

view:  
9/10

## The Interviewing Process

see

In chapter 1, the interview was defined as a complex process of dyadic, relational communication. This chapter explains and illustrates the process by developing step-by-step the Cash-Stewart Model of Interviewing (see Figure 2.1) which contains all the fundamental elements of an interview.

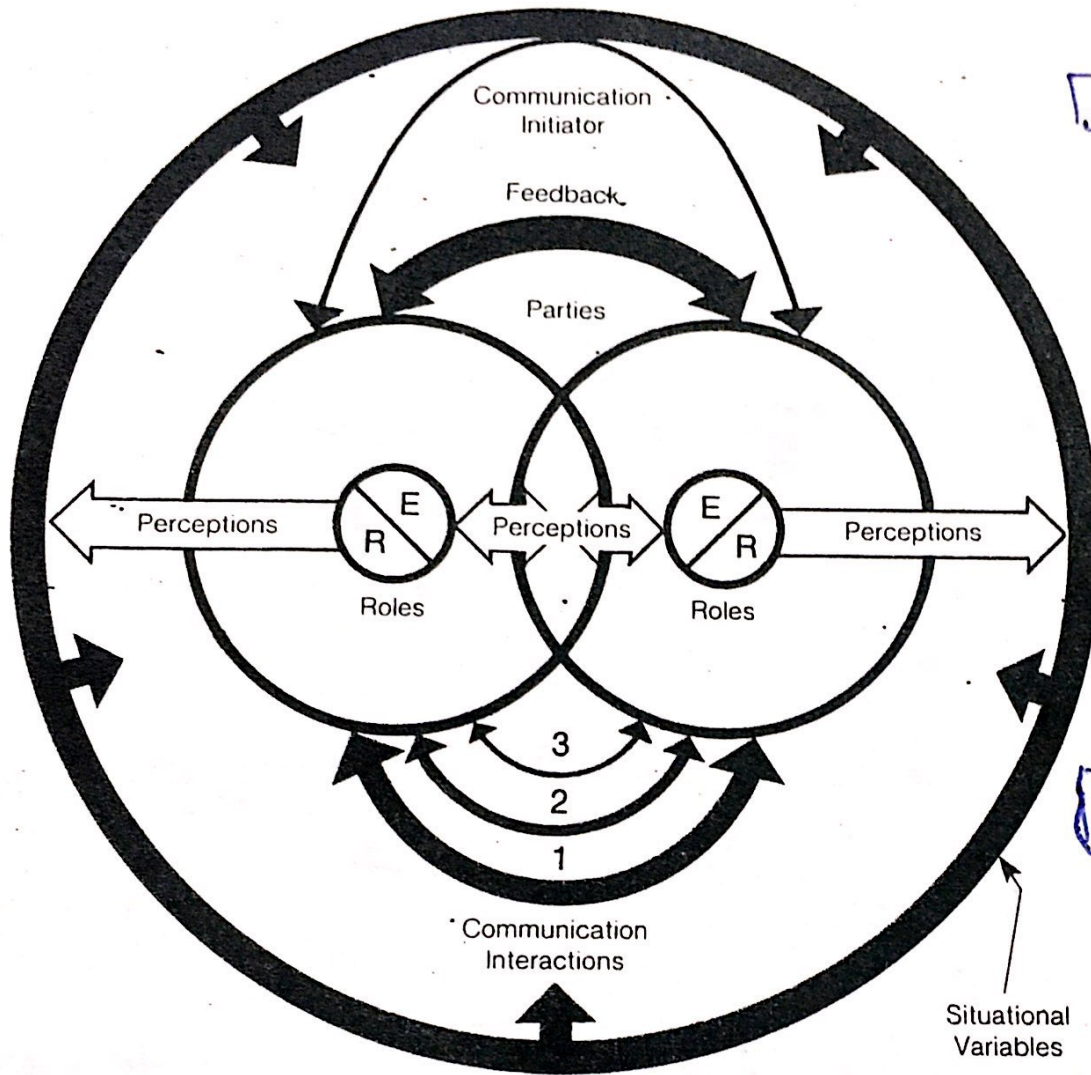
### Two Parties in the Interview

The two overlapping circles in Figure 2.2 represent the two parties present in an interview. Each individual within the parties is a unique product of environment, training, and experiences and has an interesting mixture of personality traits. Each adheres to specific and general stereotypes, attitudes, beliefs, and values and is guided by an ever-changing variety of expectations, desires, motives, and interests. In a very real sense, "the whole person speaks and the whole person listens" during the intimate, face-to-face interactions we call interviews. No single interviewing approach is appropriate for all, or even similar, interviews because each interaction involves different human beings.

