Interpersonal Communication Theories

Name

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**Social penetration theory By Irwin Altman &Dalmas Taylor**

Social penetration theory posits that with the development of relationships, interpersonal communication transforms through various phases to move from relatively shallow, less intimate levels to deeper and more intimate. The theory holds that the development of a relationship primarily occurs through self- disclosure where an individual intentionally opens up about personal issues (Griffin, 2012). Furthermore, it assumes that relationship development takes a systematic and predictable trajectory where individuals move from superficial layers of communicating to deeper ones.

**The uncertainty theory by Charles Berger**

The uncertainty theory assesses the initial interaction between persons before the actual communication process. This theory hinges on the belief that during communication and interaction, individuals need a certain level of information about the other person. This information lowers uncertainty, which helps in predicting the behaviors of the other party as well as the resultant actions. Berger and Calabrese hold the resulting actions are essential in the development of all forms of relationships (Griffin, 2012).

**The Relational Dialectics Theory by Leslie Baxter & Barbara Montgomery**

The Relational Dialectics theory in interpersonal communication explains communication patterns that form between people when they maintain a relationship. This theory pays critical attention to tensions and struggles that form a fundamental part of relationships. The strains also identified as dialectics in communication, imply competing states created through dialogues, and they could be external or internal. Internal dialectics is the tension between relational partners, while eternal dialectic is best identified as the tension that exists between the couple and the greater society.

**Media Multiplexity by Caroline Haythornthwaite**

Media Multiplexity theory posits that a tie's strength influences the pattern of media used. It states that stronger relationships affect the use of more media, while weaker ties have lesser media. This theory takes a social media approach to study interpersonal communication. With numerous means of communication, stronger relations between dyads will employ more methods, while weaker ones will have lesser (Miczo, Mariani, & Donahue, 2011). Also, the content of communication in dyads with a close relationship does not change across all platforms employed, while this is likely to change in weakly tied dyads.

**Compare and Contrast**

All the theories mentioned above have a significant impact on interpersonal communication, given that each approaches the topic from a different viewpoint. However, the social penetration theory, as well as that of Uncertainty reduction, seems to explain how Interpersonal Communication occurs. This section, therefore, compares and contrasts each approach to establish the most effective.

Firstly, the Uncertainty Reduction Theory marks the beginning of communication since it occurs before the interaction. It is quite different from other theories, given that the rest address the communication process that is already started. Individuals attempt to understand the other party in the interaction, which helps streamline the whole process. However, through the axiomatic theory, Berger poses eight ways through which this uncertainty is reduced to bring the parties to comfortable interaction. These include verbal communication, nonverbal warmth, shared networks, self-disclosure, reciprocity, similarity, liking, and information seeking (Griffin, 2012). For instance, nonverbal warmth, which is how an individual behaves without saying a word, helps reduce uncertainty, which allows the formation of opinions based on the few actions we discover.

On the other hand, Social Penetration Theory Social Penetration Theory utilizes an onion analogy towards peeling off of concentric layers away to remove possible barriers to a more intimate Interpersonal Communication. It holds a few similarities to the Uncertainty reduction theory, although in that it offers a step by step process through which interactions get intimate (Griffin, 2012). Just like Uncertainty theory, it holds that Self-disclosure is an integral part of developing and maintaining relationships. In both cases, self-disclosure refers to opening up about oneself, allowing the other to know them better. Additionally, disclosure reciprocity is essential in both cases. In both situations, each individual must disclose a little more information to reduce certainty and get more intimate in Uncertainty Reduction Theory and Social Penetration Theory, respectively.

On the other hand, Relational Dialectics Theory tends to pay more attention to friendships, romantic interactions, and family relations. This approach is contradictory to Uncertainty Reduction Theory and Social Penetration Theory, which approach interpersonal communication as a general subject. However, its approach to maintaining relations is quite similar to Media multiplexity, which focuses on friendships and family, albeit through media. Competing discourses in a relationship result in tension, struggle, and general messiness of close personal ties. For instance, a couple may be forced to keep distance in a place of work while they struggle to be together as much as possible.

Finally, the Media Multiplexity Theory approaches Interpersonal communication from the viewpoint on information technology. This approach is quite different from other theories, which include all methods of interpersonal communication (Miczo, Mariani, & Donahue, 2011). However, the theory assumes that the connection between dyads tends to remain the same within the realms of technology as well as on face to face basis. This theory provides a new dimension into the area of Interpersonal Communication in that it assesses the strength of a relationship with individuals who are closer employing more media to communicate while these far apart using one or two media.

In conclusion, the theories that explain how things work better are the Uncertainty Reduction Theory and Social Penetration Theory. This conclusion is because these theories encompass all interpersonal communication instances such as work settings, home settings, or even on the street. Uncertainty Reduction Theory explains how things occur before real communication; hence, it would be hard to pick a standalone theory that dose nor explain this initial phase. On the other hand, Social Penetration Theory explains how individuals remove layers of difficulty in establishing more in-depth and intimate communication. However, all theories tend to complement each other and offer a different perspective to Interpersonal Communication. For instance, Media Multiplexity Theory provides a technological approach to Interpersonal Communication while Relational Dialectics Theory, examines the intricacies of relationships and how the influence Interpersonal Communication.

References

Griffin, E. (2012). *A First Look at Communication Theory* (8th Ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Miczo, N., Mariani, T., & Donahue, C. (2011). The Strength of Strong Ties: Media Multiplexity, Communication Motives, and the Maintenance of Geographically Close Friendships. *Communication Reports, 24*(1), 12-24.