Evaluating and Strategizing Your Own Interpersonal Communication Competence

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Learning Objectives

In this chapter, readers will consider various ways to engage in interpersonal interactions in a more competent way. By the conclusion of this chapter, readers will be able to

- Assess and evaluate interpersonal communication success
- Create and manage expectations for interacting in various communication contexts
- Understand how to successfully face and overcome challenges in multiple communication situations
- Apply methods for the formation, evaluation, and reassessment of goals and plans for improving interpersonal communication competence

Introduction

Think back to the interaction between Kim and Pat that we presented in Chapter 1. In that scenario, Kim and Pat used different channels (including e-mail, mobile phones, and face-to-face) to engage in a conflict with each other about what they were going to have for dinner that night. Their interaction ended rather abruptly, with Pat saying that Kim's making a big deal about nothing and asking Kim to help figure out what to do about dinner. Think now about how their interaction might have progressed from that point. There are a number of different ways that Kim and Pat could have ended their conversation. Instead of Kim saying, "Oh, I'm making a big deal out of nothing?" she could have suggested that they just agree on what to eat for dinner. For example, Kim might have said, "Well, let's get pizza. We're both hungry." With Pat replying, "Fine. I'll order it, and we can talk about something else." This closing of the conversation does not fully resolve the issue but does at least allow both individuals to have their say and conclude their interaction fairly amicably.

But let's also consider two other possible scenarios. In the first, the conflict escalates, with Kim screaming, "That's because you NEVER listen to me! You are so selfish!" and Pat responding, "Well, all you do is blather constantly about nonsense, so it is impossible to remember everything you say." Then, both Kim and Pat leave—Kim goes into the den to play video games, and Pat puts on his sneakers and goes for a run. The situation remains unresolved, and the outcome is not satisfying for either of them.

Finally, Kim and Pat could take the time and make an effort to truly listen to and understand each other. Kim could say, "I guess I had not made that clear about being home early enough to have dinner together. Sorry about that." Pat replies, "OK. I will make a mental note to pay more attention. I'm sorry too." Here, Kim and Pat both feel that the situation has been largely resolved, and they are satisfied with the outcome.

Which of these three outcomes is the most competent? Why? Even though we know when we read these different interactions that the third outcome—listening and understanding—is most preferred and the most competent and that the second outcome, conflict escalation, should be avoided, we likely find ourselves in similar situations. How do we get into the habit of using the messages that increase our chances for communication success?

Throughout this text, our goal has been to assist you in understanding and improving how you interpersonally communicate with others. One important method for you to communicate more competently in interactions is by assessing and evaluating your interpersonal communication patterns. This process can help you determine what works and what does not work. What expectations do you typically have when you communicate with others? To what extent do those expectations differ according to the context or situation that you find yourself in, such as in a business or professional or mediated communication context? How do you respond to challenges or difficulties in your conversations and in your relationships? This chapter will help you learn to set and manage expectations and identify challenges in your interactions with others across different contexts and situations. We will also offer strategies and methods for creating, evaluating, and reevaluating plans and goals that are related to competent interpersonal communication.

11.1 Evaluating Communication Success

How do you know if an interaction went well? Your will likely feel an interaction is successful if three elements take place. If you and your partner truly hear and understand each other, validate each other's viewpoints, and conclude the interaction feeling as if you both acted effectively and appropriately. We saw these elements in the third possible outcome of Kim and Pat's conversation.

Throughout this text, we have discussed the importance of communication competence as a means for evaluating whether or not your communication is successful. Though communication competence is an important way to assess your communication, there are two other concepts that you can also use to decide how well, or how poorly, an interaction unfolded. There are three focus areas to consider when you evaluate communication success: shared meaning, communication satisfaction, and communication competence.

Recall that we discussed the importance of shared meaning in Chapter 1. We return to this concept here to emphasize its importance as a communication outcome. Next we introduce the concept of communication satisfaction and discuss how it can be used to assess the success of an interaction. We will then consider how we can use communication competence to create better outcomes and have greater success in a variety of communication contexts.

Shared Meaning

Recall the definition of communication presented in Chapter 1: Communication is a process that involves two or more individuals and involves creating shared meaning by using verbal and nonverbal messages in a variety of contexts. From this definition, you can see that the most basic outcome of any communication situation is for all participants in the interaction to "be on the same page" about what is discussed and how the messages are interpreted. But human beings are simply too diverse—with different viewpoints, cultural backgrounds, biases and stereotypes, and general perceptions or ways of viewing the world—to ever entirely share meaning with one another. Yet the more everyone agrees about what their messages mean and how they are interpreted, the more likely it is to achieve shared meaning. Thus, the first and most fundamental way that we can evaluate the success of an interaction is to determine if you and your partner both understand what is being discussed and derive similar meaning from the interaction.

This is easier said than done, however. The extent to which you can accomplish shared meaning with a conversation partner is based on a number of factors. First, the types of messages that you use, verbal or nonverbal, are important. If you are restricted to one type of message—for example, primarily using verbal communication in text messages or e-mails—this can decrease the likelihood that you and

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▲ Everyone has different viewpoints, backgrounds, and perceptions. The more communicators can agree about what their messages mean, the more likely they are to achieve shared meaning.

your partner will reach the same understanding. If our communication is grounded in the expectations to both verbally and nonverbally communicate in an interaction, then it is more challenging to create shared meaning in a situation where we are unable to do so. But if we are aware this challenge exists, then we can approach such interactions with more patience and thus increase the likelihood of creating shared meaning.

A second factor that can hinder the creation of shared meaning is differences between the interaction partners. We have an easier time understanding people who are like us because we share common life experiences and perspectives based on this similarity. These shared experiences and perspectives might also explain why we are attracted to those who are similar to us. Have you ever met someone who grew up in the same town as you? It was probably easy to carry on a conversation with that person about where you each went to school, the places you spent time, favorite restaurants or foods, and events that happened in your area. This conversational ease is based on your similarities.

