

# Skill in theory: Communication as skilled performance

*Owen Hargie*

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

- a form of joint economic activity or social exchange in which both sides seek rewards and try to minimise costs, which may be in the form of money, services, goods, status, or affection (Sletta, 1992)
- transactional episodes during which individuals play roles akin to acting as either parent, adult, or child, and respond to others at one of these three levels (Hargaden & Sills, 2002)
- a type of dramatic performance composed of major scenes, in which everyone has a role to play with expected lines, some have more prominent roles than others, the actors behave differently 'front stage' as opposed to 'back-stage', there are various 'props' in the form of furniture and fittings, there is a storyline, and all of this changes from one 'production' to the next (Hare & Blumberg, 1988).

These are just three of the approaches that have been developed as templates for the interpretation of interpersonal communication. In this chapter and in Chapter 2, another such approach will be presented, namely, the perspective that social behaviour can be conceptualised as a

form of skilled performance, and that it is therefore meaningful to compare socially skilled behaviour (such as interviewing or negotiating) with motor skill behaviour (such as playing tennis or operating a machine). In further pursuit of this analogy, it is argued that the models and methods successfully employed for over 100 years in the study of motor skill can usefully be applied to interpersonal skill. The validity of this comparison, and the accompanying implications for the study of social behaviour, will be investigated.

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

## MOTOR SKILLS

The study of perceptual-motor skill has a long and rich tradition within psychology. Such skills, which involve coordinated physical movements of the body, are widely employed in human performance, and they include, for example, eating, dressing, walking, writing, riding a bicycle, and playing golf. Welford (1968) traced the scientific study of motor skill back to 1820, when the astronomer Bessel examined differences between individuals in a task that involved the recording of star-transit times. However, direct psychological interest in the nature of motor skill really began with explorations by Bryan and Harter (1897) into the learning of Morse code, followed by studies on movement by Woodworth (1899), and investigations by Book (1908) into the learning of typewriting skills. Since this early research, the literature on perceptual-motor skill has become voluminous, and indeed this area remains an important focus of study.

Numerous definitions of 'motor skill' have been put forward. Marteniuk (1976, p. 13) stated that 'a perceptual-motor skill refers to those activities involved in moving the body or body parts to accomplish a specified objective', while Kerr (1982, p. 5), in similar vein, iterated that 'a motor skill is any muscular activity which is directed to a specific objective'. These definitions emphasise the goal-directed nature of skilled behaviour, which is regarded as intentional, rather than chance or unintentional. As Whiting (1975, p. 4) pointed out: 'Whatever processes may be involved in *human* skill learning and performance, the concern is with *intentional* attempts to carry out motor acts, which will bring about predetermined results.'

A further distinction has been made between innate behaviour, such as breathing and coughing, and learned behaviour. For behaviour to be regarded as skilled, it must have been learned. This feature is highlighted by a number of theorists. Thus, 'motor skill' was defined by Knapp (1963, p. 4) as 'the learned ability to bring about predetermined results with maximum certainty', while Magill (1989, p. 7) noted that skills 'all have in common the property that each needs to be learned in order to be properly executed'.

Other aspects were covered by Cratty (1964, p. 10), who described motor skill as 'reasonably complex motor performance ... [denoting] ... that some learning has taken place and that a smoothing or integration of behavior has resulted'. Skilled behaviour is therefore more complex than instinctive or reflexive movements, and consists of an integrated hierarchy of smaller component behaviours, each of which contributes in part to the overall act. In this respect, Summers (1989, p. 49) viewed skilled performance as requiring 'the organization of highly refined patterns of movements in relation to some specific goal'. Two remaining features of skill were emphasised by Proctor and Dutta (1995, p. 18), namely, the role of practice and the ease of operation: 'Skill is goal-directed, well-organized behavior that is acquired through practice and performed with economy of effort.'

As these definitions indicate, while there are commonalities, theorists tend to emphasise different features, so that Irion (1966, p. 2), in tracing the history of this research, concluded: 'The field of motor skills does not suffer from a lack of variety of approach. Indeed, the approaches and methods are so extremely various that there is some difficulty in defining, in a sensible way, what the field of motor skills is.' Robb (1972, p. 1), in discussing the acquisition of motor skill, reached a similar conclusion, stating: 'The problems associated with how one acquires skill are numerous and complex. For that matter, the term *skill* is itself an illusive and confusing word.'

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

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

## INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Given the vast amount of attention devoted to the analysis and evaluation of motor skill performance, it is rather surprising that it was some considerable time before psychologists began to investigate seriously the nature of social skill. Welford (1980) attributed the growth of interest in this field to the initial work of Crossman. In a report on the effects of automation on management and social relations in industry, Crossman (1960) noted that a crucial feature in the work of the operator of an automatic plant

was the ability to use social skills to communicate with co-workers. He also noted that no real efforts had yet been made to identify or analyse these skills. Crossman subsequently contacted Michael Argyle, a social psychologist at the University of Oxford, and together they carried out a study of social skill, explicitly designed to investigate the similarities between man-machine and man-man interactions. In this way, the first parallels were drawn between motor and social skills.

In 1967, Fitts and Posner, in their discussion of technical skills, emphasised that social skills were also important. In the same year, Argyle and Kendon published a paper in which they related the features of motor skill, as identified by Welford, directly to the analysis of social skill. They proposed a definition of skill as comprising 'an organized, coordinated activity, in relation to an object or a situation, that involves a chain of sensory, central and motor mechanisms. One of its main characteristics is that the performance, or stream of action, is continuously under the control of the sensory input ... [and] ... the outcomes of actions are continuously matched against some criterion of achievement or degree of approach to a goal' (Argyle & Kendon, 1967, p. 56). While recognising some of the important differences between motor and social performance, they argued that this definition could be applied in large part to the study of social skill.

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

In one sense, this is a term that is widely employed and generally comprehended, since it has already been used in this chapter and presumably understood by the reader. Indeed, the terms 'communication skill', 'social skill', and 'interpersonal skill' have entered the lexicon of everyday use. For example, many job advertisements stipulate that applicants should have high levels of social, or communication, skill. In this global sense, social skills can be defined as the skills employed when communicating at an interpersonal level with other people. This definition is not very illuminating, however, since it describes what these skills are *used for* rather than what they *are*. It is rather like defining a bicycle as something that gets you from one place to another. As illustrated in the next section, attempts to provide a more technical, insightful definition of social skill are manifold.

## DEFINITIONS OF INTERPERSONAL SKILL

In reviewing this field, Phillips (1978) concluded that a person was socially skilled according to 'The extent to which he or she can communicate with others, in a manner that fulfils one's rights, requirements, satisfactions, or obligations to a reasonable degree without damaging the other person's similar rights, satisfactions or obligations, and hopefully shares these rights, etc. with others in free and open exchange' (p. 13). This definition emphasised the macroelements of social encounters, in terms

of reciprocation between participants, and focused upon the outcome of behaviour rather than the skills per se (although Phillips also noted that knowing how to behave in a range of situations was part of social skill). A similar approach was adopted by Combs and Slaby (1977, p. 162), who defined social skill as 'the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial, or beneficial primarily to others'.

Although again highlighting outcome, this definition differed from that of Phillips in that it is less clear about to whom the skilled performance should be of benefit. Both definitions view social skill as an ability, which the individual may possess to a greater or lesser extent. Kelly, Fincham and Beach (2003, p. 724) linked ability to performance when they pointed out that 'Communication skills refer to the ability to realize communicative goals while behaving in a socially appropriate manner.' A similar focus has been emphasised by other theorists. Spence (1980) encompassed both the outcome or goals of social interaction and the behaviour of the interactors when she defined social skills as 'those components of social behaviour which are necessary to ensure that individuals achieve their desired outcome from a social interaction' (p. 9). In like vein, Kelly (1982, p. 3) stated: 'Social skills can essentially be viewed as behavioral pathways or avenues to an individual's goals.' Ellis (1980, p. 79) combined the goal-directed nature and the interactive component when he pointed out: 'By social skills I refer to sequences of individual behaviour which are integrated in some way with the behaviour of one or more others and which measure up to some pre-determined criterion or criteria.' More specific aspects of situational features were noted by Cartledge and Milburn (1980, p. 7), who viewed social skills as 'behaviors that are emitted in response to environmental events presented by another person or persons (for example, cues, demands, or other communications) and are followed by positive environmental responses'.

Several theorists have restricted their definitions to the behavioural domain. Rinn and Markle (1979) conceived of social skill as a repertoire of verbal and non-verbal behaviours, as did Wilkinson and Canter (1982, p. 3), who stated that 'Verbal and nonverbal behaviour are therefore the means by which people communicate with others and they constitute the basic elements of social skill.' Curran (1979), in discussing definitional problems, actually argued that the construct of social skill should be limited to motoric behaviour. He based his argument on the fact that the behavioural domain is still being charted and that this task should be completed before expanding the analysis into other domains. However, this emphasis on behaviourism would not be acceptable to many of those involved in research, theory, and practice in social skills who regard other aspects of human performance (such as cognition and emotion) as being important, both in determining behaviour and understanding the communication process.

A final defining feature was recognised by Becker, Heimberg and Bellack (1987, p. 9), who highlighted that 'To perform skillfully, the individual must be able to identify the emotions or intent expressed by the other person and make sophisticated judgments about the form and timing of the appropriate response.' Thus, the skilled individual needs to take cognisance of the others involved in the encounter. This involves perceptual acumen and perspective-taking ability, together with a capacity to mesh one's responses meaningfully, and at apposite moments, with those of others.

An evaluation of these definitions reveals a remarkable similarity with the position relating to motor skill, in that there are common elements, but no uniform agreement about the exact nature of interpersonal skill. One problem here is that any detailed study of higher-order skill will involve a long process. There is a well established '10-year rule' in relation to the learning of complex skill routines, in that the highest level of performance in any field is only attained after 10 years of concerted practice and training (e.g. Bryan & Harter 1899; Ericsson, 1996a). Top chess players, Olympic athletes, international soccer players, celebrated musicians, etc., will all have engaged in at least a decade of intensive practice. It is very probable that the 10-year rule also applies to complex social skills (negotiating, teaching, counselling, etc.). This makes analysis and synthesis problematic. While there has been study of how various types of motor skill performance change over time (Ericsson, 1996b), there is a paucity of such research in relation to interpersonal skill.

In the interpersonal domain, Spitzberg and Dillard (2002, p. 89) concluded that 'what constitutes skill, even in well-defined contexts, is difficult to specify'. Phillips (1980, p. 160) aptly summed up the state of affairs that still pertains: 'The simple facts about all social skills definitions are these: they are ubiquitous, varied, often simple, located in the social/interpersonal exchange, are the stuff out of which temporal and/or long-range social interactions are made, underlie and exemplify normative social behaviour and, in their absence, are what we loosely call psychopathology.' It is also useful to consider the rationale provided by Segrin and Givertz (2003, p. 136) in relation to this issue:

A clear, comprehensive, and widely accepted definition of social skills may never come to fruition. Social skills are complex and, at least to some extent, influenced by person and situation. Trying to define social skills in a sentence is like trying to define some complex motor skill, such as being a good baseball player, in one sentence. There are many components to these skills.

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

It is hardly surprising therefore that differing definitions of what constitutes social skill have proliferated within the literature. Any definition must, of necessity, be a simplification of what is an intricate, multifarious, and multifaceted process. This

## COMMUNICATION AS SKILLED PERFORMANCE

is not to say that definitions are without value: at the very least, they set parameters as to what should be included in the study of social skill and, therefore, act as a template for legitimate investigation in this field. Moreover, while definitions vary in emphasis, the defining features of skill can be charted. Thus, Michelson, Sugai, Wood and Kazdin (1983) identified six main elements as being central to the concept of social skills; namely, that they:

- 1     are learned
- 2     are composed of specific verbal and non-verbal behaviours
- 3     entail appropriate initiations and responses
- 4     maximise available rewards from others
- 5     require appropriate timing and control of specific behaviours
- 6     are influenced by prevailing contextual factors.

Given the above parameters, the definition adopted in this book is that social skill involves *a process in which the individual implements a set of goal-directed, inter-related, situationally appropriate social behaviours, which are learned and controlled.* This definition emphasises six main features.

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

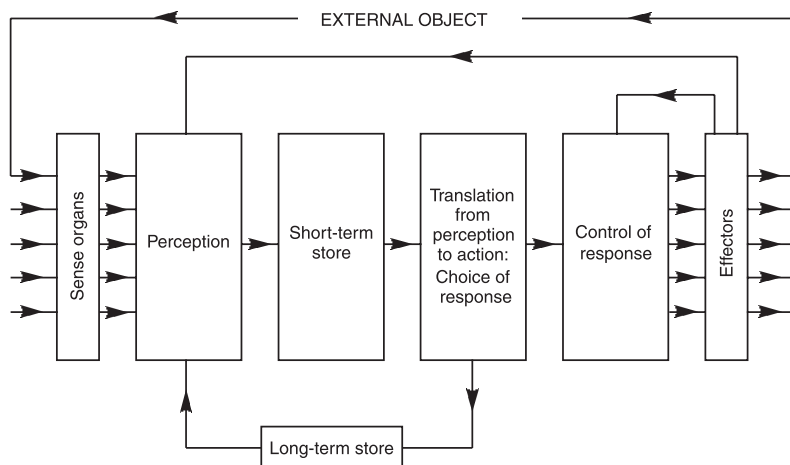
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THIS CHAPTER FURTHER EXPLORES the analogy between motor skill and social skill, as discussed in Chapter 1. In particular, it examines the central processes involved in the implementation of skilled behaviour, and evaluates the extent to which a motor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

## **MOTOR SKILL MODEL**

Several models of motor skill, all having central areas in common, have been put forward by different theorists. An early example of this type of model was the one presented by Welford (1965), in the shape of a block diagram representing the operation of perceptual motor skills, in which the need for the coordination of a number of processes in the performance of skilled behaviour is highlighted. As shown in Figure 2.1, this represents the individual as receiving information about the outside world via the sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, hands, etc.). A range of such perceptions is received, and this incoming information is held in the short-term memory store until sufficient data have been obtained to enable a decision to be made about an appropriate response. As explained by action assembly theory (Greene, 2000), responses are gradually assembled by the individual, taking into account information





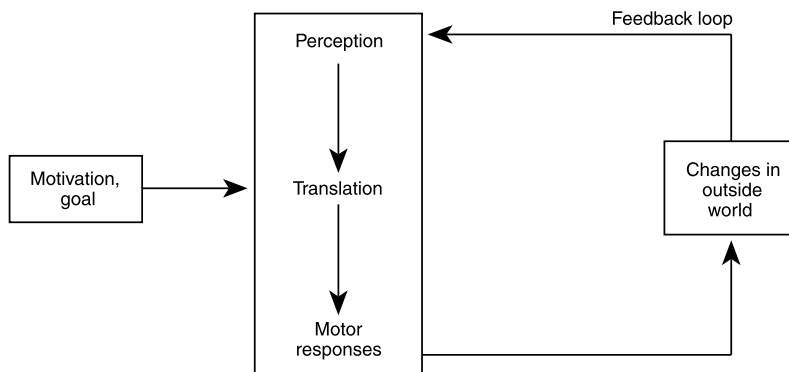
**Figure 2.1** Welford's model of the human sensory-motor system

stored in long-term memory, in terms of previous responses, outcomes associated with these responses, and impinging situational factors (see Chapter 9 for further discussion on the role of memory in skilled performance). After all of this data has been sifted, a response is made by the effector system (hands, feet, voice, and so on). In turn, the outcome of this response is monitored by the sense organs and perceived by the individual, thereby providing feedback that can be used to adjust future responses.

