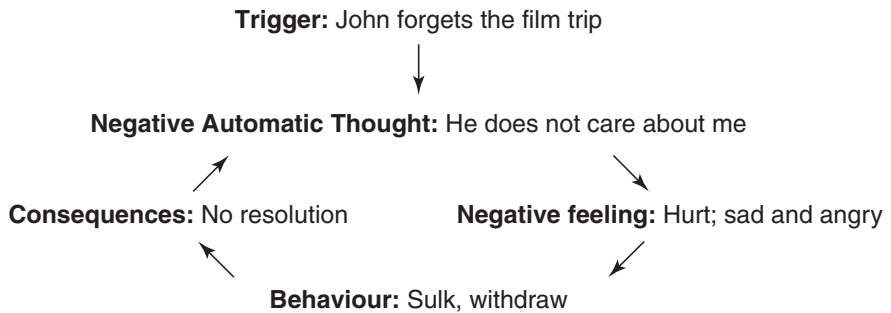
### The vicious cycle concept

The ‘vicious cycle’ concept lies at the heart of cognitive behaviourally oriented work over a range of difficulties (Wills, 2015). By identifying typical negative thoughts, it indicates useful areas where therapeutic effort can be targeted. It is important that helpers offer a rationale for targeting this area to ensure that clients and therapists are ‘on the same page’. Randomly exploring and changing peoples’ thinking may meet strong resistance – perhaps being seen as ‘patronising’ or worse.

Whilst the ‘vicious cycle’ concept is somewhat ‘rough and ready’ theoretically, it operates as a helpful heuristic for starting CBT. The example presented in Figures 19.1 and 19.2 comes from a client in CB therapy.

The diagram is best seen as representing a single moment in time and helps us to capture the client’s reaction more clearly than a broader view though it is also important to appreciate the context, which normally emerges anyway in the helping situation.

**LAUREN** is a 40-year-old woman who works with disabled children. Her husband, John, spends long periods working abroad. They have two children. Lauren’s job and marriage are sources of great joy but also of stress. When both go badly Lauren is prone to depression. After the incident shown in Figure 19.1, she realised



**Figure 19.1** Lauren’s vicious cycle

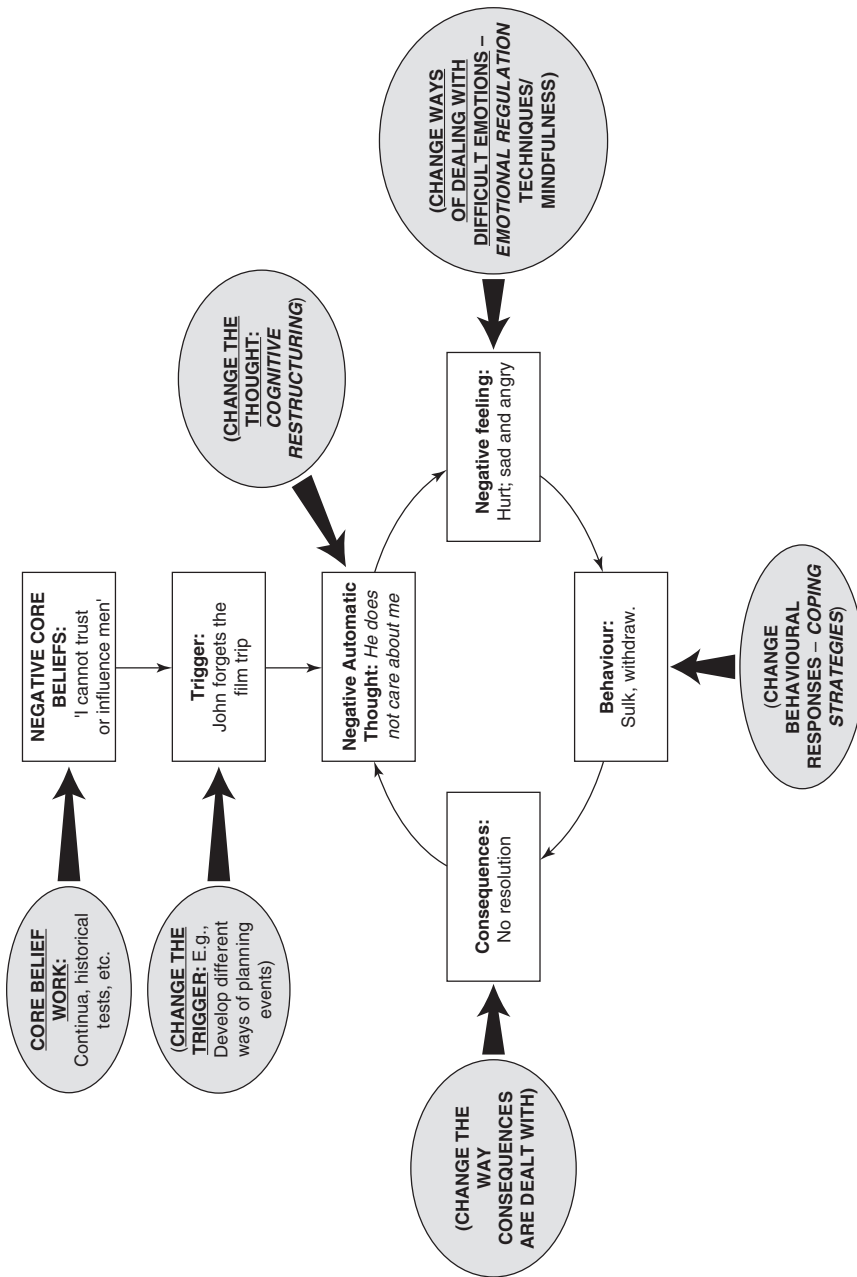


Figure 19.2 Lauren's change points

that she felt suicidal and needed to see a therapist. At work, Lauren struggles with a manager who she feels has ‘taken against’ her for no apparent reason. John recently returned from working abroad and had not stayed in touch as much as Lauren hoped. Whilst he waits for his next job, he spends much time in bed. Lauren resents that she has to go off to work whilst he is still in bed. In her view he has little to remember and forgetting their film trip was the ‘final straw’.

The ‘rough and readiness’ in the diagram is evident in the fact that the exact order and relationship between trigger, thought and emotion is not precisely known, and, are probably more reciprocal than as shown, and, the arrows are therefore not as causal as might be implied. Other factors such as longer held beliefs – described later – are also likely to be involved. We can however recognise the pragmatic utility of the diagram. There is a long-standing tradition in CBT that writing down what is in one’s mind is helpful to clients (Beck, 1995, p. 32). Research on the effectiveness of diagrams has mainly focused on educational settings (Marzano, 2007) and CBT also has educational intent (Beck, 2011, p. 9). Writing about psychological trauma has been shown to be therapeutic and can in the words of Pennebaker & Smyth (2016, p. 81), ‘Get these thoughts out of my head’. Writing and reflecting on one’s psychological reactions is the first ‘take away’ skill that CB therapists aim for clients to develop. Many therapists use a large whiteboard and will frequently write down a vicious cycle to represent what the client has recounted. Clients invariably say that it helps to see in writing what has been going round their heads. It can help them achieve psychological distance – what Beck has called ‘decentering’ (1976, p. 242) – from negative thoughts. Sometimes clients laugh at their thoughts or add comments such as, ‘That is crazy, isn’t it?’ The ‘vicious cycle’ diagram also allows therapist and client to consider at what targets interventions for change can be aimed (Wills, 2015).

There is a considerable consensus that cognition – along with emotion – plays an important role in the mediation of meaning (Lazarus, 1991). Researchers in the Beckian tradition of CBT have contributed much to our understanding of the cognitive ‘architecture’ that is involved in the precipitation and maintenance of emotional problems (Wills, 2009). The cognitive themes specifically associated with different emotional problems are summarised in Table 19.1.

The ‘cognitive specificity hypothesis’ has been extensively tested in research studies (Clark & Steer, 1996) and has proved robust. Awareness of specific thoughts that are linked to specific emotions is helpful in many problems. It gives helpers a head-

**Table 19.1** Cognitive specificity

<i>Cognitive themes</i>	<i>Emotional problem</i>
Loss, defeat	Depression/sadness
Threat, danger	Anxiety/fear
Transgression by others	Anger
Self-transgression	Guilt
Contamination	Disgust/obsession

**Table 19.2** Cognitive distortions

<i>Cognitive distortion</i>	<i>Example</i>
Catastrophisation	I will make a fool of myself

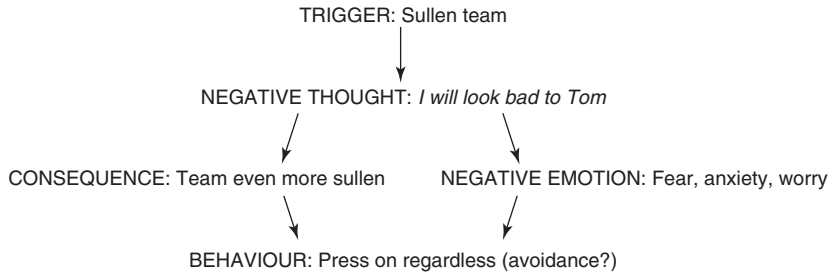
start by knowing what may preoccupy clients' thoughts, feelings and behaviours. This knowledge in turn helps to discern which areas to probe further. Another related skill in CBT is an understanding of the role played by cognitive distortions in generating emotional distress (Clark & Beck, 2012) – see summary in Table 19.2. 'Catastrophisation' for example is especially noteworthy in anxiety disorders, influencing people to make negative predictions about the future and to 'fixate' on these forecasts. This understanding is reflected in neuroscientific descriptions of 'quick and dirty' activation of the 'emotional brain' (LeDoux, 1996), which may overwhelm attempts by the 'cognitive brain' to arrive at a more balanced perspective. This view does not however imply any kind of cognitive primacy over emotion.

Emotional reasoning undermines cognitive amelioration, thereby maintaining negative emotion. People are helped by awareness of the operation of cognitive distortions – clients often have favourite distortions that tend to recur. They can be encouraged to adopt a detached, even slightly ironic attitude towards them – 'Oh there I go – catastrophising again!' A negative response to one single event is not usually too problematic but when they become habitual such responses are likely to hold the client's mood in a bad place, exacerbating other tendencies towards emotional disorder.

An important caveat warns us to be wary of assuming that individual clients are reacting as 'the research' would predict. Research findings are best regarded as a general guide on where to probe and helpers are well-advised to be sensitive to individual variations. This was forcefully brought home to me one day when I saw two new clients in succession both of whom had social anxiety. Each client had just started a new job. The first told me that he was terrified of authority figures and lived in constant anxiety over what his new boss thought of him. When the second told me he was anxious in his new job, my 'smart Alec' side got the better of me and I said, 'I suppose that you are worried about your new boss.' He replied, 'Oh no, I know exactly what to do with bosses, it is what to say to colleagues around the coffee machine that worries me.' A perfect corrective one might say to my cognitive error of 'over-generalisation'. A similar insensitivity can come from being judgmental about client perceptions that may at first seem distorted. I have found it useful to think that the ways that clients see things nearly always contain at least a 'grain of truth' – but that does not mean that they are the whole truth. There are usually reasons why people have developed their attitudes and skilful therapists will usually find what these reasons are. Such therapist attitudes help to build the ideal therapeutic relationship in CBT, i.e., based on 'collaborative empiricism' (Beck, 2011).

### ***Using cognitive-behavioural skills outside the therapy field***

**Mark** is a young manager who has just started a new job in a large company and has been given the task of introducing a new database system to his section. To him this seems a straightforward and unproblematic process to implement. He looks forward



**Figure 19.3** Mark's vicious cycle

to explaining it to his team and helping them get started on it. In the event, however, he finds his team sullen, asking awkward questions and not seeming to give him the mandate to make this change that he hoped for.

After the meeting, Mark sits in his room feeling fed up when a gentle knock heralds a colleague who has worked in this section for some time and has been designated as his mentor.

*Mentor 1:* How are you feeling, Mark?

*Mark:* (defensively) Fine, I think they'll be okay with it, won't they?

*Mentor 2:* Maybe – in time at least ... but, how are you really feeling?

*Mark:* A bit worried actually.

*Mentor 3:* And the worrying thought is ...?

*Mark:* It is the first thing Tom has asked me to do ... I could fall at the first fence. I won't look good, will I?

Thus, Mark seems intent on ignoring his worry and 'pressing on regardless' with the change. His mentor, however, suggests that this could confirm the team's dominant feeling – of having been given 'a lot of crap from on high'. To help Mark reflect more on his reaction, his mentor draws the diagram shown in Figure 19.3. Mark gives the matter more thought and decides that getting off on the right foot with his team is more important than getting a quick success to tell Tom about. He adds new elements to his mentor's Figure (shown with broken lines) to discuss with her, as shown below:

## USING GUIDED DISCOVERY THROUGH SOCRATIC DIALOGUE (GD/SD) TO EXPLORE PROBLEMATIC FUNCTIONING

CBT is somewhat more directional (as opposed to directive)<sup>1</sup> than other models of therapy – or at least as they suppose themselves to be. As well as exploring and reflecting the client's inner world, CB therapists are more prepared to 'probe' its psychological underpinnings (Egan, 2013). The general strategy employed to do focused exploration is termed 'guided discovery'. CB therapists take different positions on what balance between guiding and being guided by clients is most efficacious – Wills (2015)

suggests that the client's 'proximal zone of development' can be determined to decide this. Socratic questioning is the most frequently used verbal strategy to implement guided discovery, hence I use the term Guided Discovery through Socratic Dialogue (GD/SD) to describe this keynote CBT strategy.

Plato's *Socratic Dialogues* portray Socrates using a series of usually open questions in his debates with other philosophers as he aims to open up their constructs and persuade them to examine their assumptions. Socrates' position is famously that his wisdom lies only in knowing that he knows nothing. The outcome of Socratic dialogues is usually an uncomfortable *aporia* – 'a state of puzzlement' in which everything seems confounded. This is a useful reminder that the aim of GD/SD is not to persuade clients of other truths – that would truly be 'directive' therapy – but rather to open up their thinking to other possibilities, especially to the fact that negative thinking may be misleading them. The aim is to promote cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) actively – the discomfort of dissonance then motivates clients to keep reflecting until they reach a new sense of inner resolution (Wills & Sanders, 2013). Socratic questioning is an art but may be enhanced by learning templates of component skills – especially asking analytic questions (AQs), evaluative questions (EQs), synthesising questions (SQs) and by making frequent summaries (SUs) (Overholser, 1993). AQs tend to target 'amplifier'<sup>2</sup> words or phrases that have particular resonance in client dialogues. AQs seek to unpack the implicit content of these concepts, and then EQs ask clients to survey their experience for evidence of the presence or lack of presence of this content in their lives. SQs seek to gather in salient factors that emerge in different phases of dialogues and finally SUs seek to capture the essence of the whole dialogue and to remind clients of where the therapeutic effort seems to have arrived at. The two brief dialogues – based on earlier examples – demonstrate this sequence of questions in action:

*Mentor 4:* Mark, you say about 'looking good' (NB: amplifier word) to Tom – might it be worth looking at that? (Mark agrees) When you think about 'looking good' what do you see in your mind's eye? (AQ)

*Mark:* ... that I would look decisive and competent – Tom sort of hinted that Jeremy (NB: Mark's predecessor) did not always do that.

*Mentor 5:* Anything else?

*Mark:* (Laughing) – well yeah – the work environment is humming – a well-run ship and all that. ...

*Mentor 6:* So if you press on with the task, hoping the team will go with it, how will that be? (EQ)

*Mark:* Well it might look like I am doing well but the team may not – probably will not in fact – look happy. Tom may not be aware of that but in the long run that could be risky ... (later) ... I'd like to 'start as I mean to go on' – and develop my own management style ... it probably makes more sense to take time to feel my way into this one.

