CHAPTER 2 An Interpersonal Communication Process

Interviewing is more than asking and answering questions.

To improve your interviewing skills, you must start by understanding the **deceptively complex process** and its interrelated and interacting variables. An interview is far more complex than merely asking and answering questions or talking to someone. **The objectives of this chapter** are to develop a model of the process that summarizes, explains, and portrays the intricate and often puzzling nature of the typical interview. The completed model in Figure 2.8 looks very complicated because it summarizes a very complicated process.

Two Parties in the Interview

Each party consists of unique and complex individuals.

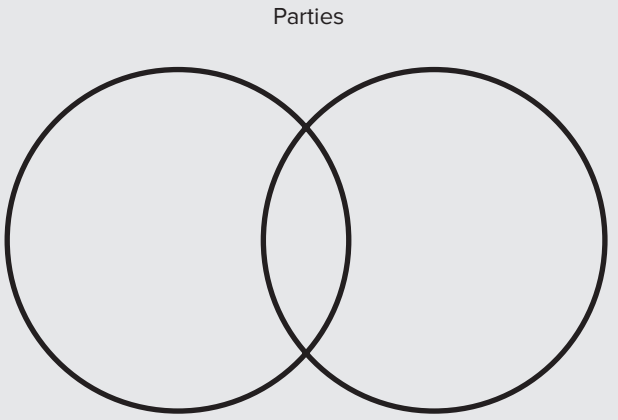
The overlapping circles in Figure 2.1 represent the two parties in every interview. Each party is a **unique sum** of culture, environment, education, training, and experiences. Each party is an aggregate of personality traits that range from optimistic to pessimistic, trusting to suspicious, honest to dishonest, patient to impatient, flexible to inflexible, and compassionate to indifferent. Each of you has specific beliefs, attitudes, and values. And each party is motivated by ever-evolving needs, interests, desires, and expectations.

You must also be aware that each person in each party communicates **intra-personally** as well as **inter-personally.** You literally talk to yourself. What you say to yourself and how you say it will influence the verbal and nonverbal messages you send and how you experience an interview. In a very real sense, "the whole person speaks and the whole person listens."[1]

Each interview contributes to a relational history.

Even though each party is made up of unique individuals, both parties must collaborate to make the interview a success. The circles overlap in Figure 2.1 to indicate the **relational nature** of the interview process in which the parties interact **with** one another. Each has a stake in the outcome of the interview, and neither party can **go it alone.** This relationship may commence with this interview or be another act in a **relational history** that dates from hours to weeks, months, or years. When parties begin a relational history, interactions may be brief or awkward because neither knows what to expect, how best to start the interaction, when to speak and listen, and what information to share. In some cultures, "all strangers are viewed as sources of potential relationships; in others, relationships develop only after long and careful scrutiny."[2] Stereotypes such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity may play significant negative roles in zero-history situations, particularly during the anxious opening minutes of

Figure 2.1 *The interview parties*



an interaction.[3] On the other hand, negative expectations and attitudes may exist from previous interactions.

A situation may alter a relationship.

Your relationships may be **intimate** (close friends), **casual** (co-workers), **functional** (physicians), **formal** (supervisors), and **distant** (elected officials). They may change during immediate interactions and over time. What might begin as a functional relationship with an attorney or teacher may evolve into a close personal relationship lasting for decades because each interaction affects how you communicate who you are and what you are for each other. Your relationships change as interview situations vary and change. For instance, you may have a formal relationship with a professor in the classroom setting, a functional relationship when the professor is counseling you in an office setting, a casual relationship at a picnic for majors, and an intimate relationship years after you have completed your degree. Sarah Trenholm and Arthur Jensen write that you must acquire **relational competence** to know when and how to adapt to the roles you play in relationships with others and to develop "workable rules and norms" for differing situations.[4]

Relational Dimensions

Your relationships are multidimensional, with five being critical to interviews: similarity, inclusion, affection, control, and trust.

Similarity

A few similarities do not equal relational peers.

You tend to find it easier to interact with others and form relationships when you share gender, race, cultural norms and values, education, experiences, beliefs, interests, and expectations. Important similarities enable you to understand and communicate with one another and thus to establish **common ground** that is portrayed by the overlapping circles in Figure 2.1. Expanding this perceived overlap during an interview reduces perceived

dissimilarities that may impede interactions and development of a meaningful relationship. Beware of surface similarities such as age, race, ethnicity, or dress that may lead you to perceive far more significant similarities with a party than you actually have.

Inclusion

Wanting to take part leads to collaboration.

Interview parties enhance relationships when both are motivated to speak and listen, question and respond, and are open and straightforward. The more you are involved and share in an interview, the more satisfied you will be with the interactions and outcome. It is not merely what you do or gain in an interview but **what you do with another.** It should be a **collaborative, joint effort.** Both parties depend on one another for the success of each interview.

Affection

We interact more freely with persons we like.

You cultivate interview relationships when both parties respect one another and there is a marked degree of friendship or warmth. Establishing a **we** instead of a **me-you** feeling requires communication that both parties see as pleasant, fair, and productive. Relationships waiver when signs of affection are inconsistent, ambivalent, or negative. In one study, parties lowered their loudness to express disliking as well as liking for one another. In others, decreased talk time seemed to indicate liking by showing greater attentiveness or disliking by exhibiting disengagement from the interaction.[5]

Sometimes you come to an interview with an ambivalent or hostile attitude toward the other party because of a relational history or what James Honeycutt calls **relational memory.** He writes that "even though relationships are in constant motion, relationship memory structures provide a perceptual anchor [so that] individuals can determine where they are in a relationship."[6] Relational memory may aid parties in dealing with what researchers call **dialectical tensions** that result from conflicts between "important but opposing needs or desires," or "between opposing" or contrasting "'voices,' each expressing a different or contradictory impulse."[7] Kory Floyd writes that dialectical tensions are a "normal part of any close, interdependent relationship, and they become problematic only when people fail to manage them properly."[8]

Control

Hierarchy may hinder the flow of information and self-disclosure.

Since the interview is a **collaborative** process, each party is responsible for its successes and failures. John Stewart has introduced the concept of "nexting" that he claims is the "most important single communication skill." Each party should be asking "What can I help to happen next," rather than how can I control the nature and content of this interaction.[9] The felt need to control interactions may result from personality traits, the competitive spirit our society fosters, and organizational rules. Hierarchies present in families, schools, churches, government, and corporations make **upward** and **downward** communication difficult for each party. Edward Hall writes that "People at the top pay attention to different things from those in the middle or bottom of the system."[10]

Trust

Trust is critical in interviews because outcomes affect parties personally—their income, their careers, their purchases, their profits, their health, and their futures. Trust comes

Trust is essential in every interview.

from **mutual** honesty, sincerity, reliability, fairness, and even-temper—in other words when you see interactions with one another as being **safe.** When you are anxious during interactions, you tend to become cautious and fearful about outcomes, and the first casualty is level of **disclosure**. You are reluctant to be direct and open to share information, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes. The risk may be too great. Cultivate and protect relationships to assure productive interviews.