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

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

## AN OPERATIONAL MODEL OF COMMUNICATIVE PERFORMANCE



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

monitored. Cool air then enters the room, making the temperature more pleasant (changes in outside world). This change in temperature is available as feedback that can be perceived by the individual, to enable goal achievement to be evaluated.

A simple example of the application of this motor skill model to a social context would be a woman meeting a man whom she finds very attractive (motivation), and wanting to find out his name (goal). To do so, various plans of action are translated (e.g. ask directly, give own name and pause, ask someone to effect an introduction). One of these is then carried out, such as the direct request: 'What's your name?' (response). This will result in some response from the other person: 'Norris' (changes in the outside world). His response is available as feedback, which she hears while also observing his non-verbal reactions to her (perception). She can then move on to the next goal (e.g. follow-up response, or terminate discussion).

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

Subsequently, few attempts were made to expand the basic model to account for the interactive nature of social encounters. Pendleton and Furnham (1980), in critically examining the relationship between motor and social skill, did put forward an expanded model, albeit applied directly to doctor-patient interchanges. Furnham (1983) later pointed out that, although there were problems with this interactive model, it was a 'step in the right direction'. In the earlier editions of the present book, a model was presented which built upon the Pendleton and Furnham extension, in an attempt to cater for many of the special features of social skill. This model was subsequently revised and adapted by Millar, Crute and Hargie (1992); Dickson, Hargie and Morrow (1997); Hargie and Tourish (1999); and Hargie and Dickson (2004). These revised

models all attempted to account for the differences between social and motor performance as discussed in Chapter 1.

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

GOALS AND MOTIVATION

As discussed in Chapter 1, a key feature of skilled performance is its goal-directed, intentional nature. The starting point in this model of social interaction is therefore

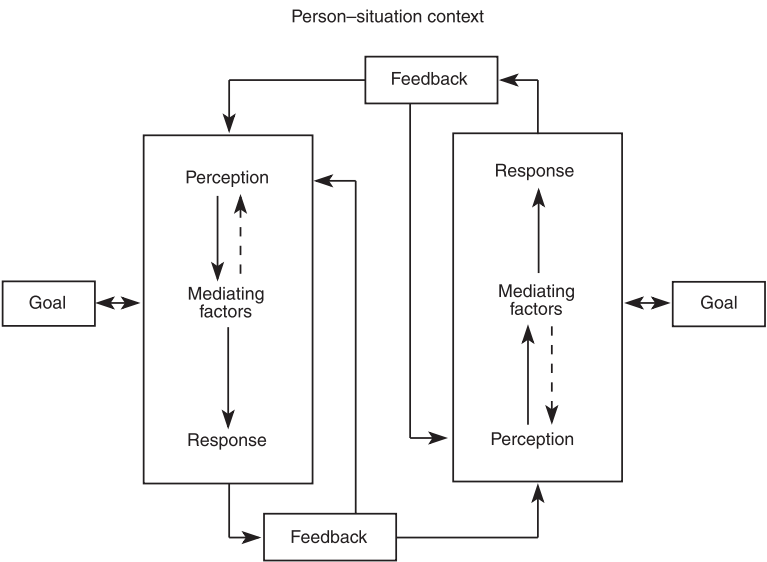
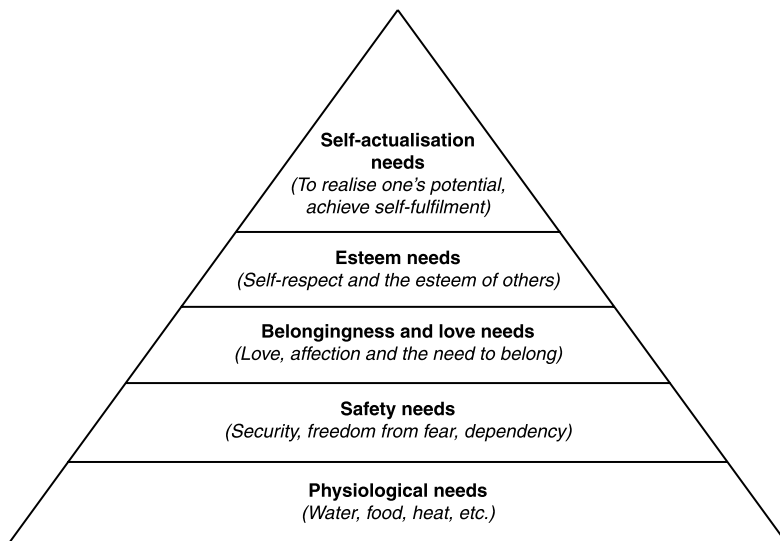


Figure 2.3 Model of skilled communicative performance

## AN OPERATIONAL MODEL OF COMMUNICATIVE PERFORMANCE

the goal being pursued, and the related motivation to achieve it. The link between needs, motivation, and goal is also recognised. As pointed out by Slater (1997, p. 137), 'The presence of various goals or motivations changes the nature of affect and cognitions generated, and of subsequent behaviors.' In essence, goals shape behaviour, while motivation determines the degree of commitment to pursue a particular goal. Carlson (1990, p. 404) described motivation as 'a driving force that moves us to a particular action. . . . Motivation can affect the *nature* of an organism's behavior, the *strength* of its behavior, and the *persistence* of its behavior.' The motivation that an individual has to pursue a particular goal is, in turn, influenced by needs. There are many needs that must be met in order to enable the individual to live life to the fullest. Different psychologists have posited various categorisations, but the best known hierarchy of human needs remains the one put forward by Maslow (1954), as shown in Figure 2.4.

At the bottom of this hierarchy, and therefore most important, are those physiological needs essential for the survival of the individual, including the need for water, food, heat, and so on. Once these have been met, the next most important needs are those connected with the safety and security of the individual, including protection from physical harm and freedom from fear. These are met in society by various methods, such as the establishment of police forces, putting security chains on doors, or purchasing insurance policies. At the next level are belonging and love needs, such as the desire for a mate, wanting to be accepted by others, and striving to avoid loneliness or rejection. Getting married, having a family, or joining a club, society, or some form of group, are all means whereby these needs are satisfied.



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

# **Non-verbal behaviour as communication: Approaches, issues and research**

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**I**N THIS CHAPTER, WE survey a large cross-disciplinary literature on non-verbal communication. After placing the study of non-verbal behaviour in historical perspective, we highlight the major approaches that have guided scientific explorations. Non-verbal communication can be understood best in relation to the settings in which it occurs. Settings are defined in terms of both the varying roles taken by actors within societies and the diverse cultures in which expressions and gestures are learned. Based on an example of research conducted in a laboratory simulation of international politics, we develop implications for the themes and techniques that can be used to guide analyses of behaviour as it occurs *in situ*.

## **NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOUR IN PERSPECTIVE**

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

Examples of this phenomenon abound. For instance, in psychology,

Gentner and Grudin (1985) undertook a review of a sample of theoretical contributions to the field published in *Psychological Review* between the years 1894 and 1975. From the 68 theoretical papers they reviewed, they were able to identify 265 distinct mental metaphors. They defined a mental metaphor as 'a nonliteral comparison in which either the mind as a whole or some particular aspect of the mind (ideas, processes, etc.) is likened to or explained in terms of a nonliteral domain' (p. 182). These metaphors were all introduced by their contributors as ways of understanding the field. They were often based on explicit comparisons, such as James' 'stream of consciousness', but also were frequently based on subtly implied, extended comparisons only identifiable from broad sections of text. Gentner and Grudin identified four categories of analogy which characterised the period – spatial, animate-being, neural, and systems metaphors – and found clear trends in metaphor preference and rates of usage over time.

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

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

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

## **NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOUR AS COMMUNICATION**

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

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

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

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

In an ever-increasing manner, tests of hypotheses derived, at least in part, from evolutionary psychology can be found in the research literature on non-verbal behaviour and communication. In a field of enquiry where few general descriptions fail to cite Darwin's (1872) book on the expression of emotions as a starting point for the scientific investigation of non-verbal behaviour, the current increased influence of evolutionary psychology and its search for evidence of adaptation has reinforced interest and work in this area. In 2003, two issues of the *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* were devoted to research guided by this perspective. As pointed out by Zebrowitz (2003), the studies in the issues 'take an evolutionary approach well beyond the domain of emotional expressions' (p. 133). The impact of evolutionary psychology can be seen across a number of research domains (e.g. social, developmental, cognitive-neuroscience) and is discussed as a primary influence in many contemporary models of non-verbal communication. However, this approach is problematic when it neglects the impact of more immediate situational factors.

The perceptually based (cf. Gibson, 1979) ecological approach of Zebrowitz (Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997; Zebrowitz, 2003) incorporates a focus on proximal

elements and mechanisms alongside an assessment of behaviour tied to the survival of our species. In an additional commentary on evolutionary psychology and its impact on non-verbal research, Montepare (2003) echoes the need to include proximal (or situational) along with distal (or historical) influences when one studies non-verbal communication.

A related metaphor comparing non-verbal actions, especially accidents and parapraxes, to a *riddle* or *obscure text*, has been employed by psychodynamic investigators. Indeed, Freud (1905/1938, 1924) argued that such actions are usually meaningful and can often be recognised as such by a person. At the same time, Freud acknowledged that people frequently deny the significance of gestural-parapraxic actions, leaving the analyst in a quandry with respect to the validity of interpretation. Freud offered a number of interpretive strategies, including articulation with the person's life context and delayed verification as approaches to this problem. The influence of this psychodynamic perspective continues to be seen in subsequent examples of psychotherapeutic techniques that incorporate a specific focus on non-verbal behaviour (e.g., Rogers' (1961) focus on examining congruence between non-verbal and verbal expression, Perls' (1969) use of non-verbal expression as an interpretive tool in gestalt psychology). Recent data have revealed that the ability to note verbal-non-verbal inconsistency appears to be already well developed by the time we reach 4–5 years of age (Eskritt & Lee, 2003).

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

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

A third approach to the behaviour as communication analogy has been provided by the careful explication of non-verbal behaviour as *code* metaphor. Developed most extensively in Birdwhistell's (1970) analogy with structural linguistics and Weiner et al.'s (1972) comparison with communication engineering, the central concern rests with the detailed, molecular examination of the structure of the code itself, modes (that is, channels) of transmission, and accuracy-utility of communication. Conventional appreciation is essential to accuracy and efficiency, as auction applications, stock and commodities trading, athletic coaching, and social-political etiquette and protocol applications may attest (Schefflen & Schefflen, 1972). Levels of communication (for instance, messages and metamessages), channel comparisons, sending and receiving



## NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOUR AS COMMUNICATION

strategies, and accessibility of the intention–code–channel–code–interpretation sequence as an orderly, linear process are all designed to emphasise the systematic, objective, and mechanistic features of the metaphor (Druckman et al., 1982). Indeed, the utilisation of non-verbal behaviour as metamessage is very informative, if not essential, in distinguishing ironic from literal meaning. This is perhaps especially the case for channels that allow for relatively fine-grained differentiation of non-verbal behaviour (e.g. facial expression, paralinguistic cues).

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

While this analogy clearly descends from mime, dance, and dramatic stage direction (Spiegel & Machotka, 1974; Poyatos, 1983), the approach has been most skilfully developed by Goffman (1959, 1969), Baumeister (1982), and DePaulo (1992) as both expressive form (that is, identity and situation presentation) and rhetorical form (that is, persuasion, impression management, and tactical positioning). The particularly fruitful features of this analogy appear to be the crafted, holistic, completely situated, forward-flowing nature of expression, with emphasis on recognisable skill, authenticity, and purpose. Strategy, guile, and deception are important aspects of this analogy, and subtlety and complexity abound (Scheibe, 1979; Schlenker, 1980; DePaulo, Wetzel, Sternglanz & Wilson, 2003).

# Questioning

*David Dickson and Owen Hargie*

**Q**UESTION ASKING AND ANSWERING is one of the most prevalent and readily identifiable features of talk. Accordingly, Fritzley and Lee (2003, p. 1297) described questioning as a 'major form of speech act in interpersonal communication', while Stenstroem (1988, p. 304), in similar vein, reflected, 'It is difficult to imagine a conversation without questions and responses.' Being prosaic, however, should not be mistaken for being trivial. While at a surface level questioning seems to be a straightforward feature of communication, deeper analysis, at functional, structural, and textual levels, reveals questioning to be a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, as we shall illustrate in this chapter. Questions are principal moving parts in the engine of social interaction. Hence, the skilful use of questions is a potent device for initiating, sustaining, and directing conversation. For Hawkins and Power (1999, p. 235), 'To ask a question is to apply one of the most powerful tools in communication.' Questions are prominently positioned in what transpires during many interpersonal encounters. They can take several forms, be one of a number of possible types, and serve a range of intended purposes (Dickson, 1987). While we typically think of questions as being posed verbally, there are also non-verbal options. For example, someone can be brought into play with a quizzical look. When using American Sign Language, Crystal (1997) explained how the act of asking a question can be signalled facially by, for instance, raising eyebrows and tilting the head slightly back. Questions, then, may be non-verbal signals urging another to respond, although in this chapter we will concentrate on those that take a verbal form.

As far as question type is concerned, there is no one commonly agreed typology according to which instances can be neatly categorised.

Some questions are blatantly interrogative ('*Where did you leave the key?*'), some declarative ('*You appreciate what this will mean?*'), while others take an imperative form ('*Tell me more?*'). Furthermore, questions can be classed, *inter alia*, as open, wh-questions, closed, tag, leading, or multiple. More will be said of these later. As far as purpose served in posing a question is concerned, getting information most readily springs to mind. Heritage (2002, p. 1427), for instance, highlighted this usage when he wrote, 'In its most elemental form, a "question" is a form of social action, designed to seek information and accomplished in a turn at talk by means of interrogative syntax.' But interrogative intent can also be signalled in other ways. *Prosodic questions* are 'declarative sentences containing question cues that may be intonational, or these utterances are marked as questions by means of a variety of contextual cues' (Woodbury 1984, p. 203). Furthermore, people ask questions to which they already have the detail requested (as when a prosecuting attorney asks the accused in court during cross-examination, '*Where did you go after leaving 26 Hope Street, that evening?*'). Some may even ask questions to which they know the respondent realises they already possess the answer (e.g. a teacher asks a pupil in class, '*What's the capital of Nigeria?*'). *Expressive questions* are framed, on the other hand, not to get information but, in an oblique way, to give it (e.g. a mother asks her wayward son, following another feeble excuse, '*Do you expect me to believe that?*'). Adler, Rosenfeld, and Proctor (2001) termed these *counterfeit questions* in that they are 'really disguised attempts to send a message, not receive one'.