*Mentor 7:* (SQ/SU) So it seems like making a balance between keeping your boss and team happy and that seems worth thinking about?

Human beings are faced with vast numbers of perceptual stimuli every day and it is inevitable that many of our appraisals are 'rough and ready' and/or 'quick and dirty'.



Cognitive psychologists, such as Kahneman (2011), describe the many inaccuracies inherent in everyday processing but one still could say that for most of the time most of our appraisals do a pretty good job of helping us manage our lives. Of course, people like Mark inevitably think about 'looking good' but what does that really mean – in the short or long terms for example? Mark's mentor has surely done him a favour by gently prompting him to think about that. GD/SD is an effective skill for such prompting and is often used in education to draw out thinking (Saran & Neisser, 2004). Let us finish this section with a further example where Lauren (from Figures 19.1 and 19.2) and her practitioner discuss her concerns:

*Lauren:* I felt so low when he forgot ... it seemed final proof that he *does not care* (NB: amplifier phrase) about me.

*Practitioner 1:* I can really see that and of course it is important to feel cared for by one's partner, but could we examine that idea a bit more? (**Lauren:** Yes – it is important). What for you are the important things about John caring for you? What shows he does and does not care? (AQ)

*Lauren:* Mmm – that he wants to be with me when he can ... that he thinks about me when we are apart ... that he thinks enough about me to remember to do stuff we agreed about ...

*Practitioner 2:* Let's take the first one, has he seemed to want to be with you? (EQ)

*Lauren:* Well sometimes ... we went to his mum's and she looked after the kids so we could go for a drink ... but he's just been withdrawn since getting back home ...

... *Further exploration* ...

*Practitioner 3:* (SU) So there is quite bit to pull together there, ... This last job was tough for John... It wasn't easy to email from there... He's tired and disillusioned with his work – as you are ... but there is a sense of drift between you beyond that and you definitely feel it would be good to 'freshen things up'. But remember that we began with your idea that *he does not care* about you, how does that seem now? (SQ)

*Lauren:* Well, it is obviously not as simple as that ... there are reasons why we have drifted apart – but I need to know what he feels about that and whether he too wants to freshen things up.

It is unclear yet if healing is possible in this situation, but readers might think that the chances of positive change have been enhanced as we have moved from the important yet abstract concept of 'caring' to more specific matters – how the couple operate together – something more inherently amenable to problem solving.

The chapter began by describing a process of change: exploration/ assessment ---> formulation/ understanding ---> action/intervention. The first stage of any change is usually awareness. The purpose of GD/SD is to stimulate cognitive dissonance which in itself tends to encourage awareness of the need for change. As GD/SD unfolds Lauren's thinking moves in parallel and will sometimes keep moving – perhaps with little or no therapist input. The more stuck the problematic functioning is however, the more likely it is that clients may need to go through further stages that consolidate understanding and promote action.

## CB COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR UNDERSTANDING PROBLEMS

CBT therapists have pioneered the notion of building models of psychological functioning to determine optimal points of intervention (Bruch & Bond, 1998), terming this activity as ‘formulation’. Other models have also shown this approach (Eells, 2006), so formulation may be considered a new ‘common factor’ in psychological therapy (Wills & Sanders, 2013). Most formulations involve elements that explain ‘here and now,’ current situation factors and ‘there and then’ factors that are more longitudinal and historical. Previously the skills associated with exploring ‘vicious cycles’ of functioning have revealed what constitutes the ‘here and now’ part of a CBT formulation. We now turn to that more traditional psychotherapeutic activity of linking clients’ past and present lives. A necessarily brief comment on how CBT differs from other models is apposite. A focus on present-time functioning has been posited as a defining principle of the CBT model (Beck, 2011). This has sometimes left critics unaware of ways that CBT can also focus on past experience (Persons et al., 1996). Focus on the present does not preclude appreciation of significant past experience. The following client scenarios show this process in action:

### Practice example

*Lauren:* Following her initial sessions Lauren saw that the twin stressors of work and family had darkened her thoughts and depressed her mood. This realisation helped her to take a more objective view of her relationship with John and subsequently things improved. Now however, she disclosed having been raped when she was 17. As she and her practitioner explored this devastating experience, skills for linking past and present experience are prominent:

*Lauren:* It felt locked into me because I could not tell anyone. Mum would have blamed me and I could not tell dad because he’d have told her.

*Practitioner 4:* Even if you had asked him not to?

*Lauren:* Yes – because that is his *Big Rule* – I could not come between them ...

*Practitioner 5:* So you had to ‘hold it’ – all by yourself.

*Lauren:* Exactly!

Lauren described a pervasive inability to trust men or to think that she could influence them. This prompted her practitioner, who was male, to explore the link between past and present using the CBT concept of schema. Schema may be defined as an overall disposition in the mind to consciously and non-consciously interpret environmental events in set ways. A CB therapist would typically identify core beliefs and assumptions likely to operate within the schematic ‘structure’<sup>3</sup>:

*Practitioner 6:* In CBT we think that there can be deeper meaning centres in our minds – we call them schemas – this means that we tend to see things in certain set ways – sometimes without being consciously aware of doing so. I’d guess that your feelings about men shifted after the rape? It would be surprising if they didn’t.

*Lauren:* Yes, for ages after that I dealt with it by thinking that although I couldn't trust men there must surely be some – a few – that I could ... Then when I met John I felt that I had found that man ... (**Practitioner 7:** ... but then that man you thought you could trust started going away and not keeping in touch?) Yes, it was a crisis by stealth ... at first, he worked round here and then it was the whole country and now the whole world! I developed this ritual of praying that he would always come back ...

Lauren was developing more understanding of her less conscious reactions to the situation – and realised that she had definitely sought out a male practitioner to do this with. Eventually she and her practitioner decided to undertake sessions to 'work through' the trauma of the rape.

## Skills commentary

In responses 4 and 5 the practitioner probes Lauren's relationships with her parents. There is a clear rift with her mother and the second probe establishes that though she has a good relationship with her father, in the event of any conflict he would ally with her mother rather than her. In response 6 he seeks to build a formulation-based understanding of this emerging history and in response 7, links this back to her earlier life. This is a typical set of moves in formulation building that explores and links multiple phases of her life – childhood, adolescence and current adult life – and highlights themes that seem to run through them.

## Example from outside therapy field

[Mark felt good after the next team meeting. His team had a moan, were listened to and although no concrete plan emerged, there was a feeling of fresh hope. When Mark went for a 'catch-up' meeting with Tom however, he had the familiar sense of unease. He managed to be vague about the team and the new system and consciously put off saying more for now. He then sought out his mentor and explored with her why he had gone in intending to be frank with Tom only to find the words 'stuck in his throat'. He then said he had felt just like he did when he took his school report back to his dad]

*Mentor 5:* I thought you were going to say it was like going to see the Headmaster?

*Mark:* Believe me, the Head was a pussy compared to dad ...

*Mentor 6:* What happened when you took your reports to him?

*Mark:* There was this big build up beforehand – this is *the* day ... and how will dad react? Basically, he was never satisfied – if I got an A, he'd say it should have been A-star ...

*Mentor 7:* So that sounds powerful ... and it happened regularly?

*Mark:* Yes – and it still does – and even when I see someone like Tom – nice though he is – I get a sort of queasy feeling in my tummy.

*Mentor 8:* Perhaps it's a double whammy, you have stress from meeting a boss ... but things from your past add yet more stress. You could perhaps cope with the first stress but get overwhelmed by the additional one?

It is now understandable why these situations are difficult for Mark and why he is driven to 'look good'. Such situations are difficult anyway but for him he may become flooded by re-stimulated emotion from the past in addition to the stressful feeling in the present. Because of the emotion which colours these situations, additional coping skills may be required. Mark decides that he would like to try rehearsing talking to Tom – at least until he finds his feet in his new job.

### **Skills commentary**

In responses 5 to 8, Mark's mentor focuses on the link that Mark himself makes between his history and his current situation. In response 5 she is clarifying the importance of situations where judgments of Mark's behaviours are likely to be made – exemplified by taking his school report to his father. Responses 6 and 7 establish that this is a significant emotional experience that happens regularly, and response 8 offers a new way of understanding how this kind of situation may become even more difficult to manage. The phrase 'double whammy' is populist but actually well matched to Mark's general vocabulary. People seem to naturally match language and linguistic styles in conversations – especially during good quality contact (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002).

Formulations are often written up as descriptions of the psychological mechanisms involved, or more simply as a map or diagram (see Wills & Sanders, 2013; Wills, 2015).

## **COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR PROMOTING EFFECTIVE ACTION**

Action in Egan's model and in CBT includes internal action – most commonly thinking or feeling differently – and/or external action – usually behaving differently in the environment. This section focuses on examples of CB communication skills to enhance cognitive, behavioural and emotional functioning.

### **CB communication skills to promote cognitive change**

There is a continuous iterative cycle between exploration, understanding and action – so that changes in thinking may already have begun as a result of awareness of one's thinking in specific situations as revealed in a 'vicious cycle' or by seeing a link between this pattern and a more historical pattern. This kind of shift may prove to be a 'road to Damascus' experience and may be sufficient to ensure that further helping intervention is not sought. More typically however, new understanding will ebb and flow so that there will be a need to persevere with effortful change because as Aaron Beck (Psychological and Educational Films, 1986) has put it, 'One swallow does not make a Summer'. It is helpful to see ways of facilitating change as arranged on a continuum from 'light touch' methods – where the door of change

is almost fully open – to more effortful interventions aimed to keep the door from closing again. The ‘light touch’ interventions come from the awareness inducing methods just referred to – for example, having stimulated some cognitive dissonance from GD/SD, we might now feel content to sit back and ‘let awareness do its work’ (Wills, 2015, p. 62). In contrast, helper and client might decide to keep the process of examining thoughts going. Typically, CBT sessions are structured around homework tasks, e.g., clients keep ‘thought records’ as a way of monitoring their negative thoughts and then they consider evidence that does and does not support them. A variant but similar approach comes with teaching clients how to use ‘pie charts’ as a way of more accurately recognising factors that contribute to negative events in their lives – especially when they criticise themselves and/or tend to take too much responsibility for their problems.

## Using a thought record

*Mark:* Mark felt nervous when Tom’s secretary asked him to come to Tom’s office as ‘something has come up’. By the time he arrived however, Tom had gone. Tom’s secretary apologised for his absence but says that a woman in Mark’s office has said he ‘got heavy’ with her about the new system. This is not a complaint, she says, but Tom wondered if Mark could send an email explaining his side of the story. Walking back to his office, Mark felt panic rising in his stomach. He sought his mentor but remembers that she is on leave. Alone in his office he reflected on what he felt and was aware of two overwhelming negative thoughts – ‘I have messed up’ and ‘I am in trouble’. ... Later he remembers that his mentor had loaned him a CBT book in which he had read about using a thought record to deal with feeling upset like this.

There are various formats for thought records (Wills, 2015), but most now follow the incorporation of evidence for and against negative thoughts, as first suggested by Greenberger & Padesky (2016). The first column of this type of thought record however focuses on the precipitating event or ‘trigger’ (Table 19.3). Mark reflects that although he was nervous before, his panic began as Tom’s secretary referred to ‘not a complaint’.<sup>4</sup> The panic was strong and he rated it at 80% – i.e., about 80% as strong as the worst panic attack he had ever had. He was also clear that the automatic thoughts that went through his head were ‘I have messed up’ and ‘I am in trouble’. In Egan’s model, the movement from explorative awareness toward understanding is facilitated by reflection. As Mark reflected on the actual incident, he did remember feeling irritated with Elaine – the young woman mentioned by Tom’s secretary. After the team meeting he had individual meetings with team members – to clarify concerns about the new system and to offer what he could to help. These individual meetings were difficult but generally productive, leaving Mark with a feeling of progress. Elaine, however, refused point-blank to engage and said she wanted to resign. Mark felt frustrated but thought he had not let it show and was surprised to hear that Elaine said he had ‘shouted at’ her. He scanned his memory and did then remember raising his voice somewhat but remembered that he had finished by insisting that if she did think of anything he could do to help, she should let him know. He also remembered that someone had mentioned that Elaine had seemed stressed recently. He wondered

**Table 19.3** Mark's thought record

<i>Event</i>	<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Negative thoughts</i>	<i>Facts that support the NAT</i>	<i>Facts that go against the NAT</i>	<i>More balanced thoughts</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Wednesday mid-afternoon. I went to Tom's office and his secretary mentioned a <b>complaint</b> .	Fearful, panicky (90%) Pissed off (50%) – with self and with E.	<i>I have messed up, I am in trouble.</i> <i>Bad things could happen – e.g., lose my job.</i>	I did get irritated with E. She seemed pissed off with me. I was frustrated and did raise my voice.	I did offer to help her. Tom's Secretary said it was NOT a complaint. Someone told me E was stressed anyway. I have dealt with this sort of stuff before okay.	This is a difficult situation – objectively, it is not personally down to me or to E alone. I will probably deal with it fine. I would not mind apologising if that would help.	Calmer – much less panicky (25%). In future I could try to channel the energy of fear into being more upfront with Tom about how I see things.

if stress had affected her reaction and whether he should mention that in his email to Tom. As he entered all this ‘evidence’ into his thought record, Mark noticed that his mood lifted. He felt calmer and more determined to sort this out. He imagined finding out more from Elaine and winning her round, apologising if necessary. He remembered that he had sorted out such situations before and felt that he could do so again.

## Skills commentary

As a psycho-educational, collaborative therapy, CBT often works by helping clients to learn skills – in this case, those of communicating with one’s inner self by use of thought records. Usually therapists first teach clients skills for using thought records and then monitor use of these skills by reviewing homework assignments. In this example the mentor uses the light touch intervention of encouraging Mark to use the skills via a self-help book. Self-help books usually highlight the skill prompts below to maximise the effectiveness of using a thought record (Wills, 2015):

- *Column One (Trigger)* pinpoints a specific moment in time when the negative thinking ‘kicked in’ – this increases emotional immediacy in the memory.
- *Column Two (Feeling)* identifies primary emotion (sadness, fear, happiness, anger, guilt etc.). This helps to avoid ‘think–feel’ confusion – i.e., if people say, ‘I feel like I will fail’, they probably mean ‘I feel anxious when I think I will fail’.
- *Column Three (Automatic thought)* highlights the ‘hot’ thought that links to the negative feeling that clients most wish to work on (in Mark’s case the panic is linked to fear of being in trouble and on the fear that he messed up – his mood is helped by challenging both thoughts).
- *Column Four: (Evidence that supports the NAT)* It is best to consider the case against negative thinking first – otherwise evidence in favour can sound over-optimistic.
- *Column Five (Evidence that does not support the NAT)* helps to balance preoccupation with negatives – which is one of the actual criteria of depression (DSM-V, APA).
- *Column Six (Alternative thoughts)* looks for a more balanced explanation of clients and their situations. Negative thoughts can be like ‘tabloid headlines’ – forceful, a bit true but often a lot wrong.
- *Column Seven (Outcome)* acts in a similar way to the final moves of GD/SD in that it summarises and suggests the main implications for the client moving forward.

## Using a pie chart

**Lauren:** Just as things were improving between Lauren and John, fate intervened. John received the call to go abroad again. He had warned Lauren that it could happen and they were at first confident that they would part on reasonable terms this time. Just before departure however, they learnt that their son, Jack, had been suspended from school because he had allegedly stabbed another pupil in the hand. For better or for

worse, John decided that he had to leave Lauren to deal with it. The other boy's parents wanted to involve the Police. John urged Lauren to persuade them to avoid this. By now Lauren felt depressed again and was not up to doing that. Jack was furious with Lauren, saying it was 'all her fault' that he had to go to the Police. Unfortunately, Lauren herself believed Jack's opinion of her and ruminated again on her failure. Eventually however, the Police believed Jack's version of what happened – that it had been a 'dare game' accident – and took no further action.