### Common Ground Between the Interview Parties

The circles representing the two parties overlap to signify that the two parties are likely to *share* some environmental influences, training, experiences, personality traits, attitudes, values, and expectations. For example, both parties may come from the same geographical area, be optimistic, have similar religious beliefs, adhere to many of the same traditions, desire to be treated fairly, want accurate information, or have a sincere interest in one another. Do not be oblivious to the differences between you and the other party, but recognize important characteristics you share. Awareness of similarities allows interview parties to understand one another, establish areas of common ground, and adapt the interview to one another's needs, perceptions, desires, and customs. You will be able to communicate more effectively with the other party if you expand the area of perceived similarities and reduce the area of perceived differences.

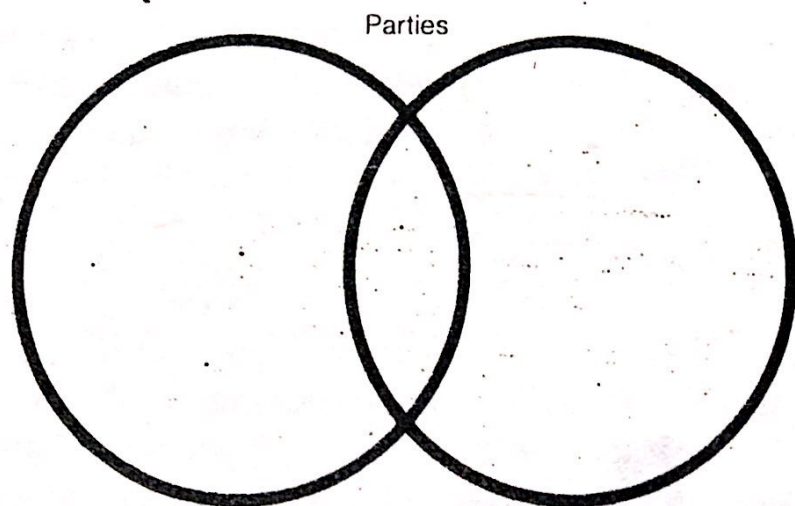
Figure 2.1 The Cash-Stewart Model of Interviewing



Inclusi

Cauti

Figure 2.2 The interview parties



Affecti



## Relationship Dimensions

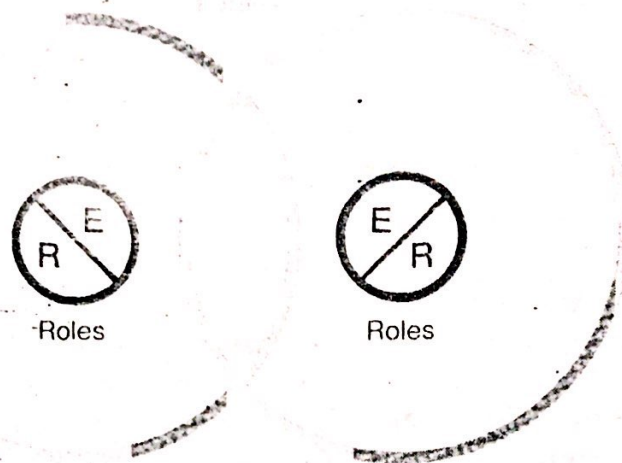
Inclusion The overlapping circles also signify that each interview is a relationship with three underlying dimensions: inclusion, control, and affection. Inclusion is the degree to which each party desires to take part in the interview. For instance, an applicant may be eager to meet a recruiter for a major corporation, but the recruiter, having conducted seven interviews since morning, may dread the interview. Inclusion also refers to how much each party desires to include others in the interview. A teenager, for example, may not want parents involved in an academic counseling interview. Inclusion involves each party's commitment to making the interview a success. Does an appraisal interviewer, for instance, view the session as a valuable means of helping the worker or as a routine and unimportant organizational task? And finally, inclusion encompasses the willingness and ability of each party to become actively involved in the interview. Personality traits, physical condition, mental health, emotional involvements, skills, and information often affect willingness and ability. The inclusion dimension is particularly important in interviews that involve more than two people where one person may elect, or be forced, to play a passive role.

