Toward Training and Learning Communication

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Toward Training and Learning Communication

Abstract
Organizations are concerned about performance in the workplace; the performance of individuals is directly related to the performance of organizations (Pfeffer and Viega, 1999). Clearly, one of the keys to improving individual performance in the workplace is an individual's ability to communicate effectively. Oral communication and listening are fundamental skills required for success. An individual’s inability to communicate can cause ripple effects throughout the organization ending in lost sales, decreased customer satisfaction, decreased job satisfaction and employee retention, low morale, and increased destructive conflict, to name a few. The dynamic nature and complexity of communication and the communication process will require HRD practitioners to understand important communication theories, find more creative ways of helping individuals learn effective communication skills and focus on transferring that learning to the workplace. A deeper knowledge of communication theory and adult learning techniques and tools can help HRD practitioners meet the emergent needs of learners in organizations.

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Toward Training and Learning Communication

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Dedication

Firstly, this work is dedicated to God, in whom, without question, I live and move and have my being. You continually demonstrate your omnipotence to me. I humbly and deeply honor you with the successful completion of this work.

Secondly, I dedicate this work to my mom, Pastor Orpah Ruth Francis. I am nothing without you and if there is any greatness in me, it is because of the beautiful personification of love and tremendous strength that you have been in my life. You are my example.

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Because of Christ!
Abstract

Organizations are concerned about performance in the workplace; the performance of individuals is directly related to the performance of organizations (Pfeffer and Viega, 1999). Clearly, one of the keys to improving individual performance in the workplace is an individual’s ability to communicate effectively. Oral communication and listening are fundamental skills required for success. An individual’s inability to communicate can cause ripple effects throughout the organization ending in lost sales, decreased customer satisfaction, decreased job satisfaction and employee retention, low morale, and increased destructive conflict, to name a few. The dynamic nature and complexity of communication and the communication process will require HRD practitioners to understand important communication theories, find more creative ways of helping individuals learn effective communication skills and focus on transferring that learning to the workplace. A deeper knowledge of communication theory and adult learning techniques and tools can help HRD practitioners meet the emergent needs of learners in organizations.
Overview

Speaking and listening effectively are among the skills most basic to individual and organizational success (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990). "People who lack proficiency in the skills of oral communication are handicapped not only in communicating with others, but also in learning for personal and professional development" (p. 25). Effective oral communication and listening skills are critical to the success of individuals and organizations. Clearly, organizations cannot function without communication (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990). "From accounting to information systems to finance – employers view effective communication as critical to an individual’s success in today’s competitive workplace" (Smart & Featheringham, 2006, p. 276). This can lead to the belief that the productivity and performance of both individuals and organizations are directly related to their ability to engage in effective communication.

Human resource development (HRD) practitioners are concerned about human performance in the workplace and, thus, should be concerned about how to assist individuals in developing their communication skills. This present literature review focuses on methods and approaches that HRD practitioners can use to assist individuals in developing strong oral communication and listening skills and overcoming challenges and barriers to achieve higher levels of proficiency in communicating. Of significance in understanding opportunities and challenges for improving communication skills is communication theory. Thus, this literature review will emphasize various theories of communication explaining how humans behave during conversation and interactions with others and why. HRD practitioners can use the information
from this research to develop ways of promoting the attitude and behavior changes necessary for increased learning and productivity enhancements in organizations.

Communication is a broad subject including, but not limited to, oral communication, non-verbal communication, face-to-face communication, interpersonal communication, written communication, mass communication, mediated communication, public communication. All of these are important aspects of communication. Communication is used in most every aspect of human life. The present study will focus primarily on training and learning oral (including face-to-face and interpersonal) communication skills in the workplace. There will be mention of non-verbal communication to highlight the effects that non-verbal communication has on the oral communication process, however a complete review about training non-verbal communication is beyond the scope of this project.

The Importance of Communication in the Workplace

Communication is essential to success in all organizations (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990). Effective communication is fundamental to the effectiveness of individuals in the workplace. Without successful communication, physicians cannot understand their patients in order to give sound diagnoses, analysts cannot obtain the information needed to develop viable solutions to business problems, baseball pitchers cannot not know which pitch to throw at a given time, staff cannot receive proper direction from management, customer service representatives cannot understand and resolve customer issues, sales representatives cannot sell, questions cannot be asked and answered. As can be seen, this list continues.

The communication climate or culture in an organization is directly related to important aspects of the business like worker morale and job satisfaction (Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield, 1981). “Better communication is usually accompanied by better morale” (p. 13). Importantly,
Effective communication is vital to the manager-employee relationship and enhances productivity and motivation in the workplace (Importance of Communication, 2008). "Workers are also more likely to be satisfied with their jobs if they are satisfied with the amount of information that they receive on the job" (Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield, 1981, p. 13). Additionally, communication is vital to the productive working of teams. Effective communication is needed at all levels and in all areas of organizations. It is virtually impossible for organizations to succeed in business without communication. Communication "is extremely important because it permits people to transmit instructions, convey feelings and attitudes, and cope in a rational way with problems that confront them and their fellow human beings" (Bradley, 1981, p. 19).

Summarily, any program or initiative implemented by HRD practitioners to improve performance will involve the ability for employees to communicate effectively. When considering implementing mentoring and coaching programs, diversity initiatives, courses in conflict management, assertiveness, collaboration, working in teams (teambuilding), accepting differences, dealing with difficult personalities, project management, leadership, management, supervision, customer service, sales, negotiating, presentation, facilitation, train the trainer, and other learning programs, HRD practitioners must consider the participant's ability or inability to communicate effectively as an impact to other skills and competencies which are being developed.

*Improvement in Communication is Possible*

Too often we have heard the old cliché, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks", implying that it may impossible for adults to learn, change and grow. Eduard Lindeman (1961) dispels this thinking with a higher order of thought that adult education affects our ability to
think critically, extend our thinking past societal norms and traditions, create new paradigms and models, and continually seek new perspectives amid old paradigms. Adults can learn, change, grow and improve in their performance. “Adult education is a process through which learners become aware of significant experience. Recognition of significance leads to evaluation. Meanings accompany experience when we know what is happening and what importance the event includes for our personalities” (Lindeman, 1961, p. 109). Most significantly, Lindeman (1961) teaches us that “education is life...The whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings” (p. 4-5).

This thinking is important to the purpose of this present literature review since its fundamental purpose is to present effective ways for HRD practitioners to draw out in learning participants more effective ways of communicating. “The core goal of improvement is possibly the single most important idea in the profession and the core motivator of HRD professionals” (Swanson & Holton III, 2001, p. 15). It is possible to improve one’s communication skills. HRD practitioners and learners must understand the importance of effective communication skills to the success of the business, know at that it is possible for individuals to learn, change and grow in the area of communication, and continually provide opportunities for individuals to expand their thinking and improve in the area of communication in the workplace. Swanson & Holton III (2001) also cite problem resolution (or opportunity) as a vitally important idea for the HRD profession. There is a current state and a desired state and the gap between that current state and desired state is opportunity. With regard to communication skills, learners must avidly seek opportunity; they must seek learning, changing and growing. The existence of the desire to learn and change within the learner will be the underpinning of the learner’s ability to improve communication skills and will ensure that improvement in communication is possible.
Communication Skills Development Strategies

There has been much debate over whether it is, in organizations, more important for HRD practitioners to focus more on learning or on performance (Swanson & Holton III, 2001). This issue is of extreme importance to this present study because communication skills and performance can be viewed as difficult to measure. HRD practitioners must design communication skills programs which both help individual learn and show measurable performance improvement. Communication and other learning programs designed by HRD practitioners that do not focus on both learning and performance will fail.

As with any other skill in the workplace, transfer of learning is important when delivering communication skills training programs. Transfer requires integration of experience into the learning process, the goal being “the full application of new knowledge and skills to improve individual and/or group performance in an organization or community” (Swanson & Holton III, 2001, p. 245). Swanson & Holton III (2001) posit that the process of transfer of learning does not happen by chance. It is not guaranteed by achieving learning objectives. “It is the result of a complex system of influences (p. 143). HRD practitioners must understand learning transfer concepts and how learning transfer can ultimately be reached and measured. Of primary importance is that learning programs be designed to focus on ensuring that learners can apply what is learned to their job or task. Learners must be able to understand the link between what is learned and the real-world.

HRD practitioners must develop a working knowledge of adult learning principles (andragogy) and an ability to translate those principles into useful, effective and measurable approaches to training and development for adult learners in the workplace. Andragogy is defined as “any intentional and professionally guided activity that aims at a change in adult
persons" (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005, p. 60). Pedagogy is teacher-directed and teacher-centered. It also assigns the full responsibility of deciding what will be learned and how it will be learned as well as the evaluation of to the instructor. Oh the other hand, andragogy represents a learner-focused method of learning (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005). Andragogy allows for adult individuals to take responsibility in his or her own learning. Knowledge of andragogical concepts should cause the HRD practitioner to employ learning strategies that will promote transfer of training.