Global Relationships

Social, political, and work worlds are becoming increasingly global, so it is necessary to understand how relationships are created and fostered in other countries and cultures. The less you know about others, the more likely you are to be anxious when initiating relationships. Martin, Nakayama, and Flores warn, for instance, that "in intercultural conflict situations, when we are experiencing high anxieties with unfamiliar behavior (for example, accents, gestures, facial expressions), we may automatically withhold trust."[11] You may fear the consequences of your words and actions that may offend the other party or make you look stupid.

In the United States, we tend to have numerous friendly, informal relationships and place importance on how a person looks, particularly early in relationships. We create and discard relationships frequently, while Australians make deeper and longer-lasting commitments. Arabs, like Americans, develop relationships quickly but, unlike Americans who dislike taking advantage of relationships by asking for favors, Arabs believe friends have a duty to help one another. The Chinese develop strong, long-term relationships and, like Arabs, see them involving obligations. In Mexico, trust in relationships develops slowly, is given sparingly, and must be earned. Betrayal of trust results in the greatest harm possible to a relationship. Germans develop relationships slowly because they see them as very important, and using first names before a relationship is well-established is considered rude behavior. Japanese prefer not to interact with strangers, want background information on parties before establishing relationships, prefer doing business with people they have known for years, and take time establishing relationships.

Relationships develop differently in different cultures.

Gender in Relationships

Gender differences have evolved but not disappeared.

Although men and women are more similar than different in how they communicate and how they establish and refine relationships, research has revealed significant differences.[12] Men's talk tends to be directive and goal-oriented with statements that "tend to press compliance, agreement, or belief." Women's talk tends to be more polite and expressive, containing less intense words, qualifiers (perhaps, maybe), and disclaimers ("Maybe I'm wrong but . . ." "I may not fully understand the situation, but . . .").[13] Women use communication as a primary way of establishing relationships, while men communicate "to exert control, preserve independence, and enhance status."[14] Women give more praise and compliments and are reluctant to criticize directly in the workplace while men remain silent when a co-worker is doing something well and take criticism straight.[15] Women report "greater satisfaction with their interactions than do men.[16] On the other hand, researchers have found that "women are more likely to betray and be betrayed by other women." Men report they are more often betrayed by other men with whom they are competing.[17]

Interchanging Roles during Interviews

A single party cannot make an interview a success but can ensure its failure.

While one party may dominate an interview, both speak and listen from time to time, ask and answer questions, and assume the roles of interviewer and interviewee. Neither party can expect the other to make the interview a success. John Stewart writes that "human communicators are always sending and receiving simultaneously. As a result, each communicator has the opportunity to change how things are going at any time in the process."[18] The small circles within the party circles in Figure 2.2 portray the exchange of roles in interviews.

The extent to which roles are exchanged and control is shared is often influenced by the status or expertise of the parties, which party initiated the interview, type of interview, situation, and atmosphere of the interaction—supportive or defensive, friendly or hostile. These factors determine which approach an interviewer selects—**directive** or **nondirective.**

Directive Approach

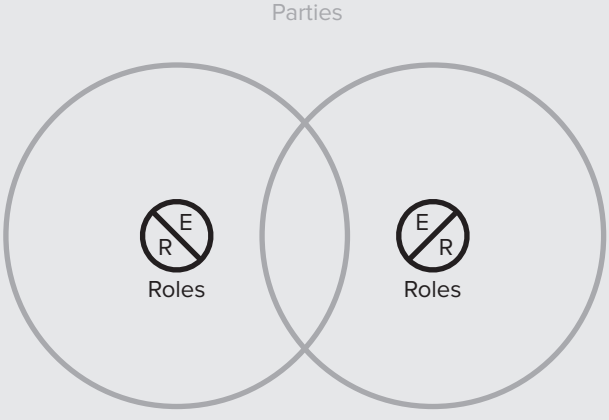
A directive approach allows the interviewer to maintain control.

In a directive approach, the **interviewer** establishes the purpose of the interview and controls the pacing, climate, and formality of the interview. Questions are likely to be closed with brief, direct answers. An interviewee may assume occasional control during the interview, but the interviewer tends to dominate the process. Typical directive interviews are information giving, surveys and opinion polls, employee recruiting, and persuasive interviews such as sales. The directive approach is easy to learn, takes less time, enables you to maintain control, and is easy to replicate.

The following exchange illustrates a directive interviewing approach:

1. **Interviewer:** Did you attend the in-service training last night?
2. **Interviewee:** Yes.

Figure 2.2 *The switching of roles*



3. **Interviewer:** How long did it last?
4. **Interviewee:** Nearly an hour-and-a-half.
5. **Interviewer:** What was the single point you found most insightful?
6. **Interviewee:** That we must remain open at all times to new ideas.

Nondirective Approach

A nondirective approach enables the interviewee to share control.

In a nondirective approach, the **interviewee** has significant control over subject matter, length of answers, interview climate, and formality. Questions are open-ended to give the interviewee maximum freedom to respond. Typical nondirective interviews are journalistic, oral history, investigations, counseling, and performance review. The nondirective approach allows for greater flexibility and adaptability, encourages probing questions, and invites the interviewee to volunteer information.

The following is a nondirective interview exchange:

1. **Interviewer:** How was the in-service training last night?
2. **Interviewee:** It was very interesting and the presenter was excellent.
3. **Interviewer:** What were the main issues covered in the presentation?
4. **Interviewee:** The main one was developing relationships with clients, and the presenter discussed the importance of the first contact in forming a relational history, how to maintain relationships over time, and how to handle conflicts that might threaten a relationship.
5. **Interviewer:** Which points did you find most helpful?
6. **Interviewee:** I think the ones on how relationships develop in different cultures and countries were most helpful since a growing number of our clients are from outside of the United States.

Be flexible and adaptable when selecting approaches.

Although choice of an interviewing approach may be influenced by organizational, societal, or cultural norms and expectations, be flexible in how you employ each approach and consider a combination. For instance, recruiters often start interviews with a nondirective approach to relax the applicant and get the person talking, then switch to a more directive approach when asking questions and giving information, and return to a nondirective approach when answering the applicant's questions.

Perceptions of Interviewer and Interviewee

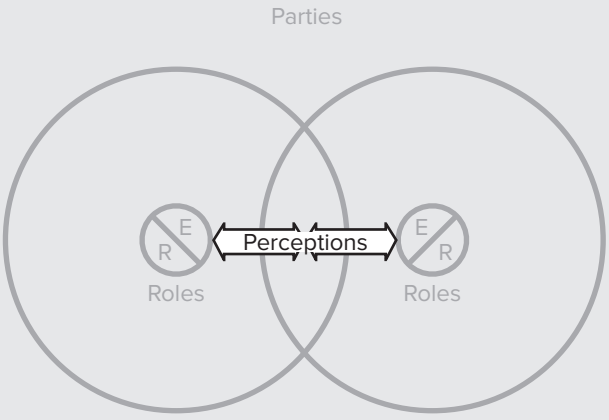
Perceptions drive our interactions.