So what, then, is a question? In broadest terms, a definition is offered by Stewart and Cash (2000, p. 79): 'A question is *any statement or nonverbal act that invites an answer*.' In this way, these authors tacitly acknowledged the conversational rule that, in being asked a question (and with the notable exception of those that are *rhetorical*), one is obligated to respond in some way, even if only to admit one's inability to provide the detail requested. Put another way, and from a conversation-analysis perspective, questions and answers comprise *adjacency pairs* (Schegloff, 1972) (see also Chapter 5). Various interactive sequences implemented through talk are structured in this 'paired' fashion, made up of two turns that are closely linked or 'go together'. As such, a question is a *first pair part*, with the corresponding answer a *second pair part*. Importantly, the relevance of turns that are second pair parts is conditional upon the preceding first pair part. This is not to say, of course, that a question, as a first pair part, only legitimises some specific response. Rather, conversation analysts recognise a relevance gradation encompassing response alternatives. A 'preferred' response is one that is most closely aligned to the substance of the question; a 'dispreferred' alternative is one that less closely complements what was asked. (For example, the reply, '*My sister's going to Africa*', in reply to the question, '*Why is there so much poverty in Africa?*', would be dispreferred; '*It's a legacy of colonial exploitation*' is the preferred option.) Preference here is not a psychological entity. It is not about what will please most, but is rather a feature of the structural arrangement of the conversational elements (Koshik, 2002). To align more fully the first reply in the above example, an explanation along the lines of the person's sister going to Africa to do voluntary work and help the poor would probably have to be offered. Even then, more elaborate repair work may be necessary to prevent the conversation from stalling. In this sense, dispreferred alternatives are often more structurally complex than their preferred counterparts.

## QUESTIONS IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS

In addition to featuring prominently in casual conversation, questions play a significant role in institutional discourse, being 'an important factor in the work of many professionals' (Waterman, Blades & Spencer, 2001, p. 477). Investigations into the use of questions in contrasting professional contexts have been carried out over some considerable period of time. The earliest of these reflect an enduring interest in how teachers put questions to use. From ancient times, exceptional teachers such as Jesus and Socrates used questions to engage their listeners and promote understanding of their messages. As shown by Ralph (1999), the reason for this interest is that 'Educational researchers and practitioners virtually all agree that teachers' effective use of questioning promotes student learning' (p. 286). However, not all teachers use questioning skilfully. An early study conducted by Corey (1940) found that, on average, the teacher asked a question once every 72 seconds. Some 30 years later, Resnick (1972), working with teachers of 5–7-year-old pupils in south-east London, reported that 36% of all teacher remarks were questions. Furthermore, this figure increased to 59% when only extended interactions were analysed.

It is clear, from a review of similar studies by Dillon (1982), that most of the questions in class are posed by teachers rather than pupils. While the former ask about two questions per minute, the latter, as a group, only manage around two questions per hour, giving an average of one question per pupil per month. This statistic, however, is quite at odds with teachers' perceptions of classroom interaction. They used three times as many questions as they estimated and reckoned that pupils asked six times more questions than they actually did. It is not that children are generally loath to question, however. Tizard, Hughes, Carmichael, and Pinkerton (1983) reported, from an observational study, that 4-year-old girls at home ask about 24 questions on an average per hour, but only 1.4 in school. Furthermore, children quickly learn how to manipulate questions to functional advantage. Thus, Lehtovaara (2002) illustrated how, at age 4 years, the 'Why?' question accounted for 46% of all questions asked by a child. These were employed to organise a still unfamiliar world and served the purposes of obtaining information, maintaining conversation, and checking rights to do certain things. By age 7 years, the proportion of questions of the 'Why?' variety fell to 22%. By this stage, the child was using the 'Why?' question in an adult fashion, demonstrating a knowledge of conversational conventions and structures which was missing from the 4-year-old's usage. The functions that this question served at age 7 were to check rules or to make accusations.

In the classroom, fear of a negative reaction from classmates may be a factor in reluctance to ask questions (Dillon, 1988). Other inhibitors include a reluctance to interrupt the teacher's flow, a deficit in pupils' questioning skills, and difficulty in recognising their own knowledge deficit (Graesser & Person, 1994). Age of pupil is a further consideration here. Daly, Kreiser, and Roghaar (1994) found a significant negative correlation between the number of questions asked and age, in pupils aged 13–16 years. White males from higher-income groups who felt accepted by the teacher and enjoyed higher self-esteem also seemed less inhibited in asking questions. However, just encouraging pupils to ask more questions is not enough, as there is no relationship between volume of pupil questions and their comprehension of material (Rosenshine, Meister & Chapman, 1996). Rather, positive benefits accrue when pupils

actively ask questions at the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Graesser & Person, 1994). Bloom (1956) identified six cognitive levels as follows:

*Level 1 – knowledge:* recalling previously learned material

*Level 2 – comprehension:* demonstrating an understanding of the facts by organising, comparing, interpreting, giving descriptions, or stating main ideas

*Level 3 – application:* applying acquired knowledge to solve problems

*Level 4 – analysis:* making inferences, identifying causes, and finding evidence to support judgements

*Level 5 – synthesis:* combining elements in different patterns to formulate new solutions

*Level 6 – evaluation:* giving opinions and making judgements about the validity or quality of ideas.

Daly and Vangelisti (2003, p. 886), in reviewing the literature in this field, likewise underlined the importance of teachers encouraging pupils to ask questions at the higher levels of this taxonomy:

Because of the low rate with which learners ask questions and the importance of questioning, scholars have spent a good deal of time trying to encourage learners to ask more and better questions. The results are impressive: They demonstrate that improvements in comprehension, learning, and memory of technical materials can be achieved by training students to ask good questions.

This issue of the cognitive demands made by teachers in requesting information will be returned to later in the chapter in relation to recall/process questions.

Imbalance between professional and service receiver in the deployment of questions is not confined to the classroom, as we shall see, turning to doctor–patient interaction. Thus, West (1983) revealed that of 773 questions featured in the 21 doctor–patient consultations sampled, only 68 (9%) were initiated by patients. Indeed, in a study cited by Sanchez (2001), doctors incredibly managed to ask, on average, one question per 4.6 seconds during consultations lasting little more than 2 minutes each. Patients may even be interrupted in order for a question to be asked. In one investigation, patients got little more than 18 seconds into a description of their symptoms before the physician butted in (Epstein, Campbell, Cohen-Cole, McWhinney & Smilkstein, 1993). Summing up this state of affairs, Street (2001, p. 543) noted: 'Research consistently shows that physicians tend to talk more, ask more questions, give more directives, make more recommendations, and interrupt more than do patients.'

While in some instances patients may ask fewer questions simply because they do not know what to enquire about (Cegala & Broz, 2003), their reticence is widely acknowledge to have relational roots, reflecting an imbalance in power and control (Thompson, 1998). As observed by Sacks (1995, p. 55), 'As long as one is in the position of doing the questions, then in part one has control of the conversation.' Female patients may be (or may have been) particularly disadvantaged in this respect. While there is some evidence, presented by Cline and McKenzie (1998), that women ask more questions generally and in consultations with doctors, these latter questions

are more likely than those of male patients to be ignored or responded to in a minimal way by the medical practitioner. Gender differences apart, when the patients studied did ask questions, nearly half of these were marked by speech disturbances, according to West (1983), indicating discomfort at requesting information from the doctor. Directing questions is, therefore, one way of marking a status differential, reflecting dominance, and exercising conversational control. This is a tactic not lost on medical students, who, according to Wynn (1996), quickly learned how to handle patient-initiated questions – by adopting the strategy of asking unrelated doctor-initiated ones. In so doing, they held sway. Consistent with this analysis, when patients did ask a question, they often prefaced it with a phrase such as ‘I was wondering’ (Skelton & Hobbs, 1999). Doctors never used this expression with patients, although they did when telephoning colleagues. Adding such pre-remarks is one way, mentioned by Tracy (2002), of making a question more ‘polite’ and less potentially face threatening to the person addressed. Incidentally, patients who are more active participants in the interaction have been found to express higher levels of satisfaction and commitment to what was decided (Young & Klinge, 1996). More particularly, opportunity to ask questions was one of the key elements rated most highly by patients when receiving bad news from health workers (Hind, 1997).

In the field of pharmacy, Morrow, Hargie, Donnelly, and Woodman (1993) carried out an observational study of community pharmacist–patient consultations. Patients in that context asked on average 2.5 questions per consultation compared to an average of 4.1 for pharmacists, a much higher ratio, as we have seen, than in doctor–patient consultations. Interestingly, some patient questions were requests for clarification of information previously given by the doctor. It could be that they felt more at ease asking questions of the pharmacist than admitting a lack of understanding to the doctor. Alternatively, they may have had time to reflect on the consultation and think of questions they would have liked to have asked at that time. Morrow et al. (1993) argued that the public may also see pharmacies as readily and easily accessible, and hence pharmacists become ‘approachable’ professionals. Furthermore, since most clients pay for the services they receive from pharmacists at the point of delivery, they may feel more empowered to ask questions of them.

It is, therefore, in general terms, the person of higher status and in control who asks the questions. As such, questions tend to be posed by teachers in classrooms, doctors in surgeries, nurses on the ward, lawyers in court, detectives in interrogation rooms, and so on. The counsellor–client relationship is typically construed differently. Here, indeed, there is evidence that HIV-prevention counsellors may actually manage the conversation in such a way as to solicit client questions in order to create a pretext for giving information and offering advice (Kinnell, 2002).

Some counselling theorists have long cautioned against the excessive use of questioning on the part of counsellors. Egan (1998, p. 101) complained that ‘Helpers often ask too many questions. When in doubt about what to say or do, novice or inept helpers tend to ask questions.’ Indeed, it was once thought by Rogers (1951) that questioning clients was to be avoided lest it established the counsellor as controller of the interaction. The concern of such theorists has to do with the undesirability of directing clients rather than creating space for them to ‘tell their story’ as they see fit. Additionally, being subjected to a particular line of questioning may place one in a certain light: others can attribute unfavourable qualities, not from answers given but

from the questions asked. According to Fiedler (1993, p. 362), 'The way in which a person is questioned may have a substantial effect on his or her credibility, regardless of what s/he actually says.' For example, witnesses being interviewed or candidates at selection interviews may be treated with varying levels of respect: more or less attention may be paid to a need for face work. As well as directly affecting the respondent's self-esteem and confidence, such treatment is likely to affect how that person is perceived and evaluated by a third party.

Questions have been shown to be an important skill for a wide range of other professionals, including, to name but a few, negotiators (Rackham, 2003), psychologists (Fritzley & Lee, 2003), salespersons (Shoemaker & Johlke, 2002), organisational consultants (Dillon, 2003), journalists (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), lawyers (Kebbell, Hatton & Johnson, 2004), and police officers (Davies, Westcott & Horan, 2000).

## FUNCTIONS OF QUESTIONS

As mentioned already, and at its most basic, 'the essential function of a question is to elicit a verbal response from those to whom the question is addressed' (Hawkins & Power, 1999, p. 236). More specifically, questions serve a range of functions depending upon the context of the interaction, as outlined, for instance, by Dillon (1997), Stewart and Cash (2000), Koshik (2002), and Hargie and Dickson (2004). These include, most obviously, obtaining information, although giving information is a further possibility. Maintaining control of the encounter, as we have seen with doctors talking to patients, may be at the heart of a questioning sequence, while teachers can ask questions to arouse interest and curiosity concerning a topic of study. Assessing the extent of the respondent's knowledge and encouraging critical thought and evaluation might be additional objectives for other teacher questions. Quite often conversation with a stranger gets under way with the aid of a question where it serves to express initial interest in the respondent. Follow-on questions can indicate, furthermore, that that person's attitudes, feelings, and opinions matter, at least to the one taking the trouble to ask. Depending upon the type of question framed, respondents can be encouraged to become more fully involved in the interchange. To this end, counsellors, when they do use this technique, are often advised to make their questions open. As explained by Hill and O'Brien (1999, p. 109), 'When helpers use open questions, they do not want a specific answer from clients but instead want to encourage clients to explore whatever comes to mind.'

An additional reason for questioning, in professional circles, has to do with managing the interactive process: more particularly with controlling its pace. Rackham (2003) found that skilled negotiators demonstrated very significant differences from average negotiators on their amount of questioning. Questions were put to use controlling the focus and flow of the interaction. Placing an obligation upon the other party to answer questions denies them space for detailed perusal. At the same time, the skilled negotiator creates space for personal reflection on the current state of affairs. Finally, in such conflict situations, questions can act as an alternative to an overt statement of disagreement.

Moreover, it should be appreciated that the type of question asked influences the extent to which each of these various functions can be fulfilled.

## TYPES OF QUESTION

Questions can be analysed on three main linguistic levels: *form* (literal level), *content* (semantic level), and *intent* (pragmatic level) (Ulijn & Verweij, 2000). Beyond this broad distinction, different systems for classifying questions have been formulated (e.g. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985; Bull & Mayer, 1993; Bowling, 1997; Gnisci & Bonaiuto, 2003). Among the most common subtypes to be specified are questions that are open, closed, wh-questions, leading, tag, process, multiple, and probing. These will feature prominently in the remainder of the chapter.

### Closed/open questions

Varying the syntax of a question can have significant effects on the answer to emerge. It can reduce response choices available from a range of possibilities, limit the length of the response, lead the respondent in such a way as to make a certain reply more likely, and impose a particular set of underlying presuppositions for embedding the response (Matoesian, 1993). The most commonly cited differentiation, identifying closed and open questions, has to do essentially with the first two of these effects. Accordingly, open questions tend to be unrestricting, leaving the respondent free to choose any one of a number of possible ways in which to answer, and at length. Closed alternatives, in contrast, can typically be adequately dealt with in one or two words with that reply even being one of a limited range of options presented in the question itself.

### Closed questions

These often request basic, limited, factual information, having a correct answer. They characteristically can be answered with a short response selected from a limited number of possible options. Three subtypes exist, the most frequently cited being the *yes-no question*, so called because it can be adequately responded to with a 'yes' or 'no', although this does not mean that it invariably will be, of course. In addition to affirming or negating what is asked, equivocation is a third alternative. This is the option often favoured by politicians when answering either 'yes' or 'no' has equally undesirable consequences (Bull, 2002). Incidentally, 87% of these so-called 'avoidance-avoidance' questions (i.e. ones where both preferred responses are problematic) used when politicians were interviewed in the 1992 British general election were of the yes-no type (Bull, Elliott, Palmer & Walker, 1996). Other conditions, at least among those speaking Finnish, under which respondents depart from a minimal answer to yes-no questions, are discussed by Hakulinen (2001).

This form of closed question plays a special role in courtroom discourse, where it has been found to account for over 66% of questions framed (Woodbury, 1984). It seems to be favoured by lawyers due to the levels of close control it enables them to exert over the process of evidence disclosure. Effectively, these yes-no questions enable lawyers themselves to present the evidence, the witness simply serving to affirm or deny what they say.