HRD practitioners must move beyond traditional training methods of lectures, simple group discussion, role plays and case studies toward more experientially-based learning methods. “Experiential learning approaches have the dual benefit of appealing to the adult learner’s experience base as well as increasing the likelihood of performance change after training” (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005, p. 199). The following are experientially-based learning methods and should be considered viable approaches to assisting learners in improving communication skills: 1) action learning technologies (Marquardt, 2004; McGill and Beaty, 1992; Marsick & O’Neil, 1999; Swanson & Holton III, 2001); 2) experiential learning methods (Kolb, 1984; Swanson & Holton III, 2001); 3) informal and incidental (unstructured) learning techniques (Marsick & Watkins, 1997; Swanson & Holton III, 2001); 4) learning contracts (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005); 5) personal and self-assessments (Noe 2008; Lawrence, 2004; Gerhardt, 2007; Deveraux, 2005); 6) critical thinking techniques (Brookfield, 1987; Paul, 1990); 7) reflective and transformational learning methods (Dewey, 1933; Paul, 1990; Argyris & Schön, 1974; Southern Cross University, 2008); and 8) learning journals (Mezirow, 1991; Comparetta, 2006). These training strategies will more effectively assist learners in linking learning to the real-world than traditional classroom training methods.
As it relates to improving communication skills and transfer of learning, goal setting and review (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003; Sauers & Bass, 1990; Soares, Lemos, & Almedia, 2005; Noe, 2008), coaching and feedback are means for helping post-learning transfer. Action plans, plans used by learners to detail actions that will be taken to actively transfer learning from the classroom to the workplace, are effective ways of self-monitoring transfer of learning. Learning practitioners should partner with clients (department managers and participants of learning) to design post-learning activities after that can ensure transfer of training. Developing approaches to transfer learning and measure performance improvement after learning can help HRD departments prove the viability and importance of the field in the workplace and to the performance of the business.

Chapter Summary

In the current competitive and global environment, organizations cannot continue to exist without improving their performance. Improved performance cannot happen if individuals do not learn. When learning programs are designed and developed both learning and performance must be the focus. HRD practitioners must design communication programs that create long-term, sustainable, and measurable improvements in performance. This is not an easy charge, but it is necessary. HRD professionals must understand both communication theory and adult learning theory in order to meet the needs of both the individual and subsequently, the organization.

Chapter 2 of this study provides relevant communication theory useful to HRD professionals in choosing learning strategies to improve communication skills. Chapter 3 combines the understanding of communication theory with that of experientially-based adult learning techniques to suggest viable ways to develop and implement effective communication programs with the workplace.
Chapter 2 – Communication Theory

Many efforts have been made toward the development of communication theory and the furthering of the field of communication. One cannot truly understand the communication process without a thorough study of relevant theories. In this chapter an overview of relevant communication theories important to HRD practitioners and learners is offered.

Importance of Theory to HRD Practitioners

According to West & Turner (2004, pp. 46-47);

…the goals of theory can include explanation, understanding, prediction, and social change; we are able to explain something because of the concepts and their relationships specified in a theory. We are able to understand something because of theoretical thinking. Additionally, we are able to predict something based on the patterns suggested by a theory. Finally, we are able to effect social change or empowerment through theoretical inquiry…. Theories, then, help us answer why and how questions about our communication experiences.

Understanding communication theory helps HRD practitioners translate abstract concepts into more tangible ideas and thoughts; and present them in more concrete, figurative, understandable and real means for their learning consumers. Theory gives a reason for patterns that are seen in our experiences. “…our concrete experiences and observations are interpreted by us through the lens offered by the theory we are using” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 47). Thus, theories developed by experts explain what could sometimes be considered phenomena to laymen.

The study of communication and the development of communication theories began over a century ago and remains an ongoing process (West & Turner, 2004). Over those years, numerous theories relating to communication have been developed and tested. There are several
theories that can be considered important to HRD practitioners in their efforts to assist participants in improving their individual communication skills, thus improving their performance in organizations. A clear understanding of the principles of the communication process, sharing meaning, non-verbal communication, listening, miscommunication and communication competence is essential to training and enhancing individual communication skills. This literature review will focus on the impact of these components of communication and following five theories related to communication: 1) Symbolic Interaction Theory; 2) Coordinated Management of Meaning; 3) Cognitive Dissonance Theory; 4) Expectancy Violations Theory; and 5) Uncertainty Reduction Theory. This present study will only give an overview of these theories as they relate to the topic of training and learning effective communication skills.

The Communication Environment

West & Turner (2004) submit that there are various environments or contexts in which communication takes place, namely: Intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, organizational, public/rhetorical, mass and intercultural. These are summarized in Table 2.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Some Theoretical Concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>Communication with one’s self</td>
<td>Impression formation and decisions making; symbols and meaning; observations and attributions; ego involvement and persuasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Face-to-face communication</td>
<td>Relationship maintenance strategies; relational intimacy; relationship control; interpersonal attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>Communication with a group of people</td>
<td>Gender and group leadership; group vulnerability; groups and stories; group decision making; task difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Communication within and among large and extended environments</td>
<td>Organizational hierarchy and power; culture and organizational life; employee morale; opinions and work satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/Rhetorical</td>
<td>Communication to a large group of listeners (audience)</td>
<td>Communication apprehension; delivery effectiveness; speech and text criticism; ethical speechmaking; popular culture analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass</td>
<td>Communication to a very large audience through mediated forms</td>
<td>Use of media; affiliation and television programming; television and values; media and need fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural</td>
<td>Communication between and among members of different backgrounds.</td>
<td>Culture and rule-setting; culture and anxiety; hegemony; ethnocentrism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from West & Turner (2004, p. 29)
Intrapersonal communication, communication with one’s self, is internal dialogue, though it may take place in the presence of someone else. Also included here are times when one imagines, perceives, daydreams and solves problems in his or her own head (West & Turner, 2004). Interpersonal communication is face-to-face communication between individuals. Important to this type of communication is how relationships begin, and the maintenance and termination of relationships (West & Turner, 2004). Small group communication involves the interaction of several people who are working together to accomplish a common goal. Small groups are task groups rather than friendship and family groups. There is much debate on the size of small groups. Some experts suggest that the study of communication in small groups should be limited to groups of five to seven people, while others put no limit on the number of individuals in small groups. Most experts agree that a minimum of three individuals must exist in the group (West & Turner, 2004). The context of organizational communication has to do with the communication within and among large extended environments. This context is far-reaching and may include subsets of interpersonal encounters, speeches and presentations, small group situations and internal memos, emails and teleconferences (West & Turner, 2004). Public or rhetorical communication is the distribution of information from one person to a large group of people. The purpose of communication in this context is to inform, entertain or persuade (West & Turner, 2004). Mass communication also targets large audiences, but involves communication via channels or delivery modes including newspapers, videos, CD-ROMs, computers, the internet, radios, digital cable television, DVDs, and the like. With mass communication both the sender and the receiver can exercise control. That is, the sender decides what information should be sent and the receiver can decided what they can read, watch, listen to or review (West & Turner, 2004). Finally, intercultural communication is communication between people from
differing cultural backgrounds. Wildermuth & Gray (2005) state that “The culture of a group involves its ways of being and behaving, what is considers appropriate and inappropriate, and its values” (p. 78). They further suggest that culture is a learned and complex set of instructions on how individuals within a group relate to the world. Understanding that communication takes place in different context is important. This literature review will only focus on communication theories that impact intrapersonal and interpersonal communication contexts described in Table 2.1.

*The Communication Process – An Overview*

Several definitions of communication have been shared by experts in psychology and sociology over many years. A sample of these is summarized in Table 2.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Cite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The sharing of meaning.”</td>
<td>Jung, 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The exchange of symbols used, at least in part, to achieve interpersonal goals.”</td>
<td>Canary, Cody, &amp; Manusov, 2003, p. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A social process in which individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meaning in their environment.”</td>
<td>West &amp; Turner 2004, p. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The exchange of ideas between two people.”</td>
<td>Resource Associates Corporation, 2005, pg. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Passing information from one person to another with”</td>
<td>Cadwell, 2006, Chapter 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One common theme in these definitions is that of the social element, which suggests that communication involves people and interactions between people (West & Turner, 2004). Indeed, each person involved plays a vital role in the communication process. Each brings intentions, motivations and abilities to the process (West & Turner, 2004). One myth about communication is that it is one way (Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield, 1981); that it is the transferring of information from one mind to another (Figure 2.1). This suggests, “When I have said what I have to say, the communication process is complete.” But if Person B in Figure 2.1 does not understand the message that Person A has sent, the communication is unsuccessful and incomplete.

Figure 2.1 – Myth of Communication
Progressively, when thinking about the process of exchanging ideas between two people, one might develop the visual definition communication shown in Figure 2.2. The figure denotes a simple sending and receiving of information. Person A sends a message after which Person B receives it and sends a response back. This is one step better than Figure 2.1 because it allows Person B to respond to what Person A has sent. The ability to respond becomes extremely important for developing understanding in the communication process. The response allows the sender to ascertain if the receiver understood the original intent of the message. It also allows the receiver to solicit future information if necessary or show agreement or disagreement with the sender.