Control refers to the degree of power the interviewer or interviewee has to determine the nature and outcome of the interview. The power to control may be situational. For example, if you do not wish to respond to a survey, you may close the door or hang up the telephone. During a selection interview, an applicant may exert a great deal of control if there are few other qualified candidates for the job. Control may be determined by organizational hierarchy or chain of command: president over vice-president, bishop over priest, sales director over sales representative, dean over professor, professor over student, parent over child. Social customs or traditions may dictate control in some communities and groups. Thus, women, elders, old money, or descendants of founders may exert control in some interviews. Control may emanate from persons who have attained prestige through accomplishments in sports, entertainment, science, politics, military actions, or feats of bravery. Powers attained through situation, hierarchy, custom, or prestige dictate if an interview will occur; when, where, and how it will be conducted; who the other party will be; the results; and how the results may be used. Whether or not interviewer or interviewee decides to exert these powers depends upon their relationship, their perceptions of societal, organizational, and situational constraints, and their needs, personalities, ego involvement, health, and interviewing philosophies.

Affection is the degree of warmth or friendship between the parties. Do they like one another? Do they trust one another? Is each capable of getting and giving affection during the interview? Some people fear affection or becoming too close to others, particularly in formal interviews with clients or subordinates. Others come to interviews with ambivalent or hostile attitudes because of unpleasant past experiences. Affection is often influenced by incompatible or opposing needs, desires, demands, and perceptions or by the



Figure 2.3 The switching of roles



history of the relationship. For example, an interview is more likely to be successful if the two parties have had previous positive encounters with one another. Ideal affection occurs in an interview when the two parties establish a "we" feeling instead of a "we-they" feeling. Both parties can adapt best to a relationship if they have assessed ahead of time that it is likely to be hostile, indifferent, or warm.

The interview relationship is mutual because both parties must contribute in order to gain. Even in surprise interviews at shopping centers, on the street, at the front door, or over the telephone, interviewees perceive within seconds why they are being interviewed, what will happen to the information they share, and whether they want to participate. If they decide to continue, these perceptions will determine the amount and type of information they give and how deeply they enter into the relationship. Once interviewees agree to listen further or answer questions, both parties become interdependent. Even when they have agreed in advance to participate, interviewees are initially dependent upon interviewers for context and content. Interviewers depend upon interviewees to provide adequate and accurate information, feelings, and attitudes.

### Interchanging Behavior During Interviews

The small circles within the two large circles in Figure 2.3 signify that behavior is constantly interchanged. Both parties are likely to ask and answer questions, to speak and listen from time to time, and to take on the roles and responsibilities of interviewer and interviewee. Neither party can sit back and expect the other to make the interview a success single-handedly. For instance, if you feel that a survey taker's question is not phrased to obtain your true feelings about a political issue, point this out and explain your answer. During this brief interchange, you have taken charge and become the interviewer. A short time later, the survey taker is likely to regain control while you return

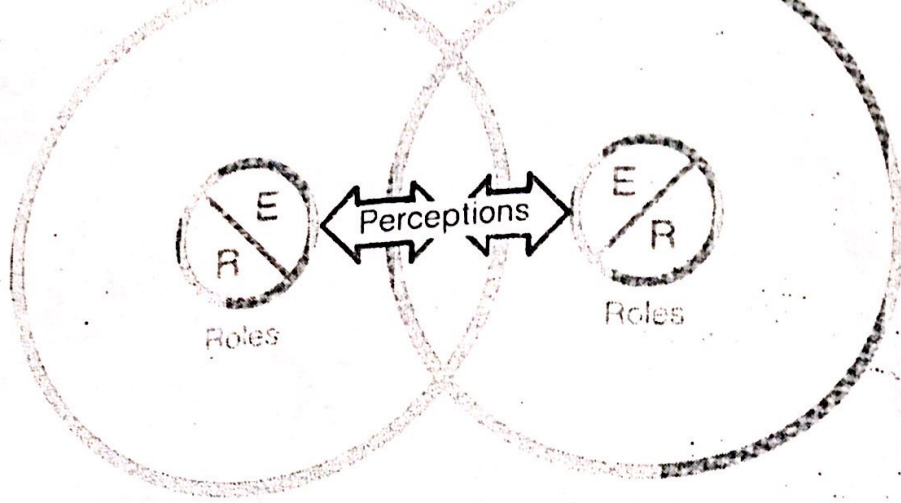
⇒ Behavior is constantly changing.