In community pharmacies, Morrow et al. (1993) found that almost all pharmacist



questions were closed in nature with 69% being of the yes–no variety. They argued that pharmacists were thereby following the clinical algorithm approach of eliminative questioning for diagnosis. While this approach, if carried out expertly, should result in the correct clinical conclusion, it is not without drawbacks in that important information may be missed.

The *selection question* is a second variety of closed question. Here the respondent is presented with two or more alternative responses from which to choose. For this reason, it is sometimes also labelled a *disjunctive*, *either/or*, *alternative*, or *forced-choice question* (e.g. 'Do you want to travel by car or by train?'). Here the options are given in the question itself from which an acceptable response can be selected. Sometimes the choice is more open-ended: the list is unspecified in the question per se. This is the case with the *identification question*, the third subtype of closed question. In this case, the respondent may be asked to identify, for instance, person ('*Who were you with last night?*'), place ('*Where were you born?*'), time ('*When does the meeting start?*'), or event ('*At which conference did we meet?*').

Closed questions have a number of applications, especially in fact-finding encounters where limited pieces of mainly objective information are required. These are of particular value and are often used in a variety of research and assessment-type interviews. Arroll, Khin, and Kerse (2003), for example, found that GPs could detect most cases of depression in patients by asking just two yes–no screening questions. In the research interview, responses to closed questions are usually more concise and therefore easier to record and code than those to open questions; this, in turn, facilitates comparisons between the responses of different subjects. They can also be less demanding to answer. Fritzley and Lee (2003) surveyed 377 studies into child development that used questions as a data-gathering technique with 2–6-year-olds. They found that 43.3% of all questions asked were yes–no. Interestingly, in their own subsequent investigation, they reported a consistent bias in 2-year-olds toward replying 'yes' in response to questions about objects they were both familiar and unfamiliar with, even when they did not understand the question. With those aged 4–5 years, this had changed to a 'no' bias, but only in response to incomprehensible questions. (This issue will be returned to later in the chapter when leading questions are discussed.) With adults, a heightened threat to face due to the limitations and restrictions imposed is a further consideration with this type of question (Tracy, 2002). But by the same token, and when compared with their more open counterparts, closed questions make it easier for an interviewer to control the talk, keep the respondent on a narrow path of conversational relevancy, and often require less skill on the part of the interviewer.

## **Open questions**

In the extreme, this type of question simply extends an invitation to address a presented topic. Open questions can be answered in a number of ways, the response being left up to the respondent. They are sometimes called *wh-questions* since they frequently start with words such as 'why' and 'what'. Those beginning with 'how' also carry this classification, despite the spelling, although spelling may not be the only feature that sets them apart. In trying to get to the bottom of causes for actions, McClure, Hilton, Cowan, Ishida, and Wilson (2001) found that 'how' questions

were used more frequently to unearth the precipitating preconditions, whereas 'why' questions led to explanations in terms of goals targeted.

Open questions are broad in nature, and require more than one or two words for an adequate reply. In general, they have the effect of 'encouraging clients to talk longer and more deeply about their concerns' (Hill & O'Brien, 1999, p. 113). For this reason, they tend to be the type preferred when counselling. Egan (2002, p. 121) advised that helpers, 'as a general rule, ask open-ended questions. . . . Counselors who ask closed questions find themselves asking more and more questions. One closed question begets another.' At the same time, however, some open questions impose more restriction and constraints than others. Indeed, Gnisci and Bonaiuto (2003) distinguished between broad and narrow wh-questions. The latter comprise those seeking limited specific information ('*What date is it?*', '*When did the flight touch down?*'). (We have regarded these as closed identification-type questions in this chapter.) Broad wh-questions request more general information ('*What are your views on globalisation?*').

Several advantages are attributed to open questions (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). They facilitate the in-depth expression of opinions, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings while leaving the questioner free to listen and observe. In so doing, they afford the respondent greater control over the interaction and what is to be discussed. Interviewed in this way, the respondent may reveal unanticipated, yet highly relevant, information that the questioner had not directly asked for. Furthermore, where a respondent has a body of specialised knowledge to convey, the use of open questions can be the easiest way to aid the process. On the other hand, when time is limited, or with talkative clients, they may be time-consuming and elicit irrelevant data.

# Reinforcement

*Len Cairns*

THE TERM 'REINFORCEMENT', AS a concept within fields such as human social communication (both non-verbal and verbal), learning theory, educational psychology, and applied behaviour therapy, has a lengthy history and very deep research base. Particularly prominent in the twentieth century in the psychological and educational literature, the concept has had less prominence in recent years, particularly in this postmodern era of thinking. Nevertheless, the significance of reinforcement as a theoretical and practical aspect of human communication, and as a key feature of skilled performance, remains today.

This chapter will examine the concept of reinforcement and its place within a social skills model of communication. The relevance of an understanding of how reinforcement plays a number of significant roles in learning to communicate effectively, and in the skilled use of communication in most of the modern forms we use, will be outlined and supported by international research findings from across the decades.

## CLARIFYING THE CONCEPT

Simply put, reinforcement is a concept which has arisen as the centre-piece of what is called *operant psychology theory*, which is most associated with the writing and philosophy of the American academic, B. F. Skinner (1904–1990). Burrhus Frederic Skinner was an idealistic and inventive scholar of the twentieth century who may have changed the way we think about behaviour and life, but never quite succeeded in his professed aim to change the world in which people live (Bjork, 1993). His work was both revered and reviled by different sectors of the academic

and scholarly community throughout his life and beyond into this century (for a critique, see Kohn, 1993). Fred Skinner (as he preferred to be addressed) was, and remains, a controversial theorist. For many, he was the father of modern behaviourism and its major theorist of the twentieth century.

In operant psychology (as the Skinner-led field became known), the term ‘reinforcement’ is usually defined in terms such as the following: the effect of a stimulus, when matched with an emitted response (*an operant action*), increases the likelihood of that action/response being repeated.

In his classic short work *About Behaviorism*, Skinner (1974) was a little more specific and also offered two examples:

When a bit of behavior has the kind of consequence called reinforcing, it is more likely to occur again. A positive reinforcer strengthens any behavior that produces it: a glass of water is positively reinforcing when we are thirsty, and if we then draw and drink a glass of water, we are more likely to do so again on similar occasions. A negative reinforcer strengthens any behavior that reduces or terminates it: when we take off a shoe that is pinching, the reduction in pressure is negatively reinforcing, and we are more likely to do so again when a shoe pinches. (p. 51)

There are different understandings of many of the terms surrounding the operant view of the world which of necessity need to be clearly differentiated in a serious academic discussion from common-sense or common usage meanings attached to some of these words. In addition, there are those who find the whole notion of Skinnerian operant psychology an unfortunate aberration of the twentieth century.

Frequently, in normal social discourse in English, people use the terms ‘reinforce’, ‘reinforcement’, and ‘punishment’, as well as ‘negative reinforcement’, yet most of these common usages are not in line with the theory and preciseness of the operant psychology where they originated. To clarify, Table 5.1 is a useful and simple way to show the different specific meanings of the base terms in operant psychological theory.

In this table, it becomes clear that the relationship between what are called ‘contingencies’ and the relevant ‘stimulus’ is the key to understanding the concepts, particularly the difference between *punishment* and *negative reinforcement* (which are frequently erroneously used as synonyms in common parlance). The term ‘contingency’ in this model refers to the direct linkage or consequential relationship – what Lee (1988), in her detailed discussion of contingencies, refers to as the ‘if-then relationship’; for example, ‘if you talk, you hear your own voice’ (p. 61). Alfie Kohn (1993), the strident critic of operant psychology, refers to this in the following terms: ‘But

**Table 5.1** Operant model of reinforcement contingencies and stimuli

	<i>Positively valued stimulus</i>	<i>Negatively valued stimulus</i>
Contingent application	Positive reinforcement	Punishment
Contingent removal	Response cost	Negative reinforcement

Skinnerian theory basically codifies and bestows solemn scientific names on something familiar to all of us: “Do this and you’ll get that” will lead an organism to do “this” again’ (p. 5).

Kohn’s criticisms have been widely reported, but his central thesis starts with the simple, yet deceptive, argument that reinforcement is just another ‘scientific’ term for reward. We will return to this and other criticisms of the reinforcement concept and its applications later in the chapter.

In operant theory, the application of a positively valued stimulus (be it food, a pat on the back, or verbal praise) that is contingent (clearly linked to the emitted behaviour) will be positively reinforcing and lead to a more likely repeat of that behaviour. So, in social interaction and discourse, parents use smiles, praise, and encouragement in language and social behaviour development. Schoolteachers also make liberal use of the skill of reinforcement in social and token forms (the latter covering the gold stars and written praise comments on school work as well). This aspect has a long history in teacher education, particularly in such approaches as ‘teaching skills’, and was a centrepiece of microteaching over 30 years ago as a major approach to the education of teachers (Turney et al., 1973).

Similarly, the application of a negatively valued stimulus contingent upon a behaviour (such as the infliction of direct pain) will constitute punishment. The removal of a positively valued stimulus (e.g. money in a fine for speeding) is called response cost, and the removal of a negatively valued stimulus (a thorn in a sock) is negative reinforcement.

The application of this model within many fields, but significantly in education and behaviour therapy, has led to reinforcement being one of the most researched topics in modern psychology and educational research. In addition, the concept and its implications have been built into social communication skills models (e.g. Hargie, 1986, 1997) and social learning models (e.g. Bandura, 1971, 1986) for over 50 years.

While there is confusion among many non-operant theorists and researchers and particularly among the ‘general public’ about what the terms ‘reinforcement’ and ‘negative reinforcement’ imply in research and communication models, there is a general acceptance of the notion that a behaviour that is ‘reinforced’ is one that is likely to recur. People are both familiar and comfortable with the usage in relation to various child-rearing advices and pet training, so that these terms are frequently used in phone-in radio, for example, in these ways.

In most models of social communication, there are elements of both *feedback* and *response*. Some of the writing and discussion of these elements can, at times, overlap and in fact lead to confusion, depending on the way the two terms are defined and utilised within the discussions. *Feedback* figures in most models as a ‘loop’ or an aspect of the model where message initiators receive (or are *fed-back*) information about the messages they have sent to others (see Chapter 2). *Response* usually refers to the actions or behaviours which have resulted from a communication or interpersonal interaction initiation. It is important for this chapter to review and clarify the differences between the two key terms, *feedback* and *reinforcement*.

# Reflecting

*David Dickson*

**R**EFLECTING, AS A FEATURE of skilled interpersonal communication, is closely associated with active listening: with responding to the other in such a way as to convey interest, understanding, and engagement. The topic of listening, though, is taken up in another chapter of this book, so little more, as such, will be said about it here. Rather, the focus in this chapter is more specifically on both functional and structural aspects of the process called reflecting. Its various functions are outlined and contrasting theoretical perspectives brought to bear. A review of research into reflecting is also presented and conclusions drawn as to the interpersonal effects of this way of relating.

Before setting off in this direction, though, time spent reminding ourselves of some of the key features of interpersonal communication may be worthwhile. One of the commonly agreed characteristics of this transactional process is its multidimensionality. Messages exchanged between interactors are seldom unitary or discrete (Burgoon, 1994; Wood, 2004). In a seminal work by Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967), attention was drawn to two separate, but nevertheless inter-related levels at which people engage. One has to do with substantive content, and the other with relational matters which help determine how participants define their association in terms of, for instance, extent of affiliation, balance of power, and degree of intimacy and trust.

Content is probably the more immediately recognisable dimension of interpersonal communication, dealing as it does with the subject matter of talk – the topic of conversation. Through relational communication, on the other hand, interactors work at establishing where they stand with each other vis-à-vis, for instance, closeness and liking. Dominance and control are also important aspects of relational communication that

have to be managed, and some sort of implicit or explicit working agreement reached. While the issue of who should control the conversation may be a topic for discussion (content), such matters are more often handled in indirect and subtle ways. It is typically in *how* interactors talk about what they talk about that relational work is carried on. Dominance and control may be manifested in a plethora of verbal and non-verbal actions such as initiating topic changes, interrupting, maintaining eye contact, and speaking loudly.

## INTERACTIONAL STYLE AND DIRECTNESS

An important consideration in the exercise of control is that of interpersonal style, a construct discussed extensively by Norton (1983) and more recently by Lumsden and Lumsden (2003). Style can be thought of as *how* what is done is done, with the characteristic manner in which someone handles an interactive episode. Cameron (2000) emphasised its expressive function in creating a particular 'aesthetic' presence for the other. Conversational style includes the degree of formality, elaboration, or directness adopted (Adler & Rodman, 2000). We will dwell upon the latter characteristic, directness, which has been commented upon in various domains of professional practice, including teaching (Brown & Atkins, 1988), social work (Seden, 1999), medicine (Roter & McNeelis, 2003), and counselling and psychotherapy (Corey, 1997). Referring specifically to interviewing, Stewart and Cash (2000, pp. 22–23) explained:

In a directive approach, the interviewer establishes the purpose of the interview and attempts to control the pacing, climate, formality and drift of the interview. . . . In a nondirective approach the interviewer may allow the interviewee to control the purpose, subject matter, tenor, climate, formality and pacing.

Directness therefore involves the degree of explicit influence and control exercised or at least attempted (DeVito, 2004) and, correspondingly, the extent to which the conversational partner is constrained in responding.

Interviewers who follow a direct approach typically employ what Benjamin (1987) called 'leads': those with a less direct style make greater use of 'responses'. Although both terms are difficult to define unambiguously, responding has to do with reacting to the thoughts and feelings of interviewees, with exploring their worlds and keeping them at the centre of things. On the other hand, the interviewer who leads tends to replace the interviewee on centre stage and become the dominant feature in the interaction. Benjamin (1987, p. 206) put it as follows:

When I respond, I speak in terms of what the interviewee has expressed. I react to the ideas and feelings he has communicated to me with something of my own. When I lead, I take over. I express ideas and feelings to which I expect the interviewee to react. . . . When leading, I make use of my own life space; when responding, I tend more to utilize the life space of the interviewee. Interviewer responses keep the interviewee at the centre of things; leads make the interviewer central.

Reflections are accordingly a type of response. They involve the interviewer striving to capture the significant message in the respondent's previous contribution and re-presenting this understanding. This has been described as mirroring back to the interviewee what the interviewee has just said, as grasped by the interviewer. Reflections can be contrasted with questions, for example, which often serve to lead in this sense.

## REFLECTING: CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES

Reflecting, as a topic of scholarly enquiry, is bedevilled by conceptual confusion, terminological inconsistency, and definitional imprecision, some of which has been alluded to by Hill and O'Brien (1999). An attempt is made here to disentangle the central themes. At a broad level, reflecting is operationally concerned with person A in some way grasping the significance of person B's preceding contribution and, in the form of a statement that re-presents this key message, making person B aware of A's understanding. Rogers (1951), who is commonly credited with coining the term although he later came to disparage it, regarded reflecting as a method of communicating an understanding of the other and the concerns expressed, from the other's point of view, and of 'being with' that person. Wilkins (2003) also highlighted a role in checking accuracy of understanding. Attempts to introduce greater precision and, in particular, to specify how these effects can be achieved by the interviewer have, however, led to some of the semantic difficulties mentioned above. (Causes of these incongruities, traceable to Rogers' evolving ideas and those of his colleagues, are discussed in the following section.) These inconsistencies and indeed contradictions can be illustrated by considering several definitions of the term. For French (1994, p. 188), reflecting 'is the act of merely repeating a word, pair of words or sentence exactly as it was said', a view shared by Burnard (1999, p. 85), for whom it is a technique that 'involves simply echoing back to the client the last few words spoken by him or her'. Contrast these definitions with the analysis given by Geldard and Geldard (2003, p. 76), who, in referring to a specific example provided, stressed that 'the reflection by the helper didn't repeat word for word what the person said, but expressed things differently. Thus, the helper used their own words rather than the other person's. This is essential . . .'. According to the first two definitions, reflecting comprises mere repetition of the exact words used by the client in the preceding exchange, while, in the last definition, this is precisely what reflecting is not.