However, we do not exclusively interact with others who are similar to us. Our identification with different groups—ethnic, religious, political, or generational—can dictate and shape how we interact with others. This concept is called **intergroup communication** (Giles, 2012). Today's globalized world and the technological advances that enable us to communicate across great distances provide us with many unique and invaluable opportunities to talk to, and learn from, individuals who come from different groups. What can we do to reduce intergroup communication differences that can be a barrier to shared meaning? A simple but extremely effective method is to have more contact with members of different groups; doing so improves our attitudes toward and reduces prejudices about those who differ from us (Harwood & Joyce, 2012). Traveling to different places, talking to people with whom we do not usually interact, and even using the Internet to connect with members of different groups are all ways to increase contact with individuals from other groups.

The context of the interaction is a final factor that can affect the creation of shared meaning. In online contexts, for example, we strive to put forth a more positive identity than when we communicate face-to-face. These more positive, online depictions can be a barrier when creating shared meaning. For example, when we meet someone in person for the first time, after connection via an online dating website, and we might find that their online description was not an accurate depiction.

Health interactions also are contexts where meanings are commonly distorted. For example, in one study, almost 25% of Americans reported leaving a patient-provider interaction feeling as if the healthcare provider did not answer their questions (Davis et al., 2006). One way to improve shared meaning in healthcare interactions is to bring a close relationship partner with you to medical appointments and involve the person in the diagnosis, management, and treatment of health conditions (Bevan & Pecchioni, 2008). Involving a trusted contact or seeking out the viewpoint of others who were a part of an interaction can help increase the likelihood of creating shared meaning. These different perspectives can provide you with information that you had not considered or assist you in considering how others interpreted the messages, both of which can contribute to creating shared meaning.

Overall, the creation of shared meaning is the most basic successful communication outcome that we strive for, and, though there can be multiple barriers, there are strategies that can help minimize these obstacles and increase the likelihood of creating shared meaning (see Table 11.1).

Table 11.1: Creating shared meaning: Barriers and solutions to consider

Factors that Can Inhibit Shared Meaning	Examples	Strategies to Counteract Inhibiting Factors
Message-type restrictions	E-mails can limit the communicators' ability to transmit nonverbal messages.	Acknowledge the limitations of different channels and exercise patience when using such channels.
Different backgrounds and experiences among interaction partners	Communicators from different countries or cultures might not have similar life experiences.	Interact more often with those who are different (increase intergroup communication situations).
Interaction contexts	Online profiles might not be accurate or candid depictions of the real-world individuals.	Involve a trusted contact who can help you navigate challenging contexts.

Communication Satisfaction

In 1978 communication researcher Michael Hecht made a case for the importance of assessing communication effects. He proposed that an important way to evaluate the success of an interaction is by determining the level of communication satisfaction that its participants experience. **Communication satisfaction (CS)** is defined as the positive outcome that is derived from a communication situation where goals and expectations are successfully fulfilled (Hecht, 1978). In other words, you are satisfied with your interaction if what you expected out of the exchange is fulfilled (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Evaluating your level of CS after an interaction can increase your awareness of how what you say and how you say it could affect you, your partner, and your relationship (Bevan & Stetzenbach, 2007). This self-awareness, then, can help increase your overall communication competence. Thus, CS is the second focus area when evaluating communication success.

Communication satisfaction is an important interaction outcome in intercultural, mediated, family, and organizational contexts. For example, when individuals from different cultures interact for the first time, the more ethnocentric and communicatively apprehensive the individuals are, the lower their communication satisfaction (Neulip, 2012). Individuals who had relationships exclusively with others online had higher communication satisfaction when they communicated more frequently with their online partner (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Communication satisfaction also increased overall satisfaction in these online-only relationships. Further, young adult siblings were most likely to express their jealousy to each other via avoidance but ironically were dissatisfied with this form of communication (Bevan & Stetzenbach, 2007). This finding shows that we do not always choose to communicate in a satisfying way, even when we may know that there is a potentially more satisfying option, such as being open and direct.

In organizations, individuals' evaluations of their communication satisfaction for interactions with a coworker were higher when they believed that their coworker could take other individuals' perspectives (Park & Raile, 2010). **Perspective-taking** is an aspect of empathy that involves being able to adopt another person's viewpoint, and this skill is thus an important way to communicate effectively in organizations. In addition, the greater an employee's communication satisfaction within an organization, the better the person's job performance and the less likely the employee is to leave the job (Tsai, Chuang, & Hseih, 2009). Based on their findings, these researchers (Tsai et al., 2009) recommend that managers create a healthy communication climate by

- Inspiring their employees to accomplish their organizational goals
- Assisting employees in identifying with their companies
- Developing clear conflict management channels
- Cultivating a satisfying system of organizational communication

These suggestions for improving CS in organizations are useful and can be logically expanded to other contexts. For example, romantic partners can encourage each other to accomplish their goals, help each other identify with groups that are important and relevant to them, better manage how they engage in conflict with each other, and create a relationship environment that is constructive and beneficial for both partners. Hecht's (1978) measure of interpersonal communication satisfaction is found in the *Self-Test* feature, and you can use this to assess your own levels of CS.

SELF-TEST

Hecht's Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory

The purpose of this self-test is to examine your reactions to a recent conversation. Select a conversation that you have had with someone in the last day or so—it can be one that you had face-to-face, online, or a combination of both channels. Use the following scale to indicate whether or not you believe each statement applies to you:

1 for *strongly disagree*
2 for *disagree*
3 for *undecided*
4 for *agree*
5 for *strongly agree*

1. My partner let me know that I was communicating effectively.
2. Nothing was accomplished.
3. I would like to have another conversation like this one.
4. My partner genuinely wanted to get to know me.
5. I was very *dis*satisfied with the conversation.
6. I had something else to do.
7. I felt that during the conversation I was able to present myself as I wanted my partner to view me.
8. My partner showed me that he/she understood what I said.
9. I was very satisfied with the conversation.
10. My partner expressed a lot of interest in what I had to say.
11. I did *not* enjoy the conversation.
12. My partner did *not* provide support for what he/she was saying.
13. I felt I could talk about anything with my partner.
14. We each got to say what we wanted.
15. I felt that we could laugh easily together.
16. The conversation flowed smoothly.
17. My partner changed the topic when his/her feelings were brought into the conversation.
18. My partner frequently said things that added little to the conversation.
19. We talked about something I was *not* interested in.

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Scoring

Individuals scoring above 63 are highly satisfied with the interaction; those scoring below 32 have low satisfaction with the interaction. Those scoring between 33 and 62 are in the moderate communication satisfaction range.