⇒ Roles and responsibilities change as interviewer and interviewee.

⇒ Positive

Imp





to the role of interviewee. An aggressive interviewee may take command of a sales, counseling, or selection interview, for example, and become the interviewer for the remainder of the exchange.

## Perceptions of the Interviewer and Interviewee

Perceptions affect the way interviewers and interviewees respond to one another. Each party comes to an interview with perceptions of the other and of self which may change as the interview progresses. These perceptions are symbolized in the model by the double-pointed arrows between the interview parties (see Figure 2.4).

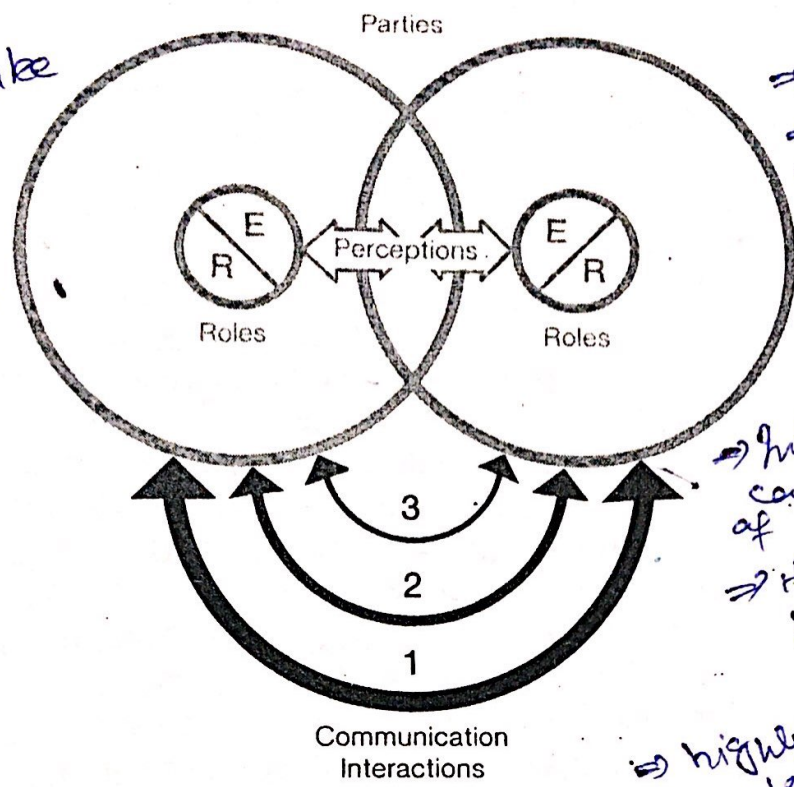
### Perceptions of the Other Party

Each party may be influenced by the other's reputation—a tough boss, a reporter who asks embarrassing questions, a shady used car dealer, a counselor who cares. Previous encounters with a person may make you look forward to (or dread) an interview, posing either an advantage or a disadvantage for both parties. Endorsements by persons or groups you like or dislike may affect how you view an interviewer or interviewee.

Perceptions may change as the interview progresses and both parties react to questions and answers. Positive perceptions result from the use of clear, logical language and supporting evidence as well as from appearance factors such as hairstyle, manner, clothing, and cleanliness. Members of governmental and business groups often react positively to well-tailored suits, white shirts and blouses, gold watches, conservative shoes, and clean fingernails. Whether you want to admit it or not, your perceptions are affected by the other party's age, sex, race, size, ethnic group, and association with other groups, persons, values, beliefs, and attitudes.



Interaction is like a door like merely ajar in level-1, half open in level-2 and full open in level-3



⇒ Safe, no threat  
 ⇒ Social question  
 ⇒ Superficial.

Level-2

⇒ Intimate and controversial as of knowing  
 ⇒ Half safe and half revealing

Level-3

⇒ highly intimate and controversial areas  
 ⇒ Without high interest.

✓ Perceptions of Self

Perceptions of self, or self-concept, come from the physical, social, and psychological perceptions that you have derived from experiences and interactions with others.<sup>3</sup> Your experiences include all past behaviors, how you have interpreted them, and how you perceive others to have interpreted them. Others include groups to which you belong or desire to belong as well as "significant others" who influence you interpersonally. The roles you play within these groups also affect your self-concept.