When you arrive at an interview, you bring two important **perceptions** with you, perceptions of **self** and perceptions of the **other party,** and these may change positively or negatively as the interview progresses. These critical perceptions are portrayed by the double-ended arrows in Figure 2.3.

Perceptions of Self

Your **self-concept** or **self-identity** is a mental portrait of how **you interpret** and **believe others interpret** what and who you have been, are at the moment, and will be in the

Figure 2.3 *Perceptions of self and others*



future. John Stewart writes that we "come to each encounter with an identifiable 'self,' built through past interactions, and *as we talk,* we adapt ourselves to fit the topic we're discussing and the people we are talking with, and we are changed by what happens to us as we communicate."[19]

What we perceive ourselves to be may be more important than what we are.

Self-esteem or **self-worth** is a critical element of your self-identify because you exert a great deal of mental and communicative energy trying to gain and sustain recognition and approval from family, peers, society, organizations, and professions because you have a "persistent and compelling" need to give an accounting of yourself.[20] When you **feel** respected or valued, you have high self-esteem and are likely to be more perceptive, confident, and willing to express unpopular ideas and opinions. When you **feel** disrespected or under-valued, you have low self-esteem and become self-critical, feel uncertain, and are hesitant to express unpopular ideas and opinions. Success in an interview may depend upon your ability or inability to convince yourself that you will be successful—a **self-fulfilling prophecy.**

Culture and Gender Differences

Many citizens of the global village are less concerned with self than with group.

Self-identity and self-esteem are central in American and Western cultures that emphasize the individual. They are not central in Eastern cultures and South American countries. Japanese, Chinese, and Indians, for example, are collectivist rather than individualist cultures and are more concerned with the image, esteem, and achievement of the group. Attributing successful negotiations to an individual in China would be considered egotistical, self-advancing, and disrespectful. Success is attributed to the group or team. Failure to appreciate cultural differences causes many communication problems for Americans.

Gender matters in self-identity because "gender roles are socially constructed ideas about how women and men should think and behave."[21] We expect men to be more assertive, in charge, and self-sufficient and women to be "feminine," submissive, and to show

empathy and emotional expressiveness. Not all men and women act this way, of course, but we cannot ignore the impact of gender and self-identity on interviews.

Perceptions of the Other Party

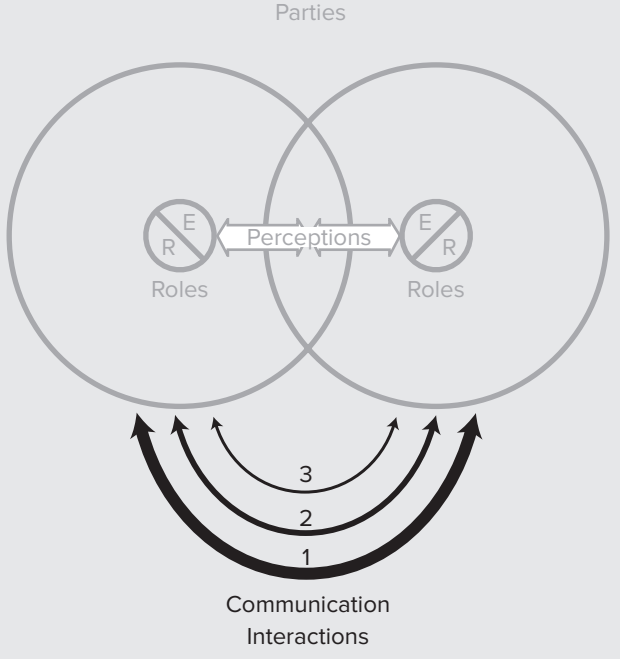
The way you perceive the other party may influence how you approach an interview and how you interact as it progresses. For example, you may be in awe of the other's reputation and accomplishments. The other party may differ from you in size, physical attractiveness, age, gender, race, or ethnic group. Previous encounters may lead you to look forward to or dread an interview. If you keep an **open mind** and are **adaptable,** differences may become assets rather than liabilities. Warmth, understanding, and cooperation in your verbal and nonverbal interactions can overcome negative preconceptions.

Allow interactions to alter or reinforce perceptions.

Communication Interactions

The curved arrows in Figure 2.4 that link the two parties symbolize the communication levels that occur during interviews. Each level differs in relational distance, self-disclosure, risk encountered, perceived meanings, and amount and type of content exchanged.

Figure 2.4 *Communication interactions*



Levels of Interactions

Level 1 interactions are safe and superficial.

Level 1 interactions are safe and nonthreatening. You may portray interaction levels as metaphorical doors with the Level 1 door being slightly open. Questions, for instance, generate brief, socially acceptable, comfortable responses such as yes or no, simple facts, and ambiguous words and phrases such as "Okay," Pretty good," "Not bad," and "Can't complain." Either party may close the door quickly and safely when necessary. The thickness of the arrow indicates that Level 1 exchanges dominate the interview and there is **relational distance** between the parties because no prior or close relationship exists.

Level 2 interactions require trust and risk-taking.

Level 2 interactions are half-safe and half-revealing. Parties delve more deeply into personal and controversial topics and probe into beliefs, attitudes, and positions on issues. The metaphorical door is half-open (the optimist's view) or half-closed (the pessimist's view) as parties reveal feelings, opinions, and potentially harmful information. They are more willing to take risks but want an opportunity to close the door when necessary. The thickness of the arrow indicates that Level 2 interactions are less common, and the length of the arrow indicates that a closer relationship is necessary for a successful interview.

Level 3 interactions involve full disclosure.

Level 3 interactions are risk-taking with full disclosure in personal and controversial topics that reveal feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. The metaphorical door is wide open with little opportunity to retreat from or dodge negative reactions. The arrow is thin and short to indicate that Level 3 interactions are uncommon and the relationship between parties must be established and trusting.

Self-Disclosure

We are on the line in many interview settings.

You must strive to move beyond Level 1 to Level 2 to Level 3 to obtain information, detect feelings, discover insights, and attain commitments. This requires maximum **self-disclosure,** and is often not easy to do. Unlike being a member of a group or audience into which you can blend or hide, the interview places your social, professional, financial, psychological, or physical welfare on the line. Interviews deal with *your* behavior, *your* performance, *your* reputation, *your* decisions, *your* weaknesses, *your* feelings, *your* money, or *your* future.

There are a number of ways to reduce the risks of self-disclosure. Understand the relationship you have with the other party. If it is minimal, begin with a safe level of disclosure and be sensitive to the potential effects of your disclosure on the other party and people not involved in the interview. Provide only relevant and appropriate information. Disclose at the level at which the other party reciprocates.[22] Be cautious when interacting online because research indicates that we tend to have fewer inhibitions than when interacting face-to-face and make "hyper-personal" revelations we may regret.

Gender

Women disclose more freely than men.

