

“Communication is a dynamic process that individuals use to exchange ideas, relate experiences, and share desires through speaking, writing, gestures or sign language.” (Glenn et al, 1998, p.39) The ways in which individuals communicate are vast and endless; some dating back to 1970 like the Critical Theory, to more modern technological ways of Computer-Mediated Communication, and more are being developed. This essay will aim to explore 3 of the many ways in which people communicate: Interpersonal Communication, Non-Verbal Communication and E-mail in Computer-Mediated Communication. The information was sourced from books, journals and a website.

### **Interpersonal Communication:**

Interpersonal communication is “Communication between two persons or among a small group of persons, communication of a personal nature, communication between or among connected persons or those involved in a close relationship.” (DeVito, 2007, p.334) Interpersonal communication generally occurs face-to-face.

Interpersonal communication involves at least two persons. Each person performs source functions (i.e. creates and sends messages) and performs receiver functions (i.e. gathers and understands the messages). This is called the source-receiver complex and it emphasises that both functions are performed by each individual in interpersonal communication.

“Interpersonal communication is best viewed as an ever-changing process.” (DeVito, 2007, p.21) Everything in the universe is constantly changing and so is everything involved in interpersonal communication; people and the environment surrounding you are changing. This is a particular strength of the theory because it implies that the theory changes as you change i.e. it is transactional. It can never be out-dated because it can be applied to anybody at any given time. This is something the other theories cannot do e.g. critical theory has been out-dated and is irrelevant now.

Interpersonal communication enables people to learn, mainly about themselves, although they do get a better understanding of the external world i.e. events, objects and other people. This ability to learn more about yourself gives interpersonal communication its greatest strength, and makes it a successful theory. “By talking about yourself with others, you gain valuable feedback on your feelings, thoughts and behaviours.” (DeVito, 2007, p.7)

Another strength of interpersonal communication is it helps you relate to others. People have a great desire to form and maintain close relationships. They want to feel loved and cared about and they in turn love and care for others. These relationships have a positive effect on a person because it makes them feel positive by eliminating depression and loneliness. Some people however,

engage in interpersonal relationships to influence or control others. By doing this they assert control to themselves, which makes them feel powerful, especially if other people are in agreement to what they are saying.

“Interpersonal communication cannot be prevented (is inevitable), cannot be reversed (is irreversible) and cannot be repeated (is unrepeatable).” (DeVito, 2007, p.27) People are always communicating even when they do not think they are and so interpersonal communication is inevitable. It is also irreversible as what is communicated to others remains communicated; you cannot un-communicate. It is also unrepeatable because everything is constantly changing, and as a result you can never capture exactly the same previous situation.

Interpersonal communication is important because it is crucial for the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. It is also crucial for professional success and advancement, as nowadays employers pay special attention to how well you can communicate and how good your interpersonal skills are.

### **Non-Verbal Communication:**

Non-verbal communication is “the process of transmitting messages without spoken words, sometimes called body language; messages can be communicated through facial expressions, gestures, gaze, and posture.” (Ottenheimer, 2006, p.120)

Non-verbal communication is different to interpersonal communication because in non-verbal communication you do not speak; you convey your messages through body language, eye contact, facial expressions to emphasise a point. In interpersonal communication, there is actual dialogue between two people.

Non-verbal communication is often used to emphasise a verbal message e.g. raising the tone of your voice to show importance to a particular word. It can also be used to complement the message being told e.g. smiling when telling a happy story.

When speaking to other people, eye contact is important because without it the person to whom you are addressing will feel isolated from you and is unlikely to relate to you in a meaningful way; you should be trying to maintain eye contact to secure the interest of your listener. Using eye contact effectively can make you seem interesting, attentive, friendly, honest, approachable and straightforward, but if it is used in a futile way, you can appear to others as arrogant, untrustworthy, disinterested and proud. Eye contact also shows that you are listening to what the other person is saying, and are interested in what they have to say.

Most of the communication we engage in occurs face-to-face and so “obviously facial expression is bound to be an important indicator to other people of our

attitudes, state of mind and relationships to them.” (Beck et al, 2002, p.154) The human face has a complex arrangement of muscles that allow us to show a wide range of expressions which, mainly signals your emotions, “some non-verbal communication researchers claim that facial movements may communicate at least the following eight emotions: happiness, surprise, fear, anger, sadness, disgust, contempt, and interest.” (DeVito, 2007, p.167)

Smiling is a powerful cue that conveys happiness, warmth and friendliness. Thus, by smiling frequently, you are more likely to be perceived as friendly, warm, approachable and attract positive energy and friends. It also indicates to others that you yourself are happy and content and you are pleased to see the other person. We can, however, also deceive others by giving a fake smile, therefore misleading them e.g. faking a smile when pretending you are pleased to see someone when in reality you are not.