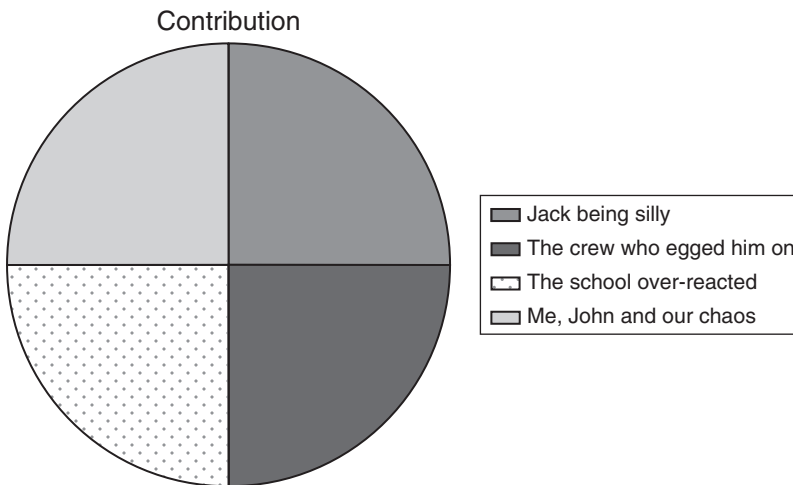
Lauren's NAT, 'It is all my fault' influenced the precipitation and maintenance of her low mood. Typically, depressed thinking ensures that sufferers take undue responsibility and blame themselves – showing the cognitive errors of both selective abstraction and self-labelling. A pie chart is an effective intervention because it helps clients to remember and evaluate other factors likely to be involved. Lauren and her practitioner produced the pie chart shown in Figure 19.4.

The following dialogue shows the skills used in generating this pie chart and is followed by concluding remarks on this section.

*Practitioner 1:* ... You seem stuck on the idea that what happened was 'all your fault'. I wonder if that is an example of those negative thoughts that crop up when you feel low?

*Lauren:* I suppose so ... I know that it can't literally be all down to me but I do feel like I am central to it ... if I was more on top of things, then I'd have noticed that Jack was drifting ...

*Practitioner 2:* Yes – you are conscientious with most things, especially being a mother but I wonder if it would help to consider this thing with Jack more in the round ... and think what other factors were involved because it might be useful to identify what your degree of responsibility was and how you responded to that and whether there are things you could learn to do better ... (Lauren expresses interest in this idea and the practitioner explains how they might think of the all the factors as a pie with



**Figure 19.4** Lauren's pie chart



individual slices – each slice cut to something like its importance)... So what about Jack himself – do we need a slice for his responsibility?

*Lauren:* (Somewhat reluctantly) Okay – I suppose! The thing is that he has got in with a ‘crew’ and they are a bit rough and he is attracted to that ... I don’t want to be over-protective. They play these ‘dare games’ and that is when the ‘stabbing’ happened – actually it was a protractor for God’s sake – and the school got that wrong – somehow it became a knife ...

*Practitioner 3:* Okay so do we have to give Jack a slice ... and his mates too? How big would they be, do you think? (Lauren draws 2 quarters into the chart) And what about the school?

*Lauren:* Jack and his mates were stupid, I know that, but the school did not handle it brilliantly. I mean it is a middle class school and the crew are ‘deviants’ ... my friend said that some teachers were looking for any chance to get rid of them. I think that Jack got trapped in the school politics there ...

*Practitioner 4:* So there would have to be a slice for the school there too ... but you can see what is happening here – we have already assigned over half the responsibility to factors other than you.

*Lauren:* (laughing) Yes – I get the point – you don’t need to go any further with it ...

*Practitioner 5:* Yes, fine – but we can perhaps now discuss your actual role more clearly.

*Lauren:* True – as we went through, it is clear to me that I did take my eye off the ball with Jack – with John abroad and all that. I meant to talk to him I but just kept putting it off ... but then there is no guarantee that the incident would not have taken place anyway.

## Skills commentary

In response 1 the practitioner focuses on the NAT and links it back to previous themes in therapy and collaboratively invites Lauren to explore this thought. Lauren’s response is an immediate unpacking of ‘all my fault’ – so the practitioner has a green light to proceed. In response 2 the practitioner links the NAT to the client’s history and offers an explanation of and rationale for a pie chart intervention. Practitioner responses 3 and 4 further unpack the thought with analytical questions (AQs) – and an evaluative question (EQ) extension to response 3 asking about the size of the slices. Response 4 synthesises (SQ) and summarises (SU) the preceding sequence. The unpacking intent of these questions is so well achieved that the client does not go on with the full pie chart but is keen to evaluate her own portion of responsibility – in what is now a more balanced way. In response 5 the practitioner wisely accepts this direction from the client, resisting any further pushing on a door that is already open.

## Concluding thoughts on cognitive change

Changing one’s thinking is a subtle process and may unfold in a variety of ways. There is usually a degree of serendipity and even luck in how it happens. Whilst it may look like a very structured process in the examples given, it can also be messy. Some

clients resist being structured. Others may see therapists as criticising them (and their thinking) – but others have begged me to give them more of a good argument! So, in addition to ‘a fair wind and a following sea’ we need skills and interpersonal subtlety to bring them effectively to the person before us. The main aim however is to ‘catch the prevailing wind’ of the direction in which their thoughts may change rather than backing them into a logical corner from which they cannot escape.

## **CB COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO PROMOTE BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE**

The integration of the behavioural and cognitive therapies was generally a harmonious process, offering much to both parties (Rachman, 1997). There has however been a residue of contention about the contribution that each approach makes to overall change. Some proponents of ‘third wave’ CBT have used evidence from, among others, Jacobson and Gortner’s (2000) study of this issue, to argue that cognitive restructuring adds little to the active element of behavioural change in the CBT of depression (Hoffman et al., 2010). This debate is well summarised in Longmore and Worrall (2007) and the rejoinder from Carey and Mansell (2009). CBT research has however been much based on large outcome studies and it may be hazardous to judge individual CBT skills from such studies because they rarely assess the finesse with which CBT techniques are used (Wills, 2010). What is not in dispute is that behavioural interventions do enhance the effectiveness of CBT. Classic behavioural interventions in depression include activity scheduling (Beck et al., 1979) and behavioural activation (Kanter et al., 2009). The next case study describes activity scheduling with Lauren. A second type of behavioural intervention – building assertive behaviours (Wills, 2015) – is shown in Mark’s case. Both interventions change behaviour and promote cognitive change – as Carey & Mansell (2009) argue, it is difficult to disentangle these two factors.

### **Behavioural activation for depressed clients**

**Lauren:** After John returned home and things settled with Jack, unfortunately Lauren’s mood continued to rise and fall alarmingly and she often felt overwhelmed – saying, ‘It is all too much’. In particular, she felt stuck at home and life began to feel ‘all grey’. Being at home and ‘merely servicing the kids’ – who now wanted to do more with friends rather than with her – she was withdrawn and isolated, giving her yet more time to ruminate on negative thoughts. Working with an activity schedule often helps to ameliorate withdrawal in depressed clients. Essentially the schedule is a simple diary in which clients track their activity levels and pleasurable activities during the week – see Table 19.4.

Activity schedules are used retrospectively – to analyse existing patterns in clients’ behaviours, and then later, prospectively, to forward plan activities – based on that analysis (Wills, 2015). Evaluations of behavioural patterns in depression usually focus on three key aspects – the level of activity (‘too little’/‘too much’); the amount of pleasurable activities;<sup>5</sup> and, finally, the degree of socially engaged activities. The necessary therapist skills here are to notice and analyse significant links between clients’

**Table 19.4** Lauren's activity schedule

	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
6-7 am	Get up, wash, dress	Get up, wash, dress	Get up, wash, dress	Get up, wash, dress	Get up, wash, dress	Sleep	Sleep
7-8 am	Make breakfast, get kids ready	Make breakfast, get kids ready	Make breakfast, get kids ready	Make breakfast, get kids ready	Make breakfast, get kids ready	Sleep	Sleep
8-9 am	See kids off & travel to work - +	See kids off & travel to work	See kids off & travel to work	See kids off & travel to work - xxx	See kids off & chill out	Get up, wash, dress.	Family breakfast - +
9-10 am	Work admin & meetings	Work admin & meetings	Work admin & meetings	Work admin & meetings	Domestic stuff - x	Make breakfast. Take kids to club/ sport - xx	Family breakfast
10-11 am	Work admin & meetings	School visit	Work admin & meetings	School visit - xxx	Health club - swim & gym - ++	Supermarket shop - xxx	Read papers, chat - +
11-noon	School visit - +	School visit	Meeting in health centre - +++	School/ family visit	Health club - swim & gym - ++	Supermarket shop - xxx	Read papers, chat - +
Noon-1pm	School visit - +	Play workshop - +++	Lunch	Family visits	Health club - Coffee & lunch with friends - +++	Domestic stuff - xx	Family walk - x

(Continued)

**Table 19.4** Continued

	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
1-2 pm	Lunch - +	Play workshop - +++	Office admin - xxx	CPD training - +	Health club - Coffee & lunch with friends	Domestic stuff - xx	Family walk - x
2-3 pm	Visit to family - ++	Office admin - xx	Case conference - ++	CPD training - +	Domestic stuff +	Walk with John - +	Café lunch - xx
3-4 pm	Office admin - x	Office admin - xx	Case conference - ++	CPD training	Domestic stuff +	Walk with John - +	Café lunch - xx
4-6 pm	Make tea/ supper - xx	Make tea/ supper - xx	Make tea/ supper - xx	Make tea/ supper - xxx	Family tea in café - xxx	Café with John - +	Kids difficult - xxx
6-9 pm	Clear up, domestic stuff - x	Clear up, domestic stuff - x	Clear up, domestic stuff - xx	Clear up, domestic stuff - xx	Cinema - xx	John made supper - ++	Walk by self
9pm-midnight	TV/bed	TV/bed - x	TV/bed - x	TV/bed - xx	Row with John - xxx	Time with John - ++	TV/bed

+ / ++ / +++ - Particularly pleasurable events

x / xx / xxx - Particularly un-pleasurable events

behaviours and moods and to bring these links to their attention to facilitate positive change, as illustrated in the following review of Lauren's schedule and the move into the prospective possibility of positive change:

*Practitioner 1:* (Looking at Lauren's activity schedule) There seems to be a pattern of starting the day okay but then running out of steam and ending up alone and miserable in the evenings. Does it look like that to you?

*Lauren:* Very much so. I can gear myself up for work but by the time it gets to tea time I just feel ground down. The kids wolf down their tea and disappear – I often feel superfluous.

*Practitioner 2:* Last week, it looks like Thursday evening was especially bad – you felt low.

*Lauren:* Yes – and that is strange because I work at home on Friday – my favourite day – so on Thursday evenings I used to go to my sister's and we would often go late night shopping or ... something fun ... but since I've felt bad, I haven't done that ... I am scared that she'd think I'm a misery guts if she sees me like this.

*Practitioner 3:* Okay ... that sounds important ... that was one of those pleasurable little things that we tend to lose track of when we are depressed ... we might want to think if you could re-engage with that when we forward plan the schedule ... what do you think?

*Lauren:* Oh, I don't know about that ... I'd have to work up to it ...

*Practitioner 4:* Yes – it is important to take things at your pace.<sup>6</sup>

## Skills commentary

In response 1, the practitioner describes a behavioural pattern that he sees in Lauren's schedule and checks out that she agrees with his perception. Her response suggests that she is not just being compliant because she describes the same pattern in her own way and adds further valuable information – for example, about how she sees her children sometimes. In response 2 the practitioner internally registers the emotional tone of the word 'superfluous' but wanting to stay focused on behaviour for the moment, probes the behavioural pattern further, highlighting a significant example. This significance is confirmed in Lauren's response – with a link to the aim of building pleasurable experiences as bulwarks against depressive mood. In responses 3 and 4, the practitioner moves into the prospective phase of schedule use and, whilst still confirming that change will be helpful, he stays in collaborative mode by affirming the client's full control of the direction and pace of change.

## Behavioural change in a context outside therapy: – assertiveness at work

Assertive training has long held a place in CBT (Salter, 1961; Dryden & Constantinou, 2004) perhaps because situations where assertion is relevant have actors who think, feel and act. The following extract from Mark's case study particularly focuses on two

elements of assertiveness training: firstly, the role of attitudes, and, secondly, the role of skill rehearsal (Baddeley, 1990).

Assertiveness training groups often begin by considering ‘assertive rights’ (Alberti & Emmons, 1970; Lindenfield, 2014). This ‘bill of rights’ includes ‘rights’ – moral rather than legal – such as ‘I have the right to choose my own priorities’ and ‘I have the right to be fallible’. In the scenario with Mark, his mentor uses her knowledge of assertiveness principles (Dryden & Constantinou, 2004) to help him build attitudes that facilitate more assertive behaviours (see Chapter 11 for more information on assertiveness).

**Mark** thought that he dealt well with Tom’s inquiry about Elaine and that he was ‘through the woods’. So he was – on *that issue* – but he was alarmed when Tom called him and said, ‘Look, you’re fine on Elaine but it is obvious to me that you have prevaricated on the new data system. Things like this happen when you prevaricate – so I’m expecting you to get on with it – clear?’ Tom sounded in a bad mood and Mark felt he should ‘put up and shut up’. He felt uneasy about this however and sought out a discussion with his mentor.

*Mark:* I don’t feel good about this ... I tried to do things how I think they should be done but then wham bam – I get squashed. Part of me feels that this is my baptism of fire ... and I should be a ‘soldier’ and do as I’m told.

*Mentor 1:* But there is another part of you ... that is saying?

*Mark:* That I should stick by my instinct ... but I can’t do that now because I said I will do it.

*Mentor 2:* Do you think that you have the right to say to Tom that you want more time?

Mark shows interest but feels it is risky. His mentor suggests he takes this as an opportunity to practice assertiveness skills – which will also be a long-term help to him. Mark wants to try this – but in a respectful way that does not alienate Tom. They decide to rehearse what he might say to Tom using a simple template (Wills, 2015, pp. 106–9) to guide this work – aiming firstly, to help Mark say clearly what he wants, and secondly, to negotiate effectively with Tom. Mark and his mentor role-play how he will approach Tom:

*Mark:* Tom, I don’t want to have to feel like I’m imposing this on the team. I’m not comfortable and feel I would make a mess of it if I did ...

*Mentor 3:* Two bits of feedback, Mark ... firstly, it would be good to think how to avoid seeming to criticise Tom ... (*they eventually agree that Mark says that he will ‘obey’ Tom if he must but wants to put another option to Tom*) ... Secondly, you said clearly what you *don’t* want – which is good – but do you think it might be better to say first what you *do* want ...

*Mark:* Okay yes – say ‘I’d like at least to finish the first bit of me doing it my way, and then think again ...

*Mentor 4:* Yes – that sounds good to me – does it fit with you?

We can see that in response 1 Mark’s mentor spots and highlights a possible negative point and in response 2, probes the link to assertiveness. In the responses 3 and 4, the mentor offers helpful feedback in a collaborative way. Such discussion would continue

until a more refined version of his original attempt emerges. As they do this, however, Mark vividly imagines being assertive with Tom and becomes anxious again. Eventually he says to his mentor, 'I am getting so het up, do I have the right to leave this until next week?' His mentor laughs and says, 'Yes, I guess that I'm hoist with my own petard – you have the *perfect right* to do that – and congratulations for being assertive with me – that's a definite start!' Readers can decide if they think Mark would ever be assertive with Tom.