Self-concept may determine whether a person is willing to take part in an interview. For instance, you may refuse to take part in a counseling session because you fear failure or think you did poorly in a previous session. Or you may take part, but fail because you were convinced that you would—a self-fulfilling prophecy: "I told you I couldn't do it;" "I just knew I wouldn't get that job;" "I couldn't help it, that's just the way I am." Perceptions of self influence the messages sent and received, how they are sent and received, risks taken, and degree of self-disclosure.

**Communication Interactions**

Communication interactions, symbolized by the curved arrows that link the parties in Figure 2.5, are the most obvious behavioral interchanges during interviews. Each level of interaction differs in degree of self-disclosure, amount of risk, perceived meanings, and amount and type of content.



## **Levels of Interactions**

Level 1 interactions deal with relatively safe, nonthreatening areas of inquiry, and produce answers that are usually superficial, socially acceptable, comfortable, and replete with ambiguities. The following exchanges illustrate Level 1 communication interactions.

- Interviewer:** Good morning, Glenn. How are you this morning?  
**Interviewee:** Fine, thanks.  
**Interviewer:** And your family?  
**Interviewee:** They're doing real well. Mom and Dad said to say hello.  
**Interviewer:** Be sure to give them my best. How did you find out about our opening?  
**Interviewee:** I was reading the *Dallas Morning News* and saw your ad.

Level 2 interactions deal with more intimate and controversial areas of inquiry—behaviors, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, feelings. Responses tend to be half-safe, half-revealing. The interviewee strives to satisfy the interviewer while not revealing too much. The following exchanges illustrate Level 2 interactions.

- Interviewer:** How do you feel about interviewing with an old friend of the family?  
**Interviewee:** Truthfully . . . a little bit uncomfortable. I want to get this position based on my own abilities and not on a friendship . . . I hope that will be the case.  
**Interviewer:** Believe me, Glenn, my interest is in finding the best sales representative for my company.

Level 3 interactions deal with highly intimate and controversial areas of inquiry, and produce answers that fully disclose a person's feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. Level 3 interactions rarely take place without a high level of trust between interviewee and interviewer which may be unattainable until a second or third interview. The following exchange illustrates a Level 3 interaction.

- Interviewer:** Why are you interested in leaving your present position?  
**Interviewee:** A major reason is the position that your company has open. It's exactly the type I have been waiting for.  
**Interviewer:** And other reasons?  
**Interviewee:** Well, frankly, I am not getting along with my immediate superior. We disagree on the philosophy of selling and how much freedom I should have in doing my job.

Levels of communication interactions are like doors. The door is merely ajar in Level 1 interactions, and only some general ideas, feelings, and information may pass through. The door is half open (the optimist's view) or half closed (the pessimist's view) in Level 2 interactions so that more specific and revealing ideas, feelings, and information may pass through. The door is wide open in Level 3 interactions, allowing highly specific and revealing ideas, feelings, and information to pass through.



The question-answer-question sequence that dominates many interviews often makes interaction levels difficult to distinguish and predict. Which levels are reached depends upon self-perceptions, perceptions of the other party, situation, level of trust, topics being discussed, defensiveness, how questions are asked, and motivation. Interviews deal with *your* behavior, *your* performance, *your* reputation, *your* decisions, *your* feelings, *your* loss, *your* money, and *your* future—not those of some distant person. Thus, your ego, if not your financial, psychological, or physical survival, is on the line. The good interviewer or interviewee understands what motivates people.

1. People are likely to communicate beyond Level 1 if they understand what you expect of them. Avoid tricks, gimmicks, and white lies; be straightforward and honest.
2. People are likely to communicate beyond Level 1 if they are interested in you, the organization you represent, or the subject matter of the interview.
3. People are likely to communicate beyond Level 1 if you treat them with respect and give them your full attention.
4. People are likely to communicate beyond Level 1 if you offer a tangible reward (money, products, services) or an intangible reward (appreciation, feeling of accomplishment, pride in a contribution).

The thickness of the arrows in Figure 2.5 symbolizes that Level 1 communication interactions are most common, particularly during the early minutes of interviews when parties are sizing up the situation. The length of the arrows symbolizes the relational distance between parties and reveals that Level 3 interactions require a close relationship. If you find it difficult to advance beyond Level 1, try to determine why by observing, listening to, and questioning the other party. The reasons may be motivational, relational, perceptual, situational, or personal (such as poor communication skills or personality). Try to ease the other party into Level 2 and Level 3 exchanges. Level 2 interactions are fairly common when the interviewer is acting as an information source and asking tactful, nonthreatening questions. Be cautious when employing evaluative comments such as “*Why do you say that?*”, especially with threatening or accusatory nonverbal emphases. Level 3 interactions require a close, positive relationship and high levels of trust, self-concept, and motivation.