Figure 2.2 – Basic view of communication – An Exchange of information

![Diagram of communication between A and B]

Often, communication is referred to as non-linear, a process; which implies that it is “ongoing and unending” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 5) as opposed to a single or simple event. Cadwell (2006) extends the process of communication to denote that it involves information and specific results (Figure 2.3) and not merely actions of sending and receiving. Cadwell (2006) broadens the visual representation of communication depicting its continuous nature, but also implying that the purpose of the communication process is to achieve specific results. The implication is that only after those specific results have been achieved does the process end.
Still depicted in Figure 2.3, though, is the thought that the sender sends the information and only then does the receiver receive information and send a response back. The process nature of communication suggests that it is dynamic, unending, and ongoing (West & Turner, 2004) and that “much can happen from the beginning of a conversation to the end” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 2).

Adapted from Cadwell (2006), Chapter 3, Section: The Communication Process, ¶ 2

Figure 2.4 – The Communication Process as a Helix

Adapted from Dance (1967)
Patterns in communication develop over time (VanLear, 1996). Bradley (1981) considers the communication process unrepeatable and irreversible. Dance (1967) depicts the communication process by using a spiral or helix (Figure 2.4) with the thought that

Figure 2.5 – The Complete Process of Communication

Adapted from Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990, p. 129
communication experiences are collective and are influenced by the past. One’s present experiences ultimately influence one’s future experiences, thus communication should be viewed as a non-linear process. The process changes over time among participants (Dance, 1967). Communication described by the helix or spiral in Figure 2.4 more accurately illustrates steady advancement or increase from one stage in the process of interaction to another.

Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer (1990) extend and expand the previously illustrated definitions of communication asserting the notion that communication evolves and that “previous communication encounters affect the ones that follow” (p. 127) bringing to light the complexity of the communication process (Figure 2.5) not depicted in Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 and not meticulously detailed in Figure 2.4. Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer’s (1990) posit that the communication process is not as simple as an exchange of facts or data between a sender and a receiver and that it, in fact, includes a sender and receiver who each bring their own individual background or field of experience (#1 and #2 of Figure 2.5) to the interaction.

Further, the communication process is impacted by the level of rapport (#3 of Figure 2.5) that already exists between the two parties or that develops as they undergo the process. This brings how the sender and receiver feel about one another (their appearance and previous interactions) into the process.

When the sender sends an idea (#7 of Figure 2.5), the receiver interprets that message and responds (#11 of Figure 2.5) based on his or her meanings. The message is the spoken word portion of the communication, but it must be received in conjunction with any unspoken elements (see message channel below). The process of making meaning is core to the communication process and is happening simultaneously while the sender is sending and the receiver is receiving.
The communication process can be impacted by interference (#5, #6, #9 & #10 of Figure 2.5) to and from the sender and the receiver. This interference represents some of the possible barriers to the communication process. According to Bradley (1981), “barriers are any factors that cause either an incorrect meaning or no meaning to be communicated” (p. 13) between parties.

The communication process involves feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas and perceptions (Resource Associates Corporation, 2005). These feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas and perceptions (#12 of Figure 2.5) can be developed before, during and after verbal conversation takes place (Resource Associates Corporation, 2005).

Each individual uses a message channel (#4, #8 of Figure 2.5) to share meaning. “Channels frequently correspond to the visual, tactile, olfactory, and auditory senses” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 10). Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer (1990) suggest that the body is the first and foremost message channel used. “We use and interpret bodily non-verbal communication such as smiles, looks, nods, touches and even styles of dress” (p. 130). The voice (tone, volume, pitch, rhythm, tempo, pauses, and articulation), and words are other message channels used in the communication process (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990). To further complicate the matters is the thought “that in face-to-face communication both people are sending and receiving at the same time, influencing each other in real time and simultaneously” (Communication Improvement, 2008a, ¶4). Not only is the person that is speaking using non-verbal gestures, the person that is receiving is using non-verbal gestures to communicate feelings of anger, hurt, agreement, disagreement, and other similar feelings (Communication Improvement, 2008a).

Viewing Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer’s (1990) model (Figure 2.5) can be thought of as zooming in on one node or point in Dance’s model (Figure 2.4) by highlighting all of the
possible elements that influence the communication process, namely, both individuals' background of field of experience, the level of rapport between the individuals, the message and the response (including words, non-verbal actions, and tone), interference and barriers during the interaction, and the feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas and perceptions developed during the process. This reflects the true intricacies and complexities of the communication process.

Sharing Meaning

The communication process also involves the sending, receiving and interpretation of symbols (words). One person interprets a word or series of words differently than another. One’s interpretation of a particular phase will be based on his or her experiences with and feelings toward that object (concrete symbol) or thought or idea (abstract symbol: West & Turner, 2004). Thus, meaning is central to the communication process.

As Jung (1964) asserts, communication involves sharing meaning. Effective or successful communication is more likely to occur when both individuals ascribe the same meaning to the words and the non-verbal information that is exchanged (Van Dalen, Bartholomeus, Kerkhofs, Lulofs, Van Thiel, Rethans, Scherpbier, & Van Der Vleuten, 2001). “It is incorrect to conclude that sharing of meaning has occurred just because the communication process of sending and receiving has been completed” (Catt, Miller, & Schallenkamp, 2007). Also, “information must not be confused with meaning” (Shannon & Weaver, 1949, p. 8). In fact, “the influences of a person’s gender, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, birth order, place(s) of upbringing, spiritual and political beliefs, education history, work experience, sense of personal power or status, sexual orientation, language skills, mental and physical health, and so on affect communication” (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990, p. 128) and determine the meaning that an individual assigns to words and non-verbal information.
Sharing meaning is vitally important to success in the communication process. Without the sharing of meaning a failure to communicate exists. Bradley (1990) defines meaning as “the understanding a specific person has of anything in his environment” (p. 280). He further expresses that “meaning exists within the person” (p. 208). This implies that each contributor to a communication interaction must reach within the self to find meaning, but must be open to and even deliberate and purposeful in coming to a common understanding with his co-contributor. Each contributor must be empathetic to his co-contributor, willing to strive toward reaching communication success with persistence. One cannot assume that the other will interpret a message in the way it is meant, nor can one interpret a message and assume what the sender meant. A number of features of the communication process can be used to send and receive the messages and work toward shared meaning. Developing a deeper understanding of the mechanics of the communication process will empower and inspire communicators to seek shared meaning.

Non-Verbal Communication

One cannot discuss face-to-face communication without the mention of non-verbal communication. The topic of non-verbal communication and associated research and study is so extensive that it will be not covered it in great detail in this present study. Non-verbal communication, however, is an extremely important part of the face-to-face communication process and to developing shared meaning, so much so that it was impossible to exclude mention of it totally from this study.

As an overview, non-verbal communication involves the use of signals other than words to create or send messages (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003). These non-verbal cues take on various forms: facial expressions and gaze, kinesics, haptics, vocalics, proxemics (see
Expectancy Violations Theory section in this chapter), physical appearance (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003), paralanguage, chronemics, oculotics, ofactics (Body Language, 2008) and colorics (California State Communications Faculty, 2008). Non-verbal cues are used both intentionally and unintentionally. In fact, one’s feelings and emotions are usually communicated non-verbally and when one wants to know someone else’s feelings the tendency is to look for non-verbal cues from them (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003). Non-verbal signals allow the facilitation of conversation (conversation management) that is necessary to have effective communication (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003).

Facial cues come in the form of static features like skin color, nose size and bone structure; or dynamic features like degree of expressiveness, eye movement (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003). Kinesics are made by body movement. Also referred to as body language, kinesics include “the way we sit, walk, gesture, shake hands, and orient our bodies as we engage in interactions with others” (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003, p. 105). Haptics are touches. “Touches can vary based on their duration, location, and strength and these varieties of touch influence the meanings that we give to touches” (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003, p. 105). Vocalics are vocal cues including “the rate, pitch, character, volume and amount of variation used as we speak. Vocalics may even involve the way we don’t speak or our use of silence” (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003, p. 105). Physical appearance includes skin color, hair color, body type, clothing, unique physical characteristics and physical attractiveness. These help individuals form impressions of others (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003). “An attractive person tends to find it easier to reach his or her goals in large part because people tend to assume that attractive people also have other positive characteristics. In the United States, attractive people are likely thought to be more honest, intelligent, sexual, and socially skilled than are unattractive
people” (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003, p. 108). Paralanguage involves how something is said, including intonation, emphasis, and word and syllable stress (Body Language, 2008). Chronemics is the study of the way people manage and organize the use of time during communication. Only within certain societies is precise time of great importance or significance (Body Language, 2008). Oculotics is the study of eyes and eye movement during communication. The implied meaning behind eye contact is often culturally based. For example, in the United States avoiding eye contact can be considered a sign of insecurity or untrustworthiness (Body Language, 2008). Olfactics is the study of the influence of smell on communicative interactions. People, particularly in Western Europe and the United States, react negatively to bad odors. A typical reaction is to avoid that person (Body Language, 2008). And finally, colorics is the study of how color impacts communication (California State Communications Faculty, 2008).

Non-verbal cues are extremely important to our effectiveness in communicating. One can see the complexity that non-verbal actions can bring to the communication process. What complicates communication even further is the fact that often, individuals are unaware of the non-verbal signals sent along with the words that are said. Non-verbal communication messages are sent during the communication process whether the individual wants to or not and whether he or she knows it or not. The ability to control the use of non-verbal cues and recognize and interpret others’ use of these cues are important skills to possess and develop when considering improving communication skills.