## **Concluding comments on skills for behavioural change**

The research literature on psychological therapy is complex. It has been easier to establish emotional change in clients but harder to be sure about the extent to which clients change behaviour after therapy. From the practitioners' point of view, any indication that significant behavioural change has occurred however is reassuring. Many aspects of change aimed for in therapy are actually behavioural experiments – and often result in changes in attitude and feelings (Bennett-Levy et al., 2004). Assertiveness for example fosters self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997) and behavioural activation often improves mood. Psychologists can over-focus on internal changes – the questionable practice of 'psychologising' – at the expense of external factors (Gordo & De Vos, 2010). In alcohol therapy – the context of my first job – there is always a crucial behaviour – dangerous drinking – and environments in which it occurs. It is good when clients increase insight but more so when they are insightful people who are not drinking themselves to death.

## **CB COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO PROMOTE EMOTIONAL CHANGE**

Early CBT models underplayed the role of emotions in therapy and there has been a need to revise some aspects of the model in light of more recent research on emotional regulation (Leahy, 2011). Here we explore how recent ideas and skills from the mindfulness and acceptance 'wave' of CBT may enhance the approach's methods. These methods have emerged as the CB theory has realised the negative role that emotional avoidance plays in emotional disorders (Hayes et al., 2004). This is particularly clear in the anxiety disorders – as shown in the anxiety 'vicious cycle' examined earlier. More recent understanding of emotions shows that anxiety, for example, is really a mostly functional response to threat and mobilises the body to deal with danger. In physical danger the response is often clear – fight, flight or freeze – and the body generally gets on with that (Sapolsky, 2004). When threats however are more psychological – many of our worries for example – functional responses are harder to determine. The discomfort that drives adaptive action in physical danger becomes an unpleasant feeling. Avoidance is an understandable response but just does not deal with the problem. Humans try to control anxiety in unhelpful ways that simply maintain it (Barlow et al., 2011). Anxiety does always fade so that the best way to deal with it can, paradoxically,

be to accept it. Acceptance is at the centre of a helpful procedure called AWARE (accept the anxiety, watch it, act with it, repeat the steps, and expect the best), promoted by Aaron Beck since 1985 (Clark & Beck, 2012). The procedure promotes five steps to facilitate mindful ‘acceptance’ and ‘watching’ the feeling of anxiety and helps the client to ‘step out’ of the feeling and end anxiety attacks more quickly. Therapists can walk clients through the procedure ‘there and then’ in the session. They can then ask clients to reflect on the experience, as Mark and his mentor now show.

*Mentor 1:* How did you find the AWARE exercise, Mark?

*Mark:* It was interesting and more helpful than I thought.

*Mentor 2:* What did you get from it that seemed to help?

*Mark:* That bit where it says to just watch your anxiety go up and down ... I was surprised to notice that was exactly what it did ... the feeling surges up and then comes down ... like a wave ...

*Mentor 3:* Yes – some call it ‘surfing the waves of your anxiety’ ...

*Mark:* Yes – I’d never really noticed that it goes down too – and that is reassuring – like it really will come down eventually ...

*Mentor 4:* Eventually?

*Mark:* Yes, you have said that, haven’t you ... it *always does come down* ...

Reflection is an integral part of the way mindfulness is used in therapy. Clients have experiences and then are encouraged to explore them. Mark’s mentor sets this up in responses 1 and 2 and gently probes and draws it out in responses 3 and 4.

AWARE was a mindfulness exercise well before mindfulness became popular in psychological therapy (Beck & Emery, 1985). More recently however, mindfulness has made a strong contribution in the form of Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT, Segal et al., 2002). MBCT is mainly practised in groups but can be modified to work with individual clients (Fennell, 2004). In the groups, members are introduced to exercises and structured experiences and asked to keep using the exercises outside therapy. The more practice clients do, the more it helps them to stay free of psychological problems. MBCT developed as a follow-up intervention after treatment for depression. It helps clients to avoid relapse – especially when they have had at least three previous episodes of depression (Segal et al., 2002). It now also shows promising efficacy in many other areas of psychological problems (Keng et al., 2011).

**Lauren’s** therapist had participated in an MBCT group and was aware that Lauren met the criteria for those likely to benefit from such a group. After completing individual therapy, Lauren joined a group and benefited greatly from it. She did however like to touch base with her practitioner occasionally to discuss how she used MBCT exercises – especially those designed to deal with strong emotions that arose in her from time to time.

*Lauren:* A great thing about the mindfulness of the breath exercises for me is that they are so portable ... you can use the ‘5-minute breathing space’ anywhere. ...

*Practitioner 1:* So how have you done that?

*Lauren:* Last week we had a school inspector and he is known as a bully ... he was observing some activities I do and said something undermining to me just before



I did my bit ... I could feel myself spiraling down and I needed to do something quickly to re-ground myself.

*Practitioner 2:* Okay good – and this has come up before, hasn't it? You know what might help but it is not always easy to find the space to do it... and this sounds like a difficult situation too ... how did you manage it?

*Lauren:* Well I was assertive actually ... and said that I thought we needed a quick break before the next bit and I slipped out into the garden to do the breathing space.

*Practitioner 3:* That's great – and it worked?

*Lauren:* Pretty well actually – it did break the sequence and I did feel calmer ... the inspector was still dour ... but I wasn't!

Here the practitioner asks open questions that lead the client to reflect on her experience and see how, why and to what effect she could operationalise what she had learnt in the MBCT group.

## **Concluding reflections on using CB communication skills for emotional change**

In the therapy field, CBT has been unusually pragmatic in both its theory and practice (Wills, 2009). This pragmatic spirit can be extended to learning useful methods for dealing with emotions from other models, I argue (Wills & Sanders, 2013; Wills, 2015), especially from emotion-focused therapy (Greenberg, 2011). In direct work with emotions, however, most CB therapists have been more inclined to work with methods – such as MBCT and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) – from within the cognitive behavioural family of methods. My examples have focused on exercises from mindfulness practice that are useful for working with emotional avoidance. In the language of MBCT these methods do encourage clients to 'stand in a new place' in relation to their feelings. This can avoid being swept into 'emotionally driven behaviour' which results only in reinforcing the maintenance of negative emotions (Barlow et al., 2011).

## **OVERVIEW**

CBT trainers have developed competence measures for CBT skills, the best known of which has been the Cognitive Therapy Scale (Young and Beck, 1980; Blackburn et al., 2001). It should be noted that these scales describe 'cognitive-behavioural specific skills' – such as described in this chapter – but also 'general therapy skills' such as listening and interpersonal communication skills. This confirms the fact that CBT is not a mechanical therapy but requires the same interpersonal subtleties as other approaches. The model generally performs well in the outcome research literature (Cooper, 2009) but it is also often remarked that we do not really understand *how and why* it works well (Teasdale, 1985; Brewin, 1996, 2006). Brewin (2006) does however suggest secure lines from which a fuller answer to this question may emerge. The traditional explanation for the workings of CBT implied that when, for example, one is

depressed, the content of one's thinking becomes negative and thereby 'depressogenic'. It has however become clear now that more metacognitive factors are also involved (Wells, 2009) – for example, the way one may, when depressed, pay more attention to negative information and less attention to positive information.

Brewin (2006) suggests that these cognitive processes are highly dependent on memory and that both positive and negative representations can be pulled from memory at any particular time. The ease of accessibility to these representations varies over time, depending on the exact type and intensity of symptoms that a client may be experiencing at one moment, and probably also the idiographic processing style of that individual. All these factors suggest the subtle and perhaps serendipitous change process, already described above. The CBT scientific community displays confidence that these processes will be tracked down and revealed. As a veteran practitioner I remain less sanguine about this prospect. In my view, CBT research has not sufficiently addressed how practitioners may best implement skills needed to work effectively. It can be argued that CBT research has been 'out-come-rich' but 'process-poor'.

Although skills have been identified there has been insufficient research on how they are best implemented with individual clients. As this kind of research does not tend to attract interest in big institutions, it may therefore fall to the 'small battalions' – individuals or small groups of practitioners – to take on this task. They could do so by seriously evaluating the use of different methods and techniques and then making this data publicly available. This chapter is based on such small-scale research – all the clients – suitably anonymised – and interventions described here are based on events in therapy. They are somewhat slanted towards what has worked but nonetheless they show client and therapist skills *and* serendipity *and* good fortune. I can only hope that readers find it instructive. Rich rewards may accrue from the well-honed practice of cognitive behavioural communication skills – across many fields of human helping – many of which are *terra incognita*.

## NOTES

- 1 A directional approach encourages direction without manipulating it (see Wills with Sanders, 2013, pp. 30–1).
- 2 For example, in Mark's dialogue with his mentor, 'looking good' has particular salience as 'looking bad' would amplify the feeling of unhappiness. This would be true for most people but as Mark's history will shortly reveal, it has even greater salience for him and therefore amplifies his negative feelings.
- 3 A full description of all these terms may be found in Wills with Sanders (2013).
- 4 The word 'complaint' probably has strong amplifier value in contemporary society.
- 5 Lack of pleasurable is a criterion of depression (APA, 2013, *DSM-V*) and it is said that pleasure often drains out of the depressed person's life (Wills with Sanders, 2013).
- 6 Longer examples are described in Wills with Sanders (2013) and 59Wills (2015).
- 7 'Metacognition' may be defined as 'thinking about thinking' and 'knowing about knowing'.

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# The appraisal interview reappraised<sup>1</sup>

*Dennis Tourish*

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE APPRAISAL INTERVIEW IS one of the most ubiquitous features of life in organisations. It is also one of the most ridiculed. Evidence mounts each year to the effect that most such interviews are poorly managed, fail to improve organisational performance, demoralise employees and subject the managers who administer them to intolerable levels of stress. Deloitte reported that 58% of HR executives felt that annual reviews are a waste of managers' time, while Willis Towers Watson found that 45% of managers did not see any value in the systems they were using (Cappelli and Tavis, 2016). One major review of the area has found that there is in fact no evidence as yet to connect individual appraisals with firm level improvements in performance (DiNisi and Smith, 2014). Reflecting on these problems, Adler et al. (2016, p. 219) argued that: 'Dissatisfaction with performance appraisal is at an all-time high.' As Chandler (2016, p. xiv) concluded, with considerable understatement: 'Our traditional approaches to performance management are not working.' Given the huge volume of research on the topic, much of it practitioner oriented, this is incredible. There can be few other examples of something that promises so much, delivers so little, but which is so universally applied – an observation made long ago by Grint (1993), and which retains its validity today.

Thus, appraisal interviews are governed by some seemingly impregnable assumptions that research nevertheless suggests may be invalid – e.g. that organisations are rational entities, administrative systems are highly reliable, and most people can be trained to be unbiased and candid in their assessments of others (McCauley, 1997). Some have

even argued that traditional appraisals are so inherently dysfunctional that they need to be abolished altogether (e.g. Evans and Tourish, 2017).

This reality contrasts with the many claims that performance appraisal brings a multitude of benefits to organisations and their employees. These include: the opportunity to ensure that staff pursue goals that are aligned with the wider organisational objectives set by senior managers; the provision of objective assessment and regular feedback, which it is assumed will improve learning; heightened commitment and motivation; improved career management through the identification of training and development needs; the creation of legal documentation for use in cases of discrimination, grievance and disciplinary processes or wrongful dismissal; an improved correlation between the wages bill and organisational performance, through linking appraisal to performance-related pay; and an overall increase in performance (Nikols, 2007). Many more such claims can be found in the literature (e.g. Bennett et al., 2006). These claims encourage managers to keep on adopting it. The view seems to advance through the stages of: it *should* work, it *might* work, it *will* work (eventually) – if only we correct this or that detail. This begs a question posed by Metz (1988, p. 47) that could equally well be asked today: ‘why, in the constant process of appraisal systems revisions, can’t we seem to get it right?’ An obvious answer might be that no one can get it ‘right’, and that a more critical engagement with the practice of appraisal is required.

I develop two lines of argument in this chapter that offer such a critical engagement. The first highlights the perceptual biases that both appraisers and those being appraised bring to the process. These alone create formidable barriers to positive outcomes. But, secondly, I argue that the influence of agency theory on management practice undermines the positive intentions that generally underline appraisal systems. Taken together, these point to the conclusion that appraisals as we have known them should be consigned to books dealing with business history rather than continue to inform management practice.

## **BIASES IN INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTION**

### **The perspective of the interviewee**

There is plentiful evidence to suggest that an appraisee is likely to have a different and more optimistic view of their work performance than the person appraising them. Self-efficacy biases predispose us to believe that we personally are better on various positively rated dimensions of social behaviour than most other people. Accordingly, most of us are inclined to exaggerate our contribution to organisational success (Rollinson and Broadfield, 2002). This has been termed the better than average effect (Alicke and Govorun, 2005). The term draws inspiration from Garrison Keillor’s fabled town Lake Wobegon, where ‘all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average.’

Furthermore, we tend to assume that others see us in the same rose-tinted light in which we see ourselves. This is despite the fact that ‘the logic of statistical regression implies that perceptions of others will be less positive than self-perceptions’ (Heck and Krueger, 2016, p. 327). The phenomenon can be observed in any reality TV show seeking to identify the next pop sensation, and in which human foghorns exhibit the conviction that they are destined to be as influential as Elvis or Madonna – whatever the judges

say. Positive feedback therefore feels intuitively valid while critical feedback that conflicts with our idealised self-image feels erroneous (Tourish and Hargie, 2004). Perhaps for these reasons appraisees who receive high evaluations tend to perceive the appraisal evaluation as fairer than those who receive a low evaluation (Stoffey and Reilly, 1997). Critical feedback is viewed as threatening. People are therefore inclined to reject it. This means that the feedback received is more likely to stimulate conflict between appraisee and appraiser than serve as the basis for improvements in performance.

Attribution processes play a crucial role in heightening such effects. We are inclined to explain the behaviour of the people around us as the result of global (i.e. what is true of them in one situation is true of them in all) personality characteristics which are also assumed to be permanent, while we excuse our own behaviour as the result of the situation we find ourselves in (Forsterling, 2001). The tendency to overestimate the role of personality in the behaviour of others while exaggerating the role of situation in our own has been termed 'the fundamental attribution error' (Kreitner et al., 2002). Thus, we attribute our failure to the situation, but our successes to personal factors ('I had a good appraisal because I am bright: I had a poor appraisal because this organisation is terrible'). This also tempts us into a process of what could be called *blame realignment*, in which our primary concern is to establish our innocence in the face of organisational problems, while putting complete responsibility for the situation on someone else's shoulders. Truly, failure is an orphan, while success has many fathers. Again, this implies that an appraisee is likely to have a very different view of their performance to an appraiser, stimulating further conflict.

Thus, people are especially sensitive to negative input – what has been termed *the automatic vigilance effect* (Pratto and John, 1991). Its effects in the workplace have been well documented. For example, Meinecke et al. (2017) studied 48 dyadic appraisal interviews. They found that dissatisfaction with their performance rating was the most common form of disagreement expressed by employees. 80.65% of such disagreements arose because they felt that their rating should be higher.

It may be argued by defenders of appraisal interviews that the focus should therefore be on the celebration of positive behaviour, and a discussion of how it can be repeated more often. Thus, many texts recommend that when criticisms have to be made they should focus on specific behaviours, be linked to realistic action plans capable of achieving improvements and occur in the context of a supportive organisational culture. In any event, the main emphasis should be on positive feedback. This is more likely to create focus, clarity and a bias in favour of action to secure significant change. Wise as this approach appears, it seems unlikely that it can be accommodated within the framework of traditional approaches to appraisal interviews. The automatic vigilance effects suggest that even modest criticisms will predominate in the mind of the recipient, and come to be regarded as more typical of the interview than may have been the case. Moreover, the biases which also afflict appraisers may create an inbuilt tendency to deliver imbalanced, inaccurate, unfocused and unhelpful feedback. It is to these biases that I now turn.