Women tend to disclose more than men and are allowed to express emotions such as fear, sadness, and sympathy. Because women appear to be better listeners and more responsive than men, disclosure is often highest between woman-to-woman parties (perhaps because talk is at the very heart of women's relationships), about equal in woman-to-man parties, and lowest among man-to-man parties.

Culture

Culture may dictate what we disclose and to whom.

Culture may determine what you disclose, when, to whom, and how. For example, people in the United States of European descent disclose on a wide range of topics including personal information. Japanese disclose more about their careers and less about their families. Asians disclose more to people with high expertise and ability to exhibit honest and positive attitudes than to those who like to talk and show emotions. People in high-context, collectivist cultures such as China are expected to work for the good of the group or team and both know and adhere to cultural norms. They disclose less than those in low-context, individualistic cultures such as the United States and Great Britain. Westerners strive to succeed as individuals and know less about their cultural norms, and this lack of familiarity with cultural norms makes them more flexible. Conflicts may result in interviews when you over-disclose, under-disclose, or disclose to the wrong party from differing cultures. Be aware that perceived similarity, competence, involvement, and the need to take the relationship to a higher level may trump cultural differences in self-disclosing.

While cultures vary, the notion of politeness—maintaining positive rather than negative face—is universal. According to **"politeness theory,"** all humans want to be appreciated and protected. Littlejohn writes,

Positive and negative face are universal motives.

> *Positive face* is the desire to be appreciated and approved, to be liked and honored, and *positive politeness* is designed to meet these desires. Showing concern, complimenting, and using respectful forms of address are examples. *Negative face* is the desire to be free from imposition or intrusion, and *negative politeness* is designed to protect the other person when negative face needs are threatened. Acknowledging the imposition when making a request is a common example.[23]

You encounter situations in which politeness is essential whenever you are involved in challenging, complaining, evaluating, disciplining, advising, and counseling. Guerrero, Andersen, and Afifi write that "people face a constant struggle between wanting to do whatever they want (which satisfies their negative face needs) and wanting to do what makes them look good to others (which satisfies their positive face needs)."[24] Severe "face threatening acts" include behavior that violates an important cultural, social, or professional rule; behavior that produces significant harm; and behavior for which the party is directly responsible. The desire to be polite—to avoid hurting or upsetting another and to show appreciation, understanding, or agreement—is one of the most common causes of deception.

Verbal Interactions

Never assume communication is taking place.

Perhaps the **greatest single problem with human communication is the assumption of it.** Virtually all of us assume, for instance, that if we share a language—words—we share meanings. Unfortunately, words are arbitrary connections of letters that serve as symbols for nearly everything we encounter in our daily and professional lives, and these imperfect symbols may cause misunderstanding, confusion, embarrassment, hurt feelings, and antagonism. Let us examine some of our assumptions.

Words rarely have single meanings.

We assume the words we use are **commonly understood** by those who share our language. Journalism professor Michael Skube at Elon University has been keeping track of common words his students do not know. These include impetus, lucid, advocate, satire, brevity, and novel.[25] Many of us assume that words have **single meanings** that are clear to everyone, even when used out of context. But simple words such as game may refer to a computer game, wild animal, sport, prank, or a person willing to try new things. We assume words and their meanings are clear even when they are **ambiguous** such as a "nice" apartment, "affordable" education, "simple" instructions, and a "living" wage. When does a person become "middle aged" or "old?" Since you typically **hear** words rather than see them in interviews, you may run into problems caused by **sound alike** words such as see and sea, do and due, sail and sale, and to, too, and two. Apparently neutral words may have negative or positive **connotations** depending on how a person uses them. When is a running suit "inexpensive" or "cheap," an SUV "used" or "pre-owned," a laptop a college "expense" or an "investment?" While we have technical words to describe high-performance automobiles according to their looks, acceleration, power, and mechanical characteristics, we often resort to jargon **common** at the time such as cool, mean, awesome, or hot. We **name** or **label** people, places, things, and ideas to reveal how we see **reality.** A recession becomes a downturn; we purchase a lite beer rather than a diet beer; and we order a quarter-pounder rather than a four-ouncer. We have finally begun to substitute woman for girl, firefighter for fireman, and police officer for policeman. This is **not** so-called **political correctness** but labeling reality and showing respect in a society based on equality. The moral of this discussion of words is that you must select words carefully even with interview parties who share your language and reward your assumptions.

Words are rarely neutral.

Slang comes and goes and often determines who's in and who's out.

Naming is an effort to alter social reality.

Language and Gender

Gender differences may lead to power differences.

Men and women tend to use language differently. For example, men use power speech forms such as challenges, orders, leading questions, first-person pronouns such as I and me, and memorable phrases such as "Make my day," "Get a life," and "Read my lips." Women use powerless speech forms such as apologies, qualifiers, disclaimers, excuses, indirect questions, nonfluencies such as "Uh" and "Umm," and third-person pronouns such as we and us.[26] Our society expects men to use more intense language than women because it is considered masculine. When women use intense language, they are often seen as bitchy, pushy, or opinionated. While gender is important in how men and women use words, you must recognize that other factors also affect language choice including context of the interview, subject matter, status differences, and roles being played.

Language and the Global Village

Global use of words may be more significant than foreign words.

North Americans value words that are precise, direct, explicit, straightforward, and often start sentences with "I." Chinese are taught to downplay self-expression. Japanese tend to be implicit in words rather than explicit and to employ ambiguous words and qualifiers. Koreans try to avoid negative or no responses and imply disagreements to maintain group or team harmony. Arab-speaking people employ "sweet-talk" and accommodating language with elaborate metaphors and similes. Idioms such as "bought the farm," "get your feet wet," and "wild goose chase" are unique to North Americans and pose

problems even for those who speak English. For instance, Wen-Shu Lee who was fluent in English and taking a graduate class in the United States was confused when a fellow student looked at her notes and commented, "That's Greek to me." When she replied that it was Chinese rather than Greek, the American student laughed, and then she realized the student had used a common idiom.[27]

Language problems are avoidable.

Irving Lee observed many years ago that we tend to "talk past" rather than "to" one another.[28] You can reduce this tendency by choosing words carefully, expanding your vocabulary, being aware of common idioms, and learning the meanings of popular and professional jargon. Do not **assume** that the words you use everyday are understood and processed similarly by others different from you in gender, age, race, culture, or ethnic group.

Nonverbal Interactions

Nonverbal signals send many different messages.

Because the parties in interviews are in such close proximity, they are likely to take note of what the other **does** and **does not do:** movement, eye contact, facial expression, touch, glance, change in voice. Any behavioral act may send a message intentionally or unintentionally, correctly or incorrectly. For instance, you can invite turn-taking or change of role by nodding your head, pausing, or leaning back. Poor eye contact may signal that you are hiding something, a limp handshake that you are timid, a puzzled facial expression that you are confused, crossing your arms or raising an eyebrow that you are agitated. Remain **silent** to encourage the other to talk or keep talking, to signal agreement, or to show you are not in a hurry to move on to a new topic or to close the interview. Show interest by leaning forward, maintaining eye contact, or nodding your head.

