

A photograph of a female nurse with dark curly hair, wearing blue scrubs, smiling warmly at an elderly male patient. The patient is seen from the back, wearing a white hospital gown. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting, likely a hospital room.

Chapter 1

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MODELS OF COMMUNICATION

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

This chapter will explore communication models that are used frequently as part of a nurse's role.

WHAT IS A COMMUNICATION MODEL?

A communication model is chiefly a process in which information is channelled, then imparted by the sender to the receiver through a medium. When the receiver gets the information they decode the message and may give the sender feedback.

Theorists have analysed the communication process many times and how individuals interact with each other. There are different models of communication that are relevant to a nurse. These are the **linear**, **interactive** and **transactional** models.

Linear Model

The best-known model of communication is the one devised by Shannon and Weaver (1949) and was originally known as 'a mathematical model of communication'. It is a simple linear model that is easily understood.



GLOSSARY

Linear

Arranged in or extending along a straight or nearly straight line or in one direction.

Linear communication consists of a sender creating a message. They send it to the receiver without any feedback. See Figure 1.1.

This model has five main parts:

- information source: where the message is produced,
- transmitter: where the message is encoded (relayed),

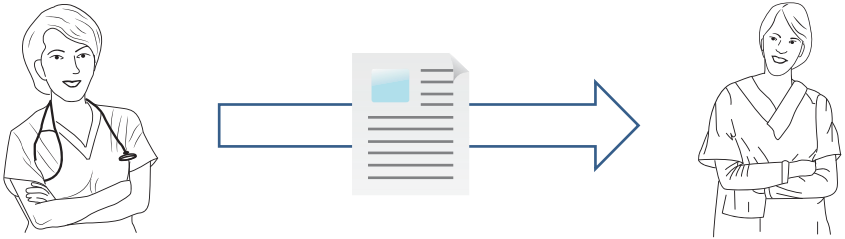


Figure 1.1 A linear model of communication. Adapted from: Shannon and Weaver (1949).

- channel: the carrier of the signal,
- receiver: where the message is decoded,
- destination: where the message ends up.

What this model is suggesting is that during a conversation between two people, at any one time only one person is expressing and sending the information, and the second person is only receiving and absorbing the information. When the information is received and decoded the roles may be reversed, and the second person becomes the sender and the first person the receiver. An example of linear communication is a letter or an email.

One of the advantages of Shannon and Weaver's model is that it is simple and easily understood, and can be applied to most types of communication. However, this type of model has been challenged because it does not take into account simultaneous interaction and transactional feedback. An example of this could be when we try to communicate with people from different cultures; in such cases, the message is relayed by one or more of our five senses (sight, touch, hearing, taste or smell). We observe the listener's body language and if they have not heard our message or it has been misinterpreted then we are able to adapt our communication or adjust our tone of voice to accommodate the listener.

Communication relies on the active participation of both sender and receiver, and cannot be accurately represented by a linear system.

Interactive Model

Wilbur Schramm was one of the early theorists to demonstrate a circular model of communication. He proposed that both the sender and receiver interpret the message, rather than assessing the message's meaning (see Figure 1.2).

Schramm (1955; cited in Wood 2009) saw communication as a two-way process with both the speaker and the listener providing and receiving verbal or non-verbal feedback. Both the speaker and the listener take turns to speak and listen to each other. Other characteristics of messages that impact communication between two individuals are intonation and pitch patterns, accents, facial expressions, quality of voice and gestures. This model also indicates that the speaker and listener communicate better if they have had the same experiences. However, this may mean that both the receiver and sender are limited by their experience.