Mehrebian’s model on meaning (Figure 2.6) makes an important distinction between meaning and words that is essential to the understanding of communication (Mehrabian, 2008). The results of his research “have to do with what happens when the words themselves are
ambiguous, or there is a conflict (incongruity) between the words a person uses and the non-verbals (actually and paraverbals like tone). When there is ambiguity or conflict between the channels people tend to rely more on the non-verbals to evaluate the emotional state of the person speaking” (Communication Improvement, 2008b, ¶4). Though controversial, Mehrabian’s model on meaning is presented here to help HRD practitioners understand and portray to learning participants the importance of non-verbal skills and the impact that non-verbal actions may have on the communication process. Words are not the only portion of the message that gets sent and received. A message is comprised of words, non-verbal actions and voice inflection. The sender and receiver must be aware of all of these components simultaneously when sending a message. HRD practitioners should use this vital information to help learners become aware of their use of non-verbal cues and the effects those usages have on communication interactions. The ability to control non-verbal signals and consciously use non-

Figure 2.6 – Meaning in the Communication Process

Adapted from Mehrabian Communication Research (2008)
verbal cues to enhance the communication process is an advanced skill deeply embedded in a keen sense of self and ability to exercise self-control. Much practice will be required to hone non-verbal communication skill.

*Listening*

Fearing (1967) defines a listener, which he calls interpreter, as “one who perceives (cognitively structures) a specific body of sign-symbol material produced by specific communicators as a stimulus field in terms of his existing patterns of need, expectancies, and demands” (p. 180). Simply put, the listener uses his or her past experiences, expectations, cultures, thoughts and perceptions about the speaker and the current interaction, and numerous other characteristics and abilities to bring meaning to what is being said verbally and shown non-verbally. Listeners and their world view are equally as important in the communication process as the communicator and how the message is constructed and delivered. Nichols & Stevens (1957) make a clear distinction between listening and hearing suggesting that listening is an extension of hearing and that listening has not happened until the interpreter gives meaning to what they have heard.

According to Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield (1981), of the 75 percent of the workday that we spend in some type of communication, 50 percent of that time is spent listening; more time than in any other type of communication activity. With all the time that an individual spends listening, one would think that it would be done easily and well, but, in fact, it is not. People remember only about 50 percent of what they hear immediately after they have heard it and only 25 percent just two days later (Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield, 1981).

Deveraux (2005) cites listening as the foundation for supervisory skills training. Every function of a manager or supervisor (problem solving, feedback, peer communication, team
development, coaching, vision development and maintenance, discipline, performance review, interviewing/hiring, safety, running effective and timely meetings) "requires the ability to listen carefully to people's verbal and non-verbal responses to achieve a harmonious and productive workplace" (p. 13).

According to Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield (1981), meaning consists of both the content of the message and the feeling of the messenger. The listener must hear and understand both of these elements in order to gain the meaning intended by the speaker. "In some situations, the message content is far less important than the feeling that underlies it. To interpret the full meaning of the message accurately, one must respond to the feelings, or attitude component" (Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield, 1981, p. 265). This requires the ability, on the part of the listener, to hear the feeling component of the message and respond with sensitivity (Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield, 1981).

Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield (1981) assert that in addition to sensitivity, an effective listener is a curious listener. Effective listeners use concentration and questioning to focus on the speaker. Effective listeners are also objective in their interpretation of messages and respond appropriately. Good listeners show interest in what the speaker is saying by responding with the appropriate non-verbal gestures or feedback. When engaged in conversation, effective listeners do not interrupt, but do provide feedback at appropriate times to let the speaker know that what is being said is understood (Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield, 1981).

Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield (1981) offer the following as some impacts or barriers to effective listening: 1) people interpret messages according to their individual world view; 2) people interpret messages according to their own expectations; 3) individuals interpret messages based on their attitudes and beliefs; and 4) the relationship of the speaker and the listener plays
an integral role in the gaining of shared meaning. According to Fearing (1967), the speaker does not always construct message content that meets the needs of the listener, but the speaker can use the reactions of the listener to adjust the message content and delivery to the listener's needs.

Nichols (1961), considered the “father of listening”, gives the following practical advice to improving listening ability: 1) find areas of interest and usefulness even in boring subjects; 2) judge the content and not the deliver – individuals often miss good information by turning off when someone’s delivery is not effective; 3) do not interrupt – wait for the appropriate time to respond; 4) listen for ideas and not just facts – this can stimulate one’s thinking and learning; 5) be flexible – adjust to the organizational pattern of the speaker; 6) work at listening – give each speaker one’s conscious attention; 7) fight distractions – seek to concentrate and focus; 8) develop an appetite for hearing things that challenge one’s mental capacities; 9) keep an open mind by knowing being aware of one’s own blind spots and hot buttons; and finally, 10) take advantage of the fact that the human mind thinks much faster than one talks by applying spare thinking time to what is being said.

Maslow (1966) asserts:

My general thesis is that many of the communication difficulties between persons are the byproduct of communication barriers within the person; and that communication between the person and the world, to and fro, depends largely on their isomorphic (or similarity of structure or form); that the world can communicate to a person only that of which he is worthy, that which he deserves or is ‘up to’; that to a large extent, he can receive from the world, give to the world, only that which he himself is (p. 195).
Maslow’s comments are placed in the listening (receiver) section of the this present literature review to highlight the significance of the listener’s responsibility to him or herself, to the speaker and even to the world in relation to communication, but most importantly, to him or herself. Maslow’s comments equate the ability to receive messages with humans’ ability to continuously learn. Continuous learning is of primary importance to the field of HRD. HRD practitioners can use the understanding of Maslow’s views to be inspired and to inspire learners to cultivate a desire to reach higher levels of openness and learning, thus higher levels of listening ability. Effective listening will be a talent given to the person who will accept the responsibility placing himself in the shoes of the speaker to truly find shared meaning with his co-communicator. “The meaning of a message clearly depends not alone on its content but also on the extent to which the personality is able to respond to it. The ‘higher’ meaning is perceptible only to the ‘higher’ person (Maslow, 1966, p. 205).

Listening is a core competency of employees in the workplace. Listening involves the use of the whole body, not just the ears. Effective listeners listen with sensitivity, focus, curiosity and interest. They listen for feeling from the sender. Most importantly, effective listeners strive to gain shared meaning with the sender by purposefully breaking down barriers in the communication process. These barriers are often within the inner self. As Maslow (1966) suggests, listeners must work toward self-development, making themselves worthy to receive and able to give in the communication process. Effective listeners do this by seeking to understand the perspective of others and becoming open to perspectives that vary from their own. Individual who are proficient at listening seek to grow continually and use the communication process to enhance that growth. They are somehow able to glean from conversations that would normally be considered boring or unfruitful. Powerful listener are able
to develop responses (verbal and non-verbal) that give back to the communication process making the response integral to the process.

HRD professionals must first use effective listening skills themselves in order to understand the needs of participants. Listening skills must be used throughout learning experiences and the facilitator must be able to adjust and flex depending on what is being heard during those experiences. HRD practitioners should use Nichols’ (1961) tips described earlier in this chapter to advise participants with concrete recommendations on improving listening skills. Discussion of relevant case studies and role plays are a means of allowing participants to practice and enhance listening skills. Action learning sessions are extremely useful in helping learners develop questioning and effective listening skills. HRD professionals should take advantage of these methods during learning experiences.

Miscommunication

Chan (2002) gives lack of planning and time; competing messages; differences in knowledge, perspectives, needs, expectations, priorities, status, culture, and gender; assumptions; and fears as some of the obstacles to clear communication. Fearing (1967) gives ambiguity as one of the primary causes of miscommunication and states that ambiguity is:

Concerned with properties of communications content which makes it susceptible to variant structurizations by interpreters. A content may be said to be relatively unambiguous when it is maximally resistant to such variant structurizations (p. 189).

The amount of detail and the complexity of a message are of primary importance to the receiver of the message (Fearing, 1967). This could lead to the notion that individuals who have a more
indirect manner of speaking allow the possibility of large numbers of interpretations from the listeners and that it is more likely that different listeners will interpret those messages differently.

But it is not as simple as that. Fearing (1967) speaks of congruency which is the “degree to which the presented content is relevant to the need-value-demand systems of the interpreter” (p. 190). He further states that:

...interpreters with specific and persisting goal integrations, strong value orientations and stereotypes, specific prior experience in or involvement with particular content, or any other form of persistent set will either reject or markedly modify presented content in the direction of greater congruity with their predispositions. Their perceptions of specific content will be deviant as compared with the perceptions of interpreters whose need-value system is less rigid, or to a greater degree is congruent with the presented content. In other situations the intensity and specificity of need for a structured field – that is, need for information, guidance, direction or meaning – will determine the degree of congruence of presented content (p. 190).