## The perspective of the interviewer

Most of us have a tendency to slot people into categories based on immediately obvious stereotypical traits, such as the colour of their skin, height, accent and mode of



dress (Bordalo et al., 2016). Appraisers also categorise in this manner. This inevitably means that they often perceive people based on their own personal prejudices, rather than as their job performance warrants. In particular, a number of biases have been identified that seem particularly active during traditional appraisal interviews, and which derail most of them. These include the following:

- Appraisers frequently fall victim to *the halo effect* (Belle et al., 2017). There is a tendency to assume that a positive attribute or a job-related success in one area automatically implies success in others. The same approach applies to failure. Kahneman (2011) argues that we do this because of our need to maintain simple and coherent explanations for whatever we are observing. The effect is that when managers see a vivid and memorable example of success they imagine that the employee concerned will be capable of replicating it across many more conditions than is possible. They also then infer generally positive qualities in the person concerned, with little real knowledge of whether is true.
- *Personal liking bias* means that when supervisors like a subordinate, for whatever reason, they generally give them higher performance ratings, their judgment of the subordinate's work performance becomes less accurate and they show a disinclination to punish or deal with poor performance (Lefkowitz, 2000). For example, one study found that when managers were faced with evidence of employee misconduct their recommendations for or against disciplinary action depended on whether they liked or disliked the employee (Fandt et al., 1990). There has been a significant growth in 360-degree appraisal since, drawing feedback from multiple sources. It tends to be assumed that it is less likely to be handicapped by such biases (Espinilla et al., 2013). However, the evidence suggests that this expectation is unlikely to be fulfilled. Interpersonal factors such as liking and similarity have been found to be more important in determining ratings in 360-degree appraisals than the technical proficiency of the person being appraised (Bates, 2002). We also now live in an increasingly litigious age. There have been a growing number of lawsuits claiming that poor appraisals relative to those of others were influenced more by the personal biases of managers than by the actual performance of the employee (Goldstein, 2001).
- *The horn effect* arises when a problem in one area is assumed to be representative of defects elsewhere (Hargie et al., 2004). If we see a scratch on the bodywork of a new car, it might well be that everything else is perfect, but it is unlikely that we will be able to set aside our initial poor impression. In turn, we feel compelled to focus our attention on such negatives rather than positives. Moreover, we are especially sensitive to negative information about other people. This means that it is difficult to set aside a negative impression, once it is formed. For example, most people regard negative self-disclosures as much more informative than positive ones (Hargie, 2017). The bad is stronger than good effect (Baumeister et al., 2001, p. 323) shows that 'bad impressions and bad stereotypes are quicker to form and more resistant to disconfirmation than good ones.' Thus, in practice, it proves difficult for people to focus most of their attention on examples of positive behaviour, at least in terms of the judgements they form. One consequence is what has been termed the 10–90 effect, in which 90% of time in an appraisal interview is spent discussing the 10% of the job where the employee is performing badly (Hargie et al., 2004).

- *The consistency error* suggests that we have an exaggerated need to feel consistent in our opinions and judgements, and to assume that people and circumstances are more stable than they actually are (Millar et al., 1992). Thus, when we form an initial impression of someone it is very difficult to change it (Fiske et al., 1999). This predisposes us to interpret new evidence in the light of our existing assumptions, while ignoring anything that contradicts our most cherished beliefs. We have a tendency to seek out and remember information that confirms our prejudices, while ignoring or forgetting anything that suggests we might be wrong. This has been described as *the confirmatory bias* (Kahneman, 2011). For example, if we expect someone to be a poor performer in their job, it is likely that we will see only evidence of this when we examine what they do. Furthermore, this perception is communicated to the person concerned by our overall bearing, and the tension created results in actual poor performance. Our expectation has created a self-fulfilling prophecy, which of course only confirms our view that what we thought at the beginning was right all along (Manzoni and Barsoux, 2002). These latter authors have dubbed this 'the set up to fail syndrome.'
- *The fundamental attribution error*, discussed above, means that an appraiser tends to attribute poor performance to the personality of the interviewee, rather than to the situation. For example, it may be assumed that there is low ability to begin with, perhaps compounded by lack of effort. However, if the employee has successes, managers are likely to conclude that it is their own inspired leadership, judgment and competency that have caused it (Heneman et al., 1989). The notion that it reflects the talent of the employee is downplayed. Employees, meanwhile, are likely to have exactly the opposite perception.
- *The similarity bias* means that we are attracted to people who look like us, sound like us and form a convenient echo chamber for our own ideas (Millar et al., 1992). Thus, dissenters in organisations are generally penalised for voicing their views (Kassing, 2011). They are at an obvious disadvantage during appraisal interviews. During appraisals, we therefore often observe a *crony effect*, in which yes men and women have a natural advantage in the competition for promotion, and *the Doppelganger effect*, in which appraisal ratings reflect the similarities between the person being appraised and the appraiser.
- *The 'what is evaluated problem'* arises when the behaviours being evaluated differ from those required to obtain organisational goals. For example, Abraham et al. (2001) found that companies often identify a variety of competences as essential for managerial effectiveness, such as communication skills, a propensity for risk taking and team working. However, they persistently fail to use the identified competencies as a criterion for assessing performance during appraisal interviews. Under such conditions, rather than driving improved performance, appraisal institutionalises a disconnect between strategic intention and what is rewarded – and therefore what gets done. Such misalignments frequently derail and incapacitate the whole enterprise.
- Each of these problems is exacerbated by *ingratiation effects*. People with lower status habitually seeking to influence those of greater status by exaggerating how much they agree with their opinions, policies and practices and so ingratiate themselves with the powerful, despite the fact that they often resent having to do so (Keeves et al., 2017). There is plentiful empirical evidence to suggest that

most managers are unaware of the extent to which they personally are at the receiving end of these practices, while they also engage in behaviours (again, often unconsciously) which discourage the transmission of critical feedback (e.g. Tourish and Robson, 2006). The effect is that managers become ever more inclined to surround themselves with those who share their views, ape their mannerisms and uncritically endorse their opinions. Those of a critical disposition are viewed with suspicion and are less likely to advance in the organisational hierarchy. Similarity and liking biases, already endemic, become ever stronger, making accurate and honest appraisals even more difficult to deliver.

These are a formidable range of problems, enough to derail appraisal processes by themselves. However, I now argue that they are reinforced by the particular ideological context in which management is generally practiced. That context is the dominance of agency theory mind-sets, disseminated by business schools and the business media. These have infiltrated management mind-sets and, in my view, produced attitudes and behaviours that are wholly destructive in the context of appraisal interviews.

## THE INFLUENCE OF AGENCY THEORY

Economists have long used agency theory to promote a particular understanding of the relationship between performance measurement systems and the provision of incentives. It is not without significance that Jensen and Meckling's (1976) seminal paper promoting this theory was entitled 'Theory of the firm: Managerial behaviour, agency costs, and ownership structure.'<sup>2</sup> From the outset, it seems that its authors intended it as an all-encompassing, theoretical explanation of organisations. The theory has been most often employed in research on the mechanisms used by owners to align the interests of CEOs with those of organisations (Gomez-Mejia and Balkin, 1992). The so-called 'principal-agent' problem (Spencer, 2013) revolves around the extent to which a principal must devote effort to minimising shirking behaviour by an agent who is motivated by self-interest and cannot be trusted. Agency theory explores variegated interests from the perspective of: 'How can an organization, through its owners and stewards, minimise the posited tendency for managers to inappropriately leverage their advantage when managers' interests are not consonant with those of owners?' (Dalton et al., 2007, p. 2). The primacy of shareholder value and owner 'rights' is taken for granted; it is assumed that an owner's expression of self-interest is tolerable, since it somehow embodies a greater good, while that of other organisational actors does not; the function of management systems, including appraisal, is viewed as one of aligning everyone's activities with the needs of owners, rather than ensuring that owner behaviour is aligned with the needs of other stakeholders.

If anything, the problem of conflicting interests within organisations has intensified. Davis (2009) argues that corporations are less concerned than ever with long-term relationships and building in-house capacity with self-interest increasingly at the fore of organisational behaviour. Although agency theorists sometimes acknowledge that this self-interest is 'bounded by norms of reciprocity and fairness' (Bosse and Phillips, 2016, p. 276), it is also assumed that 'the interests of the principal and agent diverge and the principal has imperfect information about the agent's contribution'

(p. 276). It follows that incentives are required to narrow the gap in interests. Assembling more information (if necessary, through tight reporting mechanisms and close surveillance) is also helpful.

This presents an imbalanced view of human behaviour, since although we may be hard wired to prioritise our own interests and to compete, we are also hard wired to cooperate, reciprocate favours, behave altruistically and value fairness (Bowles and Gintis, 2011). The ‘ultimatum game’ offers a good illustration (Güth et al., 1982). One person with a sum of money (the proposer) offers it to another (the receiver) who knows how much the ‘proposer’ possesses. Self-interest would suggest that if the sum is \$10 the proposer should offer only \$1 and that this would invariably be accepted, since the rules of the game dictate that refusal by the responder means both sides get nothing. Repeated studies show that in actual fact, the proposer generally offers 50% of the sum available, and that if their offer falls below 25%, it will most likely be rejected. Perceptions of fairness appear to trump naked financial self-interest. Powerful group identities, forged in fire, can also find people subordinating their own fate and interests to the welfare of the group.<sup>3</sup>

Despite such shortcomings the theory has become an ideological template for management–staff relationships within organisations, including the public sector, where a culture of auditing, monitoring and appraisal has taken root (Craig et al., 2014). Thus, appraisals are now commonplace in universities, where they would once have been disdained, and where they reproduce some of the negative effects that have been well documented in the private sector (Simmons, 2002). This is not without its ironies. Precisely at a time when the shareholder value model is most suspect, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, human resource management (HRM) seems to be embracing it with renewed devotion.

Thus, we find Levy and Williams (2004, p. 889) arguing ‘that agency theory models have widespread implications for companies at both the individual and organizational level as the links between basic level constructs such as goals and participation could be examined and tied to employee attitudes, employer–employee relationships, employee performance, organizational effectiveness and employee withdraw behaviors.’ These implications surely constitute one reason for its success, since the theory has at least the merit of offering seemingly simple prescriptions for managerial actions. Another is that the theory chimes with the hierarchical and power saturated nature of organisations and management work. It has an intuitive appeal for many, since it seems to merely describe ‘what is’ and which it is imagined must therefore lie beyond interrogation. The theory becomes naturalised by dint of its association with practice, and practice becomes further naturalised because of its association with the theory.

Managers become trapped in an Orwellian state of Doublethink. On the one hand, they subscribe to the supportive, co-operative and developmental purposes of appraisal interviews (Mind-set One). On the other hand, they are also influenced by the more sceptical notions of agency theory (Mind-set Two). These contradict and undermine the positive aspirations of Mind-set One. Such role conflict undermines the good intentions offered in defence of HR practices, such as performance appraisals. Yet line managers primarily adopt Mind-set Two and implement HR policies with the primary intention of meeting cost focused performance targets (Evans, 2015).

Here, I discuss five key problems with appraisal interviews that can be at least partly explained by the influence of agency theory.

## **Problem 1: Reliance on short-term measures to assess individual employee performance**

Surveys of appraisal practice consistently show that ‘a results orientation has come to be the dominant approach for expressing performance requirements’ (Ward, 2005, p. 5). Monks et al. (2012, p. 389) also reported a tendency in their sample for the close monitoring of behaviour ‘through metric-based performance management systems that focused on the achievement of targets ... individuals were castigated for poor performance ... if they failed to meet the performance standards required in the initial training. Reward systems were very closely tied to performance metrics that related to output.’

The predominance of measurable targets and the close monitoring of employee achievement of such targets is, of course, aligned with agency theory assumptions, and in particular with the notion that economic interests are the key driver of human behaviour. It assumes that agents are shirkers, with a self-interest incentive to avoid work and viewed as ‘resourceful, evaluative maximizers’ (Jensen, 1994, p. 1), pursuing money, respect, honour, love and whatever else is in their interests, while being willing to sacrifice the common good to do so. Agency theory’s assumption of individualistic interest is explicit. In this world view, departures from self-interest are irrational, aberrational and, ultimately, inexplicable. Shirking is therefore inevitable (Rocha and Ghoshal, 2006). On the other hand, the principal is motivated to ensure that no shirking occurs. But it is often the case that the principal cannot be sure if agents have applied maximum effort in pursuit of the goals and tasks to which they have been directed (Holmstrom, 1979). It follows that surveillance and tighter supervision is required. The tension here is between allowing agents an element of discretion – often the reason that they are chosen as agents in the first place, particularly when the principal is unsure of what their own precise interests or objectives will be (Hendry, 2002), *or* counter-productively eliminating the scope for such discretion by tight specification and close monitoring. Either variant is liable to incur agency costs, creating an irresolvable paradox (Shapiro, 2016). Regardless, organisations often attempt to overcome this paradox via a Sisyphean default to complex incentive and performance management/ appraisal systems that make extensive use of hierarchical authority (Monks et al., 2012).

This reinforces short-term measures of financial performance, since these are viewed as capturing the primary purpose of organisational activity. Organisations become viewed as ‘simply legal fictions which serve as a nexus for a set of contracting relationships among individuals’ (Jensen and Meckling, 1976, p. 310). This contributes to a focus on the most immediately visible and quantifiable aspects of performance, thus undermining the opportunity to identify longer term employee development and performance needs (Antonsen, 2014).

### ***Relationships and the long-term view of behaviour***

Yet relationships (and organisations) develop over time. Such issues as fairness and equity are central to how most people, in reality, view their relationships and evaluate their working environment (Pepper et al., 2015). But the short-term nature of

performance appraisal, with its focus on annual reviews, means that such relationships are difficult to both nurture and measure. In addition, the focus on past performance and measurable targets often conflicts with long-term performance indicators (Bach, 2005). The data in Monks et al.'s study (2012, p. 390) also highlights this issue, finding that the performance management and monitoring systems that they investigated 'encouraged competition between employees.' This leads to tension between short-term and long-term perspectives on performance. Short termism arises because of the lack of congruence between the time when people are appraised and those activities that yield long-term benefits to organisations. In turn, this limits the ability of performance appraisal to facilitate sustainable performance from employees. Appraisals designed in this way teach people to focus their efforts only on those aspects of performance likely to be recognised and rewarded during the appraisal process, even if these prove to be ultimately detrimental to improved performance and sustainability (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006).

Additionally, performance levels deteriorate over time when the emphasis shifts from intrinsic motivation to the gaining of short-term targets (Kohn, 1993). This is because long-term indicators of performance incur immediate costs, such as training and development. The benefits may not show up until after many years or may remain unknown (Goddard et al., 2000). To this extent, a heavy stress on measurable performance indicators during appraisal interviews, in line with the precepts of agency theory, is liable to increase extensive or constrained effort at the expense of discretionary effort. No wonder that performance appraisals have been criticised for the conflicting nature of their purposes and a resultant failure to improve employee performance on any sustainable basis (Marsden, 2010).

Appraisals are therefore implicated in destructive self-fulfilling prophecies. They are implemented, at least partly, to monitor and limit shirking behaviour. But they risk reducing the intrinsic motivation so important for more and more occupations. The very behaviour that the system is seeking to prevent can then become entrenched – reduced effort, and poorer performance. It is, of course, likely that this will produce a heightened commitment to surveillance on the part of managers rather than a realisation that the monitoring induced by an agency influenced mind-set is itself part of the problem.

## **Problem 2: Developmental feedback undermined by relating appraisal to pay and a close scrutiny of performance**

Driven by agency assumptions that immediate self-interest and tangible rewards are what most motivate people, many organisations also use appraisal systems to determine pay increases. In the UK, the proportion of organisations linking pay to appraisal outcomes in this way rose from 15% in 2004 to 24% in 2011 (Van Wanrooy et al., 2013). However, appraisals are simultaneously expected to address developmental goals associated with helping employees to improve their individual and collective job performance. As McGregor (1957) complained, this requires managers to play God. Employees grow reluctant to openly discuss performance problems, since it may damage their

pay and career prospects. This reluctance undermines the developmental, learning and supportive intentions purportedly associated with performance appraisal, and which depends on trust and open two-way communication for their realisation.