Some have regarded reflecting as a unitary phenomenon (Benjamin, 1987), while others have conceived of it as a rubric subsuming a varying number of related processes. These include *reflection of content* (Manthei, 1997), *reflecting experience* (Brammer & MacLeod, 2003), *reflecting meaning* (Ivey et al., 2002; Freshwater, 2003), *content responses* and *affect responses* (Danish & Hauer, 1973), and *restatement* (Hill & O'Brien, 1999). Perhaps the most commonly cited distinction, though, is between *reflection of feeling* and *paraphrasing* (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). In some cases, ostensibly different labels have essentially the same behavioural referent (for instance, paraphrasing, reflection of content, and content responses), while in others the same label is used to denote processes differing in important respects.

To appreciate fully the issues involved and locate the sources of these confusions



and inconsistencies, it is necessary to extend our discussion of communication and what it entails.

A common distinction is that between verbal and non-verbal communication. Laver and Hutcheson (1972) further differentiated between vocal and non-vocal aspects of the process. The latter relates to those methods that do not depend upon the vocal apparatus and includes, for example, facial expressions, posture, gestures, and other body movements. These have more recently become popularised as *body language* (Bull, 2002). Vocal communication incorporates all of the components of speech; not only the actual words used (verbal communication) but features of their delivery (the vocal element of non-verbal communication). The latter has been divided, although with little consistency (Robinson, 2003), into *prosody* (e.g. speed, rhythm), *paralanguage* (e.g. timbre, voice quality), and *extra-linguistics* (e.g. accent). For ease of reference, though, and because their tight specification is not central to the thrust of this chapter, the more global term *non-verbal* will be used, for the most part, to label all three, together with body language (for a review of non-verbal communication, see Chapter 3). In the face-to-face situation, therefore, people make themselves known by three potential methods: first, and most obviously, by words used; second, via the non-verbal facets of speech; and third, by means of various other bodily movements and states.

Another common distinction in this area, with respect to that which is communicated (rather than *how* it is communicated), is between the *cognitive* and the *affective*. The former has to do with the domain of the logical and rational, with facts and ideas that are mostly predicated on external reality, although they can be subjective. On the other hand, affect relates to emotional concerns, to feeling states and expressions of mood. As explained by Cormier and Cormier (1998, p. 101):

The portion of the message that expresses information or describes a situation or event is called the *content*, or the cognitive part, of the message. The cognitive part of a message includes references to a situation or event, people, objects, or ideas. Another portion of the message may reveal how the client feels about the content; expression of feeling or an emotional tone is called the *affective* part of the message . . .

In actual practice, of course, both types of communication coalesce. In addition, both can be conveyed verbally and non-verbally (via body language, prosody, paralanguage, and extra-linguistics), although it is generally more common for cognitive information to be conveyed verbally and emotional expression non-verbally (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). More particularly, the affective component of a message can take the following three basic forms:

- 1 *Explicitly stated.* Here the feeling aspect is explicitly stated in the verbal content. For example, 'I was terrified.'
- 2 *Implicitly mentioned.* In this case, feelings are not directly stated, but rather the affective information is implicitly contained in what is said. For example, 'I tried to scream but nothing came out.' Here the emotional message is grasped by 'reading between the lines'.
- 3 *Inferred.* The affective component can also be deduced from the manner in

which the verbal content is delivered – from the non-verbal accompaniments, both vocal and non-vocal. Research has shown that when the verbal and non-verbal elements of an emotional or attitudinal message conflict as, for example, when someone says glumly, ‘I am overjoyed’, the non-verbal often holds sway in our decoding (Knapp & Hall, 2002). In the case of inferred feelings, the verbal content of the message (i.e. *what* is said) does not play a direct part.

# Explaining

*George Brown*

**E**XPLAINING AND QUESTIONING in many ways represent the core skills of the professions. They underpin many of the skills discussed in this book; they are used in everyday conversation, and they are of importance to teachers, lecturers, doctors, other health professionals, lawyers, architects, and engineers. Despite the ubiquity of explaining, as an area of research, it is still neglected. The reason is, perhaps, that explaining is at the intersection of a wide range of subjects. Epistemology, psychology, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology all contribute to an understanding of the nature of explaining.

This chapter does not attempt to cover all of these areas, but it does not shirk the deeper issues of explaining. An understanding of the deeper issues will assist readers to relate explaining to their own professional and personal experiences. To assist them in this quest, a framework is provided for understanding explanations and the overviews of major findings in various professions. These findings include those primarily concerned with explaining to a group, such as a lecture, class, or a group of managers, and dyadic encounters, such as doctor–patient consultations. The chapter is based on the premise that explaining is a skill. While there have been some naive criticisms of the skills-based approach adopted in this book (e.g. Sanders, 2003), this approach is a powerful heuristic for practitioners, and it provides a useful theoretical framework in which to explore the subtleties of explaining.

## A DEFINITION OF EXPLAINING

The etymological root of explaining is *explanare*, to make plain. This root suggests two powerful metaphors: 'to strip bare' and 'to reveal'. These metaphors hint at different purposes of explaining. The first has connotations of getting down to the essentials. The second leans toward revelation, to revealing subtleties, intricacies, and perhaps the uniqueness of an object, action, event, or occurrence. The first metaphor resonates with scientific approaches, such as the development of attribution theory, which seeks to identify the dimensions, through statistical analysis, on which people provide explanations of their behaviour (Hewstone, 1989). The second metaphor resonates with work in discourse analysis and hermeneutics (Antaki, 1994; Potter & Wetherall, 1994), which seeks to tease out the patterns and meanings of speech in a specific context such as a courtroom or classroom.

In standard Modern English, the term 'explain' has come to mean 'make known in detail' (*OED*). It is arguable whether providing more detail improves an explanation. Equally arguable is whether the standard definition covers the many personal meanings of explanations constructed and used by explainers. It was perhaps for this reason that Antaki (1988, p. 4) offered the general principle that explaining is 'Some stretch of talk hearable as being a resolution of some problematic state of affairs.' However, this broad definition does not cover written explanations, and it deliberately leaves open the question of intentions, meanings, and interpretations of utterances. Its core is that there is a problem to be explained in terms of causes, reasons, excuses, or justifications.

A working definition formulated by the author and a colleague (Brown & Atkins, 1986, p. 63) is as follows: 'Explaining is an attempt to provide understanding of a problem to others.' This definition was developed for pragmatic reasons. We wanted a definition that would be helpful to professionals engaged in explaining and which would link transactions between explainers and explainees and the connections made in their heads. The weight of our definition rests on the nature of understanding.

## THE NATURE OF UNDERSTANDING

Given that explaining is an attempt to give understanding, it is necessary to explore the nature of understanding – otherwise, one may be accused of explaining the known in terms of an unknown. Put simply, *understanding involves seeing connections which were hitherto not seen*. The connections may be between ideas, between facts, or between ideas and facts.

This apparently simple definition has strong links with much of cognitive psychology. Dewey (1910) described five steps in arriving at understanding, which began with 'felt' difficulty and proceeded to the search for corroborative evidence. His approach also describes neatly the process of explaining to oneself. Thyne (1966) emphasises the importance of recognising the appropriate cues in the information presented. Norman and Bobrow (1975), following the work of Piaget (1954) and Bruner (1966), argued that the aim of cognitive processing is to form a meaningful interpretation of the world. Ausubel (1978) stressed that the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. He highlighted the

importance of anchoring ideas in the learner's cognitive structure, of the use of advanced organisers, and of the learner's meaningful learning set. Pask's (1976) conversational theory of understanding and research on how students learn (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Entwistle & Entwistle, 1997; Biggs, 2003) are built on the proposition that understanding is concerned with forming connections.

Entwistle's (2003) more recent and qualitative work has revealed students' conceptions of understanding. He reports that, for many students, understanding was not merely cognitive but a feeling, including a feeling of satisfaction at creating meaning for themselves. They stressed, above all, coherence and connectiveness and a sense of wholeness, although many recognised that the 'wholeness' was provisional yet irreversible. Once you understood something you could not 'de-understand' it, although your understanding could increase. The composite of their views captures the essence of understanding.

Understanding? It's the interconnection of lots of disparate things – the feeling that you understand how the whole thing is connected up – you can make sense of it internally. You're making lots of connections which then make sense and it's logical. It's as though one's mind has finally 'locked in' to the pattern. Concepts seem to fit together in a meaningful way, when before the connections did not seem clear, or appropriate, or complete. If you don't understand, it's just everything floating about and you can't quite get everything into place – like jigsaw pieces, you know, suddenly connect and you can see the whole picture. But there is always the feeling you can add more and more and more: that doesn't necessarily mean that you didn't understand it; just that you only understood it up to a point. There is always more to be added. But if you really understand something and what the idea is behind it, you can't not understand it afterwards – you can't 'de-understand' it! And you know you have understood something when you can construct an argument from scratch – when you can explain it so that you feel satisfied with the explanation, when you can discuss a topic with someone and explain and clarify your thoughts if the other person doesn't see what you mean. (Entwistle, 2003, p. 6)

Experts on human information processing have rarely considered understanding. But from Baddeley's (2004) model of memory, it is possible to deduce a model of understanding which is rich with implications for explaining as well as understanding. For an explanation to be understood, the explainee must first perceive there is a gap in knowledge, a puzzle or a problem to be explained. This perception activates the working memory to retrieve schemata from the long-term memory. These schemata may have been stored in any of the procedural, semantic (thoughts and facts) or episodic memories (narratives, events). Cues in the explanation being given are matched to the activated schemata. This matching may lead to assimilation of the explanation into the existing schemata or it may modify the existing schemata. In both, it produces new connections of concepts and/or facts. The degree of stability of those new connections depends in part upon the network of existing concepts and facts. The validity of the new connections, that is, of the understanding, can be tested only by reference to corroborative evidence, which may be from an external source or from other evidence and rules stored in the person's cognitive framework.

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

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

## TYPES OF EXPLAINING

The literature abounds with typologies of explanations (e.g. Ennis, 1969; Smith & Meux, 1970; Kinneavy, 1971; Hyman, 1974; Turney, Ellis, and Hatton 1983; Rowan, 2003; Pavitt, 2000). In considering these typologies, I (together with a co-author) designed a robust, simple typology which would be relatively easy to use by researchers and practitioners (Brown & Atkins, 1986). The typology consists of three main types of explanation: *the interpretive*, *the descriptive*, and *the reason-giving*. They approximate to the questions, What? How? Why? However, the precise form of words matters less than the intention of the question. They may be supplemented with the questions, Who? When? Where? Together, these questions can rapidly provide a framework for many explanations.

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

*Descriptive explanations* address the question, 'How?' These explanations describe processes, structures, and procedures, as in: How did the chairperson lead the meeting? How do cats differ anatomically from dogs? How should a chairperson lead a meeting? How do you measure sustainability?

*Reason-giving explanations* address the question, 'Why?' They involve reasons based on principles or generalisations, motives, obligations, or values. Included in reason-giving explanations are those based on causes and functions (Pavitt, 2000), although some philosophers prefer to distinguish causes and reasons. Examples of reason-giving explanations are answers to the questions: Why do camels have big feet? Why did this fuse blow? Why do heavy smokers run the risk of getting cancer? Why are some people cleverer than others? Why is there more crime in inner-city

areas? Why am I reading this chapter? Why should I keep to deadlines? Why is Shakespeare a greater writer than Harold Robbins?

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

## THE FUNCTIONS OF EXPLAINING

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

## THE TASKS AND PROCESSES OF EXPLAINING

Explaining is an interaction of the explainer, the problem to be explained, and the explainees. The explainer needs to take account of the problem *and* the knowledge, attitudes, and other characteristics of the explainees and use appropriate approaches in the process of explaining. To assist in this process, Hargie and Dickson (2003) suggested a 'P5' approach:

*p*re-assessment of the explainees' knowledge  
*p*lanning  
*p*reparation  
*p*resentation  
*p*ost-mortem.

Their approach was developed from the work of French (1994), and our earlier work (Brown & Atkins, 1986). The model is pertinent to formally presented explanations, such as lectures or presentations, and to 'opportunistic explanations' prompted by a question from a client, patient, or student, although in the last, one may have little time to prepare. Some of Hargie and Dickson's suggestions have been incorporated into the approach advocated in this section. It follows the sequence of defining the problem, determining the process, and clarifying and estimating the outcomes.

# **Self-disclosure: Strategic revelation of information in personal and professional relationships**

*Charles H. Tardy and Kathryn Dindia*

**S**ELF-DISCLOSURE, THE PROCESS whereby people verbally reveal themselves to others, constitutes an integral part of all relationships. As stated by Rubin, 'In every sort of interpersonal relationship, from business partnerships to love affairs, the exchange of self disclosure plays an important role' (1973, p. 168). People disclose to friends and spouses, to physicians and hairdressers, to solicitors and pub governors. The importance of self-disclosure for individuals and their relationships is not always apparent. Revelation of such mundane matters as the events of the day may be a cherished ritual in a marriage (Sigman, 1991; Vangelisti & Banski, 1993), while people sometimes confide personal problems to virtual strangers (Cowen, 1982).

The pervasiveness and importance of self-disclosure accounts for the intense interest in this phenomenon shown by social scientists. Literally thousands of quantitative studies have been conducted over a period extending 40 years. The periodic publication of reviews of this literature has helped provide coherence and helped organise this body of knowledge. Both reviews of thematic issues (e.g. Dindia & Allen, 1992) and more comprehensive treatments (e.g. Derlega et al., 1993) enable readers to cope with a mounting body of knowledge.

The present review offers a strategic perspective on self-disclosure by highlighting the motivations and means by which people manage the disclosure of information in personal and work relationships. We review



literature that describes the disclosure of personal information in friendships and romantic relationships as well as in relationships with supervisors, subordinates, and co-workers. We focus on three facets of disclosure in these two contexts: self-disclosure and relationship development, factors affecting self-disclosure, and risky self-disclosure.

## **SELF-DISCLOSURE IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Self-disclosure is one of the defining characteristics of intimate relationships (Brehm, Miller, Perlman & Campbell, 2002): 'Two people cannot be said to be intimate with each other if they do not share some personal, relatively confidential information with one another' (p. 138). Self-disclosure serves important functions in relationship development. We can not initiate, develop, or maintain a relationship without self-disclosure. We terminate relationships, in part, by terminating self-disclosure. Self-disclosure has other important relational consequences, including eliciting liking and reciprocal self-disclosure. Requests for disclosure are common when individuals want information about their partner, including details about the partner's sexual history in order to engage in safer sex.