It is the responsibility of both the speaker and the listener to reduce or eliminate miscommunication in an interaction. Speakers do their part by developing the ability to construct and deliver sound messages that meet the specific needs of the listener. Intent is important in accomplishing this. Intent implies planning or organization. A planned message is listener-centered; takes into account the needs of the listener where the communicator: 1) is explicit with respect to the goal of the communication; and 2) purposefully maneuvers and adjusts the content based on these goals (Fearing, 1967). Also important to the communicator is the alignment of spoken words and non-verbal gestures (Communication Improvement, 2008b).
Listeners' responsibility in reducing or eliminating miscommunication is accomplished by listening with sensitivity, concentration and curiosity (as detailed in the Listening section of this present literature review). Listeners should develop the critical skill of using questions to develop clarity of understanding.

One approach to gaining clarity and understanding when conflict or miscommunication exists is to preplan important conversations (similar to the way one would plan a negotiation). This can be accomplished by determining the purpose of the interaction, that is, understanding what outcome is desired. Based on the desired outcome an outline of messages and possible responses from the listener can be developed and used. Additionally, individuals must have an understanding of themselves, hot buttons and triggers, for example. Considering beforehand how one typically behaves during the conversations involving conflict allows time to prepare to behave in more productive, results-oriented ways. Another approach to gaining clarity during communicative interactions is to slow the communication process down by allowing breathing and thinking time, particularly when tempers have flared during the interaction. Too often, time is not taken to truly think about the response while in the act of communicating. Taking time to breath, think, and consider the consequences of our words often results in more productive responses.

HRD professionals must highlight the importance of shared meaning and the significance of taking the time to plan communication messages. This is especially important when assisting individuals in improving communication skills, particularly during times of conflict or when clarity is especially necessary. Reaching shared meaning between individuals takes time. The day is filled with pressures to complete tasks fast and faster. This forces persons in the workplace to rush or avoid communication. Quality, however, is of equal or greater importance to the
quantity of productivity and performance. In fact, quality during the communication process is vital. Effective, quality communication requires time; time to construct and deliver meaningful messages and time to listen to and respond to those messages in order to reach the shared meaning that is necessary.

**Symbolic Interaction Theory**

Symbolic Interaction Theory is centered in concepts about the self and its relationship to society (West & Turner, 2004). The central themes of Symbolic Interaction Theory are the importance of meanings for human behavior; the importance of self-concept; and the relationship between the individual and society (West & Turner, 2004). George Herbert Mead was the originator of this theory. The theory focuses on how individuals interact with each other to create their own world view (meaning) and how these world views shape behavior and communication (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Understanding that communication is impossible without shared meaning (West & Turner, 2004), helps one understand Symbolic Interaction Theory’s importance to communication. Symbolic Interaction Theory holds that individuals both develop and modify meaning through the communication process, that is, through interaction with others (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Developing and modifying meaning requires interpretive construction among people. “In fact, the goal of interaction, according to Symbolic Interaction Theory, is to create shared meaning” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 86).

In addition to constructing meaning through interaction, Symbolic Interaction Theory holds that individuals develop their own self-concept through interaction with others (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The meaning we construct and our sense of self that we develop drive how we behave and how we communicate (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).
There is no greater understanding than the understanding of self. We use our perception to understand self. Itelson & Cantril (1954), posit that:

Every one of us every minute of our waking lives is constantly and continuously perceiving, with the possible exception of brief moments of intense concentration. Whatever else we may be doing – whether thinking talking, reading or writing, going to the movies or taking a walk, working or playing – we are also perceiving. We are constantly perceiving simply because it is an inseparable and necessary part of everything we do... For it is through perception that we come into contact with the world (p. 207).

Simply put, Symbolic Interaction Theory provides learning practitioners with an understanding of the development of human behavior in relation to how people develop a self-concept and the meanings or symbols used to understand the self and the world they live in.

HRD professionals can make use of Symbolic Interaction Theory to help participants get in touch with the world (individuals in the world) through development of exercises that are reflective and experiential in nature. Specifically relevant here would be exercises that help participants improve in the areas of becoming more aware of, conscious of and sensitive to others and their environment and how differences between themselves and others play a role in development of perceptions. Practitioners and learners must understand that just as they have perceptions of others, others develop, during communication interactions, perceptions of them. Just as they have meanings of messages, others have meanings to those same messages and the meanings may or may not coincide. Additionally, the Symbolic Interaction Theory is important when the goal is to help others develop a sense of understanding and empathy for others – an
appreciation for how others develop a sense of self and how one's attitudes and behaviors impact others in that development.

*Coordinated Management of Meaning*

Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory deals with the self and its relationship to others, specifically, how we assign meaning to a message (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). Coordinated Management of Meaning, firstly, assumes humans live in communication. This suggests that we cannot be separated from communication and that it is vital to our existence; “people inhabit the communication process” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 101). But further, “communication is, and always has been, far more central to whatever it means to be a human being than had ever been supposed” (Pearce, 1989, p. 3). Howe (1967) states that “Communication means life or death to persons” (p. 148). This, of course, proposes the interconnectedness of people and the communicate process and further rejects the idea that communication is a linear process (Pearce, 1989).

Secondly, Coordinated Management of Meaning assumes that individuals co-create a social reality (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). “Social reality refers to a person’s beliefs about how meaning and action fit within his or her interpersonal encounter” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 102). When engaging in conversation, each person brings their own set of experiences and social realities. The coming together with others who each bring their own social realities elicits new realities, thus the co-creation of a new social reality (West & Turner, 2004).

Finally, Coordinated Management of Meaning assumes that information transactions depend on personal and interpersonal meaning (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). According to West & Turner (2004), “personal meaning is defined as meaning achieved when a person interacts with another and brings into the interaction his or her unique experiences” (p. 102). Interpersonal
meaning is further defined as "the result when two people agree on each other's interpretation of an interaction" (p. 103).

One of the core features of Coordinated Management of Meaning is the notion that people organize meaning in a hierarchical manner (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). That hierarchy is illustrated in Figure 2.7.

Six levels of meaning are offered: content, speech acts, contract, episodes, life scripts, and cultural patterns. According to West and Turner (2004), the higher levels of meaning help individuals to interpret the lower levels of meaning; they are embedded in one another.

At the content level raw data or uninterpreted stimuli (movements, noises, and visual stimuli) are converted into some meaning (Pearce & Conklin, 1979). At the speech acts level of meaning the

Figure 2.7 – Hierarchy of Meaning

Adapted from Pearce & Cronen, 1980
intention of the speaker and how a communication should be taken is given (West & Turner, 2004). Speech acts are “actions we perform by speaking (e.g. questioning, complimenting, or threatening)” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 105). The contract level involves a unspoken agreement between the parties communicating or in a relationship. “Contracts set guidelines and often prescribe behavior ... suggest a future ... communicate relational boundaries ... provide parameters for attitudes and behaviors ...” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 105). Episodes are “communication routines that have recognized beginnings, middles, and endings. Individuals may interpret the same episodes or interactions differently and have different perspectives or vantage points of the same episode (Pearce & Conklin, 1979). Life scripts are sets of past or present episodes that allow individuals to create a system of manageable meanings (Pearce & Conklin, 1979). And finally, cultural patterns are “images of the world and a person’s relationship to it” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 107). This is extremely relevant when two individuals from two different cultures try to understand the meaning of each other’s world (West & Turner, 2004). “Difficulty may arise when two people representing two different orientations interpret meaning from their particular vantage point. Culture, therefore requires shared meanings and values” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 107).

Pearce and Cronen’s (1980) espoused level of meaning is proposed as a model of the way people process information rather than an order to the way people process information. The hierarchy is useful and important in aiding the understanding of how meaning is coordinated and managed (West & Turner, 2004). It is also important to note that because people have varied past and present interactions, “some people will have highly complex hierarchies, and others will
have simplified hierarchies. In addition, some people are able to interpret complex meaning, and others are not as proficient" (West & Turner, 2004, p. 108).

One cannot discuss Coordinated Management of Meaning without an emphasis on coordination (making sense of meaning). West & Turner (2004) posit that:

…the best way to understand coordination is by watching people interact on a daily basis. Because people enter conversations with a variety of abilities and competencies, achieving coordination can be difficult at times. Further, coordination with others is challenging, in part because others try to coordinate their actions with ours. Coordination exists when two people attempt to make sense out of the sequencing of messages in their conversation (p. 108).

Philipsen (1995) gives three possible results with two people dialogue: they coordinate, they do not coordinate or they partially coordinate “because social reality is not perfectly coordinated” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 108). According to Pearce (1989), coordination is also influenced by a sense of morality and the availability of resources (stories, symbols, perceptions, memories, concepts and images that people use to make sense of things). When resources are not available or are insufficient, coordination is challenged.

Communication is a cornerstone of Coordinated Management of Meaning. The heuristic nature of Coordinated Management of Meaning makes it impossible to speak of training, learning and improving communication skills without a clear understanding of the theory. Theorists have used the theory to understand everyday conversations and conflict and how people develop and manage meaning and make sense of their worlds (West & Turner, 2004).

Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory emphasizes the true importance of communication in our lives. The theory can be used by HRD participants to develop ways to
assist participants in realizing that interplay and exchange with others helps people build and manage meaning. Exercises can be developed around the six layers of meaning to help move from theory to practical application. For example: videos of certain episodes can be shown to allow learners a chance to interpret meanings of those episodes. The exercises demonstrating how people interpret the meanings of words and interactions differently can be a useful tool for learning and self-development.