Instructions: To determine your score on the Inventory for Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction, complete the following steps:

Step 1. Add scores for items 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, and 16.
Step 2. Convert the scores for items 2, 5, 6, 11, 12, 17, 18, and 19 so that 1 becomes 5, 2 becomes 4, 4 becomes 2, 5 becomes 1, and 3 remains 3. Then add the scores for these items.
Step 3. Add the scores from Steps 1 and 2. This is your total score.

Source: Self-test from Hecht, M. L. (1978). The conceptualization and measurement of interpersonal communication satisfaction. *Human Communication Research, 4*, 253–264. Copyright © 2006, John Wiley and Sons.

Consider Your Results

Once you have calculated your score, look at your responses to the individual items to determine what exactly about the interaction was satisfying or dissatisfying. Many different things go into whether an interaction is satisfying, and these are reflected in the items and can give you increased insight into what went well or what went wrong.

1. What can you as a communicator do to have more satisfying interactions with others? How could your interaction partner contribute to communication satisfaction as well?
2. Take this self-test twice—once while thinking about a positive interaction and once while considering an interaction where you were less satisfied. Then compare your scores. What, in your opinion, was the difference between an interaction that was satisfying and one that was less so?
3. Based on this self-test and from what you know about communication satisfaction and communication competence from this text, in what ways are these two communication concepts related to each other in interpersonal interactions?

Communication Competence

Communication competence has been an important thread throughout this text—one that sews together the different aspects and contexts of communication, as well as offering an easy-to-implement pattern that can be used in different communication situations to create successful outcomes. Recall from Chapters 1 and 2 that communication competence involves being both effective—obtaining what you seek or accomplishing your goals—and appropriate—following the rules and expectations of others regarding a particular situation or interaction. Improving your communication competence also means that you must possess necessary knowledge or awareness about how to communicate competently, be motivated or energized to do so, and be skilled at or capable of encoding competent messages. Thus, being knowledgeable, motivated, and skilled can help make you more effective and appropriate in your interactions with others.

These communication competence concepts have been successfully applied to a variety of communication contexts and situations. For example, Brian Spitzberg (2006) proposed a series of relationships between communication competence concepts in online and mediated contexts. For example, much as in face-to-face contexts, knowledge in mediated contexts is positively associated with motivation. Having both knowledge and motivation also means you are likely to be more skilled in mediated interactions. In other words, if you know the basics of how to use social

networks such as Facebook and Twitter, and are interested in being a member of these social networks, you are likely to visit them and use such networks more frequently, which then will make you a more adept social network user. Knowledge, motivation, and skill are each then positively related to a variety of computer-mediated competence-related outcomes, such as appropriateness, effectiveness, relationship and communication satisfaction, increased attractiveness, and the ability to develop relationships (Spitzberg, 2006). In essence, the more one knows about and participates in social networking, the better the person is at it and the more communication and relationship benefits that the person accrues.

Health communication is another example context. Gary Kreps (1988) advocated for a model of relational health interaction that would promote patient and provider communication competence in order to improve the quality of care and increase both patient and provider satisfaction. How individuals in an interaction communicate about health at the interpersonal level is significant because this is when meaningful relationships between healthcare consumers and providers are formed (Kreps, 1988). Kreps emphasizes the importance of effective communication in health interactions in part because more effective patient-provider communication is related to greater patient compliance with provider treatments. In addition, realistic and fulfilled patient expectations during interactions contribute to decreased cultural stereotyping and greater clarification of roles and needs (Kreps, 1988). Subsequent research has supported Krepp's (1988) model, finding, for example, that the communication competence of healthcare workers was directly related to their increased social support and decreased stress (Wright, Banas, Bessarabova, & Bernard, 2010).

Having the knowledge, motivation, and skill to be communicatively competent allows an individual to create better outcomes and have greater success in a variety of specific communication contexts. Retake the communication competence survey in the *Self-Test* feature, first provided in Chapter 2, and compare your updated scores to your scores from Chapter 2. Now that you are almost done reading this text, has your competence has changed?

SELF-TEST

Interpersonal Communication Competence

The following self-test is based on Spitzberg and Cupach's (1984) model of communication competence. Answer each item honestly as it currently applies to you in typical conversations with others. Use a 5-point scale for your responses to each item. Rate each question according to the following scale:

1 for *strongly disagree*
2 for *slightly disagree*
3 for *unsure*
4 for *slightly agree*
5 for *strongly agree*

1. I act in ways that meet situational demands for appropriateness.
2. I successfully achieve my interpersonal goals.
3. I show my understanding of others by reflecting their thoughts and feelings to them.
4. It is easy for me to manage conversations the way I want them to proceed.
5. I show my engagement in conversation both nonverbally and verbally.

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6. I use a wide range of behaviors, including self-disclosure and humor, to adapt to others.
7. I am aware of the rules that guide social behavior.
8. Once I set an interpersonal goal for myself, I know the steps to take to achieve it.
9. I know that empathy means to try to see it through others' eyes and feel what they feel.
10. I know how to change topics and control the tone of my conversations.
11. I know how to respond because I am perceptive and attentive to others' behaviors.
12. I have enough knowledge and experiences to adapt to others' expectations.
13. I want to communicate with others in an appropriate manner.
14. I am motivated to obtain the conversational goals I set for myself.
15. I want to understand other people's viewpoints and emotions.
16. I want to make my conversations with others go smoothly.
17. I want to be engaged in the conversations I have with other people.
18. I want to adapt my communication behavior to meet others' expectations.

Scoring

Now we will identify your separate and overall communication competence scores. To do this, we will do a bit of math to determine your average score based on the categories outlined in the sections below. This will give you a score, out of 5, where

Higher values (generally 3.5 to 5) indicate greater communication competence.
Middle values (generally 2.5 to 3.5) indicate moderate communication competence.
Lower values (generally 1 to 2.5) indicate less communication competence.

Your possible overall score will be between 18 and 90. Scores for each of the nine subscales (*skill, knowledge, motivation, adaptability, conversational involvement, conversation management, empathy, effectiveness,* and *appropriateness*) can be averaged to obtain the communication competence total score, or you can add up each of your question ratings and divide the total by 18.

Subscales and Criteria

One dimension includes three subscales that are measured via the following identified questions:

Skill—questions 1–6
Knowledge—questions 7–12
Motivation—questions 13–18

Instructions: For each of the separate dimensions, determine your score by calculating the average (add up your ratings for each question assigned to the dimension and then divide the total by 6).