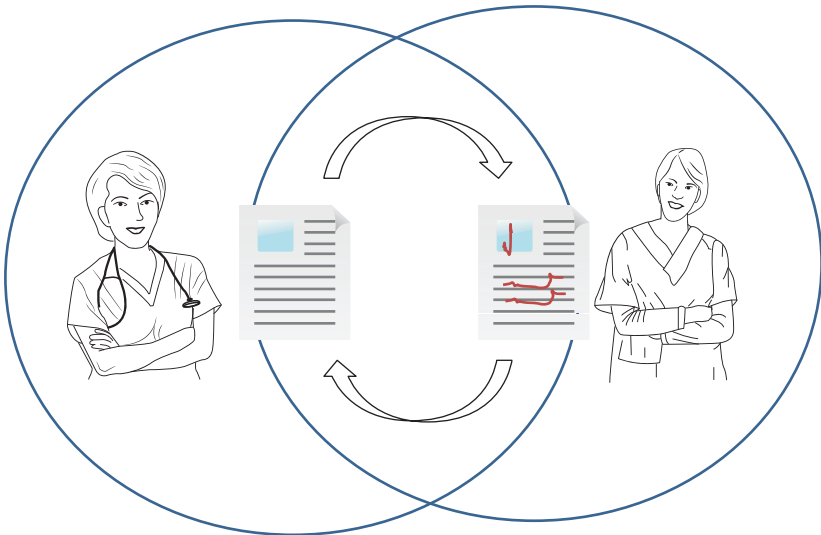


Figure 1.2 An interactive model of communication. Adapted from: Schramm (1954).

Nevertheless, there must be some experience common to both in order for the communication to be useful and for the intended message to be conveyed. For example, if you were asking someone who did not speak the same language as you if they wanted sugar in their coffee, you would most probably point to the sugar and then the cup of coffee, hoping that the other individual has had some common experience of putting sugar in their coffee. However, if the receiver comes from a culture where sugar is not used, then your communication will be ineffective.

Two people from completely different cultures who speak different languages and who have no common experiences may find that communication becomes nearly impossible without help from a third party such as a translator or an interpreter.

Common ground or mutual understanding is important in communication and essential for interpersonal communication.

Transactional Model

The transactional model builds on the interactive model by adding non-verbal communication methods such as gestures, eye contact, use of silence, positioning, facial expressions and body language. It demonstrates that communication is an ongoing and continuously changing process. You are changing, the people with whom you are communicating are changing and your environment is also continually changing as well. Each person in the communication process reacts depending on factors such as their background, prior experiences, attitudes, cultural beliefs and self-esteem.

Figure 1.3 shows a transactional model of communication that takes into account 'noise' or interference in communication as well as the time factor.

As you can see from the diagram, the outer lines of the model indicate that communication happens within a shared **field of experience**. This could be that you have

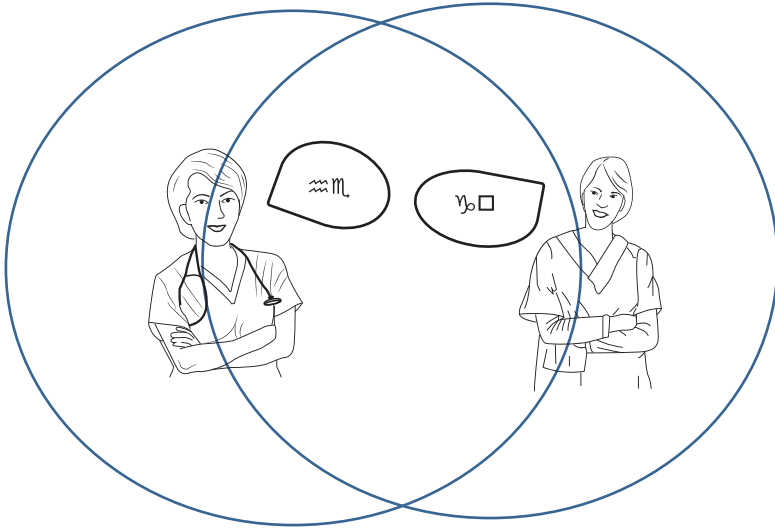


Figure 1.3 A transactional model of communication. Adapted from: Wood (2009).

worked in the same department or that you know the same person.

The transactional model displays communication interactions as ongoing negotiations of meaning. As already mentioned, non-verbal expressions take on additional importance when you are communicating with people from completely different cultures, speaking different languages and with no common experiences with which to take part in this negotiation of meaning.

Individuals come to a communication interaction with their own field of experience. This includes things like personal culture, history, gender, social influences and experience. Your field of experience is the frame of reference that you bring to each situation that you encounter. At times, individuals' fields of experiences overlap and they share things in common.

Other times, individuals' fields of experiences do not overlap; and because they share no common past experiences, it is difficult to negotiate meaning.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1 What is a communication model?
- 2 What type of model was identified by Shannon and Weaver (1949)?
- 3 The transactional model builds on the interactive model by adding what into the communication?

KEY POINTS

- Defining models of communication
- Linear model of communication
- Interactive model of communication
- Transactional model of communication

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