

**Book Review****Interpersonal Communication: How do people communicate?****Nazma Nasir***Department of Psychology, University of Peshawar***Madeeha Asghar***Department of Psychology, Islamia College, Peshawar***Salma Rehman***Department of Psychology, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University*

Author: Peter Hartley

Publisher: Routledge

Published: 1993

PETER HARTLEY is Professor of Education Development at the University of Bradford where he runs the educational development team. Formerly Professor of Communication at Sheffield Hallam University, he has a longstanding interest in interpersonal communication and student groups, both in terms of theory and the development of practical support and resources. He has devised and produced innovative multimedia to enhance student's skills and was one of the team who planned and developed the award-winning 'Making Group work' online resource, working with colleagues from the Learn Higher Centre for Excellence (CETL). From November 2010, Peter Hartley has been working part-time in the Centre, further developing projects. He is also working independently on projects and publications. From 2003 to October 2010, Peter Hartley led the University's educational development unit, formerly the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group (TQEG), now the Centre for Educational Development (CED). He was previously Professor of Communication at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) where he was their first winner of a National Teaching Fellowship in 2001.

At SHU, following a successful career in Communication Studies where he produced several textbooks, he had over 10 years' experience on the executive group of the School of Cultural Studies, in both line manager and cross-faculty roles, This included work on quality assurance with responsibility for implementing semester and modular systems and student choice, developing programme specifications, and experience on TQA/Subject Review submissions. His major role was in educational development across the faculty, which became known as the most active in the University in its application of new technology. His published courseware (*The Interviewer*, Gower, 2004) reached the finals of the European Academic Software Awards, again with a team of academic and technical staff.

His career has included over 40 years' teaching experience in HE at all levels (from pre-degree through to postgraduate taught and research) and in many subject areas (e.g. business/management, engineering, computing, communication, humanities, psychology, education, art/design). During this time he has planned/delivered a wide range of innovative curricula (e.g. from a Foundation Degree in Multimedia; to the first undergraduate Communication Studies degree in the UK; and to postgraduate programs in Education Studies, including distance-learning with video conferencing support for international postgraduate students).

Peter Hartley describe in his book that how do people communicate with each other in their face-to-face meetings and conversations? Can we trust our first impressions of people, or should we be more cautious? What evidence is there that our gestures and facial expressions reveal to others what we 'really' mean?

Ten chapters, distributed in three section covers concepts like: definition, process, and skills of interpersonal communication; the role and importance of social context, social identity, social perception, and language codes (verbal and nonverbal); and communication and groups, mediated communication, and further extensions and uses of the text material. In this book notes and references to additional source material are found at the ends of chapters. Four main elements of model of interpersonal communication--social context, social identity, social perception, and coding are described in detailed.

### **Contents of books and chapter distribution**

#### **Section A: Understanding interpersonal communication**

1. Defining what we mean by interpersonal communication
2. The process of interpersonal communication
3. The skills of interpersonal communication
4. Communication skills in context

#### **Section B: The components of interpersonal communication**

5. Social Context
6. Social identity
7. Social perception
8. Codes

#### **Section C: Moving beyond interpersonal communication**

9. Communication and Groups
10. Looking back and forward

**Defining what we mean by interpersonal communication (IC)**

Peter tried to express and define interpersonal communication with the help of definition given by others and his own instances of people involved in communication. Peter gave the idea that interpersonal communication varies in term of differences in nature of audience (individual to individual, individual to crowd etc.), relationship (between those individuals), and medium of communication (face to face, telephonic). Then he describes the best type of IC, individual to individual that is face to face among six different categories. Author describe following main principles of IC:

1. IC involve face to face meeting with people excluding telephone conversation where medium is artificial. As every medium have its own particular characteristics that impact communication.
2. IC involves two people in varying roles, policeman, teacher etc.
3. IC is always two ways, instead of one way model.
4. IC is not only the exchange of messages but also the exchange of meaning, for instance person A asking B, Did you have good time last night? Can be interpreted in different ways that also depend upon one's personal biases and state of relationship between A and B.
5. IC s partly or completely intentional
6. IC is an ongoing process rather a series of events or event in itself. For example appearing in an interview, a person cannot identify exactly where he started to communicate.
7. IC is cumulative over time, depends upon what one said in the past and what you expect of them.

**The process of interpersonal communication**

In describing the process of IC and its understanding, Peter gave a very good explanation of compact disc, (CD), suppose a person says he understand what CD is? Then he must know

- How CDs were first developed and made?
- How a CD player works? When and where CDs are used etc.