A second dimension includes six criteria that are measured via the following identified questions:

Adaptability—questions 1, 7, & 13
Effectiveness—questions 2, 8, & 14
Empathy—questions 3, 9, & 15
Conversational management—questions 4, 10, & 16
Conversational involvement —questions 5, 11, & 17
Appropriateness—questions 6, 12, & 18

Instructions: For each of the separate dimensions, determine your score by calculating the average (add up your ratings for each question assigned to the dimension and then divide the total by 3).

Sources: Self-test adapted from the eTrees Consortium, Needs Analysis Report (2013, July 31), originally based on data from Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (1984). *Interpersonal communication competence.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

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Consider Your Results

As noted earlier, higher score indicates a greater overall communication competence. If one or more of your scores are relatively low, these may be areas that you need to be aware of, and you should attempt to increase your skill in such areas when communicating with others. Once you have calculated your score, compare it to the scores from the communication competence self-test that you took in Chapter 2. Now take a moment to evaluate your scores and consider the following questions.

1. Were any of your scores higher? If so, what do you think you have learned from this text that may have contributed to your increased competence?
2. Overall, are your scores at a level that you are comfortable with, or are you interested in increasing your competence in one or more areas?
3. How might you apply course concepts and strategies to your own interactions in order to become more communicatively competent?

11.2 Setting and Managing Expectations for Various Contexts

At the end of each chapter in this text, we offered strategies for creating and managing your expectations about how you will communicate with others. Though these suggestions are tailored to the specific context or situation covered in each chapter, these strategies present three overarching strategies:

- Be more aware of and analyze how you communicate to increase understanding of your and others' messages.
- Practice the knowledge and skills that you are acquiring in this course in your own interactions in order to increase your communication competence.
- Consider how others see you and how their perceptions and messages shape who you are and how you communicate.

Together, these general suggestions ask you to identify and think about your own motivations and messages, as well as those of the people with whom you communicate, and work to apply the information from this course to your own interactions. These suggestions require that you have the ability to reflect upon an interaction and to be flexible when communicating in order to successfully adapt to a specific communication situation. Both abilities can be used to help you determine what you can expect and can hope to accomplish from an interaction. (The *Web Field Trip* feature offers some practical tips on conversing competently.)

WEB FIELD TRIP

Conversational Work

In an article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (http://chronicle.com/section/Home/5), English professor Anne Curzan comments on a recent course in which she teaches undergraduates about how conversations work. Over the term, she and her students come to the conclusion that conver-

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sations take practice—that conversations are work. Communicators need to consider several different aspects of the conversation as a whole, and they must both make an effort. Search for and then review Curzan's article, "The Work of Conversation," paying particular attention to the different forms of conversation work. Now take a moment to consider the following critical thinking questions.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Which form(s) of conversational work (e.g., asking questions, listening actively and attentively) do you think that you are most adept at? Which form(s) require a bit more effort for you? How has this class assisted you in working harder at conversation?
2. The end of the article implies that meaningful conversation takes place via face-to-face channels. Is meaningful conversation also possible via mediated channels? If so, how do we accomplish this?

Be a More Mindful Communicator

What does it mean to be mindful? According to psychology professor Ellen Langer (1989, p. 138), **mindfulness** is defined as "a state of alertness and lively awareness" in which an individual consciously focuses on and processes information and cues derived from the present situation to determine how to act. In other words, a mindful person is alert to a particular situation or context and takes cues from what is going on at that moment, in that environment (as opposed to previous situations or experiences), to help him or her figure out how to behave. In this way, a mindful individual can consider multiple perspectives and differentiate between various pieces of information and categories (Langer, 1989), and thus has cognitive flexibility (Canary, Lakey, & Sillars, 2013). In contrast, **mindlessness** occurs when there is "a state of reduced attention" and minimal processing of information (Langer, 1989. p. 139). A person who is in a mindless state does not pay attention to the current situation; rather, he or she draws almost entirely on past experiences when deciding how to act. Langer's research has demonstrated that being mindful is important because it positively contributes to individuals' physical health, reduces organizational burnout and job turnover, and encourages more creative thinking in educational settings (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000).

Being more mindful, or less mindless, can also help us be more competent and successful communicators. Mindless actions are, according to Langer (1989), frequently rigid and governed by rules. Mindless people behave and communicate based on their first and usually only assessment of the situation, and such people are also typically unwilling to consider alternative options or courses of action. In contrast, when people are mindful, they can identify both their own and their partners' thoughts and feelings, can express their cognitions and emotions clearly, and are sensitive to what their partner is thinking and feeling during an interaction (Canary et al., 2013). The ideas generated in interactions where individuals are mindful are often specific and detailed. Mindful individuals are also more responsive to an interaction that is taking place at that moment, meaning they are less judgmental about what is being said and that the interaction thus flows more smoothly (Canary et al., 2013).

It is no surprise then that mindfulness is associated with greater marital adjustment, a greater ability to be empathic and take other people's perspectives, and a decreased use of hostile expressions of anger and aggressive behaviors (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Individuals who are more mindful also respond more constructively to distress in their relationships, engage in better quality communication, and experience more relationship satisfaction (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007). Mindfulness is also important in healthcare interactions; according

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▲ A mindful communicator takes cues from what is going on in the moment to help figure out how to best behave in an interaction.

to researchers, patients may mindfully consider their healthcare needs and decide to not follow a provider's treatment recommendations; this is called mindful nonadherence (Brashers, Naas, & Neidig, 1999).

To illustrate, let's imagine a situation from both a mindful and a mindless perspective. Jackie and Joe are recent hires at a biotech company and are both navigating through their first day of work, which consists of a companywide orientation for recent hires. Both employees are nervous, but Joe attempts to be mindful when approaching this situation. He plans ahead to determine where the office is located, leaves at a specific time in order to arrive at the company headquarters early, and pays attention to his surroundings. Once there, he watches how the other new hires behave and interact with one another. During a question and answer session, he asks the event organizer a question that is reflective, thoughtful, and based on the information that he has learned thus far. Joe's mindful consideration of his first day with a new company has thus allowed him to understand how his current situation is distinct from previous, similar ones he has had in other employment settings.