_Cognitive Dissonance Theory_

Cognitive Dissonance Theory, developed by Leon Festinger (1957), falls in the category of consistency theory. It holds that humans desire consistency and feel an imbalance (dissonance) when things are not consistent. Further, these feelings of imbalance moves the individual to take action to reduce this dissonance. People seek, in fact, need stability, psychological consistency. They do not like inconsistencies in their thoughts and beliefs.

“…when people experience psychological inconsistencies the dissonance that is created is aversive, Thus, people do not enjoy being in a state of dissonance; it is an uncomfortable state” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 123).

The actions a person takes to reduce dissonance has to do with the amount of dissonance (magnitude of dissonance) they experience and whether they justify and explain (rationale) why the inconsistency exists (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive Dissonance Theory holds that the dissonance that one feel’s can be lessened by making behavioral and attitudinal changes (Festinger, 1957). We develop and use strategies to change our perceptions to reduce or avoid dissonance. According to West & Turner (2004) we use the following dissonance reducing methods: 1) selective exposure by seeking information that is consonant with our current beliefs and actions; 2) selection attention by paying attention to information that is consonant with
current beliefs and actions; 3) selective interpretation by interpreting ambiguous information so that it becomes consistent with current beliefs and actions; or 4) selective retention by remembering information that is consonant with current beliefs and actions. Theorists use Cognitive Dissonance Theory to explain communication behaviors because it “offers insight us into the relationship among attitude, cognitions, affect, and behaviors and it does suggest routes to attitude change and persuasion” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 133).

Essentially, Cognitive Dissonance Theory helps HRD practitioners understand that people require consistency and balance and will selectively filter information during conversations, avoid conversations, or behave in other ways in order to maintain or regain consonance, the balance that is needed. The theory should be used to assist individuals in behavior management and becoming aware of their behaviors and the behaviors of others during times of discomfort or disharmony. Individuals should understand the role that discomfort plays in miscommunication. The ability to relieve discomfort in one’s self and the ability to develop ways to help co-communicators relieve discomfort are important skills to possess. Again, videos are a powerful learning tool for understanding and recognizing the behaviors emphasized by this theory.

Expectancy Violations Theory

Expectancy Violation Theory, developed by Judee Burgoon (1978) proposes that people have expectation about the non-verbal behaviors of others during the communication process. The theory focused in early years on personal space and individuals expectations of conversational distance but was later extended to examine how humans are driven by other expectations during conversation.
“Proxemics is the study of a person’s use of space” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 137). Hall (1966) informed Burgoon’s Expectancy Violation Theory claiming that there are four proxemic zones: intimate space, personal space, social space and public space. Figure 2.8 shows the ranges of spatial distance for each zone. Hall (1966) posits that there are behaviors that are appropriate for each zone.

Figure 2.8 – Proxemic Zones

Adapted from Hall (1966)

In the intimate zone (0 – 18 inches) appropriate behavior ranges from tough to being able to observe a person’s facial characteristics. When people “find themselves in intimate surroundings but are not with intimate partners, they often attempt to create a nonintimate experience” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 137). A good example is what happens in elevators. “We fix our eyes on the ceiling, the buttons or the door as the elevator passes floor after floor. People keep their hands at their side or grasp some object” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 139). Hall notes that whispers in this zone can be very powerful. The personal distance zone ranges from 18 inches to four feet. According to Hall (1966), behaviors in this zone can range from holding hands to keeping someone at arms length. This zone is typically used for family and friends,
though the farthest point is used for less personal relationships. “The voice is usually moderate, body heat is detectable, and breath and body odor may be perceptible” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 138). The social distance zone (4 – 12 feet) is reserved for casual social settings to formal social settings. Here, one is able to perceive skin and hair texture and monitor another person while completing a task. Finally, the public distance zone, ranging 12 feet and beyond is reserved for formal discussions. It is difficult to read facial reactions

According to Burgoon (1978), Expectancy Violation Theory assumes that people are driven by expectations and that expectations are learned. “…people do not view others’ behaviors as random. People have various expectations of how others should think and behave” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 140). According to Expectancy Violation Theory, as it relates to conversations, “people enter interactions with a number of expectations about how a message should be delivered and how the messenger should deliver it” (West & Turner, 2004, p. 141). There are factors that influence a person’s expectations: 1) the individual communicator factors are gender, personality, age, appearance and reputation; 2) the relational factors are prior relational history, status differences, levels of attraction and liking; and 3) the context factors are formality/informality, social/task functions, environment restrictions and cultural norms (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Further, one brings knowledge and skill to an interaction (pre-interactional expectations) and has different levels of ability to carry his interaction (interactional expectations: Burgoon & Hale, 1988).

Becoming aware that a person has deviated from our expectations (called arousal) may pose a threat to us which we may either reward or punish. The reward or punishment is based on how we view the person who initiates the threat. If we like the person, we will consider the
violation a positive one, thus not a threat; if we do not like the person, we will deem the violation to be a negative one (Burgoon & Hall, 1988).

Expectancy Violation Theory brings to light the fact that individuals have expectations about their own and others’ behavior and thinking. Violation of one’s expectations causes behaviors driven by either a punitive or reward system. One can see how Expectancy Violation Theory is intertwined with the communication process. While in the midst of conversations and interactions, humans are constantly evaluating and responding not only to the content of messages, but to the non-verbal behaviors of others. Expectancy Violation Theory is one of the few theories centered on non-verbal communication (West & Turner, 2004). It increases one’s understanding of how humans are influenced by conversational distance (West & Turner, 2004). HRD professionals will find this theory useful for becoming cognizant of their own non-verbal behaviors and how those behaviors affect others during the learning process. Communication skill will be significantly enhanced by understanding Expectancy Violation Theory and how our non-verbal behaviors enhance or impede the communication process.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Berger and Calabrese (1975) developed Uncertainty Reduction Theory. Their goal was to give explanation for how the communication process is used to decrease fears and reservations (uncertainties) between strangers during first time interactions. Uncertainty Reduction Theory holds that people experience uncertainty in interpersonal settings and that that uncertainty is uncomfortable and causes us to avoid or reduce the discomfort. It is important to people that they reduce uncertainty and increase predictability (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Though early development of the theory began with a focus on interaction between strangers, Uncertainty
Reduction Theory has been expanded to include relationships that are already developed (Berger, 1987).

Uncertainty Reduction Theory further holds that the interpersonal communication process has developmental stages: the entry phase – the beginning of interaction between strangers, the personal phase – people begin to communicate more spontaneously, and the exit phase – people decide whether to continue or leave (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This explains how interpersonal communication both creates and mirrors the process of building interpersonal relationships (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

Uncertainty Reduction Theory draws further from axioms that are extremely useful in helping to understand communication (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, pp. 101-107):

Axiom 1: Given the high level of uncertainty present at the onset of the entry phase, as the amount of verbal communication between strangers increases, the level of uncertainty for each interactant in the relationship decreases. As uncertainty is further reduced, the amount of verbal communication increases.

Axiom 2: As nonverbal affiliative expressiveness increases, uncertainty levels decrease in an initial interaction situation. In addition, decreases in uncertainty level will cause increases in nonverbal affiliative expressiveness.

Axiom 3: High levels of uncertainty cause increases in information-seeking behavior. As uncertainty levels decline, information-seeking behavior decreases.

Axiom 4: High levels of uncertainty in a relationship cause decreases in the intimacy level of communication content. Low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of intimacy.
Axiom 5: High levels of uncertainty produce high rates of reciprocity. Low levels of uncertainty produce low levels of reciprocity.

Axiom 6: Similarities between people reduce uncertainty, whereas dissimilarities increase uncertainty.

Axiom 7: Increases in uncertainty level produce decreases in liking; decreases in uncertainty produce increases in liking.

Berger (1995) continued to develop Uncertainty Reduction Theory positing that individuals use three types of strategies to reduce or coping with uncertainty: 1) passive strategy – by unobtrusive observation; 2) active strategy – by means other than direct contact; and 3) interactive strategy – by engaging in conversation. Emmers and Canary (1996) extend this notion later by stating that in relationships that are already developed the additional strategy of uncertainty acceptance is employed simply by the building of trust.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory helps learning professionals understand that fears and anxieties exists in interpersonal relationships. The uncertainty in relationships is usually reduced as more interaction happens between the two parties. Attempts are consciously and unconsciously made to reduce one’s discomfort in interpersonal relationships. Uncertainty Reduction Theory is the only theory that specifically examines initial interactions and is extremely important to the field of communication (West & Turner, 2004). HRD practitioners can make use of this theory to help participants develop more effective ways of communicating to influence and persuade others, to help reduce the uncertainty of others during interactions, to build trust and, thus, build and sustain relationships.
Communication Competence

Competence is "possession of required skill, knowledge, qualification, or capacity" (Dictionary.com, 2008). Trying to understand communication competence involves asking: what makes an effective communicator? The question is not easily answered. Adler & Rodman (2003) state that there is no ideal way to communicate. "A variety of communication styles can be effective" (p. 17). The communication process is affected by the lack or existence of shared meaning, culture, one’s self-concept, one’s concept of the co-communicator, and the situation itself, to name a few. Thus, Adler & Rodman (2003) suggests that competence is situational. It varies from one situation and one person to another. "It’s a mistake to think that communication competence is a trait that a person either possesses or lacks. It’s more accurate to talk about degrees or areas of competence" (p. 18). Adler & Rodman (2003) further posit that competence can be learned. "Communication is a set of skills that anyone can learn" (p. 19). Canary, Cody, & Manusov (2003) suggest that communication competence is the standards used for evaluation.