Any behavioral act, or its absence, can convey a message.

Physical appearance and dress reveal how you view yourself, the other party, this situation, and the importance of the interview. Both are particularly important in initiating zero-history relationships and the first minutes of interviews. You tend to respond more favorably toward attractive and well-dressed people and perceive them to be poised, outgoing, interesting, and sociable. Unfortunately, you may react more favorably toward attractive persons who are neither too fat nor too thin, tall rather than short, shapely rather than unshapely, and pretty and handsome rather than plain or ugly. Few match all of these social criteria, so strive to eliminate these biases during interviews and building relationships.

Verbal and Nonverbal Intertwined

In mixed messages, the *how* may overcome the *what*.

Although we have separated verbal and nonverbal interactions in previous discussions for instructional purposes, it is impossible to isolate one from the other. The nonverbal often **complements** the verbal when you call attention to important words or phrases through vocal emphasis (like underlining, italicizing, or highlighting in print). You complement words with tone of voice, speaking rate, facial expression, and eye contact. The nonverbal **reinforces** words with a head nod or head shake. The nonverbal may **substitute** for words when you point to a chair without saying "Sit here," or nod your head to say "Enter." Silence can signal disagreement more tactfully than words. Research indicates that nonverbal signals exchange feelings and emotions more accurately than words; convey intentions relatively free of deception and confusion;

Verbal and nonverbal messages are intricately intertwined.

Be aware of cultural differences in nonverbal communication.

be more efficient; and impart ideas indirectly. Subjects indicated they thought nonverbal behaviors were more truthful than verbal messages and, if the messages conflicted—they were more likely to believe the nonverbal. *How* trumps the *what*.

Gender and Nonverbal Interactions

Women are more adept at nonverbal communication.

Women are more skilled at and rely more on nonverbal communication than men. Facial expressions, pauses, and bodily gestures are more important in women's interactions than men's, perhaps because women are more expressive than men. Women tend to gaze more and are less uncomfortable when eye contact is broken. Men's lower-pitched voices are viewed as more credible and dynamic than women's higher-pitched voices. Female parties stand or sit closer than opposite-sex parties, and males maintain more distance than opposite-sex or female parties.

Culture and Nonverbal Interactions

Different cultures share many nonverbal signals. People nod their heads in agreement, shake their heads in disagreement, give thumbs down for disapproval, shake fists in anger, and clap hands to show approval. There are significant differences, however. In the United States, African-Americans maintain eye contact more when speaking than when listening. They give more nonverbal feedback when listening than European-Americans. In general, African-Americans are more animated and personal, while European-Americans are more subdued. They avoid eye contact with superiors out of respect, a trait often misinterpreted by European-Americans who see lack of eye contact as a sign of disinterest, lack of confidence, or dishonesty. And African-Americans tend to touch more and stand closer together when communicating than do European-Americans.[29]

Nonverbal Interactions in the Global Village

Americans are taught to look others in the eye when speaking, while Africans are taught to avoid eye contact when listening to others. An honest "look me in the eye" for a Westerner may express a lack of respect to an Asian. An American widens his or her eyes to show wonder or surprise, while the Chinese do so to express anger, the French to express disbelief, and Hispanics to show lack of understanding. Americans are taught to smile in response to a smile, but this is not so in Israel. Japanese are taught to mask negative feelings with smiles and laughter. Americans are taught to have little direct physical contact with others while communicating, but Mediterranean and Latin countries encourage direct contact. On a loudness scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being high, Arabs would be near 10, Americans would be near the middle, and Europeans would

Be aware of the diversity of nonverbal messages in different parts of the world.

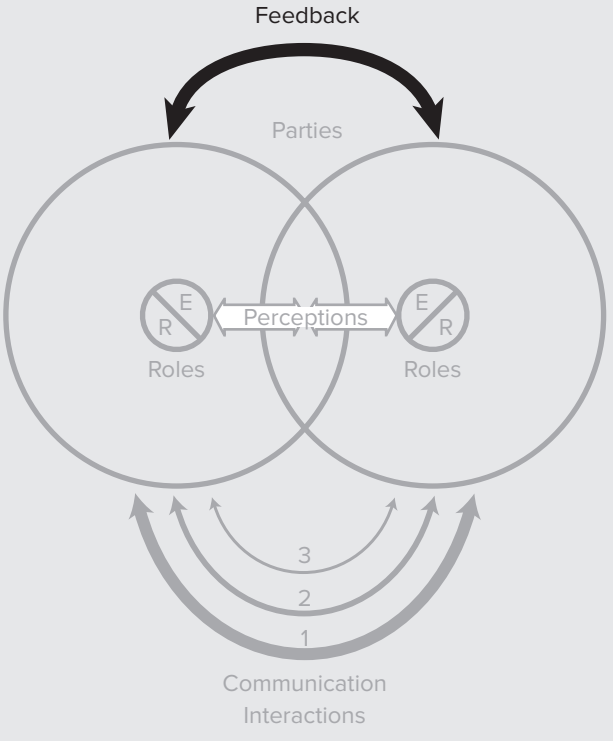
be near 1. Arabs perceive loudness as signs of strength and sincerity and softness as signs of weakness and deviousness. Not surprisingly, many Americans and Europeans see Arabs as pushy and rude. A firm handshake is important in American society but signals nothing in Japan.

Many gestures you observe in different cultures and countries have different meanings. A simple wave means "hello" in the United States and "come here" in Algeria. A finger to the forehead means smart in the United States and stupid in many European cultures. A thumb up means "way to go" in the United States and "screw you" in Iran. A circular motion of a finger around the ear means crazy in the United States and "you have a telephone call" in the Netherlands. Fingers in a circle means "okay" in the United States and is an obscene gesture in Brazil.

Feedback

Feedback is immediate and pervasive in interviews, and is essential when verifying what is being communicated and how. The large, double-ended arrow that links the top of the party circles in Figure 2.5 symbolizes the heavy stream of feedback between interview

Figure 2.5 *Feedback*



parties. Feedback is both verbal (questions and answers, arguments and counterarguments, agreements and disagreements, challenges and compliances) and nonverbal (facial expressions, gestures, raised eyebrows, eye contact, vocal utterances, and posture).

Be perceptive, sensitive, and receptive.

You can detect critical feedback and assess how an interview is progressing by observing and listening to what is and is not taking place or being said. During the interview, does the other party select a power position and move closer or farther apart? Are there changes in tone or attentiveness? Are there changes in eye contact, voice, or posture? Is there more or less willingness to disclose information, feelings, and attitudes? Do not read too much into small nonverbal actions and changes. A person may fidget because a chair is hard, not because a question is threatening; pay less attention because of noise and interruptions, not disinterest; speak loudly because of habit, not because of a hearing impairment. Poor eye contact may indicate shyness or culture, not deceptiveness or mistrust.

It is difficult to listen with your mouth open and your ears closed.