Jackie, in contrast, approaches her first day mindlessly. She pays little attention to the surroundings, and gets lost on her way to the office, making her late for the orientation. She pays no attention to the other new hires, assuming this job will be just like every other job. When she asks a question, it is because she has not closely listened during the different presentations. Jackie is thus behaving based on her previous work experiences and is not attuned to the one she is currently in, even though it is new and unfamiliar.

Approaching our communication with others mindfully—particularly when the interaction is new, important, or potentially challenging—can help you set and meet your communication expectations and be more competent. As you can see, approaching a new job the way that Joe mindfully does helps him learn more about his new company and coworkers, and it also helps him better understand the role that he will have in the organization. In contrast, Jackie's mindlessness means that she has to continually focus on basic information and questions, which prevents her from gaining a broader sense of her role at the biotech company. Thus it is best, and most beneficial, to approach new, unfamiliar situations in a mindful way.

Be a Communication Chameleon

You will have the greatest chance of enhancing your communication success if you become something of a communication chameleon. A chameleon is an animal that is extremely attuned to its environment, to the point where a chameleon can adapt to its surroundings by physically changing colors. Chameleons are also able to look at two different objects at the same time because they have eyes that rotate independently and offer a 360-degree view. Chameleons are flexible:

The species can live in many different environments, including the rainforest, desert, savannas, and the mountains. Basically, a chameleon survives and thrives because it can observe its surroundings from different perspectives and because it can quickly adapt to the situation.

You can be a communication chameleon by assessing a specific situation and recognizing how to shift your communication to best fit the expectations for each unique situation. This means that you can recognize, for example, that you will communicate differently in a business and professional situation than you will on a first date. Further, you will know exactly how to adapt to each of those situations in ways that increase your chances that your interaction will create shared meaning and be satisfying and competent for both you and your partner. (*Everyday Communication Challenges* offers information on basic communication skills.)

EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Basic Communication Skills

When communication researchers talk about being a more skilled communicator or being more communicatively competent, they often talk broadly about being appropriate, meeting expectations, and having knowledge and motivation. But how exactly does this translate to how we should behave when interacting with others? Communication scholars have attempted to answer this question by making the leap from research to practice. These researchers have developed specific guidelines for the skills that individuals should strive for when communicating. For example, Rebecca Rubin and Sherwyn Morreale (2000) compiled basic and advanced core competencies that college students need to master in order to be effective communicators. Rubin and Morreale define **basic communication skills** as the minimal competencies that represent the knowledge, attitudes, and abilities needed to function effectively in business and professional settings and in society in general.

Regarding interpersonal communication, the following list summarizes the important basic skills identified by Rubin and Morreale (2000):

Analyzing the situation, which includes:

- Recognizing when another communicator does not understand a message
- Identifying and managing misunderstanding
- Knowing when it is appropriate and inappropriate to say something

Managing relationships, which involves:

- Managing interpersonal conflict
- Being open to others' conflicting views
- Asserting ourselves effectively

Exchanging information, which includes:

- Listening and being attentive to others' comments and questions
- Asking questions effectively
- Answering questions in a concise manner
- Providing directions that are correct and concise

Managing conversations, which involves:

- Being open-minded about others' viewpoints
- Conveying enthusiasm by how we deliver messages

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Look over this list and think about which specific behaviors you are most skillful at when you communicate. Then consider the following questions.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Which behaviors do you still need to work on?
2. How can using these specific behaviors in interpersonal interactions help you to be more competent in your communication?
3. How has this text assisted in your understanding and enactment of these skillful actions?

11.3 Strategically Managing Difficult Interactions

As we have seen throughout this text, we often encounter multiple challenges and difficulties when we interact with others. Most are minor, such as a misunderstanding between friends that requires that you provide more information to clarify your message. Others are frequent but fleeting, such as a minor lie that can protect your relationship with your boss at work or a brief spat with your romantic partner about whose turn it is to do the dishes. Others are even less frequent but have the potential to negatively affect how we communicate and can even jeopardize the quality or existence of a relationship, such as jealousy when you discover that your romantic partner is spending a great deal of time with a potential romantic rival.

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▲ Competent and mindful communication is particularly important in difficult or challenging interactions such as conflicts.

Competent and mindful communication is particularly important in these challenging interpersonal situations, but it is often more difficult to actually enact competence and mindfulness in such situations. Our emotions—especially anger and stress—can take over in these situations, causing **emotional flooding** that encourages us to act impulsively and prevents us from thinking and responding rationally (Gottman, 1994a). Challenging interactions—such as engaging in conflict, finding out that our partner has lied to us, or expressing our jealousy—are thus common situations where individuals can lose control and are less mindful of their messages and potential consequences.

So how do we face these challenges in a competent and mindful way? Interpersonal communication researchers Daniel Canary, Sandra Lakey, and Alan Sillars (2013) have created a method for strategically managing conflict that can also be applied to other difficult interactions. Canary and his colleagues (2013) argue that their method of strategically managing communication challenges is significant for three reasons:

1. It encourages individuals to adopt an ethical code of conduct when interacting with others.

2. It discourages and preempts the aggressive or violent behaviors that can sometimes arise.

3. It contributes to increased relationship satisfaction, a more stable and longer-lasting relationship, and positive relationship outcomes, such as increased trust and cooperation.

The next few sections will examine Canary and his colleagues' (2013) strategic management method in more detail. Overall, the method involves four forms of control: episode, personal, attributional, and goal.

Episode Control

The first important way to strategically manage challenging interactions is to anticipate how you will respond in difficult situations (Canary et al., 2013). The form is referred to as **episode control**, in which you can exercise influence over situations because you are more mindful in anticipation of them. If you know that particular issues or situations are triggers for you and will cause you to overreact or become emotionally flooded when you discuss them, you can anticipate the negative reactions and be more mindful about how you respond. This mindfulness, in turn, can give you pause when you are in an actual situation. You can use this spare moment to anticipate your own responses and then curb the less desirable reactions. This premeditation can prevent you from unnecessarily taking out your frustrations on people who are not directly involved in the situation.