Communication interactions may be verbal or nonverbal, intentional or unintentional. Often during an interview, it is impossible to separate the verbal from the nonverbal and the intentional from the unintentional, but for discussion purposes we will do so.

### **Verbal Interactions**

Words are merely arbitrary connections of letters that serve as symbols for people, animals, things, events, ideas, beliefs, and feelings. They are imperfect vehicles for communication learned in a particular environment under particular circumstances. Why do you call an elephant an elephant, a house a



house, a democracy a democracy? Other English-speaking people do not use the same words the way you do. For instance, football identifies one form of sport in England and a very different sport in the United States. Irving Lee has written of a person who exclaimed, "Just get people to use words in their right meaning and then everyone will understand everyone else."<sup>4</sup> If only communication were that simple. The arbitrary nature of language has led to a host of communication problems.

Many words have multiple meanings which can cause communication breakdowns between persons of different ages, professions, geographical backgrounds, economic statuses, experiences, or educational levels. A "strike" means one thing to a factory owner and quite another to a bowler, baseball pitcher, or batter; and each feels differently about strikes. Be careful with slight changes in words that alter meanings (such as revocable and irrevocable clauses in contracts) or you will "talk past" the other party.<sup>5</sup> Talking past the other party often occurs because of the connotations placed on common words. You can speak of an "inexpensive" or a "cheap" suit, of your business partner having "convictions" or "prejudices," of a client being "tenacious" or "stubborn," or of a supervisor "leading" or "dictating to" subordinates. Not many people would admit to "manipulating" others during interviews, but the verb "to manipulate" has as many positive as negative meanings:

**Negative meanings**

cunning  
undermine  
trick  
gerrymander  
scheme  
deceive  
intrigue  
beguile

**Positive meanings**

touch  
handle  
join  
meet  
use  
exercise  
operate  
set in motion

Remember, words don't mean; people do! Choose language carefully and be aware of how your listener will interpret each word and phrase.

Keep up-to-date with changing usages of common words. For example, fast cars went from "keen" and "neat" in the 1940s and 1950s to "hot," "cool," "groovy," and "far-out" in the 1960s and 1970s, and to "decent," "tough," "mean," and "awesome" in the 1980s. It takes two to communicate. Know the current meanings of words and words preferred in specific situations so you can share language with others. Listen to people talk in a variety of situations; read popular and local materials; pay close attention to "in" words used in television programs and interviews. All of these sources will keep you informed about the latest meanings of words. As a general rule, avoid slang in interviews, do not limit your vocabulary to "in" words, and do not try to be what you are not.

Confusion often results during interviews when words sound alike and look alike but have different meanings. *Sail* and *sale* refer to selling and sailing; *bowl* and *bull* can refer to anything from a stadium, cereal bowl, or game to



a male animal or shoving one's way through a crowd; and *game* may connote a chess match, basketball game, wild animal, or person willing to try something new. Listen carefully to what is being said by you and the other party, and do not assume that accurate communication is taking place.

Each profession has its own jargon. Teachers refer to "underachievers" when they mean students who are failing; sociologists speak of "culturally deprived environments" instead of slums; a highway engineer may recommend a "vehicular control device" instead of a stoplight; and a communications professor may speak of dyads instead of interviews. Jargon may lead interview parties to talk "at" or "past" one another.

Everyone is guilty of using ambiguous words. What is a "nice" vacation, an "affordable" college education, a "simple" insurance policy, a "moderate" increase in salary, or a "typical" work day? Who is not "middle-class" in America? When is a person "young," "middle-aged," or "old"? When is something "one of the best," or, perhaps more accurately, when is it not "one of the best"? Strive for specificity in language to minimize problems and maximize communication. Each time you use an ambiguous word or phrase, you invite misunderstandings, misperceptions, and false expectations. Never assume that accurate communication has taken place. Explain or illustrate what you mean by a nice vacation; give a figure for moderate cost; explain what a simple insurance plan includes; give age ranges for middle age. If the other party uses an ambiguous word or phrase, ask for an explanation, example, or figure.