Adler & Rodman (2003) suggest the following characteristics of competent communicators: 1) the ability to choose the most appropriate behavior from a wide range of behaviors; 2) skill at performing the selected behavior; 3) empathy and perspective taking; 4) cognitive complexity – "the ability to construct a variety of frameworks for viewing an issue" (p. 21); 5) self-monitoring – "paying close attention to one’s behavior and using these observations to shape the way one behaves" (p. 21); and 6) commitment to relationship. Competence in communication involves purposeful focus on and awareness of communication behaviors at all times. It requires a willingness to test and adjust behaviors. In order to improve communication skills, one must be open to change.
Alternatively, the following set of criteria is offered as viable for measuring communication competence: 1) Adaptability – the ability to adjust behaviors and goals to meet the needs of the interaction; 2) Communication Involvement – cognitive and demonstrated involvement; 3) Conversational Management – regulation of interactions; 4) Empathy; 5) Effectiveness – achieving the objectives you have for your conversation; 6) Appropriateness – upholding the expectancies for a given situation (Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003).

Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) associate communication competence with the communicator's ability to achieve goals through appropriate interaction. They propose that competence in communication occurs in three components: motivation – how individuals handle various social situations, knowledge – an understanding of how to act in those situations, and skill – the behaviors actually performed in those situations. These communication competence experts and others offer self-evaluation tools as a means of assessing communication competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989; Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2003).

Use of communication competence self-assessments is a practical method of bringing to light opportunities for development in learners. HRD practitioners can take advantage of the communication competency assessment tools made available by experts to allow participants to become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in communication. These self-assessments should be used in conjunction with performance appraisals, coaching, goal setting and employee development plans to provide guidance and support to employees for improving communication skills. If, for example, the ability to communicate is a core competency for a position, employees in that position can assess themselves using the communication competence self-assessment. The results of this self-assessment can be used by the employee to develop specific goals and action plans for improving in the area of communication. Simultaneously, the manager of those
employees can engage them in one-on-ones, using this time with the employees as coaching opportunities, and taking the time to make use of employee development planning and ongoing, development-oriented performance appraisals.

Chapter Summary

Participants of learning need to understand that communication is an ongoing process. It is equally important to understand the concept of sharing meaning. The primary purpose of the communication process is to allow individuals to set and reach goals, define a purpose and fulfill it, influence and persuade others and, most especially, build and sustain meaningful relationships. To truly be effective at communicating the senders must understand that during the process they have a meaning and intent of the message sent, but receivers will develop a meaning of what is received as well. Unfortunately, the two meanings may not coincide. This is actually an acceptable beginning to the communication process, and should not be the end. One must view communication as a process, not a single event. Two individuals can come to an understanding during that process. Effective verbal and non-verbal skills can be used to develop an understanding. Unfortunately, lack of time, skill, empathy, patience or desire cause individuals to remove themselves from the process too soon, or choose to avoid communicating when discomfort is experienced. Developing communication competence will require much practice and persistence. Understanding the impact that developing shared meaning, using non-verbal actions, using listening techniques has on the communication process is essential. Using planning techniques to bring clarity and avoid miscommunication will individuals in the workplace to be more productive.

Symbolic Interaction Theory helps humans understand themselves in relation to the world. Understanding self is important to our growth and development and the way we deal with
problems. Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory helps us understand how we attach meaning to the things of life. This understanding can help us appreciate how others attach meaning that may differ from ours. Most importantly, Coordinated Management of meaning allows us to understand our self in relation to others and prepares us to learn how good relationships can be developed and maintained. Understanding Cognitive Dissonance Theory is essential to understanding that people require consistency and balance and will take necessary steps, consciously or unconsciously, to create the balanced needed for self-fulfillment, particularly during the communication process. These moves to create balance cause misunderstanding and miscommunication and present obstacles to building relationships. Expectancy Violation Theory tells us that we have expectations of each other. The misalignment of our expectations also leaves much room for misunderstanding and miscommunication and again presents obstacles to building relationships. And finally, Uncertainty Reduction Theory shows us that humans have periods of doubt, anxiety, and fear during interactions with others. Conscious and unconscious attempts are made to reduce uncertainties and provide self-protection.

These theories speak to the complex nature of human beings. So much information is occurring around each of us all in the same moment. These theories bring to light the humanness of mankind; the complexity and frailty of each of us, yet the incredible abilities in each of us. Our ability to, above all, become more self-aware while exercising greater empathy and appreciation for others will allow improvement in communication skills. Theories help us understand how and why humans think and act the way they do. Theories help explain the practical. The communication theories discussed here are important to understanding and improving face-to-face communication.
Chapter 3 provides further details regarding methods and approaches that can be used to develop and enhance communication programs in organizations. Knowledge of the communication theory presented in this chapter is paramount to developing and implementing effective communication programs.
Chapter 3 – Discussion & Conclusion

The Trainer Must Learn

An absolute must in order for HRD practitioners to demonstrate excellence as a facilitator of learning is that they first partake of the learning process they are going to be facilitating. The HRD practitioners must enter into a journey of self-transformation. They must use the methods and concepts to teach others to move to a place of change themselves.

An HRD professional must develop a positive self-concept. HRD practitioners have the difficult task of helping people move to a place of learning. Learning experience can be a confusing, full of doubt, and frustrating (Argyris and Schön, 1974). HRD practitioners must demonstrate self-confidence as they move learners, often times, from a place of low confidence. Remember that Symbolic Interaction Theory holds that people develop a self-concept through interaction with others. In fact, one’s world view is developed from interactions with others. Both good and bad interactions are had with others. HRD practitioners should remain positive about self and about their view of others even in the midst of negative interactions. Negative views about self or others can be seen by participants and will have a harmful effect on the learning environment. HRD practitioners must find themselves continually learning and renewing themselves in order to stay positive. HRD practitioners must be self-directed learners and constantly find ways of learning, growing and improving performance. The teacher must first be taught. The trainer must first learn.

From Theory to Practice

The present literature review shows that improving communication skills includes, among other things, an understanding of the communication process, the ability to develop
shared meaning others during the communication process, the ability to manage non-verbal actions and listening skills, an understanding of self and how one relates to the society and understanding of several theories that explain how one interacts with others. Theories help explain why humans think and behave in ways that seem unusual. After understanding theory one finds that these ways are normal (human nature), based on the research findings by developer of the theories. HRD professionals can make use of these theories to help learners better understand themselves, appreciate the behaviors and thinking of others, and develop empathy for others.

Traditional education and training is teacher-centered. The learner is told what the learning objectives are and what to do to accomplish the objectives. The learning is structured by the trainer or teacher. Because adult learners are self-directed and take responsibility for their own learning, the teacher-centered method presents a conflict for them in the learning process which could cause them to resist, withdraw or become apathetic (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005). HRD practitioners must move past traditional methods of training into more experiential methods of training and take advantage of the self-directed nature of adult learners. Argyris and Schöns (1974) say that:

Effective learning 1) is based in personally caused experience, 2) is usually produced by expressing and examining dilemmas, 3) values individuality and expression of conflicts, 4) must be guided by an instructor who has more faith in the participants than they may have in themselves, 5) who recognizes the limits of the participants’ learning methodologies, 6) whose idea of rationality integrates feelings and ideas and 7) who can encourage spontaneity (p. 98).
Providing an environment for learning at this level presents obvious challenges for HRD practitioners. The action learning and experiential learning concepts are excellent methods for learning at this level. An HRD practitioner must be a user of his or her own product in order reach levels of effectiveness in designing and developing learning solutions for learning and growth at this level. The complexities of the communication process lend well to programs that involve experiential, action learning and theory in action constructs. HRD practitioners must develop ways to help participants deconstruct the models that have established from their experiences and understand that those models or assumptions are assumptions and not facts (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005). This could lead to learning that is crucial for both individuals and organizations to realize much needed performance improvements.

HRD practitioners should begin by using communication competence self-assessments to help individuals recognize their strengths and weaknesses when communicating. Though theory is important and useful in helping learners understand concepts, Deveraux (2005) submits that “self assessment, based on job specific situations, appear the best way to give them practical reasons to learn and also identify areas critical for their personal development” (p. 13). Thus, combined with communication competence self-assessments should be other self-assessments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator learning preference assessment and 360-degree feedback. Taking self-assessments often allows individuals to understand where they are in relation to where they want to be. One can see more clearly the strengths and problem areas or opportunities available when proper self-assessment tools are used. Assessments are an excellent means for beginning the learning process, use during the process or as the learning process for a particular skill is approaching the end. HRD practitioners should use assessments to show employees areas that need developing. Then suggestions should be made as to the most effective learning strategy
to use to develop in the areas needed. HRD professionals should continually weave assessments into the regular work life of employees along with goal setting, employee development and the performance appraisal process. Use of these tools can prepare and motivate the learner to enter into the learning process.