Personal Control

The second way to be more strategically competent in challenging situations is to have faith that your efforts at being competent can have an impact. Two concepts that illustrate our power to make a difference are locus of control and efficacy. First, **locus of control (LoC)** is the extent to which we believe we are responsible for what happens to us. Having an internal LoC means that we take responsibility for our own actions, both positive and negative, and that outcomes are due to our abilities and the effort we put forth. In contrast, an external LoC puts the onus of responsibility on forces outside of us, such as when we say that something occurs due to chance or fate, or is caused by someone or something that we cannot control. Second, when a person feels that they have **efficacy**, they believe they can successfully control or manage a situation such as a challenging or difficult interaction. Clearly, having more of an internal LoC contributes to feeling greater efficacy when in a particular situation.

In terms of Canary and colleagues' (2013) strategic management method, LoC and efficacy are both parts of **personal control**, or the belief that difficult interactions can be competently managed and translated into positive outcomes. Recognizing that you have personal control is helpful, because it can empower you to try to guide how the difficult interaction unfolds. Try not to blame others or be a victim: These behaviors show that you do not believe that you have personal control over the situation. Another benefit of having personal control is that it will assist you in considering which messages will be more likely to create productive outcomes. Potentially productive messages include exchanging information, working to solve problems, and being cooperative and direct. Canary and colleagues (2013) note that "believing that one can negotiate with a high probability of success is a critically important component" to competently managing challenging interactions (p. 270).

Attributional Control

The third way that we can strategically manage difficult interactions in a more competent manner involves how these situations are interpreted by the parties who are involved. Canary and colleagues (2013) note that we make **attributions**, or explanations and reasons about what events mean and how they unfold and about who is responsible. A willingness to accept the appropriate amount of responsibility for your role in the situation will help you communicate in a more

cooperative way. In turn, the refusal to take responsibility is associated with more defensive and protective messages. **Attributional control**, which involves individuals generating explanations and attributions that do not simply blame the partner and that assume responsibility for the situation, can increase the possibility that the result of the challenging interaction will be constructive. Canary and colleagues (2013) argue that mindfulness can help individuals generate more potential attributions for their partners' behaviors. This then enables the individual to delve into deeper and more complex explanations for the situation.

Goal Control

The fourth way that we can strategically manage difficult interactions in a more competent manner is to better understand what we want to get out of an interaction when we communicate. A **goal** is an objective that an individual seeks to achieve, and goals are important when we communicate with others. In fact, most communication is goal-directed, which means we have an objective in mind when we interact with others, and we communicate in a way that best allows us to accomplish this objective. We might not always be conscious of our goals, however; we can (and often do) communicate without conscious awareness of goals, but we are later able to clearly identify our goals if someone asks us what we wished to accomplish in a particular interaction. Goals help guide communication. Specifically, they

- Help us determine how, why, when, whether, and to whom we should communicate
- Give us standards against which to assess our interaction outcomes
- Give our interactions meaning
- Help us understand and interpret others' messages (Canary et al., 2013; Dillard, 1990).

It is for these reasons that goal control is an important element of mindful communication. **Goal control** is the extent to which a communicator knows what he or she wants, as well as being aware of and sensitive to his or her interaction partner's goals (Canary et al., 2013). In essence, goal control involves being mindful about your goals because you must be aware of and thoughtfully consider what you hope to achieve ahead of time and as the interaction unfolds. Goal control thus increases your chances of communication success.

Together, the four forms of control help you create positive and helpful messages when you are in a difficult interaction. They can also increase the likelihood that you will view your partner's communication through a more positive lens. In essence, the ultimate goal is to control your communication strategies in a way that contributes to the use of more compromising and cooperative messages (Canary et al., 2013). The next sections will discuss the importance of goals and plans in interpersonal communications situations. (*IPC in the Digital Age* offers some tips on mindful behaviors when multitasking.)

IPC IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Mindfulness and Media Multitasking

The growth of accessible media and channels of communication in the last 20 years has opened up a whole host of new ways for us to relate to one another and has allowed us to be more connected than ever before. This also means there are more reasons and ways to multitask, or juggle and

(continued)

switch between more than one task at the same time. For example, you can check your Facebook page while e-mailing a work colleague and carry on a conversation with your roommate at the same time. But does our increased ability to multitask mean that we are less mindful in these interactions? In other words, are we so used to spreading our attention thin when we multitask that we don't fully concentrate on any of the interactions in which we are involved?

Amanda Ie, Chiara Haller, Ellen Langer, and Delphine Courvoisier (2012), psychology researchers at Harvard University, conducted a study to determine if multitasking while using different forms of media such as television and the Internet is related to **mindful flexibility**, or the ability to inherently know that a problem or issue can be considered from a variety of viewpoints or perspectives. In other words, mindful flexibility "assumes that there is no absolute, optimal fit between problem and solution" (Ie et al., 2012, p. 1526); rather, individuals should brainstorm and consider different options. To examine this potential relationship, Ie and her colleagues (2012) asked their participants to complete measures of how mindful they were and then take part in a multitasking exercise that involved them writing an essay and solving anagram puzzles that were provided to them via an online chat program. The researchers found that younger individuals and those for whom mindfulness was an enduring personality trait performed well on the multitasking exercise. The researchers explained that younger participants may be more adept at multitasking because they have grown up with and become accustomed to the different forms of technology that we use every day (Ie et al., 2012). Apply these findings to your own communication, and then consider the following questions. Though multitasking is a common and sometimes even expected practice today, think about how it might reduce your ability to fully concentrate on, and be mindful of, each of the tasks and interactions in which you participate.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Do you consider yourself to be a mindful person?
2. Do you think that how consistently mindful you are relates to how well you multitask?
3. Do the different media that you use to multitask (e.g., Internet, texting, talking face-to-face) impact how mindful or focused you are about each task that you are working on?

11.4 Creating, Evaluating, and Reevaluating Goals and Plans for Competent Communication

As we saw earlier in this chapter, mindfulness is a very useful technique for engaging in effective and appropriate interactions. Specifically, one way to practice mindfulness is to establish what you wish to accomplish in an interaction and then identify how you can achieve such goals. But how do we accomplish our communication goals? The most important thing we can do is create plans that help us achieve our interaction goals. **Plans** emerge directly from goals and can help an individual determine what actions or messages they should use to accomplish a particular goal (Canary et al., 2013). Plans, in other words, are the essential link between your goals, which are internal to you and involve your thoughts and feelings, and how you communicate to the external world.

