

A Primer on Communication

At the most basic level, communication would appear to be that thing that happens between two or more individuals or groups that exchange meaning.

We could well ask if communication is connected to any combination of the following:

1. Information to be relayed
2. Information to be sought out
3. An organizational chain, wheel, star, circle, shape or structure that shapes messages and content
4. Direction based (i.e. only one sender and receiver)
5. Story telling, a narrative
6. Knowledge sharing and creating
7. The message that was intended by the sender
8. The message that received / interpreted by the receiver
9. A process to reduce uncertainty by at least one party
10. Acts of encoding and decoding messages
11. Acts of misinterpretation
12. Culturally bound (non-synchronic)
13. Time bound (non-diachronic)
14. Place bound
15. Symbolic engagement
16. A rational process
17. A process where relationships come to the fore
18. A way to grasp or order reality (a social construction)
19. An exercise in conscious rhetoric
20. Is it a recreation of parent, adult, child roles (a la Eric Bernes of *transactional analysis*) in the communication? Does that define the communication?
21. Is communication a flow? Is it linear, interactional, transactional?
22. Observer validated?
23. Does the communication message reproduce itself well? (fidelity)
24. What kind of capacity does the interaction / message have?
25. What is the source of information? (event, one or more reporters)

For some communication theorists, there are general, situational, and limited models that can cross disciplines to get at what communications is all about. That is to say that in general we might expect 'y' to occur, or that in certain circumstances we might expect 'z' behaviour. Along those lines, what is a theory anyways? Does it predict, explain, help us to understand, or get a hold a number of looser thoughts in a better package? Is theory, as its Greek roots, referring to the idea of divining something – that is checking in with gods to see what truth is / was? Is an act of looking deeply? We might think of the communication act itself, particular theories about that act, competing theories and a theory of theories. Along these lines, which theories do a better job of helping us to decode any number of communications layers?

For some theorists, communications is essentially an expression of underlying social structures (i.e., gender, race, social economic status, social construction of ability, privilege roles, etc.).

Drawn in part from from “Understanding Communications Theory” (Cragen and Shields: 1998)