### **Self-disclosure and relationship development**

Self-disclosure performs important relational functions (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Derlega et al., 1993). Revealing information about self can help people as they attempt to initiate and develop relationships with others. Some authors even suggest that self-disclosure may be a strategy by which people seek to obtain desirable responses from others (Schank & Abelson, 1977; Baxter, 1987; Miller & Read, 1987). On the other hand, self-disclosing some information creates problems for individuals and relationships. Telling others exactly how we feel can be cruel and destroy trust. Consequently, individuals must learn how to regulate their disclosures. Below we discuss both the role of self-disclosure in different stages of relationship development and the necessity of managing personal information by regulating self-disclosures (see Chapter 15 for a detailed discussion of relational communication).

### **Relationship initiation and development**

Self-disclosure is used to initiate relationships. In initial interaction, people reveal their names, hometowns, hobbies, and so on. As stated by Derlega et al. (1993, pp. 1–2), 'it is hard to imagine how a relationship might get started without such self-disclosure.' Self-disclosure is typically superficial and narrow in breadth in the early stages of a relationship. Although this self-disclosure may not be intimate, it is the prelude to more intimate self-disclosure. Self-disclosure in the initial phases of a relationship functions to promote liking and to help people get to know each other. Self-disclosure provides information that helps us reduce uncertainty about the other person's attitudes, values, personality, and so on, thereby enabling the relationship to

develop (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Similarly, through self-disclosure we acquire mutual knowledge, or knowledge that two people share, know they share, and use in interacting with one another (Planalp & Garvin-Doxas, 1994).

Self-disclosure is also an important component in the development of a relationship; thus,

If you like this person, you will want to know more about him or her, and you will, in turn, be willing to share more information about yourself. You will begin to talk about attitudes, feelings, and personal experiences; in brief, you will begin to disclose more personal information. If your new friend likes you, he or she also will disclose personal information. (Derlega et al., 1993, p. 2)

Research indicates that people strategically use self-disclosure to regulate the development of a relationship. In Miell and Duck's (1986) study of strategies individuals use to develop and restrict the development of friendships, participants described how they got to know others and how they chose appropriate topics of conversation for interacting with someone they just met and a close friend. They also indicated strategies they would use to restrict and intensify a relationship's development. Superficial self-disclosure, appropriate for conversing with a stranger, was also used to restrict the development of a relationship. Similarly, intimate self-disclosure, appropriate for conversing with friends, was used to intensify a relationship.

In Tolhuizen's (1989) study of romantic relationships, seriously dating college students reported self-disclosing information about self ('I told my partner a great deal about myself – more than I had told anyone before') as a strategy to intensify dating relationships. Another strategy was to disclose things about the relationship, feelings in the relationship, and what is desired for the future of the relationship ('We sat down and discussed our relationship so far, how we felt about each other and what we wanted for the relationship'). Thus, disclosing information about yourself as well as your thoughts and feelings about the relationship is a strategy to increase the intimacy of a relationship.

## **Relational maintenance**

Self-disclosure about the events of the day, referred to as 'catching up' or 'debriefing', is an important relationship maintenance strategy. All relationships involve periods when the partners are away from each other (e.g. while they are at work). One of the behaviours used by partners to maintain the continuity of their relationship across these periods of physical absence is catching up (Sigman, 1991; Gilbertson, Dindia & Allen, 1998). When couples are reunited at the end of the day, they often talk about what happened during the day: how their day went, who they saw, what they did, and so on. Research indicates that debriefing one another is a relationship maintenance strategy that is positively related to marital satisfaction (Vangelisti & Banski, 1993).

Self-disclosure of intimate information is also important for maintaining a relationship. Once partners feel they know each other, the exchange of objective or factual information about the self probably decreases (Fitzpatrick, 1987). As a relationship progresses, the amount of subjective or emotional information that can be exchanged

between partners increases; not only how the speaker feels about himself or herself but also how the speaker feels about the partner and the relationship can be revealed. Thus, self-disclosure in relationships continues to include the disclosure of facts and feelings about the self, but it also includes feelings about the partner and the relationship.

Self-disclosure is essential for preventing problems in relationships and solving problems after they have occurred. Discussing our relationship and the rules in our relationship is important for preventing relational transgressions, and it is also important in repairing relationships after relational transgressions have occurred (Dindia & Emmers-Sommers, 2006).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, total and complete openness was advocated, and open communication was considered the essence of a good relationship. Jourard (1971), as well as others, advocated full disclosure in relationships: 'the optimum . . . in any relationship between persons, is a relationship . . . where each partner discloses himself without reserve' (p. 46). More recently, others (Bochner, 1982; Parks, 1995) have argued that moderate levels of self-disclosure lead to satisfaction in long-term relationships. Gilbert's (1976) review of research found support for a curvilinear relationship between self-disclosure and satisfaction; moderate degrees of self-disclosure appeared to be most conducive to maintaining relationships over time.

Baxter and Wilmot (1985) have shown how most relationships involve taboo topics, topics that partners do not talk about. In developing relationships, one of the most common taboo topics is the state of the relationship itself. Other common taboo topics are other current relationships, past relationships, relationship norms, conflict-inducing topics, and negatively valenced self-disclosure. 'People are often keenly interested in the likely future of their partnerships and are eager to learn their partner's expectations and intentions, but they don't ask' (Brehm et al., 2002, p. 141). Instead, they create secret tests (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984) to get the desired information. For example, if I want to find out how much my partner loves me, I might watch how he/she responds to other attractive people (triangle test), or ask my partner's best friend how my partner feels about me (third-party test), and so on. Why do partners engage in secret tests when they could simply ask their partner how they feel about them? The answer is that in many relationships, such matters are too intimate to be discussed (Brehm et al., 2002). It takes a high level of trust to talk about such intimate matters. Ironically, it takes discussing such intimate matters to develop a high level of trust. However, even in the most committed relationships, there are still some things that are left unsaid and are better left unsaid.

An alternative conclusion is that openness is an effective communication strategy for some types of couples, but not others. Fitzpatrick (1987) described three types of couples, traditionals, independents, and separates, and argued that there are similarities within and differences among the types of couples in the degree to which they self-disclose and value self-disclosure in their marriage. Fitzpatrick argued that these couple types establish different norms about what is appropriate to reveal in their relationship, and that these norms determine the relationship between communication and satisfaction. Fitzpatrick found that traditionals value self-disclosure in marriage and that they self-disclose to their spouses. However, their self-disclosure is limited to positive feelings and topics about the partner and the relationship.

# The process of listening

*Robert N. Bostrom*

**T**HE ABILITY TO PERCEIVE and process information presented orally – ‘listening’ – has traditionally been viewed as a communication skill, such as interviewing and public speaking. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, there has been a great deal of debate about the exact meaning and delineation of the concept of ‘skill’. Some skills involve considerable overt activity, whereas others consist primarily of covert mental processing. Listening seems to fall in this latter category, in that one can listen without exhibiting any external activity that would indicate that listening is taking place. Traditionally, we have distinguished between cognitive events as opposed to behaviour, although today most researchers are suspicious of such simplistic categories in almost every discipline (Dawkins, 1998). It still may be correct to say that listening is a cognitive process, but we are less sure of this designation than we once were (Hargie & Dickson, 2004).

The importance of listening would seem to be obvious. Whenever individuals are asked about the nature of their organisational activities, listening is cited as one of the most central. For example, in a recent survey of the Law School Admission Council (Luebke, Swygert, McLeod, Dalessandros & Roussos, 2003), listening activities were described as central to the practice of law and success in law school. Nor is the concern for listening confined to organisational settings. Paul Krugman, describing the stresses of modern politics, notes that neoconservatives today actually seem to have an aversion to listening to others (Krugman, 2003). Given some of this concern, it seems that knowing more about the nature of listening would be of great benefit.

Most early research in listening grew out of the cognitive tradition. This research was importantly influenced by an assumption that

listening and reading were simply different aspects of a single process – the acquisition and retention of information. (It should be noted that most early research was conducted in university settings, and the universal assumption was that college students learned by reading textbooks and listening to lectures). If listening and reading produce the same outcomes, it is easy to assume that they are similar (if not exactly the same) skills. Success or failure of listening activity was therefore couched in cognitive (linguistic) terms. This assumption has been the dominant paradigm in listening and other communication research for the last 50 years. In other words, we have believed that linguistic events are central to the educational experience, and that relational and affective issues are less important.

This paradigm is firmly rooted in Western philosophical thought. The emphasis on symbols and the universal acceptance of philosophy has been the dominant paradigm in Western intellectual life ever since. The study of philosophy has been intermingled with the study of language ever since its inception. We use language according to certain well-established principles, and even though a strong case can be made that this usage is ‘hard-wired’, or determined by the physiological nature of the human brain (Pinker, 1994, 1997), the principles seem to be ‘inherently’ true – so much so that philosophers were led to contend that they indicate ‘reality’. More recently, ‘social’ reality has been invoked as the aim of research in social interactions, especially communication. Language is primary in ‘constructing’ this reality. The nature of language is so intermingled with the ‘proofs’ of the reality hypotheses that it is impossible to approach them separately.

From the point of view of the cognitive/linguistic paradigm, communication (or symbolic behaviour) was an early evolutionary step in the development of human beings, leading to social behaviour and the beginning of civilisation. This explanation asserts that human beings somehow acquired the ability to communicate and subsequently were able to engage in social behaviour.

This paradigm, then, tells us that to improve our abilities in communication we should improve our facility with language. Words (cognitions) are either generated by internal processing or received from others, and then behaviour follows the words. A popular example of this paradigm is ‘symbolic interactionism’, which takes as its basic assumption that our social life is constructed of words. Some organisational communication theorists (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993) have taken the position that a symbolic interactionist perspective is the most productive way in which to study organisations, and they draw on symbolic interactionism as a basic conceptual framework for organisational study.

Symbolic interactionism begins with the assumption that all life is a search for ‘meaning’, which, according to symbolic interactionists, is found in the way that each of us interacts with other persons, our institutions, and our culture. These interactions are *symbolic*, in that they take place primarily through language and symbols. This is in contrast to the well-known ‘hierarchy of needs’ (Maslow, 1943), which proposes that ‘self-actualisation’ (meaningful) needs are addressed only when the more basic needs of food and shelter are satisfied (see Chapter 2). This approach relies both on interpretation and the acceptance of principles derived from linguistic frameworks. The recipe for social change, therefore, involves a change in the symbol system, and behaviour is assumed to follow. Whether the changes are political, social, or organisational, the communicator must only ‘manage meaning’ to have significant effect. So if

we are to increase the numbers of women and minorities in our organisational systems, we should concentrate on building symbol systems that will facilitate changes in hiring and promotional practices.

There is no doubt that changes in behaviour sometimes do follow changes in symbol systems. But at the same time, there is abundant evidence that changes in behaviour more often occur through coercion, social pressure, physiological and chemical changes, and sometimes random events. These changes, often termed 'mindless' ones, are then 'justified' by subsequent explanations by the participant. An individual who bows to social pressure in making a group decision then 'rationalises' the event by constructing evidence and logical processes. When this occurs, it is the case that language follows behaviour, rather than the other way around.

While communicative outcomes have traditionally been described as symbolic or behavioural, there are other communicative activities that may be as important, or even more important than these. The development and maintenance of relationships may be far more important than any other aspect of our daily life. Concerns with relationships are clearly facilitated through interactive activity (Knapp, Miller, and Fudge, 1994). We communicate in order to maintain and develop relationships with others, and the 'content' of the interaction may be only secondary to the process. Whether we use terms like 'affinity-seeking' or 'homophily' (Rogers, 1962), interpersonal relationships are a fundamental human characteristic, and are a significant outcome of communicative activity.

In summary, researchers in communication have placed an inordinate amount of emphasis on the linguistic, or cognitive, aspects of the communicative process. This focus on language led to ideas of 'reality' as dominant paradigms governing communicative activity. The rationale for this emphasis on language assumes that social change and behavioural alteration follow from changes in language and linguistic systems. The opposite view – that language follows behavioural change – is just as defensible but has not received as much attention. Recently, researchers in interpersonal communication have pointed out the importance of interactive behaviour, as well as the central role that relationships play in interpersonal communication (see Chapter 15). While these more recent trends would seem to lead to questioning the dominance of the language-centredness of traditional 'reality-based' research, we still see linguistic assumptions as pervasive ones. Since these assumptions have affected most thinking in communication, it is not surprising to see that this tradition has also affected examination of the process of listening.

## RESEARCH IN LISTENING

Research in listening, like most communication research, has focused on symbolic rather than behavioural or relational outcomes, and, as a result, has had some of the same conceptual problems that have afflicted communication in general. Symbol-oriented definitions of information acquisition assume that since reading, writing, listening, and speaking are all communicative activities, they should share the same methods and outlook, and aim for the same end product – the processing of information. Larger differentiation of communicative outcomes has not traditionally been a part of the research in listening. Instead, we have focused on the inherent differences

*in persons*, looking to research to help us understand why people differ in communicative skill.

Individuals vary widely in their ability to receive information that is presented symbolically, and the causes of this variation are poorly understood. Clearly, contexts and media affect the reception of messages. But individual differences are probably the most important source of variability in communication activities. The most logical explanation for differences in receiving ability would seem to be the possession of a generalised facility to manipulate and remember symbols. To this end, individual variations in reading, both in speed and comprehension, have been extensively studied. A 'general ability' explanation, however, is elusive. For example, reading and writing skills are not closely associated (Bracewell, Fredericksen and Fredericksen, 1982). The lack of a strong association between reading and writing skills leads us to expect that listening and speaking abilities are similarly unrelated to reading skill. But these individual differences in listening ability, if any, have attracted much less attention. This seems anomalous, since listening is probably the most common communication activity.

In a much-cited study, Paul Rankin (1929) asked persons to report how much time they spent in various types of communication. They reported that they listened 45% of the time, spoke 30%, read 16%, and wrote 9%. In a more recent study, Klemmer and Snyder (1972) studied the communicative activity of technical persons. These persons spent 68% of their day in communicative activity, and of that time 62% was 'talking face-to-face'. Klemmer and Snyder did not distinguish between speaking and listening, but it seems safe to assume that at least half of the face-to-face activity was listening. Brown (1982) estimated that corporate executives spend at least 60% of their day listening. To say that listening is an essential communication skill is to risk restating the obvious.

## **Humour and laughter**

*Hugh Foot and May McCreaddie*

Humour is a source of power and healing and may be a key to survival.