The way we dress is also a form of non-verbal communication. The clothes we wear makes a statement about ourselves, “...people we meet and interact with will still interpret our appearance as though we had deliberately constructed a message.” (Beck et al, 2002, p.157)

Interpersonal and non-verbal communication can be categorized as face-to-face communication because they literally occur face to face.

### **E-mail Communication:**

The world of communication is constantly changing and central to these changes is the way in which our lives are becoming centrally dependent on communication technology. “E-mail, mobile phones and tele-conferencing have all affected people’s working patterns to a point where the workplace itself is a far less significant feature of their lives.” (Beck et al, 2002, p.45)

Electronic mail, or e-mail has become one of the most popular methods of communication. E-mail is a system that uses the Internet to send messages between people from one computer to another. It is a powerful business tool that can save time, money and energy. The main features of e-mail are that the same message can be sent to many people and blind carbon copies can be sent so that the recipients do not know who else has received them. This is a great strength for computer-mediated communication because it ensures privacy. Face-to-face communication, in contrast to computer-mediated communication has limited privacy as you cannot stop someone from listening to your conversation.

The main advantages of using e-mail are: it is fast so messages can be sent world-wide instantly. It is cheap and so does not cost very much compared to calling or posting a letter to someone anywhere else in the world. E-mail is also

very easy to filter. The subject line on an e-mail makes it easy to prioritise messages, "...this feature facilitates quick responses to action items." (Duarte et al, 1999, p.42) This allows users to send e-mails marked as urgent and recipients can then deal with them immediately. Another great advantage is that message threads can be sent to include previous e-mails. Thus, recipients are able to keep the replies for each message, making them more understandable. Another big advantage is that messages can be retrieved anywhere in the world, provided you have access to the Internet. This is especially useful to people who travel a lot and so it is an easy way to keep in contact.

There are however, some disadvantages that come with e-mail. The greatest one is spam/chain-mail. Chain mail is sending people information that they do not really need or want. When chain e-mails are used, they often contain the e-mail addresses of everyone on the chain, revealing their addresses which some people may prefer to keep private. Another disadvantage is that viruses are common on the Internet and spread rapidly when users open infected e-mail attachments, which can sometimes be forwarded to everyone in the mailing list. There is also no mechanism for tracking a sent message and so you do not really know if the message has been delivered. Also, because so many people use e-mail, e-mail addresses are often very similar so you have to ensure the spelling is correct otherwise the message would be sent to the wrong person. E-mail can only be sent to people who have access to the Internet, which not everyone does. In this case, postal or face-to-face communication is more effective. Another great disadvantage is that e-mails can easily be made public; the ease of forwarding e-mails to others makes it especially important to consider what you write.

When you communicate electronically, via e-mail, your messages are being communicated with typed letters without facial expressions or gestures that are shown with face-to-face communication, giving it a great advantage. However, to compensate for this lack of non-verbal behaviour, the emoticon was created. "The emoticon is a typed symbol that communicates the nuances of the message normally conveyed by nonverbal expression." (DeVito, 2007, p.121)

It was mentioned earlier that face-to-face communication is irreversible and temporary i.e. it fades after you have spoken; it can only remain in your memories, giving it a great disadvantage. In computer-mediated communication, however the messages are written and can be saved and stored to be retrieved later, giving it a great advantage.

In my opinion, interpersonal communication is the most effective and useful communication theory, out of the three described. A person's interpersonal skills are always developing and are constantly being used. You need good interpersonal skills to communicate and express yourself effectively, and this is something employers focus on when applying for a job. These skills can also be used in seminars and especially presentations. You are always communicating to someone and so it is beneficiary to develop these skills, and the better your skills, the more confident you appear.

Non-verbal communication is, however, also important because your body language and facial expressions portray your emotions. You may act confident in class or an interview but your body language may suggest nervousness e.g. legs crossed and hands clenched tight. Maintaining eye contact is also necessary to keep listeners interested and involved, so these skills are important to develop too.

E-mail is not as important as face-to-face communication as you are not interacting with other very much. With face-to-face communication, you are addressing people and sending verbal messages them, enhancing interpersonal skills. However, e-mail is a quick and easy way to send the same messages and notices to large groups of people e.g. students. It is also effective as it can be accessed anywhere at any time, and usually allows instant replies, provided the recipient checks their messages, and is actually delivered to them.

In conclusion, all three theories are relevant and useful, all with their own strengths and weaknesses. Interpersonal communication focuses on interpersonal skills and having a better understanding of the external world. Non-verbal communication focuses on emphasising points that where made verbally with eye contact, facial expressions, body language. E-mail has become one of the most popular methods of communication because it is quick and easy to use and can save businesses time, money and energy. However, chain-mail is likely to be send which can sometimes contain viruses and messages may not always be delivered. On the whole, all three theories show effective communication skills which are critical to success in life.

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