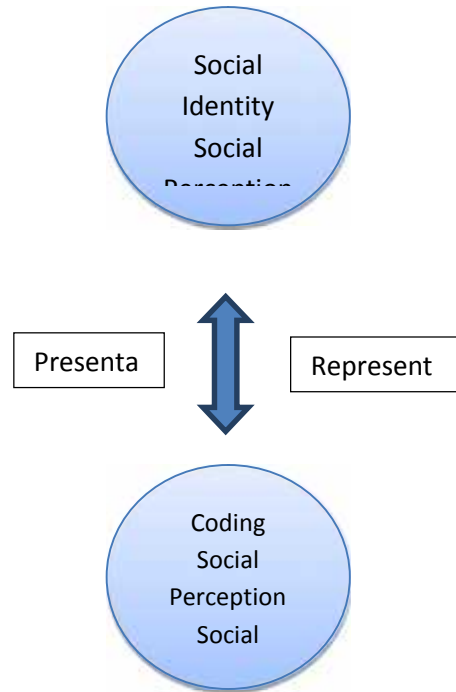
Peter says that degree of understanding anything including IC depend upon how much you know and your purpose to know something. He describe the aim of the book that it provide understanding how IC works by exploring the mechanisms and components of the process and their relationship. One definition of IC that is who says what, in which channel, to whom and with what effect. Then he describes model of IC, given below and describe that model with the help of conversation between B-Dr. Poussaint (a black doctor) and A-a white police man,

- A- What's your name boy?
- B- Dr. Poussaint. I am a physician.
- A- What's your first name boy?

Here peter wanted to explain component of social context, social identities and the codes (the term boy, not looking at dr. while asking again) that constitute the conversation or IC.

### Social Context

#### Person A

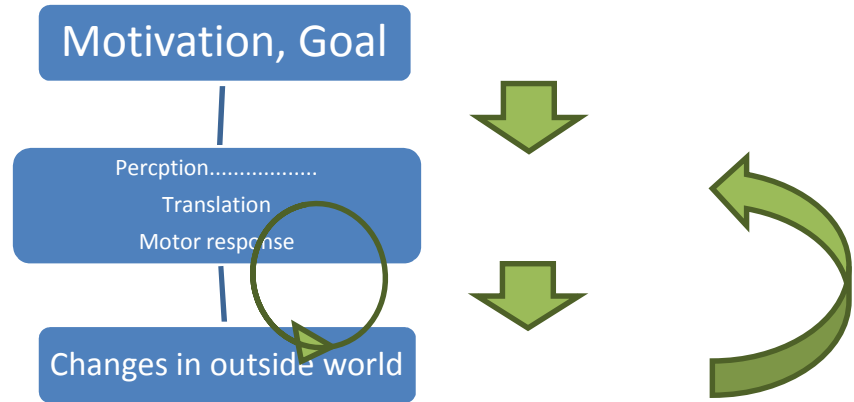


#### Person B

### Chapter 3 The skills of interpersonal communication

In this chapter Peter describes why communication should be considered as skilled behavior? Why some people are good at handling certain situation and others are not? Why you enjoy talking to someone who makes use of careful listening, smiling, nodding and encouraging while dislike those who do not make use of such skills. Here peter describe Michael Argyle social skills approach, by first describing it in the form of physical activity, riding a motor bike (goal: traveling, to impress a friend- perception: cues from muscles of body, concentrating on road to avoid bumps and obstacles- translation: physical action what

you want to do) and then explain in very clear way the model in terms of IC. In explaining the model of Social skills in terms of IC author give example of delivering lecture; where **goal** is to be seen as a good lecturer, (having good material, illustration, clear introduction, keeping audience attentive and avoiding sleep inducing consequences), perception translation behavior and feedback, these all are crucial for IC.



In explaining the component of interpersonal skills author adopted list from Hargie et al. that includes:

- Nonverbal communication (face expression, gaze, postures, bodily contact and spatial behavior etc.)
- Reinforcement (with sounds like grunts nodes, uh, umm huh etc. here Peter reported a study when subjects were asked to produce singular words but after producing plural nouns given reinforcement in such sounds their production of plural words increased.)
- Questioning (open and close ended that demand specific or expanded responses from others as in case of professional interviewers)
- Reflecting (for directing the conversation or to elaborate what one have said)
- Key words (identifying keyword or phrases that will encourage speaker to say more)
- Paraphrasing (will encourage speaker to say more in detail)

Peter then describes some of the listening barriers that creates problems in IC, e.g. verbal battle, fact hunting etc. he also describes patterns of listening such as pretended listeners, limiting listeners, self-centered listeners that these are hurdles in IC while positive or active listening enhance IC that includes self-disclosure which can also play important role in improving IC.