For example, imagine that you are attracted to someone who frequents the same coffee shop as you do. Your goal in this situation would be to build a relationship with that person. The plan that you would employ to accomplish that goal might be to strike up a conversation one afternoon to gauge the person's potential interest in you or to ask him or her out on a date. You would then use communication to follow through with your plan. This communication might include sitting at an adjacent table one day and striking up a conversation about the book he or she is

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▲ If you are attracted to someone, your goal might be to build a relationship, and your initial plan for accomplishing the goal might be to strike up a conversation. But goals and plans are not static—shifts may occur as a result of interactions.

reading. As you talk, you are likely evaluating how he or she responds to you. Does the person seem interested in what you say? Or does he or she seem distracted and spend most of the time checking his or her phone or continuing to read the book? As this interaction continues, your goals will likely change. Perhaps your initial goal was to determine if the person was interested in you, but once you accomplish this goal you might move on to your next goal: asking the person to spend time together in a different environment. Or, if the person is clearly not interested in you, you may shift gears to get out of the interaction as quickly as possible and avoid embarrassment. Thus, your goals and plans are not static; they are dynamic and malleable in response to the messages exchanged between communicators. This means that goal control and being mindful involves creating goals and plans before an interaction and then evaluating and reassessing these goals and plans during and after the interaction.

Based on what you have learned in this text, you have four essential goals to becoming a competent communicator:

1. Focus on competence
2. Emphasize empathy
3. Decrease communication apprehension
4. Control verbal abuse and aggression

Achieving these goals in your interpersonal interactions requires knowledge, motivation, and skill. When you employ clear and mindful plans that carry out these goals, you have an increased chance of being both effective—accomplishing specific goals via mindfully constructed plans—and appropriate. Further, these strategies are relevant to and useful in a variety of interpersonal communication contexts and situations, including close relationships, business and professional settings, mediated channels, and challenging interpersonal interactions.

Focusing on Communication Competence

We have emphasized the importance of communication competence throughout this text. Your decision to read this text indicates that you are motivated to become a more competent and skilled communicator. Learning more about interpersonal communication in general and communication competence in particular can enhance your communication skill. Make use of the easy-to-implement strategies provided at the end of each chapter, techniques based on research findings from communication experts; these can help you develop and hone your communication skills. You can implement such skills and abilities in different contexts, which suggests that focusing on competence can offer you greater flexibility and success in your interactions, no matter what the topic of conversation or the communication partner. Thus, competence is the first goal to focus on if you want to be a more effective and appropriate communicator.

Emphasizing Empathy

In Chapter 8, we discussed empathy, or putting yourself in another person's shoes, as an important way to maintain our interpersonal relationships. Empathic communication is also a component of competent communication (Query & Kreps, 1996; Wiemann, 1977). Indeed, Rubin and Morreale (2000) note that feeling and conveying empathy is a helpful communication technique when individuals want to relate to others. Developing a capacity to be empathic is also a recommended training intervention in individual and couples' therapy (Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, & Orsillo, 2007). Further, when healthcare workers were more empathic at work, they experienced lower stress and reduced job burnout (Wright et al., 2010).

Empathy is also related to mindfulness. Karen Wachs and James Cordova (2007) explain that mindfulness promotes empathy in three ways:

1. Mindful individuals are receptive and open about their own experiences and curious about the experiences of others.
2. Mindful individuals are less distracted by their own thoughts and experiences and thus devote more attention to others' perspectives.
3. Mindful individuals are receptive to other experiences and perspectives and thus become more compassionate and empathic.

More specifically empathy is positively related to mindfulness, the ability to take different perspectives, and the ability to control one's anger and aggression (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Empathy is thus an important goal to pursue when you communicate with others; be willing to take others' perspectives and engage in active listening, consciously making an effort to hear and comprehend what the other person is saying.

Decreasing Communication Apprehension

As we discussed in Chapter 5 communication apprehension is a very common barrier to skillful and competent communication. Recall that communication apprehension (CA) is fear and anxiety experienced either during or before communication situations (McCroskey, 1977). In Chapter 5, we noted that CA can be a relatively stable personality trait. However, you can work to reduce your CA in three ways:

1. Be aware of how apprehensive you are and whether you have more or less apprehension in different situations or interactions.
2. Seek out opportunities to learn and practice communication skills.
3. For more serious instances of CA, reach out to others for help.

If you feel that your communication apprehension creates unwanted challenges or that it gets in the way of competent communication, items 1 and 2 listed above may help. Specifically, we hope that this text provides you with the information that you need to identify your CA levels and the skills that you need to feel confident as you embark on communication opportunities that allow you to learn and practice those skills. In the *Self-Test* feature, we provide the CA self-test that first appeared in Chapter 5 so you can reassess your current levels of CA and compare the results.

SELF-TEST

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension

This instrument, often referred to as the PRCA-24, is composed of 24 statements concerning feelings about communicating with others. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you:

1 for *strongly disagree*
2 for *disagree*
3 for *neutral*
4 for *agree*
5 for *strongly agree*

1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
8. Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.
9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
15. Ordinarily, I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
16. Ordinarily, I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Scoring

Group discussion: 18 − (scores for items 2, 4, & 6) + (scores for items 1, 3, & 5)
Meetings: 18 − (scores for items 8, 9, & 12) + (scores for items 7, 10, & 11)
Dyadic: 18 − (scores for items 14, 16, & 17) + (scores for items 13, 15, & 18)
Public speaking: 18 − (scores for items 19, 21, & 23) + (scores for items 20, 22, & 24)

Group discussion score: _____
Dyadic score: _____
Meetings score: _____
Public speaking score: _____
To obtain your total score for the PRCA, simply add your sub-scores together: _____

(continued)

Scores can range from 24–120. Scores below 51 represent people who have very low CA. Scores between 51–80 represent people with average CA. Scores above 80 represent people who have high levels of trait CA.

Norms for the PRCA-24

The following norms are based on over 40,000 college students. Data from over 3,000 nonstudent adults in a national sample provided virtually identical norms, within 0.20 for all scores.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	High	Low
Total	65.6	15.3	> 80	< 51
Group	15.4	4.8	> 20	< 11
Meeting	16.4	4.2	> 20	< 13
Dyad	14.2	3.9	> 18	< 11
Public speaking	19.3	5.1	> 24	< 14

Source: Self-test from McCroskey, J. (1982). *Introduction to rhetorical communication* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc. Printed and electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Consider Your Results

1. Did your score change? If so, did it increase or decrease?
2. If you have a lower communication apprehension score now than you previously did, what from this course might have contributed to you feeling less apprehensive and fearful about your communication with others?
3. How did you integrate information from this course and text into your own interactions?