Linking appraisal to pay and attendant tight supervision is consistent with the predominant agency theory assumption that there is no such thing as non-pecuniary agent motivation, or that if there is, it is insignificant (Besley and Ghatak, 2005). The assumption is that people could work more effectively, efficiently and smartly if they wanted to, but will usually choose not to. Consequently, close monitoring, regular feedback and complex systems of rewards and punishments are required to compensate for their deficit of motivation. This approach tends to undermine the developmental intentions that are generally held to be appraisal's primary purpose. Thus, the evidence suggests that performance-related pay linked to appraisals does little to actually improve employee performance (Kennedy and Dresser, 2001), that it demotivates staff (Smith and Rupp, 2003), does not help retain high performers or encourage poor performers to leave and that it creates perceptions of unfairness (Varma and Stroh, 2001).

None of this should be a surprise. Studies of motivation have long suggested that close monitoring of behaviour and performance-related pay reduces the intrinsic motivation so crucial to much modern work (Heyman and Ariely, 2004). Once a premium on rewards is installed people become less willing to engage in any form of work-related activity without them, however poor the resultant quality or their own lack of interest in the outcome.<sup>4</sup> The use of appraisal is in danger of producing further *negative* self-fulfilling prophecies, in that managers are encouraged to believe employees will only put in an effort if pay is closely linked to the effort required; employees become more distant and disengaged from any intrinsic investment in the effort in question; and, managers become even more convinced that it is only through such rewards that employees will do anything, since they are ever more inclined to demand more money *and* neglect those tasks not directly related to pay progression. As so often, McGregor (1960, pp. 41–42) anticipated this argument. He observed that when managers focus on money, people respond by demanding more of it. They will also 'behave exactly as we might predict – with indolence, passivity, unwillingness to accept responsibility, resistance to change, willingness to follow the demagogue, unreasonable demands for economic benefits. It seems that we may be caught in a web of our own weaving.' Among its other effects, it appears that agency theory has erased the memories of those who research, teach and practice management, condemning them to forever reinvent the wheel but immediately forget that they have just done so.

### **Appraisal and 'differentiation'**

Similar misbegotten and forgetful dynamics are evident when performance appraisal systems are linked to what is described as 'differentiation' or 'forced distribution systems.' Many companies have used differentiation in their appraisal schemes, including General Electric, IBM, Railtrack, Kimberley-Clark and the Royal Bank of Scotland.<sup>5</sup> It has sometimes been termed 'rank and yank.' Within such systems, a designated percentage of employees are classed as failing to the point whereby they may ultimately be targeted for redundancy. Others are rated as 'high performers' who receive generous levels of reward. Still others are viewed as 'average' who need to improve if they are

to avert further downgrading. Such systems compel employees to behave in the self-interested manner predicted by agency theory, since it becomes in everyone's interest to make someone else look bad rather than themselves. In that way, they can hope to safeguard their position a little longer. No wonder that people generally perceive such a system to be the least fair form of appraisal (Roche et al., 2007).

Moreover, it privileges the management voice over others in determining goals, rewards and training needs. Yet research has found that raters also find such systems more difficult to implement and less fair than traditional formats (Schleicher, 2009). Interestingly, Enron based its performance management systems on precisely this approach.<sup>6</sup> Management power over employees was intensified. People became so concerned with the prospect of being classified in the bottom category that they muted all criticism of management action (Tourish, 2013). The resulting culture, of high conformity, compliance with toxic management systems and lax ethical practice, led to disaster. While formal appraisal schemes are intended as one of the main tools for dealing with the problem of shirking and sub-optimisation, in practice their side effects have the capacity to undermine whatever putatively positive intentions are expressed.

Managers are thus placed in an ever more paradoxical position, thereby increasing their feelings of role conflict. They are required to devote greater effort to the monitoring and management of performance. Yet such systems discourage open reflection on performance problems, reduce intrinsic motivation and encourage people to project an exaggerated image of their work efficacy, even as that efficacy is put under threat. A vicious cycle emerges. Managers react to reduced intrinsic motivation by defaulting to 'hard' HRM approaches in the implementation of practices such as appraisal (Evans, 2015). As these produce yet more unintended consequences, they then become ever more critical of the shirking, gaming employees that have been produced by systems at least partly designed to minimise precisely these behaviours.

### **Problem 3: Prioritisation of individual rather than team performance**

There has been growing acknowledgement of the multiplicity of relationships that form complex organisational structures and the value of a stewardship approach in such a context (Roberson et al., 2007). Despite this, the majority of performance appraisals are conducted on an individual basis, while individual merit pay raises and bonuses are the most common form of performance-related pay (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [CIPD], 2009). These approaches mirror the agency notion that individual self-interest invariably trumps concern for the collective (Sen, 1994).

Yet systems thinkers argue that emphasising individual performance and self-interest at the exclusion of team performance results in an ineffective system (Seddon, 2008). It is difficult to reconcile team responsibility and commitments with an emphasis on individual responsibility. The encouragement of self-interest, through a stress on individual effort, also incentivises employees to cover up errors and inflate claims for their own performance, potentially at the expense of team performance. This negates efforts to promote organisational learning capability, despite its claimed potential to make a positive contribution to organisation performance (Camps and Luna-Arocas, 2012).



I offer an example here from the UK university sector. Targets for research income have been introduced at one in six UK universities, at either individual or departmental level (Jump, 2015). However, the UK-based Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)'s annual report for 2014–15 disclosed that only one of 21 open call business and management applications secured funding. In short, success or failure depends to some significant extent on factors beyond the control of the applicant. Paradoxically, the more people who apply for funding – driven by targets – the lower their chances of success will be. This is a zero-sum game. Applying for grants will increasingly resemble a lottery. But academics will still be ‘performance managed’ if they fail to achieve institutionally imposed targets. Perversely, the process of appraisal encourages managers to see problems created by *systems* as evidence of *individual* weaknesses that must be ‘managed.’ They therefore promote an ever more individualistic approach to how academics are managed and how they work. In a further instance of managerial amnesia, Deming (1982) warned against appraisal systems decades ago on the basis that they had precisely these perverse effects.

Even where appraisals have been designed around team working principles it has been found that issues of individual gaming are still prevalent while team working relationships are not necessarily enhanced (Toegel and Conger, 2003). Appraisal processes founded on principles of maximised performance and measureable objectives tend to ‘be self-serving, irrespective of any inclusive, team-working rhetoric’ (Tourish et al., 2010, p. 53). Once more, employee–manager relationships are shunted onto a track consistent with agency theory, and away from building trust, loyalty and reciprocity. The benefits of this are not immediately obvious.

#### **Problem 4: Difficulty of accurately and objectively measuring performance**

Ultimately, the developmental and supportive intentions behind appraisal systems that are routinely articulated in the literature rest on the assumption that assessment methods can measure performance with reasonable accuracy. Even scholars who advocate appraisals and the use of financial incentives within them admit that performance measures of appraisals must be both complete and accurate. Otherwise, they ‘lead to undesired behaviours’ (Shaw and Gupta, 2015, p. 288). Agency notions that people should be closely monitored rest on the same assumption, since it is imagined that such supervision yields a more or less accurate impression of people’s work effort. This is questionable on two main grounds. Firstly, some research into the accuracy of what are known as frequency-based assessments of behaviour in garment manufacturing plants compared estimated and actual frequencies of behaviours on the part of sewing machine operators (Deadrick and Gardner, 1997). The authors report a correlation of 0.59. Given a sample size of 397, this was statistically significant. However, the effect size is small. These data would appear to suggest that even when tangible and repetitive tasks are at the heart of a job it is difficult to estimate people’s behaviour, no matter how closely they are observed. The more intangible the effort in question, the harder this will be. Moreover, the effects of close monitoring on job satisfaction, commitment and intrinsic motivation are unlikely to be positive.

Secondly, a problem arises here from the effects of the moral hazard assumption of agency theory on the accuracy of our perceptions. The idea of moral hazard suggests that people will take risks or avoid effort if they imagine that the costs of doing so will be borne by others, such as employers rather than employees (Dembe and Boden, 2000). This is obviously often true, as in the banking crisis: in this instance, as in others, there clearly are principal-agent issues to be addressed. But moral hazard does not invariably prevail, particularly in a context of deeply embedded and long-term relationships between people. Regardless of this qualification, the notion of moral hazard is generally taken to imply that employees should be closely scrutinised. Typical of many, Milgrom and Roberts (1992) devote a chapter of a book tellingly entitled 'Economics, Organization and Management' to employee retention strategies. As Heath (2009, p. 501) critically notes, they don't 'once mention the fact that employees sometimes feel a sense of loyalty to the firm (and that managers have it within their power to cultivate such loyalties).' A predominantly economic perspective informs project scrutiny, born of the fear of deviance, which is in turn facilitated by traditional appraisals. However, behaviours that are not easily observed may offer more important indicators of effectiveness, particularly in knowledge-oriented and creative workplaces such as universities. Context-oriented behaviours such as organisational citizenship behaviour, pro-social organisational behaviour or extra-role behaviour are often intangible, and not easily captured within a performance appraisal process (Organ et al., 2006). Appraisers seeking to form an overall judgement of performance must therefore default to other criteria, or resort to the perceptual biases with which all of us are fully equipped, and some of which I discussed earlier in this chapter.

Thus, the focus on what is 'measurable' and hence observable supports agency theory's assumption of widespread and inevitable employee shirking, its inclination to disregard the multi-dimensional nature of effort and the distinctive impact different types of effort can have on performance. The ability of managers to make sound and fair judgements on all facets of employee performance becomes progressively more difficult (Wilson, 2010). Such systems shift managers' emphasis away from creating meaning and purpose and towards a micro-management of efforts that, despite being highly visible, may be much less important for longer term success than their visibility assumes. Managers often forget that what happens back stage is as vital as what happens on stage in the production of a compelling performance.

A further difficulty from the standpoint of moral hazard is determining precisely what employees have done, and hence the extent of their contribution to organisational success or failure. Complex organisational structures create multiple priorities, conflicting instructions and a proliferation of targets. Spans of control and long-distance appraisals in multi-national corporations make the principal agent relationship and close monitoring of performance subject to more errors (Holmstrom, 1982). As a result, appraisal interviews permit managers, who perhaps know less and less about an individual's work, to determine which aspects of their performance are to be evaluated, as well as to decide the consequences of the measurement, including pay and career progression. Consequently, the context of performance may be lost, despite its importance for the ability of any appraisal scheme to even partially achieve its objectives (Farr and Levy, 2004). However, the need for decisiveness (e.g. when appraisal schemes involve a rating scale) encourages an attitude of certainty towards evaluations when they are objectively uncertain. This makes it difficult to deliver cogent, well informed

assessments of the performance of others – the very thing on which the whole system depends. The inherently doomed attempt to deliver it turns managers into the suspicious monitors of what is obvious rather than what is important, and creates employees who are increasingly distant, disengaged and defiant. Once again, the advantages of this are not immediately clear.

### **Problem 5: Self-efficacy biases cause employees to have a more favourable view of performance than their managers do**

I discussed self-efficacy biases earlier in this chapter. But agency theory once more magnifies their effects. It suggests that employees must be closely monitored since they will otherwise deviate from organisational goals. This in turn affects how their performance is perceived. Some experimental work suggests that the more managers monitor performance the more likely they are to value the end product highly, since they have a strong belief in their own efficacy and hence on whatever they attribute to be the outcome of their actions (Pfeffer and Cialdini, 1998). However, this does not necessarily translate into an appreciation of the contribution that employees have made to such outcomes. While the evidence on this point is mixed, there is some to suggest that the greater a person's power over others, the less likely they are to interact with them and the less favourable the evaluations of their performance will be (Kipnis, 1972). After all, it can be reasoned, if they were really good at their job they would not require such close supervision in the first place.

Performance-related pay compounds these problems. An experimental simulation study led those in the role of supervisors to falsely believe that those whose work they were overseeing were either enjoying what they did (*Intrinsic Motivation*) or, alternatively, doing it only for money (*Extrinsic Motivation*). When they believed that money was the driver of performance the supervisors responded by becoming more controlling. In turn, 'employees' in the study became more disinterested in the task. The flipside was also observed, in that those in the 'intrinsic motivation' condition chose to spend significantly more of their free time on the task (Pelletier et al., 1996). As Ghoshal (2006, p. 24) summarised: 'Because all behaviour (especially that which is consistent with management's objectives) is seen by management as motivated by the controls in place, managers develop a jaundiced view of their subordinates.' This does not displace their confidence that these judgements are accurate, even as they diverge from those of the employees in question.

In addition, if managers imagine that the work produced under close supervision is of higher quality than that which is less closely monitored – what Pfeffer and Cialdini (1998) call 'the illusion of influence' – and that employees have therefore performed well, it follows that ever-tighter monitoring would confer even more benefits. Thus, good performance may be seen as occurring *in spite* of the attributes of the person involved. Their successes can instead be credited to the system of surveillance which, it is imagined, has reigned in their tendency to deviant behaviour. In addition to the harmful effects of this on intrinsic motivation and the quality of work, there is the risk that ever-tighter monitoring becomes a form of 'petty tyranny', and so triggers

low self-esteem, damages performance, weakens work unit cohesiveness and produces higher levels of frustration, stress, reactance, helplessness and work alienation (Ashforth, 1994), all of which undermine people's capacity to learn.

Of course, these are not the only problems here. But I am stressing those that arise from close supervision, driven by agency theory reasoning, and its ensuing negative impact on managers' perceptions of the work of others. In aggregate, it means that during formal appraisal interviews, managers are often reduced to informing employees that their performance is weaker than what they themselves imagine it to be.

These outcomes may well activate a large number of destructive self-fulfilling prophecies, whereby negative feedback creates resentment, places obstacles in the path of personal development and diminishes rather than enhances effectiveness. It equates to an instrumentalist view of the employment relationship whereby employees are viewed as a 'resource' to be employed or discarded on the basis of their short-term performance. Moreover, close monitoring exacerbates the power relationships existent in traditional organisational hierarchies and endorsed by agency theory. Such a context only highlights the pervasive influence of agency relationships in the appraisal process and the role they play in maintaining structural power inequalities between managers and employees. Overall, it supports the conclusion that the (mal)practice of performance appraisal is intimately informed by the assumptions of agency theory, and constitutes a further example of how this theory leads to what I view as bad management practice.

## UNREALISED POTENTIAL, OR TIME TO GO?

While advice for practitioners on how to 'improve' appraisal is plentiful, it is clear that the 'creation of a successful performance appraisal system remains largely an unrealised goal' (Gordon and Stewart, 2009, p. 274). In problematising conventional perspectives on this issue, I argue that agency theory has influenced the implementation of performance appraisals, by virtue of the deeper traction it exerts within management theory and hence on the ideological context in which management is practised. I have argued that dominant assumptions within agency theory of economic rationality, self-interest and moral hazard have a negative impact on how performance appraisal (PA) systems are misused in many organisations. In doing so, I suggest that appraisals constitute a prime example of how a theory can contribute to bad management practice. Their continued popularity is a classic instance of hope triumphing over experience. It owes little to any inherent utility.