(Gregg, 2002, p. 1)

**W**HEN THE FIRST EDITION of this handbook was published in 1986, the notion that humour and laughter might have beneficial effects on health, work, and personal life was only just starting to catch our imagination. Research was relatively sparse, and much of the subsequent upswing in professional interest in the use of or need for humour was a development based more upon an act of faith than on any substantial research evidence. Nevertheless, a stream of humour-related websites and programmes has emerged in recent years, extolling the virtues of humour and laughter and holding out the carrot of enhanced well-being and a healthy body and mind. One of the best known of these programmes was Robert Holden's Happiness Project, a series of workshops designed for health professionals and company managers, among others. This followed from his laughter clinics set up in the UK in 1991. As Mauger (2001) reports, there are now websites for those with phobias, panic attacks, and anxiety states which advise subscribers to 'laugh yourself calm'; and there is an on-line Laughter Therapy Centre, which offers guidance on how to put more laughter into your life, a sentiment shared by those in the Laughter Club Movement (Kataria, 2002). Patty Wooten (1992) developed the 'jest for the health of it' workshops for nurses with the aim of reducing burn-out or loss of caring. It is currently fashionable to appreciate the psychological benefits that humour can bring, but whether humour is an easy recipe or solution for self-help is still somewhat questionable.

Beyond doubt, humour is a very complex phenomenon involving cognitive, emotional, physiological, and social aspects (Martin, 2000, 2004). It is surprising neither that humour research has spilled over into fields of psychology such as personality, emotion, and motivation,



nor that there is such a diverse range of conceptualisations of sense of humour. To many, however, the idea of humour as a communicative or social skill is still relatively novel, perhaps because we tend to think of it as a relatively stable expression of personality. Unless we are planning a career as a professional comedian, we tend not to think of humour as something that needs nurturance and cultivation.

The manner in which the exploitation of humour is occasionally catapulted into the public eye, however, can be breathtaking. In October 1995, the national press carried the story of British Airways' sudden 'discovery' that 'criticism softened by humour may be more effective than traditional forms of communication' (*The Guardian*, 12 October 1995). To implement this notion, BA had appointed a 'Corporate Jester' to stalk executive offices and tell top managers where they are going wrong while putting a smile on their faces at the same time. First-quarter profits were up by 57% according to *The Guardian*, but the Confederation of British Industry remained sceptical!

Part of the apparent ludicrousness of this venture is the implication that humour can be marshalled and deployed to order, without immediately losing any of the positive impact that it may have had. It might work once, but how can any beneficial effect possibly be sustained? There is a wide gulf in the potential effectiveness of humour which is spur of the moment, arising directly from the situation one is in, and humour that is rehearsed and carefully groomed to fit a particular occasion. Perhaps this is why there is a degree of discomfort in considering humour as a skill: a skill by its very nature is practised and studied; humour is spontaneous, fleeting, situation-specific, and so essentially frivolous and playful.

Much of the research on humour has occupied itself with explaining why we find jokes funny and why we are amused by certain episodes in real life. So the focus of attention has been primarily on the features or ingredients of the joke or episode which render it humorous. Rather less attention has been paid to the creation or production of humour, either in terms of the task facing the professional comedian in consciously constructing new jokes for a comedy show, or in terms of the ordinary individual deciding when or how to initiate humour in a social situation. Sometimes, we might argue, such a 'decision' to initiate humour is not under our conscious control; an amusing event occurs and quite spontaneously an apt comment or witticism 'pops out' which neatly captures the feeling of the moment. This is probably a naive view; with few exceptions, we are in control of what we say and we do 'initiate' humour in order to achieve some interpersonal goal.

Essentially, the distinction we are drawing here is that between the 'decoding' of humour – understanding the meaning of a joke that we have just read or heard – and the 'encoding' of humour – understanding how and when we use humour to convey a message to others. To consider humour and laughter as social skills, therefore, is to be concerned with encoding characteristics, the reasons why we initiate humour. The bulk of this chapter is devoted to the social uses to which humour and laughter are put.

Before we embark upon this analysis, some of the main humour theories are briefly summarised.

## THEORIES OF HUMOUR AND LAUGHTER

There are probably well over 100 theories of humour, some quite narrowly focused and some more general in nature. However, it is recognised that no single theory of humour can ever do justice to the rich array of characterisations of humour. Researchers and theoreticians have even been somewhat reluctant to define humour and laughter. Most have chosen to emphasise some particular elements, such as incongruity or surprise, as necessary prerequisites for a stimulus to appear humorous. Most of the theories address the question of humour appreciation and the outcome of our responses to humour rather than dealing with our motivation for encoding humour.

Historical conceptions of humour and laughter and problems of definition have been outlined in more detail in Goldstein and McGhee (1972), Chapman and Foot (1976), and McGhee (1979). Broadly, humour theories fall into four main groups.

### Incongruity and developmental theories of humour

These theories stress the absurd, the unexpected, and the inappropriate or out-of-context events as the basis for humour. While these incongruities are necessary, they are not sufficient prerequisites for humour alone (McGhee, 1979). After all, incongruous events or statements can lead to curiosity or anxiety rather than to humour; so the perception of humour is dependent upon how the incongruity is understood in the context in which it occurs. Suls (1972) suggested that not only does an incongruity have to be perceived for humour to be experienced, but it has to be resolved or explained. Rothbart (1976), on the other hand, proposed that the incongruity itself is sufficient to evoke humour as long as it is perceived in a joking or playful context. And, of course, the same ludicrous idea can continue to evoke merriment long after the surprise has gone.

This debate has proved exceptionally fertile ground for cognitive investigations. McGhee (1979) carried the debate forward by interpreting 'resolution' as the need to exercise 'cognitive mastery', without which the incongruity cannot be accepted and used in the humour context. He has proposed a developmental-stage approach which maps out the types of incongruity understood by children across the stages of their increasing cognitive development. For example, the child first recognises incongruity when making pretend actions with an absent object, based upon an internal image of that object. Then the child learns the fun of deliberately giving incongruous labels to objects: 'girls' may be called 'boys'; 'cats' may be called 'dogs'. Later come more subtle forms of incongruity such as endowing animals with human characteristics ('the dog is talking to me') and learning that words and phrases may have multiple meaning (puns and riddles).

Forabosco (1992, p. 60) has extended the cognitive model to show that mastery involves understanding the cognitive rule and identifying both aspects of congruity and incongruity with that rule:

There is therefore a succession (diachronicity) of incongruity-congruence configurations that terminates in a contemporaneousness (synchronicity) of

incongruity/congruence. What is more, typical of the final act in the process is an attention-shift situation in which the subject passes from the perception of congruence to the perception of incongruity and, sometimes, vice versa, with several shifts.

Seen from this perspective, both the perception of the incongruity and its resolution are essential components for the humour process.

Ruch and Hehl (1986) argued that we should not look for a general model of humour but rather just accept that there are at least two kinds of humour, one in which the solubility of the incongruity is important (e.g. congruous build-up to an unexpected and cognitively incongruent punchline) and one in which the incongruity alone is sufficient (e.g. nonsense or absurd jokes). Research suggests that preference for these major dimensions of humour correlates with personality variables such as conservatism (Ruch, 1984).

## **Superiority and disparagement theories of humour**

These theories have a tradition going back at least three centuries to the work of the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), and for some they are the key to humour (Gruner, 1997). They are based upon the notion that humour stems from the observations of others' infirmities or failures. Hobbes spoke of 'sudden glory' as the passion which induces laughter at the afflictions of other people, and it results from favourable comparison of ourselves with these others. So, at one level, for example, we find it amusing when our companion slips on a banana skin; at another level, we take delight in the downfall of our enemies. Zillmann and Cantor (1976) and Zillmann (1983) proposed a 'dispositional' view that humour appreciation varies inversely with the favourableness of the disposition toward the person or object being disparaged. In other words, the less well disposed we are toward someone, the more humorous we find jokes or stories in which that person is the butt or victim. The source of the disparagement is also important; we are highly amused when our friends humiliate our enemies but much less amused when our enemies get the upper hand over our friends. These ideas relate very much to jokes and humour involving social, national, ethnic, and religious groupings with which we personally identify.

What is interesting, as Ruch and Hehl (1986) pointed out, is that this model works well in predicting the behaviour of groups which believe they are traditionally 'superior': for example, men appreciate jokes in which women are disparaged but show less appreciation for jokes in which a woman disparages a man. However, 'inferior' group members are no more amused at jokes which disparage a man than at jokes disparaging a member of their own sex. Indeed, sometimes the inferior groups laugh more at jokes putting down a member of their own group. Clearly, some moderating variables are at work here. From their factor analytic studies, Ruch and Hehl (1986) suggest that the personality dimensions of conservatism and tough-mindedness are conjointly associated with enjoyment of disparagement humour. This does not say much for the humour of men, who are more likely to score higher on these scales than women. Tough conservatives (chauvinistic, ethnocentric, and authoritarian) appreciate disparagement jokes directed at outside groups but tender-minded liberals do not.

Authoritarians tend to be preoccupied with power relationships, the strengthening of in-group bonds, and feeling of superiority over the weak or out-group members (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson & Sanford, 1950). One might, however, question their sense of humour. Perhaps those who enjoy disparagement humour are singularly lacking in appreciation of other kinds of humour. We certainly might expect this if, as Allport (1954) claimed, sense of humour and ability to laugh at oneself are a clear measure of self-insight.

## Arousal theories of humour

A number of theories suggest that the most important qualities of humour operate at a physiological level. These theories assume that the initiation of humour brings about measurable arousal changes, which directly influence the experience of amusement. Berlyne (1972) has linked humour with fluctuations in arousal in two ways: first, humour is associated with the reduction of high arousal; second, it is associated with moderate increases in arousal followed by a sudden drop. This 'arousal boost-jag', as he terms it, accounts for the pleasure derived from many jokes. The build-up to the joke is moderately arousing in that it attracts attention (for example, the audience latches on to the fact that a joke is being told and becomes attentive). The joke may be additionally stimulating by virtue of having a sexual, aggressive, or anxiety-arousing theme, or it may be intellectually arousing. The punchline comes when the audience is suitably aroused and seeking a resolution to the joke; timing can be crucial here. The resolution produces a rapid dissipation of arousal frequently associated with laughter. The build-up and subsequent dissipation of arousal are rewarding and pleasurable, and produce the experience of amusement. An important aspect of Berlyne's position is his belief that there is a curvilinear relationship between arousal level and amount of pleasure experienced: that is, moderate levels of arousal are more enjoyable than either very low or very high levels.

Arousal theories of laughter also feature in explanations of certain kinds of non-humorous laughter. For example, *nervous laughter* occurs in states of tension after periods of shock and fright or acute embarrassment; more extreme *hysterical laughter* is conceived of as a psychogenic disorder (Pfeifer, 1994) and is often exhibited cyclically with weeping, possibly shouting, in an uncontrolled outburst after periods of intense stress or prolonged deprivation of some kind. Laughter through arousal can also be easily induced by tactile stimulation, normally *reflexive laughter*, rather than involving any cognitive process. Tickling is a more complicated kind of stimulus because the desired response may be achieved only when a mood of fun, compliance, or self-abandonment is already operating. If unexpected, or in the wrong company or environment, tickling can be a very aversive stimulus and elicits an aggressive response.

## Psychoanalytic and evolutionary theories of humour

Freud's (1928, 1938) view of the function of humour is akin to his view of dreaming, namely, that they both serve to regulate sexual and aggressive desires. Humour is the

outcome of repressed sexual and aggressive wishes, which have been pushed into the unconscious due to society's prohibition of their expression. Wit and humour are not forbidden; indeed, they may be socially valued and therefore present an acceptable outlet for such repressed feelings. The process of repression, according to Freud, involves the use of 'psychic energy', which is saved once the joke has been emitted; thus, repression is no longer necessary. The experience of humour and laughter flows directly from the saving of psychic energy whose repressive function is (momentarily) relaxed.

Freud's theory shares with arousal theory the basic view that humour serves a physical as well as a psychological function by manipulating arousal or the level of felt tension. The well-known criticism that psychoanalytic theory is rarely amenable to scientific investigation does not debase the insights and ideas that the theory has generated.

Another psychodynamic view has been expressed by Bokun (1986), who has linked humour with our over-serious construction of the world. This view stresses the need for humour as a means of offering us a more realistic vision of ourselves and the world around us, stripped of all our self-imposed fears, frustrations, and suffering. Having a sense of humour, therefore, provides us with the ability to cope with the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

Freud's ideas represent one strand of what are more widely referred to as evolutionary or biological theories of humour, in which laughter is viewed as an adaptive response with an early onset. Just as play has evolved to allow children to rehearse and develop the practical and social skills they will need as adults, so humour has evolved to allow rehearsal of more abstract cognitive skills (McGhee, 1979). Laughter is also a release from the inevitable tensions of daily life and permits the flights of imagination that lead to innovations and ways of coping (Christie, 1994). It is adaptive because it can operate as a circuit-breaker, momentarily disabling people and preventing them from continuing with misguided behaviour patterns (Chafe, 1987).

## **Persuasion**

*Daniel J. O'Keefe*

**T**HE SKILL THAT IS most fundamental to persuasive success is that of adapting messages to audiences. Skilled persuaders adapt their messages to those they seek to influence. The general idea of adaptation, however, can usefully be unpacked into two separate (but related) tasks. One is the task of identifying the current obstacles to agreement or compliance, that is, the bases of the audience's resistance to the advocated action or viewpoint. The other is the task of constructing effective messages aimed at removing or minimising such obstacles. In what follows, each of these tasks is analysed further through the lens of current theory and research concerning effective persuasive communication. The extensive social-scientific research literature concerning persuasion offers a number of principles and guidelines that can be useful in illuminating the nature of, and possibilities for, adapting persuasive messages to audiences.

As an initial observation, however, it should be remembered that the circumstances persuaders face can be quite diverse, if only because persuasion itself is a ubiquitous human activity. Persuasion occurs in the marketplace (e.g. consumer advertising), the courtroom, the political arena, family and interpersonal settings, the workplace, and so on. This diversity of persuasion situations in turn guarantees that there can be no simple, completely dependable directives for skilful persuasion; what is needed in one persuasion setting may be quite different from what is needed in another. But the task of adapting to the particular circumstance at hand is a task faced by all persuaders, and what follows is meant to provide a general guide to skilful adaptation by discussing, in turn, the identification of obstacles to compliance and the creation of messages aimed at those obstacles.

## IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES TO COMPLIANCE

One common obstacle to the audience's embracing the persuader's advocated action or viewpoint is the audience's current attitudes, that is, the audience's general evaluations (of the advocated action, policy, product, and so on). For instance, low participation in recycling programmes might be the result of negative attitudes about recycling; in that case, a persuader who wants to encourage recycling would obviously be well advised to try to change those negative attitudes.

However, skilful persuaders will realise that it is a mistake to assume that what lies behind a person not performing a given action is a negative attitude. To be sure, sometimes current attitudes are indeed the obstacle, and in such circumstances (as will be discussed) attitude change is needed. But sometimes the basis of the audience's resistance lies somewhere other than attitude. Thus, it is useful to distinguish two broad persuasion circumstances – one in which the audience already has the desired attitudes (but for some reason is not acting consistently with them) and the other in which the audience lacks the desired attitudes.

### **When the audience has the desired attitudes**

When the audience already has the desired attitudes in place, the persuader's challenge is that of encouraging people to act consistently with those attitudes. This circumstance is actually not uncommon. For example, people almost certainly already have favourable attitudes toward good health; what is needed is to persuade people to make attitude-consistent behavioural choices about exercise, diet, medical care, and the like. Similarly, persons who have positive attitudes toward energy conservation and environmental protection might not act consistently with those views – might not choose appropriate thermostat settings, engage in recycling, and so on. Two broad (not mutually exclusive) approaches are available to persuaders here. One is to attempt to connect more closely the existing attitudes with the desired behaviour; the other is to focus on non-attitudinal influences on behaviour.