Listening skills are essential to obtaining information, detecting clues, and generating Level 2 and Level 3 responses. Few people listen well. Surveys of hundreds of corporations in the United States reveal that poor listening skills create barriers in all positions from entry level to CEO. An interviewee may not listen carefully to a question, while the interviewer may not listen carefully to the answer. Parties may be so absorbed in their primary roles as questioner or respondent that they do not listen well. Unfortunately, most of our educations prepare us to talk, not listen. There are four approaches to listening—for comprehension, for empathy, for evaluation, for resolution—and each plays a specific role in giving, receiving, and processing information accurately and insightfully.

Listening for Comprehension

The intent of listening for comprehension is to understand content.

When listening for comprehension, you are striving to receive, understand, and remember an interchange as accurately and completely as possible, not to judge. This approach is essential when giving and getting information and during the first minutes of interviews when determining how to react. When listening for comprehension, listen carefully and patiently to each question and answer. Listen to content and ideas as well as tone of voice and vocal emphasis for subtle meanings. Ask questions to clarify and verify.

Listening for Empathy

The intent of empathic listening is to understand the other party.

When listening for empathy, communicate genuine concern, understanding, and involvement. Empathic listening reassures, comforts, expresses warmth, and shows regard. It is the ability to place your self in another's situation. When listening with empathy, show interest and concern nonverbally, by not interrupting, and by being nonjudgmental. Reply with tact and understanding and provide options and guidelines.

Listening for Evaluation

The intent of evaluative listening is to judge content and actions.

When listening for evaluation (*critical listening*), you judge what you hear and observe. You are ready to judge when you comprehend the verbal and nonverbal interactions. Openly expressing criticism may diminish cooperation and level of disclosure. Use evaluative listening only after listening carefully to content and observing nonverbal cues. Ask questions for clarifications of exchanges and validations of your interpretations. Do not become defensive when an interview party reacts critically to your criticisms.

Listening for Resolution

The intent of dialogic listening is to solve problems.

Dialogic listening focuses on *ours* rather than *mine* or *yours* and believes the agenda for solving a problem or task supersedes the individual.[30] Dialogic listening is most appropriate in problem-solving interviews in which the goal is the joint resolution of a problem or task. When listening for resolution, encourage interaction, trust the other party to make significant contributions, paraphrase and add to the other party's responses and ideas while focusing on the present, and center your attention on the communication that is taking place.

Listening, like speaking, is a learned skill.

Active and insightful listening is a difficult, invisible skill to attain, partly because our educations and experiences as children, students, employees, and subordinates prepare us to be passive listeners. Become a more effective listener by being as satisfied as a listener as a talker, by attending carefully and critically to both verbal and nonverbal signals, by learning to ignore distractions such as surroundings, appearances, and interruptions, and by knowing which is the most appropriate listening approach to use.

The Interview Situation

Every interview takes place at a specific *time*, in a specific *place*, and with specific *surroundings*. These variables, and how you *perceive* them, impact every aspect of the interactions that take place. The enveloping circle in Figure 2.6 portrays the interview situation and the imploding arrows represent the variables that influence the process.

Initiating the Interview

Who initiates an interview and how it may affect control, roles, and atmosphere.

The arrows in Figure 2.6 that emerge from the top of the circle indicate that either party may initiate an interview. For instance, you may initiate an interview with an academic counselor or the counselor may initiate an interview with you. The particulars of the situation often determine who initiates the interaction and why. You may initiate an interview with a physician because of a persistent cough, or a physician may initiate an interview with you to discuss results of medical tests following a recent illness. The initiator may enhance the climate of an interview by initiating the interview directly rather than through a third party and by explaining the purpose, nature, and use of the information to be exchanged.

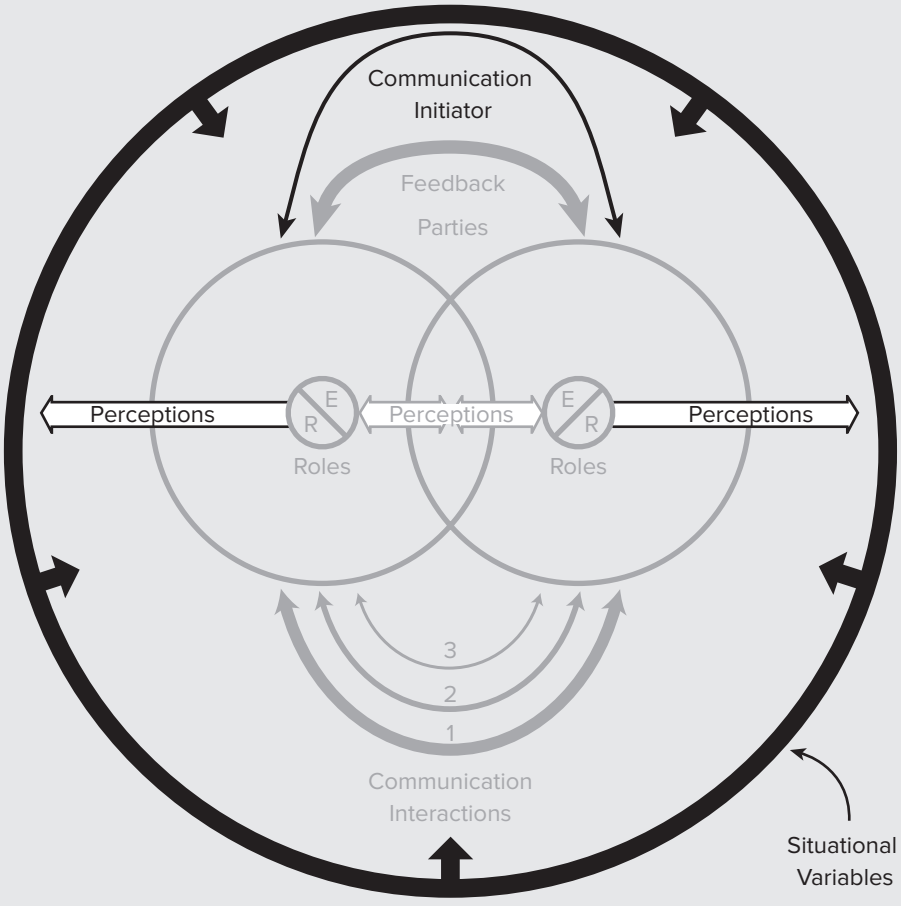
Perceptions

Perceptions are critical in moving beyond Level 1 interactions.

The arrows that extend from the parties to the situational circle indicate that each may **perceive** an interview situation similarly or differently. For example, a recruiter and applicant may see the purpose, need, and timing of an employment interview similarly. However, the recruiter may see the interaction as a routine event, while the applicant may see the interaction as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Each may have very different goals, a physician to complete a routine examination efficiently and effectively and the patient to get good news and escape.

You are more likely to communicate at Levels 2 and 3 if you perceive the situation to be familiar rather than strange, informal rather than formal, warm rather than

Figure 2.6 *Situational variables*



cold, private rather than open, and close rather than distant physically, socially, and psychologically.

Timing

Each of us have optimum times for interactions.