Other effective tools for entry into the learning process are learning contracts and goal setting. Improving communication skills should be thought of as a developmental process. Communication skills are not improved by attending one training event. Improving these skills will happen over time. A learning contract will allow learners and facilitators of learning to plan and evaluate the learning experiences of learners over time, seeking for incremental learning and behavior change. There is often a tug-of-war within individuals between the needs and expectations of the organization and the needs and interests of the individual. This inner struggle often presents outward behaviors for the learner demonstrated by job satisfaction, low morale or low performance and productivity. Learning contracts offer a viable solution to the tug-of-war between the needs and expectations of the organization and the needs and interests of the learner. Learning contracts and goal setting can be intertwined with employee development plans often used in performance appraisals. Learning contracts and goal setting allow the establishment of tangible action steps that will be taken to meet the performance objectives. The HRD practitioner, in partnership with the learner and the learner’s manager, should ensure that the terms of the contract and goals are reviewed regularly throughout and after the formal learning experience (class, seminar or workshop).

Yet another way tool for improving communication is the utilization of learning journals. As Comparetta (2006) describes, journaling brings one’s thinking to light or makes it visible. This journaling during reflections allows one to combine cognition with affective to motivate
change. Brookfield (1987) cites the following as effective ways to promote, facilitate and develop critical thinking: 1) the importance of affirming the learner’s self-worth; 2) modeling critical thinking, being a critical teacher in the classroom, and being a critical manager in the workplace. Journaling combined with action learning technologies are useful for allowing participants to first write their thoughts and then express their thoughts, thus practice communication skills. Thus, reflection journaling and the critical thinking process are powerful tools for self-development.

Communication theory demonstrates the importance of understanding self. A strong self-concept is the foundation of being able to relate to others. The ability to communicate effectively is deeply rooted in the concept of self. Understanding self involves understanding one’s feelings, emotions, perceptions, assumptions, beliefs and values. One of the most important aspects of communication training and development is bringing awareness of behaviors and attitudes related to how learners currently communicate to the forefront of the learner’s consciousness.

HRD practitioners and learners can take advantage of this subconscious to conscious movement to by using reflection journaling to drive behavior change. The use of learning journals is an excellent way to begin to understand self. Combining the use of learning journals and self-assessments can cause learners to move toward self-realization, growth and change.

Assessments, particularly, the MBTI and 360-degree feedback, provide individuals with useful and pertinent information for development of self. The use of learning journals should be ongoing and used after the formal learning event, which means that it will be time-consuming. It also means that organizations must ensure that employees have time to learn and grow in order to experience a return on investment and learners must be willing to be continually self-directed.
Learning programs should include the use of these powerful tools to move participants to the place of deep change.

Design of the learning process for improving communication skills should include the use of videos to show examples of effective and ineffective communication, particularly as it relates to the communication process, shared meaning, non-verbal skills, listening skills, questioning skills and miscommunication. Experiential activities like action-learning sessions used to discuss, analyze, and resolve real-life problems (both related and unrelated to communication) can be utilized to allow participants to practice the concept of developing shared meaning with other individuals. Time should be given to participants during the learning process for development of questions for case studies and scenarios. This will help learners practice questioning, listening, and non-verbal action skills to assist in creating shared meaning with other individuals. Action learning sessions can be a powerful method of practicing communication skills. These small group discussion groups where real-life problems are the topic of discussion lend themselves nicely to practicing and improving communication skills.

Informal learning activities are also powerful tools for improving communication. Networking, trial-and-error, learning from mistakes, mentoring, coaching, brainstorming meetings, and self-directed learning are examples of informal learning (Swanson & Holton III, 2001). These learning strategies can be weaved into the day-to-day work experience of individuals to assist in developing communication skills. Marquardt (2004) speaks of the engagement of learning coaches in organizations who help in providing the type of environment where mistakes, reflecting and learning can take place. Learning coaches encourage learning by providing a safe environment for individuals to be vulnerable and take risks. Failures are seen as opportunities to learn rather than chances to blame. Essentially, the work environment must
become a classroom were continual learning takes place. When developing communication skills, employees must not feel fear of retribution but instead must be free to learn and grow. This is a paradigm shift for organizations and will require change in the organization culture such that an appreciation for and learning from mistakes is developed.

Incidental learning strategies are still another means of improving communication skills. Argyris & Schön’s (1974) double-loop learning strategy falls in the category of incidental learning and can be particularly effective as an approach to enhancing communication skills. The approach can be used by learners one-on-one with his or her manager or within teams. Again, HRD practitioners should partner with managers and the learner to assist in appropriate use of these strategies.

Yet another powerful method of improving communication skills is the use of goal setting. Goal setting can be effective when woven into communication training program design. HRD practitioners can use action planning (goal planning) as part of the training both before and after the learning experience. Learners can also set goals for the learning that will take place during and after learning sessions. Gerhardt (2007) suggests the use of self-assessments combined with goal setting as an effective approach to self-development. Goal setting is a powerful tool for increasing the motivation of learners. Goal setting, when used in conjunction with performance appraisals and employee development plans, is effective in improving employee performance.

Not covered in detail in this present study are the following topics: coaching, mentoring, dialogue, persuasion and influence, credibility of the communicator, communication & conflict, communication & cultural impacts, and questioning skills to name a few. It is imperative that
HRD professionals develop knowledge in these and other areas related to developing communication skills.

Learning Partners

One suggestion for improving learning, performance and transfer of learning is the concept of learning partners in the workplace. Learning partners, the term and concept coined while writing this present study, are employees who formally, purposefully and intentionally partner with each other and develop a vested interest in the success of one another. Learning partners help each other in setting and reviewing of goals and the elements of learning contract. These individuals give honest, necessary and timely feedback to one another based on goals that have been set and the elements of the learning contract. Learning partners meet regularly and discuss previously established goals and progress toward the learning contract.

The best learning partners are employees at the same level within the organization. This will reduce the anxiety and fear inherent in relationships between people not at the same level or in relationships where positional power can exist. The assumption is that greater levels of freedom and comfort exist between people at the same levels within organizations. Learning partners can be within the same department or division, though it would serve the organization much more effectively if the partners were from different divisions. This would allow for the development of relationships that cause higher levels of productivity and creative problem solving.

The learning partner relationship has obvious benefits for individuals in organizations. With respect to communication, the relationship and meetings allow conversations and reflection to take place. Thus, each person can practice naturally what was learned during formal communication learning events. This also has some inherent benefits for the organization. When
strong relationships are formed throughout the organization, employees work better and productively together in teams and support internal customers more effectively.

The learning partner relationship is similar to that of a mentor relationship or Marquardt’s (2004) action learning coach except that the individuals have equal footing in their positions and in the organization. They become helpers one to another, assessing one another and giving suggestions for improvement and growth. HRD practitioners can use the concept of learning partners in conjunction with training and other learning programs. Learning partners, like action learning coaches, must possess or develop the ability to ask questions, the ability to listen effectively, the ability to trust and be trustworthy, a commitment to growth and learning, a strong sense of self, a concern and respect for others, among other things (Marquardt, 2004). Learning experienced by the use of learner partners falls in the category of incidental learning rather than planned learning. The learning partner is a powerful concept and can be used by HRD practitioners across divisions to increase and assess learning, and help participants review and attain goals. Learning partners can be the impetus for much learning in the workplace.

Chapter Summary

Advances in the field of Human Resource Development make these exciting times for HRD practitioners. Much progress has been made in developing theories, models, tools and techniques for learning practitioners. This present study has provided information that is useful, not only for communication skills development, but other skills and competencies necessary in high performing organizations.

HRD practitioners must make a paradigm shift from traditional classroom training to the use of techniques like learning contracts, action learning, reflective learning and journaling,
double-loop learning, experiential learning, assessments, and goal setting, particularly for complex skills and competencies like communication.

Three concepts should be of primary importance to HRD practitioners and should drive their focus as it relates to improving communication skills within organizations: learning, performance and transfer of training. Clearly, organizations exist to perform; to succeed. The performance of an organization is directly affected by the performance of individuals in the organization. Individuals’ performance is directly related to his or her ability to learn and transfer that learning to the workplace. This is the unquestionable challenge of the HRD professional in the 21st century and the challenge of the learner also. A careful study of the information presented in this chapter coupled with an understanding of communication theory can cause HRD practitioners to be undeniably poised to meet the challenge in the 21st century.

Closing

A wealth of information, techniques and tools exist and can be used to assist employees in improving communication skills. HRD practitioners must stay abreast of the trends in the industry and must get and stay on a life-long learning journey in order to assist others. Practitioners should endeavor to learn and understand theory, but constantly seek innovative ways to move from theory to practice. HRD practitioners should seek to focus on individual learning that can deliver organizational performance. HRD practitioners should also seek to form partnerships with internal customers to develop better ways of ensuring transfer of learning. These efforts will cause HRD departments to be an integral and visible part of the overall business strategy of the organization.

HRD practitioners play an important role in the quest to improve communication skills in the workplace. An understanding of the intricacies of communication process, communication
theories and various adult learning techniques and tools are vital to an HRD practitioner’s ability to develop strong communication learning programs.
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