### ***Connecting the existing attitude with the desired behaviour***

When a persuader seeks to have persons connect their existing attitudes more closely to a behavioural choice (so as to shape that choice), three general strategies recommend themselves: enhancing the perceived relevance of the attitude to the behaviour, inducing feelings of guilt or hypocrisy, and enhancing the salience of the current attitude.

One strategy for enhancing attitude-consistent behaviour is to encourage people to see their attitudes as relevant to their behavioural choices. The general principle here is that persons are more likely to act consistently with their attitudes if they see the attitudes as relevant to the behaviour in question; hence, increasing perceived attitudinal relevance will increase the likelihood of attitude-consistent behaviour.

For example, in a study by Snyder and Kendzierski (1982), participants completed measures of their attitudes toward affirmative action, read arguments in an

affirmative-action court case, and rendered individual verdicts in the case. Some participants received instructions from the judge emphasising that the case dealt with a contemporary issue (affirmative action) and thus that decisions in this case could have implications not only for the involved parties, but also for affirmative-action programmes generally (because of the precedent-setting nature of judicial decisions); these instructions underscored the relevance of participants' attitudes to their decision. Participants who did not receive these instructions displayed little consistency between their affirmative-action attitudes and their decisions, but those who received the instructions exhibited substantial attitude-behaviour consistency.

In short, emphasising the relevance of an existing attitude to a current behavioural choice can be one means of inducing attitude-consistent conduct. Indeed, one need think only of the computers, computer programs, tutoring sessions, academic camps, and similar products or services that have been purchased by parents who had been led to see that various of their current attitudes were relevant to the purchase decision ('You want your children to have an advantage at school? To get a good education? To succeed in life?'). (For related research and discussion, see Borgida & Campbell, 1982; Snyder, 1982; Shepherd, 1985; Prislin, 1987.)

A second strategy for encouraging attitude-consistent behaviour is that of inducing feelings of hypocrisy or guilt. When people have previously acted inconsistently with their attitudes, drawing their attention to the hypocrisy can lead them to act more consistently with their attitudes. Specifically, the research evidence suggests that when both the existing attitude and the previous inconsistent behaviour are made salient, persons are likely subsequently to act more consistently with their attitudes. For example, Stone, Aronson, Crain, Winslow, and Fried (1994) varied the salience of participants' positive attitudes about safe-sex practices (by having some participants write and deliver a speech about the importance of safe sex) and varied the salience of previous behaviour that was inconsistent with such attitudes (by having some participants be reminded of their past failures to engage in safe-sex practices). The combination of salient attitudes and salient inconsistency induced greater subsequent attitude-behaviour consistency (reflected in greater likelihood of buying condoms at the end of the experiment) than either one alone. Similarly, Aitken, McMahon, Wearing, and Findlayson (1994) reported that households given feedback about their water consumption, combined with a reminder of their previously expressed belief in their responsibility to conserve water, significantly reduced their subsequent consumption. Feedback alone did reduce consumption, but was not as effective as the combination of feedback and the reminder. (For similar findings, see Kantola, Syme & Campbell, 1984; Linz, Fuson & Donnerstein, 1990; Aronson, Fried & Stone, 1991; Fried & Aronson, 1995.)

Plainly, then, one means of inducing attitude-behaviour consistency may be to lead people to recognise their hypocrisy (which may involve making them feel guilty about their past inconsistency). But this strategy can easily backfire if not deployed carefully. For instance, persons made to feel hypocritical about apparent attitude-behaviour inconsistency might resolve that inconsistency not by changing their behaviour so as to align it with their attitudes, but by changing their attitudes so as to justify (be consistent with) their previous behaviour (for an example of such a backfire effect, see Fried, 1998). Similarly, several studies have found that although more explicit guilt appeals do arouse greater guilt than less-explicit appeals, those



more-explicit appeals are significantly less persuasive than less-explicit appeals, perhaps because the strategy generates anger or resentment (e.g., Englis, 1990; Pinto & Priest, 1991; Coulter & Pinto, 1995; Coulter, Cotte & Moore, 1997; Cotte, Coulter & Moore, 2005; for reviews and discussion, see O'Keefe, 2000, 2002a).

A third means of encouraging attitude-consistent behaviour is simply to ensure that the relevant attitudes are sufficiently salient. In the right circumstances, persuasion can be effected through relatively straightforward prompts or reminders.

For example, Conn, Burks, Minor, and Mehr (2003) found that mail and telephone prompts led to significant increases in the exercise behaviour of older women compared to conditions without such reminders; Andersen, Franckowiak, Snyder, Bartlett, and Fontaine (1998) reported that stair use in a shopping mall was significantly increased by placing signs (mentioning the benefits of stair use) next to escalators that had adjacent stairs; Austin, Alvero, and Olson (1998) found that when a restaurant hostess prompted departing patrons by adding 'don't forget to buckle up' to her usual parting comments, seat belt use increased by over a third; Alemi et al. (1996) found that computerised reminder telephone calls to parents significantly increased the likelihood that children would be immunised on schedule; Ferrari, Barone, Jason, and Rose (1985a) reported that persons who had signed a pledge card to donate blood were significantly more likely to fulfil that pledge (more likely to report to give blood) if they received a reminder telephone call a day or two before the blood drive began. As these findings illustrate, when the relevant attitudes are already in place, effective persuasion can simply be a matter of making those attitudes salient.

### ***Focus on non-attitudinal factors***

However, even if the audience has the appropriate attitudes and is prepared to act consistently with them (e.g. even if the attitude is seen as relevant to the desired action), attitude-consistent behaviour may nevertheless not occur, because other (non-attitudinal) factors can outweigh any influence of attitude on behaviour. Two such additional factors deserve special mention: normative considerations and the person's perceived ability to perform the behaviour.

Concerning normative considerations, a number of generalised models of intentional behaviour recognise that both attitudinal (personal) and normative (social) factors can influence conduct. Thus, even when an individual has the desired attitudes, perceived normative pressures might prevent the person from engaging in the desired action.

The most extensively studied model that incorporates both attitudinal and normative influences on intentional conduct is Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) theory of reasoned action (for reviews and discussion, see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, pp. 168–186; Conner & Sparks, 1996; Sutton, 1998; O'Keefe, 2002b, pp. 101–113). The theory of reasoned action is based on the idea that the primary determinant of a person's (volitional) conduct is that person's behavioural intention (what the person intends to do). Behavioural intentions, in turn, are seen to be a function of two factors: the person's attitude toward the behaviour in question and the person's 'subjective norm', which represents the person's general perception of whether others who are important to the person (e.g. friends, spouse, parents, and so

on) desire the performance of the behaviour. These two factors may not have equal influence on a given intention, so the theory acknowledges that these factors may have varying 'weights'. This is expressed algebraically in the following formula:

$$BI = (A_B)w_1 + (SN)w_2$$

BI represents behavioural intention,  $A_B$  represents the attitude toward the behaviour, SN represents subjective norm, and  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  are weighting factors. As this model makes clear, even if an individual has a positive attitude toward the recommended behaviour, perceived normative pressures can override that attitude. In such a circumstance, the appropriate persuasive target is obviously not attitude, but subjective norm.

Hence, altering the subjective norm can be a mechanism for influencing behaviour. For example, Kelly et al. (1992; St. Lawrence, Brasfield, Diaz, Jefferson, Reynolds & Leonard, 1994) identified a number of 'trendsetters', who were then recruited to communicate HIV risk-reduction information to gay men in their communities. This intervention produced substantial and sustained risk-reduction behaviour and illustrates how alterations in subjective norms can affect behaviour.

But the individual's subjective norm is not the only sort of norm that might influence a person's conduct. A person's 'descriptive norm' – the person's perception of what most people do – can also play a role. Several studies have found that behavioural intentions can be influenced by descriptive norms; the more one perceives that others engage in a behaviour, the more likely one is to intend to engage in it (e.g. Heath & Gifford, 2002; Okun, Karoly & Lutz, 2002).

Thus, one avenue to influencing intentions and behaviour can be to change perceived descriptive norms. For example, college students appear often to overestimate the frequency of drug and alcohol use on their campuses (e.g. Perkins, Meilman, Leichter, Cashin & Presley, 1999; cf. Wechsler & Kuo, 2000). Interventions aimed at correcting such descriptive-norm misperceptions might be helpful in reducing drug and alcohol abuse (for some relevant findings, see Haines & Spear, 1996; Steffian, 1999; Miller, Monin & Prentice, 2000, pp. 106–107; Carter & Kahnweiler, 2000; Werch, Pappas, Carlson, DiClemente, Chally & Sinder, 2000; Thombs & Hamilton, 2002).

Concerning perceived behavioural control, another non-attitudinal obstacle to compliance with the persuader's advocated action can be the audience's perceived inability to perform the desired behaviour. A number of theoretical perspectives on intentional behaviour have emphasised this possibility, but for present purposes Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour provides a convenient example. The theory of planned behaviour provides an elaboration of the theory of reasoned action, by adding perceived behavioural control as a third predictor of behavioural intention. Perceived behavioural control refers to the person's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour, that is, the person's perceived self-efficacy with respect to the behaviour. Thus, the algebraic expression of the theory of planned behaviour is

$$BI = (A_B)w_1 + (SN)w_2 + (PBC)w_3$$

where PBC refers to perceived behavioural control and  $w_3$  is the corresponding weighting factor.

It is easy to imagine circumstances in which perceived behavioural control is the key obstacle to compliance. For example, a person might have a positive attitude toward exercising regularly ('I think exercising regularly would be a good thing') and a positive subjective norm ('Most people who are important to me think I should exercise regularly'), but negative perceived behavioural control ('I don't have the time, and the health club is too far away'), and so the person does not form the intention to exercise regularly. A large number of studies have confirmed that perceived behavioural control does indeed often have a significant influence on behavioural intentions (for reviews and discussion, see Godin & Kok, 1996; Conner & Armitage, 1998; Notani, 1998; Sutton, 1998; Albarracin, Johnson, Fishbein & Muellerleile, 2001; Armitage & Conner, 2001; Hagger, Chatzisarantis & Biddle, 2002; O'Keefe, 2002b, pp. 113–127). To take one example of the distinctive role of perceived behavioural control, in a comparison of householders who recycled and those who did not, De Young (1989) found recyclers and non-recyclers to have similar positive attitudes toward recycling, but non-recyclers perceived recycling to be much more difficult to do than did recyclers and indicated uncertainty about exactly how to perform the behaviour; that is, the barrier to behavioural performance appeared to be a matter of a perceived inability to perform the action, not a negative attitude toward the behaviour.

Given that a lack of perceived behavioural self-efficacy is sometimes the primary obstacle to gaining the audience's compliance, the question becomes one of identifying ways in which persuaders might enhance self-efficacy. Broadly speaking, persuaders have at least four different means by which they can attempt to influence a person's perceived behavioural control. The usefulness of these various mechanisms will depend on the particular behaviour of interest, but each can be helpful in the right circumstances.

First, sometimes persuaders will be able to remove some barrier to behavioural performance. In cases where the barrier is a lack of information, persuaders can simply supply the necessary information. Cardenas and Simons-Morton (1993), for instance, found that parents' self-efficacy for lowering the temperature setting of a water heater (so as to prevent tap-water scalding of infants) could be enhanced by an informational brochure describing how to perform the action. In cases where the barrier is substantive (rather than informational), persuaders may sometimes be able to remove the barrier. For example, among low-income patients whose initial medical test results indicate a need for a return hospital visit, transportation problems might represent a significant barrier to returning; Marcus et al. (1992) found that providing such patients with free bus passes or parking permits significantly increased the likelihood of a visit for follow-up procedures. Similarly, if a political party finds that its potential voters do not know the location of their polling places (informational barrier) or lack transportation to polling places on election day (substantive barrier), the party might well take steps directly to remove those impediments to performance of the desired behaviour.

Second, audiences can be given examples of other people performing the behaviour successfully. Such modelling can enhance self-efficacy (by receivers reasoning, in effect, 'if they can do it, so can I'). For example, Anderson (2000) found that viewing a video in which successful breast self-examination was modelled produced significantly greater perceived behavioural self-efficacy than various control

conditions. (For some additional studies of the effects of modeling on self-efficacy, see Mahler, Kulik & Hill, 1993; Anderson, 1995; Hagen, Gutkin, Wilson & Oats, 1998; Ng, Tam, Yew & Lam, 1999.)

Third, persuaders can sometimes create opportunities for successful performance of the target behaviour. Rehearsal of the behaviour – that is, practice at accomplishing the behaviour – will presumably enhance perceived self-efficacy ('I've done it before, I can do it again'). For example, Steffen, Sternberg, Teegarden, and Shepherd (1994) found that practising testicle self-examination on a life-like model significantly increased participants' reported ability to perform the examination. And a number of studies have reported that self-efficacy for condom use can be enhanced by practice at using condoms correctly, role-playing (or mental rehearsal) of conversations with sexual partners, and similar interventions (Maibach & Flora, 1993; Weeks, Levy, Zhu, Perhats, Handler & Flay, 1995; Weisse, Turbiasz & Whitney, 1995; Yzer, Fisher, Bakker, Siero & Misovich, 1998). (For examples of other research concerning the effects of successful practice on perceived behavioural control, see Luzzo, Hasper, Albert, Bibby & Martinelli, 1999; Duncan, Duncan, Beauchamp, Wells & Ary, 2000.)

Finally, self-efficacy can apparently be enhanced by receiving encouragement from others. A persuader who indicates confidence in the receiver's behavioural abilities can sometimes thereby increase the receiver's perceived self-efficacy. For example, assuring people that they can successfully prevent a friend from driving while drunk can enhance their perceived ability to do so (Anderson, 1995).

Of course, these are not mutually exclusive possibilities. Indeed, several studies have indicated that combinations of these elements (e.g. combining modelling with rehearsal) can be especially valuable as a means of influencing self-efficacy (Eden & Kinnar, 1991; Maibach & Flora, 1993). But whether deployed individually or jointly, these various mechanisms all offer good prospects for enhancing perceived behavioural control.

## **Summary**

Persuaders often seem prone to suppose that the primary reason that the audience currently fails to embrace the advocated action or viewpoint is that the audience does not have the appropriate attitudes, that is, the appropriate general evaluations of the action or object. Thus, it might be assumed that, for instance, the reason that households do not participate in recycling programmes is negative attitudes toward recycling; the reason that consumers do not purchase one's product is negative evaluations of the product; and so forth.

But as should now be apparent, the audience's resistance to the advocated action need not necessarily lie in negative attitudes. On the contrary, often the audience already has the desired attitudes. In such circumstances, skilful persuaders will want to identify carefully the locus of such non-attitudinal resistance. It might be that the attitudes are insufficiently connected to the behaviour (for instance, they are insufficiently salient), or it might be that other influences on behaviour (such as norms or behavioural self-efficacy) represent the key obstacles to compliance.