Selecting the best time for an interview is tricky because each party may have an ideal time of day for communicating openly and effectively. Some of us are morning people and are ready to go before many people awaken; some of us are afternoon people and work best after lunch; and some of us are evening people and communicate effectively well into the night when most people have gone to bed. The same goes for days of the week and time of year. Monday morning and Friday afternoon have traditionally been

poor times to exchange information and deal with critical issues. Holiday times are good for some types of interviews and poor for others. Become familiar with interview parties before arranging interviews. The legendary "cold call" that has interrupted dinners and sleeping has led states and the Federal Government to pass "don't call" legislation. Be aware of events that will or have preceded an interview such as being the third person of the day to ask for a raise, request a person to take a political survey, or request an extension for an assignment. Tax time is not good timing for conducting fund-raising interviews.

Take into account events before and after interviews.

Location and Setting

First of all, whose turf is best for an interview. For instance, you may feel more comfortable and less threatened in your home, room, office, business, or in a neutral place such as a lounge area or restaurant. You protect your turf. Think of your reactions when you walked into your room or office and found another person in your chair or at your desk. Create or select a well-lighted, pleasantly painted, moderate-sized room with comfortable furniture, temperature, and ventilation. Some organizations have created professional settings that resemble living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens, and studies that make interview parties feel at home and ready to communicate.

Surroundings help create a productive climate.

Objects and decorations may create an appropriate atmosphere and interview climate. Trophies, awards, degrees, and licenses attractively displayed communicate achievements, professional credibility, and stature in a field. Pictures, statues, and busts of leaders or famous persons communicate organizational and personal history, success, recognition, endorsement, and contacts. Models or samples may display state-of-the-art products and services. Carpeting, wall hangings, wallpaper, and curtains can provide a warm, attractive atmosphere conducive to effective communication.

Control noise to focus attention on the interaction.

Noise in an interview is anything that interferes with the communication process, including background noise, doors opening and closing, music, others talking, objects being dropped, and traffic. The interview may be interrupted by a cell phone or a text message. People coming in and out of the room, walking by an open door, or asking for assistance are common distractions. Eliminate negative influences of noise by selecting locations free of background noise or taking simple precautions.

Territoriality

All of us are territorial animals to varying degrees. You may select a seat, arrange books and papers, and place coats and hats strategically around you to stake out your physical and psychological space. You may resent those who invade this carefully crafted space with their choice of seating, possessions, eyes, voices, or bodies. Think of how you reacted to common invasions of territory such as another student walking into a professor's office while you were discussing a problem, a nearby diner listening to your conversation with a recruiter, or a colleague talking loudly at the next desk while you were talking to a client.

Relationship affects territorial comfort zones.

Proximity of interview parties affects your comfort level. You may feel uncomfortable with persons who insist on talking nose-to-nose, and react by backing up, placing furniture between you, or terminating the interview. Trenholm and Jensen write about "**territorial markers**" and use the term "**personal space**" to describe an

"imaginary bubble" around us that we consider to be "almost as private as the body itself."[31] Researchers have identified intimate distance (touching to 18 inches), personal distance (1½ to 4 feet), and social distance (4 to 12 feet). Two to four feet—approximately an arm's length or on opposite sides of a table or desk—is an optimum distance for most interviews.

Relationship, status, situation, and feelings of parties toward one another, influence the size of the bubble with which you are comfortable. High-status people stand or sit closer to low-status people, while low-status people prefer greater distances when dealing with superiors. You may maintain a greater distance with a stranger than with close associates, peers, and friends. Some people want to "get in your face" when angry, while others widen the space because their anger is translated into distancing themselves from you physically, socially, and psychologically.

Age, gender, and culture influence territorial preferences.

Age, gender, and culture may determine space preferences. People of the same age stand or sit closer together than those of mixed ages, particularly when the age difference is significant. All-male parties tend to arrange themselves farther apart than all-female or mixed-gender parties. North Americans prefer greater personal distances than do Middle Eastern and Latin American peoples. Arabs and Latin Americans see us as distant and cold, while we see them as intruding into our space. Northern Europeans prefer greater personal distance than Southern Europeans.[32]

Seating may equalize control and enhance the interview climate.

Seating

Where you sit and on what you sit is often determined by status, gender, cultural norms, and relationship. A superior and a subordinate may sit across a desk from one another, arrangement A in Figure 2.7, with one sitting in a large leather swivel chair while the other sits on a simple chair. Two chairs at right angles near the corner of a desk or table, arrangement B, creates a less formal atmosphere and a greater feeling of equality between parties. Students often prefer this arrangement with college professors.

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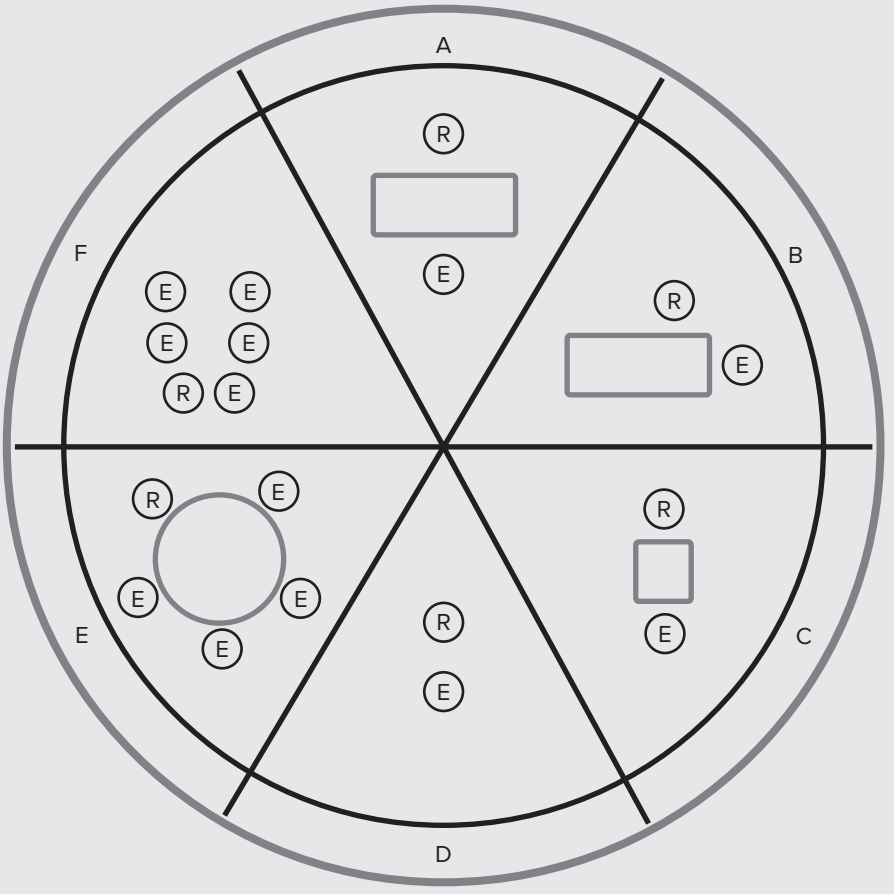
A corner seating arrangement is preferred by many interviewers and interviewees.