Managers are often only too well aware of these issues, but face two key problems in addressing them. Firstly, as Mintzberg (2009) has reminded us, management work is unrelenting, orientated to action, fragmented and full of interruptions. The time for reflection, including reading, is minimal. No wonder that folklore, tradition and the casual imitation of what others do frequently triumphs over a careful study of the evidence (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006). Secondly, managers are encouraged to keep hoping that things will improve. Key texts promoted by business schools recognise that 'good intentions in the PA area have often been associated with disappointing outcomes' (Boxall and Purcell, 2003, p. 145), but still go on to assume that adjustments will enable managers to ensure that 'formal PA systems reach more of their potential' (p. 146). The problem is that each such fix has unintended consequences. Keen to ease

their pain, managers look for yet more fixes. And they have an eager supplier – in the form of the HR industry, for which appraisal systems work very well as a highly effective job creation scheme. In contrast, I seek to situate debate on the issue in a deeper appreciation of the power saturated and ideological contexts in which appraisals are implemented. This suggests that the more formalised, ritualised and bureaucratised the process of appraisal becomes, the less helpful and more damaging it is likely to be. Perhaps it useful to recall the injunction of the Hippocratic School: ‘First, do no harm.’ If appraisals risk doing more harm than good, perhaps we should suggest abolishing them. Surely, by now, there have been enough attempts to fix the unfixable?

## WHAT NEXT?

Of course, this begs the question: what is the alternative? In briefly canvassing this issue it is worth noting that my scepticism about the value of appraisals is becoming more widely shared in the corporate world. Accenture, a global consulting firm with over 330,000 employees, conducted an internal review which concluded that the time, money and effort spent on them did not produce better performance among employees. It decided to abandon the annual appraisal interview altogether.<sup>7</sup> Cappelli and Travis (2016) suggest that up to one-third of US firms are in the process of abandoning traditional appraisals, and moving to more frequent and more informal ‘check-ins’ between managers and employees. Burkus (2016) details many similar initiatives. For example, Adobe calculated that its managers spent 80,000 hours a year conducting annual performance reviews, to little positive effect. They replaced the annual review with a less formal and more frequent ‘check in’ process. Microsoft has abolished ratings of performance and a system that emulated that of ‘rank and yank’, discussed above. In 2010, the Lear Corporation also abolished annual appraisals and replaced them with quarterly feedback discussions between managers and employees.

These initiatives are welcome. The less formality and paperwork that is involved, the less likely everyone is to feel overwhelmed by bureaucratic mechanisms devoted to monitoring, grading, ranking, rewarding and firing. But whether the supposedly more informal and ongoing discussions that seem intended to replace them will prove any better remains to be seen. The main problem is the extent to which agency theory has become part of an institutional logic that underpins, and subsequently damages, staff–management relationships. Ultimately, the key to progress must lie in challenging those theories of human behaviour that lead managers astray and infect the good intentions of practices such as performance appraisals.

How likely is this? Davis (2016) points out that the number of shareholder corporations has fallen by over half in the past decade, at least in the US. Small-scale production technologies are emerging that facilitate different forms of organising. As he argues: ‘While corporations are basic units of production in many theories about the economy, they should be regarded as only one hypothesis about how production is and can be organized’ (p. 129). Theories (agency theory) based on the study of publicly-traded corporations, and long-standing practices also modelled on behemoth corporations, should not be regarded as immutable. As the world around us changes, so should our theories and our practices.

I do not question the value of regular, informal communication and two-way feedback between managers and employees. But this needs to be informed by different values, based on trust and a diminution of power differentials within the workplace. By contrast, conventional appraisals prioritise hierarchy over intrinsic motivation, distrust over trust and the importance of individual effort over that of building sustainable, co-operative systems. Without a major rethink, they will continue to blight relationships in the workplace far into the future.

## NOTES

- 1 Some of this chapter has been adapted from Evans and Tourish (2017).
- 2 As one measure of this paper's influence, it registered over 67,000 citations on Google Scholar in August 2017. This was up 7000 on the same time in 2016.
- 3 For example, it is often remarked that soldiers fight not for flag, king or country but for each other. The film-maker Sebastian Junger spent five months with US soldiers in a remote part of Afghanistan. He realised, he said, that 'the guys were not fighting for flag and country... They may have joined up for those sorts of reasons, but once they were there, they were fighting for each other and there was a completely kind of fraternal arrangement that had very little broad conceptual motivations behind it.' (See <https://www.rt.com/news/afghanistan-war-us-politics/> Accessed 23rd June 2016). The seminal anti-war novel *All Quiet On the Western Front*, in which Erich Maria Remarque explores the fate of a group of German soldiers in World War One, remains one of the most moving depictions of this in all fiction.
- 4 The problem goes even deeper than this. A fascinating study by Frey and Oberholzer-Gee (1997) looked at the willingness of Swiss citizens to support the building of a nuclear power facility in their area. They found that when (extrinsic) financial incentives were offered the proportion of people willing to do so declined. There are lessons in this for organisations who attempt to link every instance of pro-social behaviour to money.
- 5 It is significant that many, including General Electric, have now abandoned differentiation entirely.
- 6 Enron may be fast receding into history, but its bankruptcy in 2001 was at the time the biggest in US corporate history. It subsequently emerged that its 'profits' were mostly based on accounting fraud.
- 7 See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/07/21/in-big-move-accenture-will-get-rid-of-annual-performance-reviews-and-rankings/>. Accessed 5th September 2015.

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**Part V**

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# **The training context**

**Part V**



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# **Training in communication skills: Research, theory and practice**

*Owen Hargie*

## **INTRODUCTION**

**T**HIS BOOK HAS INCORPORATED a detailed analysis of skilled communication theory and practice. Without the necessary linguistic terminology to guide cognitive processes, it is not possible to conceptualise and deal effectively with complex problems. Since social interaction is a multifaceted process, it is essential to have a language with which to describe, analyse and attempt to understand this milieu. The wide glossary of interactional terms elucidated in this text, pertaining to verbal and nonverbal communication in groups and dyadic contexts, can be employed when observing, describing and evaluating interpersonal communication.

An increased knowledge of the nature of communication should, in turn, be followed by an increase in interpersonal skill. Therefore, the information contained in this book can be used by the reader, who should be prepared to experiment with various social techniques to ensure the most effective response repertoire in any particular situation. It is anticipated that such experimentation will, for many professionals, occur in the context of a skills training programme. For this reason, it is useful to examine the rationale for the skills approach to training, together with some of the criticisms that have been levelled at this approach.

## TRAINING IN SOCIAL SKILLS

In his overview of the skills approach, Argyle (1999) noted that one of the benefits of conceptualising interpersonal behaviour as skill was the likelihood that it could be trained in the way that motor skills are trained. This in fact proved to be the case. As discussed in the Introduction to this book, many professionals now undergo some form of specialised training in interpersonal communication as a preparation for practical experience. The most widely utilised method of training for professionals is the microtraining approach, which can be traced back to the development of microteaching in teacher education. Microteaching was first introduced at Stanford University, California in 1963, when a number of educationists there decided that existing techniques for training teachers 'how to teach' needed to be revised. In recognising the many and manifold nuances involved in classroom teaching, the Stanford team felt that any attempt to train teachers should take place in a simplified situation (Allen & Ryan, 1969). Attention was turned to the methods of training used in other fields, where complicated skills were taught by being 'broken down' into simpler skill areas, and training occurred in a simulated situation, rather than in the real environment.

Prior to the presentation of a play, actors engage in rehearsals when various scenes are practised in isolation until judged to be satisfactory. Tennis players in training concentrate on specific aspects such as the serve, smash, lob, volley and backhand in order to improve their overall game. Similarly, the novice driver learns to use various controls separately before taking the car on the road. The rationale in all of these instances is to analyse the overall complex act in terms of simpler component parts, train the individual to identify and utilise the parts separately, and then combine the parts until the complete act is assimilated.

At Stanford this approach was applied to the training of teachers in a programme of training which comprised learning a number of teaching skills in a scaled-down teaching encounter termed microteaching. In microteaching, the trainee taught a small group of pupils (five to ten) for a short period of time (five to ten minutes) during which time the focus was on one particular skill of teaching, such as using questions. This microlesson, which took place in college with actual pupils being bussed in, was video-recorded and the trainee then received feedback on the skill under review (e.g., effectiveness of the questioning techniques used), in the form of a video replay coupled with tutorial guidance. This procedure was repeated for a number of teaching skills, and was designed to prepare students more systematically for actual classroom teaching practice.

Research in microteaching found this to be an effective method for training teachers (Hargie & Maidment, 1979; McGarvey & Swallow, 1986; Hong, Hwang, Lu, & Tsai, 2017). The system of training was then adapted in counsellor training, where it was termed microcounselling, and again shown to be effective (Ivey & Authier, 1978; Daniels & Ivey, 2007; Ivey & Daniels, 2016). As a result, this training method was adapted by trainers in other fields to meet their own particular training requirements (Hayes, 2002). This eventually resulted in the introduction of the generic term microtraining to describe the approach wherein the core skills involved in professional interaction are identified separately and trainees provided with the opportunity to acquire these in a safe training environment (Hargie, Tittmar, & Dickson, 1978). Later, the

term 'Communication Skills Training' (CST) was widely employed to describe this microtraining method (Dickson, Hargie, & Morrow, 1997).

Hargie & Saunders (1983) identified three distinct phases in this form of CST, namely, preparation, training and evaluation. At the preparation stage, the skills necessary for effective professional communication are identified. Although most of the skills presented in this book are relevant to all professions, there will be important differences in focus and emphasis. For example, teachers use a much larger volume of questions during lessons than counsellors in helping sessions, and the main types of questions used also differ (see Chapter 4). Thus, the application of skills to contexts is an important task during preparation.

The second stage is the implementation of training. The first part of this stage is the sensitisation phase, during which trainees learn to identify and label the communication skills. This involves guided reading, lectures, seminars and the use of video models of skills in action. Sensitisation is followed by practice, when trainees are given an opportunity to try out the skills, usually in a simulated encounter such as role-play. This practice is video-recorded and is then followed by the feedback phase when trainees receive information about their performance in the form of comments from tutor and peers, together with discussion and analysis of the video replay.

The third element is the evaluation of the programme. This includes, *inter alia*, ascertaining the attitudes of trainees to the CST programme itself, charting changes in the performance of trainees and their ability to interact successfully in the professional situation, and monitoring the impact of the programme upon relevant client groups (Konopasek, Rosenbaum, Encandela, & Cole-Kelly, 2017). Although a large amount of formal evaluation has been conducted in this field, trainers also should evaluate their programmes informally, in terms of feedback from trainees, other tutors and fieldwork supervisors. Such information can then be used to guide future training approaches.

The CST training paradigm is clearly based on a 'reductionist' strategy for the study of social interaction. As was discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, this approach to the analysis of social skills evolved from work carried out in the field of motor skills where a similar *modus operandi* had proved to be successful. Thus, it was argued, just as a motor sequence, such as driving a car or playing tennis, can be broken down into component actions, so too can a social sequence, such as interviewing or teaching, be broken down into component skills.

## CRITICISMS OF THE SKILLS APPROACH

This reductionist methodology to the study of interpersonal communication has met with some opposition from adherents of other theoretical perspectives. For example, Salmon & Young (2011, p. 45) argued that 'Communication cannot be atomised into skills'. This form of opposition falls into two main areas. First, it is argued that the analysis of communication in terms of skills simply does not make sense, since the study of such component skills is totally different from the study of the whole communication. Second, there is the viewpoint that by analysing social interaction in terms of skilled behaviour, the spontaneity and genuineness of human interaction are lost. It is useful to examine each of these criticisms separately.



## The whole and the parts

Advocates of Gestalt psychology would reject the notion that it is meaningful to isolate small segments of an overall sequence, and study these in isolation from the whole. Gestalt psychology (the psychology of form) originated in Germany in the early twentieth century, and emphasised the concept of structure. A central tenet of Gestaltism is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Once an overall structure is broken down into smaller units, it is argued, the original meaning or form is changed accordingly, since the study of each of the units in isolation is not equivalent to the study of the whole. For example, a triangle comprises three intersecting straight lines, yet the study of each of the lines in isolation is patently different from the study of the overall triangle.

Within Gestalt literature, however, there is confusion as to the nature of the relationship of component elements to the whole from which they are derived. Murphy and Kovach (1972) illustrated how, on the one hand, some Gestaltists argued that the component parts need to be studied in terms of their inter-relationships in order to understand the whole structure. On the other hand, there is the view that there are no component parts with separate attributes, and that structures can only be studied meaningfully as total entities. Taking this latter, more extreme interpretation, social interaction could be likened to a beautiful piece of pottery. The beauty and meaning of the pottery lie in its wholeness, and if the piece of pottery is smashed into smaller parts, this beauty and meaning is lost forever. It does not make sense to study each of the smaller parts separately in order to understand the whole, and even if the parts are carefully put back together again, the original beauty is lost.

But is social interaction broken down in this sense, in CST? Proponents of CST would argue that the answer to this question is 'no'. Rather, social interaction is analysed in terms of clearly identifiable behaviours which are, at the same time, inter-related. Although emphasis is placed on one particular skill sequence of behaviours at a time during training, others will be present. Thus, for instance, while the focus may be on the skill of questioning, trainers are well aware that other skills such as listening or reinforcing will also be operative when questions are being employed. No one skill is used in total isolation, and in this sense the 'parts' of social interaction differ from the 'parts' of a broken piece of pottery. Indeed, it can be argued that the piece of pottery as an entity represents only one component and that the analogy to interaction is therefore spurious. Taking a different example, in studying a motor car, it is essential to understand the workings of the various elements which comprise the more complex whole in order to diagnose breakdown, effect repair or improve performance. In a similar vein, social interaction is a multifarious process which necessitates careful examination to ensure understanding. Just as it is possible to drive a car without understanding the mechanics of its operation, so it is possible to interact socially without being able to analyse the key dimensions involved in the process. However, to achieve greater comprehension and insight, identify areas of communication weakness, or train people to improve their social repertoire, a much more systematic and greater depth of analysis is required.

Obviously, each of the interpersonal skills studied can only exist in a social context. Social interaction, by definition, can never occur in a vacuum and this is recognised within the skills model which underpins the 'micro' approach to the analysis

of interpersonal interaction (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of this model). In practice, the CST method can be described as one of homing in and honing up, where one aspect of social interaction is focused upon at a time and trainees are encouraged to develop and refine their use of this particular aspect. Once the trainee has acquired a working knowledge of a number of skills of social interaction, the ultimate goal is to encourage the appropriate use of these skills in an integrated fashion.

It is also emphasised within the skills model that the overall process of social interaction is affected by a large number of both situational and personal factors, which may be operative at any given moment (see Chapter 2). The study of skills *per se* is undertaken in order to provide some insight into this overall process of communication. It is emphasised that not only should these elements be studied separately, but that consideration should also be given to the inter-relationship between elements. This line of thought is consistent with the view of those Gestaltists who hold that the study of parts should be undertaken in terms of their inter-relationships, in order to understand the overall structure.

## Artificiality

Another objection that has been raised in opposition to CST is that by teaching interpersonal skills, eventually social interaction will lose its natural beauty and become artificial and stilted. Everyone will become so aware of their own actions, and the actions and reactions of others, that this knowledge will inhibit their natural behaviour. In the final analysis, people will all end up behaving in the same fashion and individuality will be lost forever. This line of argument raises several important issues concerning the skills approach to training in communication.

During CST those undergoing instruction will become aware of the nature and function of social behaviour – indeed, the development of such awareness is one of the main objectives of training. As a result of such awareness, social actions will become more conscious and at times may even seem artificial. This also occurs during the learning of motor skills. For example, the learner driver will be conscious of the component skills necessary to perform the act of driving, namely depressing clutch, engaging gear, releasing clutch, depressing accelerator and so on. When one is completely conscious of all of these motor skills, the overall act becomes less fluent – thus the learner driver may experience ‘kangaroo petrol syndrome’. With practice and experience, the motor skills involved in driving a car become less conscious, and eventually the individual will perform the actions automatically. It is at this stage that the person is said to be skilled.