## Communication skills in context

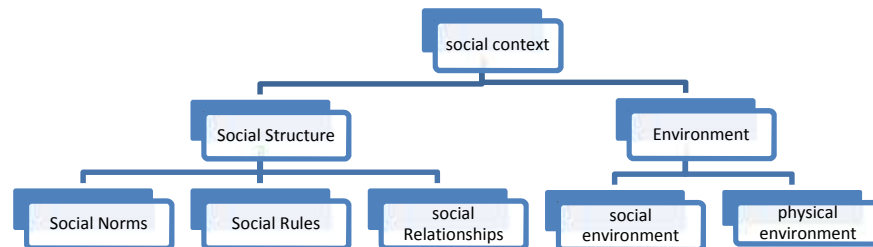
In forth chapter author describes practical examples that explain where communication skills work and where do not. Three examples are:

- 1- Fred at parties (who seems to have over confident at his IC but always create problems due to poor communication skills at parties, getting very close to people, staring at them etc. and who needs IC skills to be improved.
- 2- Chairing a meeting (author describes committee meeting chaired by people badly that end up unsuccessfully, where he suggested certain behaviour and skills that needs to be adapted by chair.)
- 3- The nurse dialogue (example of analysis of dialogue with a patient having Colostomy-surgery for creating artificial opening for wastes to discharge, in the wall of abdomen which needed to be changed after intervals- where nurse blocks patient to express and ward off her worries)

## Section B: Understanding the components of interpersonal communication

### Social Context

Peter has the opinion that one cannot understand completely the process of IC without understanding social context. Social context has the following components:



Environment that has both physical (lights, heat, color shape and size of objects and surrounding), and social components (environment with people who seems supportive or controlling seems to reduce or induce stress, which Peter describe with the help of experiment conducted by Schachter- where subjects reaction in form of emotional arousal, positive or negative depending upon bonafide subjects reaction, after adrenaline was administered to them) Social structure in authors opinion comprises of social norms, rules and relationships where author did not clearly differentiate norms from rules. For social norms author describes

**The Fairs Days work And Collective Illusion (Phenomenon)  
as examples.**

While describing social roles and its impact in IC, Peter beautifully describes Zimbardo's experiment on Effect of Prison on individuals, that how adapted roles effects communication.

**Social identity**

While defining social identity, author refers to the case of Dr. Poussaint again. That friend describes his personality as polite and considerate and gentle, which leads to the development of his self-concept as law abiding citizen. And he was aware of his role as a doctors and this made him expect a fair degree of respect from others which seems to him, to be humiliated by police man. Personality is a set of specific characteristics and for describing self-concept and self esteem peter refers to Carl Roger and George Herbert's explanation of theories. Author clearly describes the difference of I and Me.

**Social perception**

Author describes social perception as the processes where an individual perceives and evaluates other people, their nature and the setting in which they are involved in conversation. For support author give reference of experiment by Harold Kelley, where he gave university students a written description of a new visiting lecturer in two forms (differ in only one statement Warm/ cold), before lecture. After 20 min. lecture students description clearly suggests the influence of the specific description they were provided before lecture. Author also added and clearly described but did not seem to relate the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy, attribution theory and stereotypes.

**Codes**

Codes as described by author are the transformation that is used to convert messages from one set of signs to another. Their use according to Peter is to make communication more economical and efficient. But for use of codes one needs to be specialist as it can create problems if used with someone who cannot understand the actual meaning, author very accurately describe that problem by explaining the case of Doctor communicating report to patient that tests for cancer are negative, while patient do not understand the exact meaning of results being negative and that leads to adverse outcomes. Peter describes in this chapter different codes that we use, basically categorized as verbal and nonverbal codes.

But later in this chapter, author seems to complicate the operation and importance of codes in IC. Again while describing the relationship of sets of codes; and the power one seems to have upon other, give good illustration of instance of a busy boss and subordinate who clarify that nonverbal codes seems to overrule verbal codes.

### **Section C: Moving beyond interpersonal**

#### **Communication and Groups**

In this chapter Hartley describes beautifully the factors that make communication different, in groups from communication between people. One factor is group mind, means that group could have emotions independent of members. Very briefly and comprehensively describing different types of group, author moved toward the impact of group membership upon communication. For further clarification Hartley described concept of conformity (change in person's behavior or opinion as a result of real or imagined pressure from group) by describing Solomon Asch experiment. Critically analyzing Asch experiment with later studies upon subjects in London at the end Hartley comes to the conclusion that group do exert pressure upon individual but that depend upon factors as:

- The social context
- Membership of the group
- The group norms
- Nature of the task

#### **Looking back and forward**

In this last chapter author describes very briefly that how channels effect IC for example telephone and video phone. And author suggested that one thing the need to be focused but that remain un-emphasized, the importance of ethical concern and values attached to IC.

#### **Conclusion**

Author designed this book as an introductory text for undergraduate students; the book is organized into three sections on interpersonal communications: definitions, components, and group situations. One aim of the author was to be "readable and interesting," and in this goal he succeeded admirably.

In the chapter endnotes, classic references are summarized so appropriately that makes it easy to comprehend in short time the main



theme and if necessary then to look for the detail with the help of references.

Concepts are illuminated by examples drawn from personal and professional situations. Although the focus of the book is face-to-face interaction between two people, the last chapter on intra-group (within a group) and intergroup (between groups) communication is probably the best brief overview I have ever read that contains many concepts but that need elaboration if someone is reading such terms for the very first time. Furthermore, the chapter on codes also seems to have shortcomings, especially with regard to non-verbal communication, and how the codes operate?

Finally the book is good source of understanding what Interpersonal communication is, basic components of IC, and how they help in enhancing communication skills.