Controlling Verbal Abuse and Aggression

One of the major challenges that we can face in interpersonal communication is verbal abuse and aggression, which we described as a "dark side" communication behavior in Chapter 9. Verbal abuse occurs when words are used to threaten or harm another person. Verbal aggression is a specific form of verbal abuse that involves attacking who an individual is as a person rather than his or her position on an issue (Infante, 1987). Verbal aggression and abuse can occur in person or online, in the form of cyberbullying. Consider again the scenario presented at the beginning of this chapter: Kim and Pat's conversation could have continued in a less competent way if Kim had called Pat selfish. If this had escalated and Kim had threatened to break up with Pat for not listening to her, this would be a clear example of verbal aggression.

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▲ Verbal aggression can be damaging to both individuals in an interaction and can harm the relationship. Competent communicators think critically before speaking or acting, using the moment to evaluate how their messages may affect others.

Verbal aggression is an incompetent way to communicate because it is damaging to both individuals in an interaction and the relationship that they share; it can also teach observers, such as children, that it is an acceptable way to act (Wigley, 2008). However, Charles Wigley (2008) notes that there is one important method that can minimize verbally aggressive behaviors: learn more constructive arguing techniques via communication skills training. This training can encourage individuals to communicate based on critical thinking rather than irrational emotional responses. Indeed, across different studies, being trained in communication courses such as argumentation and public speaking and taking part in activities such as debate and forensics significantly increased individuals' critical thinking skills (Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Louden, 1999). Encouraging individuals to think about how what they are saying might hurt their interpersonal relationships, or at least make them more aware of the impact of their aggression, is an additional method for reducing verbally aggressive and abusive behaviors (Wigley, 2008). Critical thinking and considerate message use are also important and helpful techniques for those who wish to become competent communicators.

Summary and Resources

In this chapter, we bring together information from throughout the text that will help you become a more successful and competent communicator. We discussed three ways to evaluate an interaction as either successful or unsuccessful. First, we must create shared meaning with the other communicator, such that you both mutually understand and agree upon what is being discussed. Second, we can use satisfaction with the communication to assess overall communication success. An important part of communication success, and thus communication satisfaction, is learning to consider the other communicator's perspective in the interaction. Third, your sense of communication competence will also help you gauge whether or not your interaction was successful.

How can you set and manage communication expectations across interactions? The strategies that we offer at the end of each chapter generally suggest that being aware of your and others' communication, practicing the knowledge and skills you have learned from this text, and considering others' perceptions of you in relation to how you communicate will be beneficial. They can also help you be a more flexible communicator and help you adapt to specific communication situations, much like a chameleon would. Mindfulness can also help you set and manage expectations about your interactions with others.

When faced with challenging communication situations, it is important to try to stave off emotional flooding. In addition, you can strategically manage difficult interactions by engaging in episode, personal, attributional, and goal control, which can result in more competent communication. These forms of control can help you be more mindful and communicate in a more constructive and compromising way.

Forming communication goals and plans that we can use to accomplish those goals are also important tools for competent communicators. Four specific goals can be used to increase communication competence. First, focus on the mechanics of competence. Second, emphasize empathy by considering the situation from others' viewpoints. Third, work to decrease your communication apprehension so that it is at a level that doesn't inhibit your communication. Fourth and finally, control verbally abusive and aggressive messages by being a more critical thinker and considering how what you communicate can impact your relationship with the other person.

Key Terms

attributional control A means of managing difficult interactions by generating explanations and attributions that do not simply blame the partner and do not deny one's own responsibility.

attributions Explanations and reasons about what events mean and how they unfold and about who is responsible.

basic communication skills The minimal competencies that represent the knowledge, attitudes, and abilities needed to function effectively in business and professional settings and in society in general.

communication satisfaction (CS) The positive outcome that is derived from a communication situation where goals and expectations are successfully fulfilled.

efficacy The belief that one can successfully manage or control a situation.

emotional flooding A situation that occurs when one's emotions take over, encouraging the person to act impulsively and preventing the individual from thinking and responding rationally.

episode control A means of managing a difficult interaction by exercising influence over the situation by mindfully anticipating it.

goal An objective that an individual seeks to achieve.

goal control A means of managing a difficult interaction by knowing what one wants while being aware of and sensitive to an interaction partner's goals.

intergroup communication The extent to which our identification with different groups dictates and shapes how we interact with others.

locus of control (LoC) The extent to which we believe we are responsible for what happens to us.

mindful flexibility The ability to implicitly know that a problem can be considered from a variety of viewpoints or perspectives.

mindfulness A state of alertness and awareness in which an individual focuses on and processes information derived from the present situation to determine how to act.

mindlessness A state of reduced attention in which there is minimal processing of information.

personal control A means of managing a difficult interaction by believing that difficult interactions can be competently managed and translated into positive outcomes.

perspective-taking An aspect of empathy that involves being able to adopt another person's viewpoint.

plans The essential link between our goals, which are internal, and how we communicate to the external world.

Critical Thinking and Discussion Questions

1. Consider a recent conversation you had that you feel went well. Why do you think the conversation was successful? Is creating shared meaning, communication satisfaction, or communication competence most important and why? Does your evaluation of an interaction depend on who you are talking to, what is being discussed, and/or the context in which it is taking place?

2. Think about a difficult interaction you have recently been involved in. How did the four types of control—episode, personal, attributional, and goal—fit into this interaction? How might exercising these types of control make a similar interaction go more smoothly in the future?

3. When you communicate with others, how conscious are you of your goals and plans? How can being more mindful of your goals and how they are related to communication help you be a more competent and successful communicator?

4. Based on your self-test results from this and earlier chapters, are you comfortable with your current levels of communication competence and communication apprehension? If not, how might you continue to work on your communication to get to a place where you are satisfied with your communication with others?

5. Consider the text as a whole. How do you think your interpersonal communication has changed as a result of what you have learned? What information have you taken away from this content that you can continue to apply in your own interpersonal interactions?