A similar phenomenon occurs in CST. Once the individual receives instruction in the use of a particular skill, the cognitive processes involved in the performing of this skill become conscious. At this stage, a ‘training dip’ may occur, where the awareness of the skill actually interferes with its implementation and performance suffers accordingly. This is not a particularly surprising phenomenon and occurs not just with trainees undergoing programmes of CST, but with all students involved in the study of human behaviour (Mulholland, 1994). Following the training period, the use of skills will again become spontaneous, and the individual will lose this self-consciousness. However, if an interaction becomes strained, we are more likely to become more aware

of and focus upon actual behaviour. At such times, prior training in communication skills bears fruit, allowing us to reflect quickly on the likely consequences of certain courses of action, in relation to the probable reactions of the others involved.

Training dips are also encountered in the learning of motor skills. Thus, someone being coached in tennis may find that having to focus on the component elements of, and practise separately, the serve, lob, smash or volley actually interferes with the overall performance. It is only when the tennis player has a chance to 'put it all together' that performance begins to improve. Ivey, D'Andrea, Ivey and Simek-Morgan (2002), in highlighting how the awareness of the numerous components involved in skill learning can actually interfere with behavioural coordination, used the analogy of the Japanese samurai to illustrate this aspect of skill learning. The samurai learns the complex process of sword handling through an intensive programme in which the component skills are broken down and studied separately. Once the skills have been fully acquired, the samurai will then go to a mountain to meditate and deliberately 'forget' what has been learned. When they return and find they do not have to think about the skills, but can implement them 'naturally', they have become samurai.

The initial emphasis in CST has been on identifying social behaviours and grouping these behaviours into skills in order to facilitate the training process. In this respect, CST has been successful and, as illustrated in this book, advances have been made into the identification and classification of a large number of skills in terms of their behavioural determinants. Once the behaviours have been mastered by the trainee, then the categorisation, by the individual, of these behaviours into more global skill concepts facilitates their utilisation during social interaction. As discussed in Chapter 1, such larger skill concepts are assimilated into the cognitive schemata employed by the individual during social encounters. These are then used to guide responses in that they provide various strategies for the individual to employ in the course of any interaction sequence (e.g., ask *questions* to get information; provide *rewards* to encourage participation; be *assertive* to ensure that one's rights are respected; introduce *humour* to make the interaction more enjoyable). Just as the tennis player combines the separate motor skills, once these social skill concepts have been fully assimilated, they too are 'put together' in the overall social performance. Behaviour then becomes smoother and fully co-ordinated, with the individual employing the concepts subconsciously. In other words, the person becomes more socially skilled.

As mentioned earlier, the study of communication skills provides the individual with a language for interpreting social interaction. This is of vital import, since without such a language it would be extremely difficult to analyse or evaluate social behaviour. By studying interaction in terms of skills, it is possible to discuss the nuances of interpersonal communication, and give and receive feedback on performance. It also facilitates reflection on previous encounters, and the conceptualisation of these in terms of the appropriateness of the skills employed and how these could be developed or refined. Indeed, this process of self-analysis is one of the most important long-term benefits of CST.

The argument that providing professionals with the opportunity to engage in CST will result in them all behaving in exactly the same way can also be countered. This is analogous to arguing that by teaching everyone to talk, we will all eventually end up saying exactly the same things. Just as the latter state of affairs has not prevailed, there is absolutely no reason to believe that the former state of affairs would

either. Individual differences will always influence the ways in which people behave socially. One's personality, home background, attitudes, values and so on invariably affect one's goals in any given situation, and this in turn affects how one behaves accordingly. Different professionals develop different styles of behaviour in different contexts, and this is a desirable state of affairs. There is no evidence to suggest that, following instruction in interpersonal skills, everyone will conform to a set pattern of behaviour in any given situation. Rather, the individual will become more aware of the consequences of particular actions in given situations and will be able to choose those deemed most suitable.

The emphasis during CST is on the development of understanding of social interaction, in terms of the effects of behaviour. Any controls on this behaviour should come from within the individual, who is always the decision-maker in terms of choice of responses. The individual will become freer as a result of such training, possessing a greater behavioural repertoire from which to choose. This is, in fact, evidenced by the finding that CST serves to increase the confidence of trainees in the professional situation.

## **The function of training**

In terms of wider social and cultural concerns, another criticism of the CST approach pertains to the reason for offering this training, the actual purpose of the programme itself and the meanings imbued in the process. For example, Elmes and Costello (1992) criticised CST in the business sphere, on the basis that it is an inherently manipulative means of strengthening management control within organisations. They argued that CST uses covert methods of control by creating emotional indebtedness (employees may conceive attendance as a form of paid vacation and so have their loyalty to the company increased); by transforming the training experience into a sophisticated type of social drama conducted by charismatic trainers in such a way as to create a form of mystification; and, by changing the views of trainees about what constitutes effective communication. It should be noted that such criticisms could be applied to any form of communication training in the business sphere and not just to CST. However, the criticisms of CST made by Elmes and Costello were based primarily upon observations at one workshop, and have been countered by Hargie and Tourish (1994).

The 'time-off from work' argument could be levelled at any form of in-service training away from the workplace wherein trainees are allowed to participate during working hours. The CST programme discussed by Elmes and Costello took place away from participants' workplace, in a rather plush environment, and was undertaken by trainers wearing expensive apparel. But this would not be typical. While it is likely that in-service training can be best facilitated if people are away from the day-to-day pressures of work, little research exists to validate the exact location of training programmes. Yet, removing employees from their work environment can also be viewed as mystification and manipulation – the interpretation proffered by Elmes and Costello. Once it is accepted that training is necessary, decisions then have to be taken about its location. Training can, and does, occur in-house run by staff in the organisation's own training department and using the firm's facilities. Where these do not exist, then external consultants can be employed and such training normally occurs in modest hotels or

conference-type locations. Typically, training is conducted by staff in normal business attire. In all of these senses, the CST course experienced by Elmes and Costello, with its palatial surroundings and charismatic facilitators, is not typical. At the pre-service level, of course, CST normally occurs in college, conducted by far from mystifying lecturing staff, within a less grandiose setting!

Elmes and Costello did raise the more important issue of CST being conducted primarily for the benefit of trainees. Of course, this can also lead to benefits for the employer in relation to job performance of employees. For instance, if a hospital pharmacist attends a training programme on the skills of interviewing, it would be reasonable for the employing authority to expect benefits to accrue, both for the pharmacist in terms of greater knowledge, awareness, insight and job satisfaction, but also for patients in terms of how they are dealt with during actual interviews. However, some of the central concerns highlighted by Elmes and Costello were in fact detailed by Pawlak, Way and Thompson (1982), who in recognising the tensions which may be inherent between the goals of organisations and those of trainees, pointed out that CST trainers: 'may have to confront management with the incongruence if it is marked and likely to lead to low trainee motivation or dissatisfaction. In extreme circumstances, they may even have to refuse to offer the training program' (p. 379).

In their analysis of CST as manipulation, Elmes and Costello failed to distinguish between the *acquisition* of skill and how it is *exercised*. It is certainly the case that all skills are open to abuse. Children taught to write may later use the skill of writing to spray obscenities on walls or send poison letters, but this does not mean that they should not be taught to be literate. Likewise, people may use interpersonal skills learned during CST for devious Machiavellian purposes. The possibility of such abuse does not *ipso facto* mean that people should be denied training in how to function effectively with others. What is the case is that ethical issues in CST should form an integral part of the training package and this would include how the knowledge learned should be used. For instance, Elmes and Costello contended that it is unethical to attempt behavioural change without individuals being aware such an attempt is being made. This is true, and so the aims and objectives of CST should be fully itemised by trainers at the outset of the programme and discussed with trainees. It is also the case that an often neglected element of skilful practice is its ethical and moral foundation (Barge & Little, 2008), and so tuition in the main ethical dimensions of communication – honesty, openness, justice, equality, professionalism, respect for others and non-maleficence – needs to form an integral part of training (see Hargie, 2017).

What Elmes and Costello did identify was that the wider phenomenological concerns regarding the backdrop within which training occurs have not been charted (although again this is true of most forms of training and not just applicable to CST). The social meaning of the process for trainer and trainee has not been a central area of focus. Skills theorists while recognising the importance of situational context have not grappled with the issue of how trainees conceptualise their involvement in training and what meanings are construed therein. Trainees probably bring a range of interpretations to the training process, some of which will be more positive than others.

Training does not occur in a vacuum and research into CST should consider the wider ramifications of the methodological and social dimensions which underpin this approach. For example, an organisation may wish employees to undergo CST simply to produce greater profits as a result of increased sales or influencing skills on their

part. This would be an example of CST deployed as management control rather than for the personal development of the trainee. An ethical consideration of these issues would suggest that a CST programme should seek to address both the wider needs of the organisation and the individual needs of the trainee.

A final issue with CST is that while communication scholars are *au fait* with the myriad nuances of the communication process and understand their importance for training, this is not true for many professionals who actually implement the training programmes. Using the health care context as an example, Ruben (2016) illustrated how, when communication concepts are translated into health care discourse and training, the concepts are greatly simplified and focus mainly upon basic information-exchange perspectives. I have experienced this many times and in different contexts. I recall being invited to review the CST programme in a medical school, and queried the very basic texts that were recommended reading. The course tutors informed me that their students would not have time to read the more complex books on interpersonal communication that I cited and would not see their relevance. To me, this did a disservice both to Communication as a discipline *per se*, and to the student trainees. It would also undoubtedly colour the attitudes of the trainees to what they would then perceive to be a very basic level education. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that CST programmes are often planned, operationalised and implemented by trainers who have no background or qualifications in Communication or a related social science discipline. In their text on CST in the health care field, Dickson et al. (1997) emphasised the importance of having a qualified and experienced social scientist working in close collaboration with health professionals at all stages of training. The same holds true for all other professions.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CST

A vast volume of research has been conducted into the effectiveness of the microtraining approach to CST. Part of the problem with comparisons of research in this field is that CST is not a unitary phenomenon (Hyvärinen, Tanskanen, Katajavuori, & Isotalus, 2010). Rather, there are wide variations in approach within this paradigm, in terms of number of skills covered, time spent on each phase of training, nature and use of video models, type and length of practical sessions, numbers of trainees involved, total training time and so on (Hargie, Boohan, McCoy, & Murphy, 2010). CST has been widely adapted to meet the specific needs of a variety of diverse groups (Dickson et al., 1997; McGehee & Webb, 2008). For example, it has been shown to be highly effective in clinical contexts (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2004); in this realm, Segrin and Givertz (2003, p. 167) concluded: 'the evidence accumulated thus far suggests that social skills training has great promise for improving the condition of people who are dealing with an amazingly vast array of challenges in life'.

More generally, the main conclusion to be reached from an analysis of research investigations is that this system of training offers significant benefits (Lievens & Sackett, 2012). Indeed, the research findings have convinced both private and public sector organisations to invest huge sums of money in such training (Robbins & Hunsaker, 2014). In an early review, the benefits of CST were summarised by Ellis and Whittington (1981: p. 195/6):

- 1 Short-term effects are consistently reported.
- 2 Trainees' attitudes towards the experience are positive.
- 3 Results (short- and long-term) are at least as positive as most comparable interventions.
- 4 It engenders debate among theorists, practitioners and trainees about the nature and contexts of interaction.
- 5 It is a relatively short, inexpensive intervention strategy which proved viable across a wide range of trainees and settings.
- 6 The face-validity of the exercise is high. Other activities with similar face-validity are far more expensive and, to date, lack any comparably rigorous evaluation.

In a slightly later review, Hargie and Saunders (1983, p. 163) likewise concluded that: 'The general outcome from this research has been to demonstrate that microtraining is an effective method for improving the communicative competence of trainees; that it is often more effective than alternative training approaches; and that it is well received by both trainers and trainees alike'.

These findings have been confirmed in a whole host of studies over several decades and across a variety of professional contexts, as detailed by, among others, Hargie (1977), Baker and Daniels (1989), Baker, Daniels and Greeley (1990), Cronin and Glenn (1991), Papa and Graham (1991), McLennan (1994), Irving (1995), Tourish and Hargie (1995), Dickson et al. (1997), Ostell, Baverstock and Wright (1998), Ivey et al. (2002), Nørgaard, Ammentorp, Ohm Kyvik and Kofoed (2012), Kraiger (2014), Kraiger, Passmore and dos Santos (2015) and Maatouk-Bürmann et al. (2016). For example, Dickson et al. (1997), in relation to CST with health professionals, concluded that 'skills training is effective in improving communication performance, clinical practice and patient satisfaction' (p. 48). Likewise, the conclusion reached by Baker and Daniels (1989) in relation to counsellor training was that 'the microcounseling paradigm, as it has been used thus far, is an effective educational program' (p. 218). In an evaluation of CST in the business field, Papa and Graham (1991) found that, 'Managers participating in communication skills training received significantly higher performance ratings on interpersonal skills, problem-solving ability and productivity' (p. 368) than those receiving no such training. Similarly, Cronin and Glenn (1991), in their analysis of the effects of CST on students in the higher education context, concluded that 'this approach holds significant promise for curricular development and improvement of student communication skills' (p. 356).

It should be realised, of course, that if a training programme is not well designed, or does not fully meet the requirements of the situation for which the trainee is being prepared, then it will be less effective (see Roloff, Putnam, & Anastasiou, 2003), or even harmful (see Hajek & Giles, 2003). In essence, '(a) properly designed training works, and (b) the way training is designed, delivered, and implemented can greatly influence its effectiveness' (Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger, & Smith-Jentsch, 2012, p. 74). Thus, research findings show that well-structured skills training programmes are effective (Kuntze, van der Molen, & Born, 2016). The pre-requisites for effective training were itemised by Street (2003), in that programmes should run for an extended period of time, provide opportunities for practice and feedback on performance, use role models, have follow-up assessments and review and have underpinning institutional support and incentives to underscore the value of effective communication.

In conclusion, there is overwhelming evidence that, when used in a systematic, coordinated and informed fashion, CST is indeed an effective training medium. As summarised by Ivey (1994, p. 17) 'a general conclusion is warranted that considerable validation of the microtraining model is found in the research literature'.

## OVERVIEW

This book has been concerned with a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of effective interpersonal communication in terms of: providing an understanding of many of the nuances of social interaction; highlighting the importance of an awareness of one's own behaviour and of its effect upon others; interpreting and making sense of the responses of others; and generally contributing to increased social awareness and interpersonal skill. The importance of effective communication skills cannot be over-emphasised. We now know that socially skilled individuals tend to experience greater well-being, live longer, be happier, more resistant to stress and psychosocial problems and achieve more in academic and professional contexts (see Gable, 2015; Hargie, 2017; Segrin, McNelis, & Swiatkowski, 2016). Given these potential benefits, it is important for us to analyse and understand the processes involved in skill acquisition and development.

The theoretical perspectives discussed in Part I are essential in that they provide an underlying rationale for the analytic approach to communication adopted in the remaining chapters of the book. The core communication skills covered in Part II are of direct application to all professionals. Likewise, in most occupations people spend a considerable proportion of their time in activities such as being assertive, working in groups, negotiating, mentoring and ensuring effective relationships are maintained with others, and so knowledge of these specialised aspects, as covered in Part III, is of vital import. Finally, the dimensions of interviewing included in Part IV will be of relevance to most professionals, who will be involved to a greater or lesser degree in selecting, appraising, helping or using a cognitive approach to eliciting information.

Overall, therefore, this text will be an important handbook for many professionals, both pre-service and practising. Ideally, it can be employed as a course reader during training programmes in communication, thereby facilitating the learning by trainees of interpersonal skills and dimensions. However, it can also be employed solely as a reference text by the interested, experienced professional. Either way, the coverage represents the most comprehensive review to date of communication skills. At the same time, it should be recognised that this is a rapidly developing field of study and, as knowledge increases, further skills and dimensions will be identified, and awareness of interpersonal communication expanded accordingly.

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