Remove physical obstacles and reduce the superior-subordinate atmosphere by placing chairs at opposite sides of a small coffee table or by omitting the table altogether, arrangements C and D. A circular table, arrangement E, is popular in counseling and interviews involving more than two people. It avoids a head-of-the-table position, allows participants to pass around materials, and provides a surface on which to write, review printed items, and place refreshments. Arrangement F is most suitable for a focus group.

Figure 2.7 *Seating arrangements*



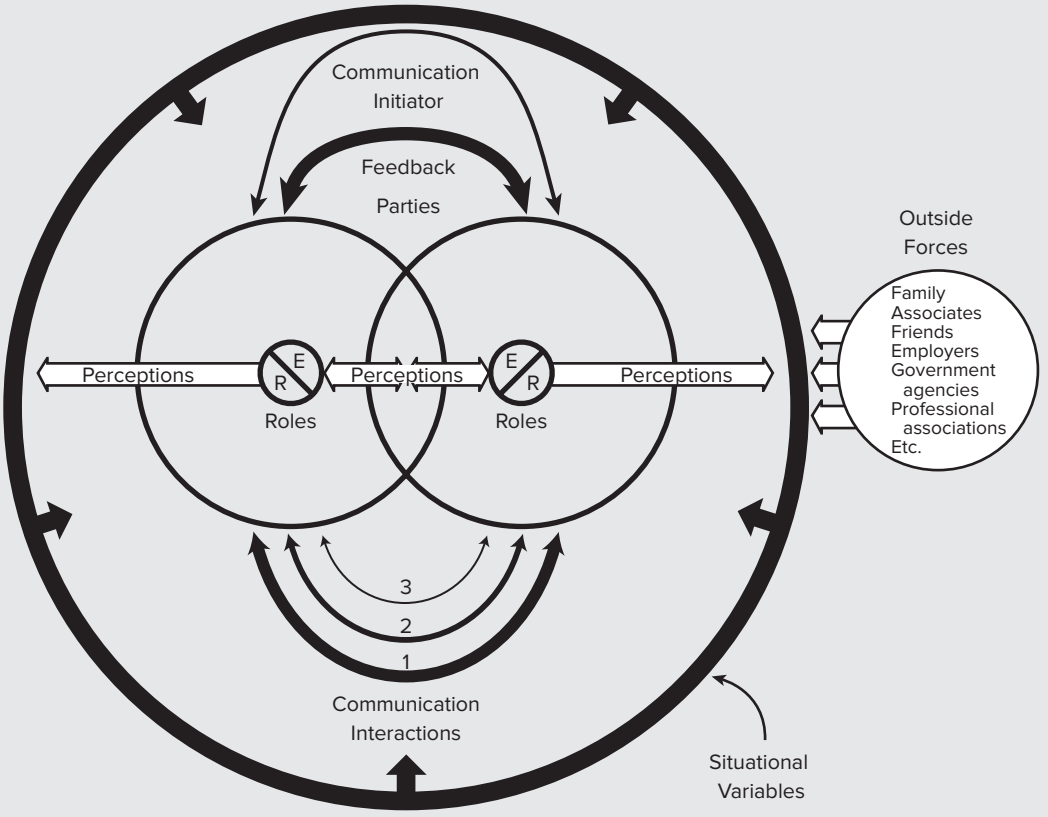
Outside Forces

Outside forces determine roles in many interviews.

Outside forces such as those identified in Figure 2.8 may suggest or dictate who takes part, when, and where; attitudes assumed; topics covered; structure followed; questions asked; and answers given. Organizational policies, union contracts, pressures of a political campaign, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws, and competitors influence perceptions, levels of exchanges, self-disclosure, and interviewing approach. What may take place *following the interview*—a report you must submit, accounts in the media, possible grievances or lawsuits, reactions of peers—may make parties careful and wary or headstrong and hasty. You may feel pressure to relate that you "followed the rules," "drove a hard bargain," "got a deal," or told the other party "where to get off." Remember that the interview parties are seldom truly alone in the process.

We are not really alone with the other party.

Figure 2.8 *Outside forces*



Summary

The **summary model** developed step-by-step in this chapter **appears to be very complicated** precisely because the interview is a **very complicated process.** If you are to understand what takes place in an interview and why, you must understand the interacting variables and the roles you play when taking part in a purposeful, planned, and serious interaction with another party.

Each interview involves two parties made up of complex individuals who may have prior relational histories or form a relationship as the interview progresses. In this collaborative process, the parties may exchange roles, maintain and alter perceptions of self, the other party, and the situation; exchange verbal and nonverbal messages; and disclose information, attitudes, opinions, and feelings at one or more levels from very safe and unrevealing to very open and highly revealing. Each party must listen appropriately for comprehension, empathy, evaluation, or resolution and realize that silence may be more effective than talking.

Each party must be flexible and adaptable in choosing which approach to take (directive, nondirective, or a combination) not only because each party is unique and each situation is different, but because each party is molded and affected by demographics such as age, gender, race, and culture. This chapter has tried to enhance your awareness of how demographics and culture affect self-esteem, disclosure, levels of communication, language, nonverbal communication, and territoriality. In the global village of the twenty-first century, be aware of how different people and different cultures communicate.

Key Terms and Concepts

Complex communication process
Control
Culture
Defensive climate
Dialectical tensions
Dialogic listening
Directive approach
Downward communication
Feedback
Gender
Global relationships
Idioms
Initiating
Levels of interactions
Listening
Noise
Nondirective approach
Nonverbal interactions
Outside forces
Perceptions
Personal space
Politeness theory
Proximity
Relational dimensions
Relational distance
Relational history
Relational memory
Role competence
Self-concept
Self-disclosure
Self-esteem
Self-fulfilling prophecy
Self-identity
Silence
Situation
Supportive climate
Territorial markers
Territoriality
Upward communication
Verbal interactions

Student Activities

1. Interview four students on your campus: one from Central America, one from southern Europe, one from the Near East, and one from Asia. Ask them to identify and illustrate verbal and nonverbal communication problems they have encountered since coming to the United States. How have they managed to work through these problems?
2. Watch a 10–15 minute television interview with a person who had been accused of a crime or unethical behavior. How effective was the interviewer in getting to Level 2 and 3 interactions? How did the interviewee attempt to avoid disclosing potentially damaging information?
3. Research indicates measurable differences in communication between genders. Observe interactions between two males, two females, and a male and a female to see what differences if any you can detect in proximity, eye contact, gestures, body movements, and territoriality. What influence do you believe the prior relationships of the parties had on these nonverbal and situational factors?
4. Watch three 10–15 minute interviews between sportscasters and professional athletes, one in which an athlete is about to take part in a game, one in which an athlete just won a game, and one in which an athlete just experienced a loss. Which forms of listening did the participants in these interviews use most often? How did the situations appear to have affected the participants' abilities to listen?

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