### **Nonverbal Interactions**

When you take part in an interview, observe the other party for nonverbal clues that reveal how well the interview is proceeding. The other party is likely to be detecting everything you do and do not do, assigning meanings to the simplest behavioral acts: head nods, facial expressions, vocal inflections, speaking rate, pauses, hand and arm movements, leg movements, body movements, posture, touches, yawns, smiles, and glances at your watch. The intimate nature of the interview (with parties often a mere arm's length apart) magnifies nonverbal communication.

Verbal and nonverbal messages are often intertwined, with the nonverbal complementing the verbal. Vocal stress may call attention to an important word: "I am *not* going to Chicago" or "The *net* income last year was \$325,000." Inflection may give a specific meaning to a word. If, for instance, you must release an employee, you may complement the verbal message with a sincere tone of voice, deliberate speaking rate, serious facial expression, and direct eye contact. The nonverbal accentuates and verifies your words. People often assess the verbal and the nonverbal before interpreting messages. For example, if a client remarks, "That's a nice looking outfit; you ought to have it cleaned and burned," you are likely to listen to the voice, observe the facial expression, and look for a twinkle in the eye to determine if the client is joking





or serious. Since words are imperfect collections of symbols, they often cannot express inner feelings, exact meanings, or attitudes. Nonverbal actions join with words to express subtle meanings and feelings.

<sup>sup</sup> Nonverbal actions may repeat verbal messages: a head nod while saying yes, a head shake while saying no, an extended arm with the hand up while saying stop, a wave while saying hello or goodbye. You may point to a chair and say, "Sit here, please." "We're number one!" would not be the same without a raised arm and an extended finger. "Give us two beers" is repeated with two raised fingers. "I love you" is repeated and accentuated with a touch, a wink, or a squeeze of the hand.

A nonverbal action may stand alone as a substitute for words. For instance, you may point to a chair without saying, "Sit here, please," and the interviewee will get the message. People express "We're number one!" by raising and shaking an index finger; say "I don't know" by shrugging shoulders; or express "I don't care" with a shrug and a sour look. You may say "I approve," "please continue," or "I'm interested in what you're saying" by nodding your head. Nonverbal substitutes—a kind of everyday sign language—may be as effective as and less disruptive than words. A pause or moment of silence may communicate a variety of messages: Go on; I agree (disagree); I do (don't) believe you; I am interested (disinterested); I have confidence (no confidence) in you; or I don't understand. Silence is not a void; communication is taking place.

Nonverbal symbols may be inconsistent with words. For example, if a supervisor says, "Go ahead and take tomorrow off . . . if you want to," you are likely to observe his nonverbal signals as well—not merely *what* is said but *how* it is said. You may interpret the real message as "I don't approve!" or "It'll create problems." People often mean the opposite of what they say.



For instance, "What a choice!" may mean there is no choice, and "That was a great raise!" may mean the raise was ridiculously low. A misplaced pause may communicate different messages: "What's up the road ahead?" or "What's up the road (pause) ahead?" Messages sent and messages received are inseparable combinations of the verbal and the nonverbal. Research suggests that when one party's voice, face, gestures, eye contact, or posture communicate an attitude or feeling inconsistent with the words used, the other party typically responds to the nonverbal over the verbal—the *how* dominates the *what*.

Some nonverbal symbols and actions communicate messages on their own.

For example, an interviewer may see a yawn and interpret it as a sign of boredom. Poor posture, such as slouching in a chair, may communicate sloppy habits, fatigue, or laziness. Poor eye contact or a limp handshake may "tell" an interviewer that an interviewee is untrustworthy, has something to hide, is timid, or is ill. Leaning forward, smiling, and nodding the head are positive reinforcers that communicate empathy, interest, trust, sincerity, and agreement. Physical appearance and dress may send positive or negative messages about intelligence, education, cleanliness, maturity, interest, composure, and professionalism.

The rate of speaking and conducting an interview may communicate urgency (fast speed), the gravity of the situation (slow speed), lack of interest (fast speed), lack of preparation (slow, halting speed), or nervousness (fast speed and breathless voice). A client, employer, journalist, or medical technician, for example, may notice changes in vocal tone (from friendly to serious), in eye contact (from normal to either a stare or avoidance), in posture (from sitting back to sitting on the edge of a chair), in volume (from soft to loud), and in gestures (from none to highly animated hand, arm, or head movements).

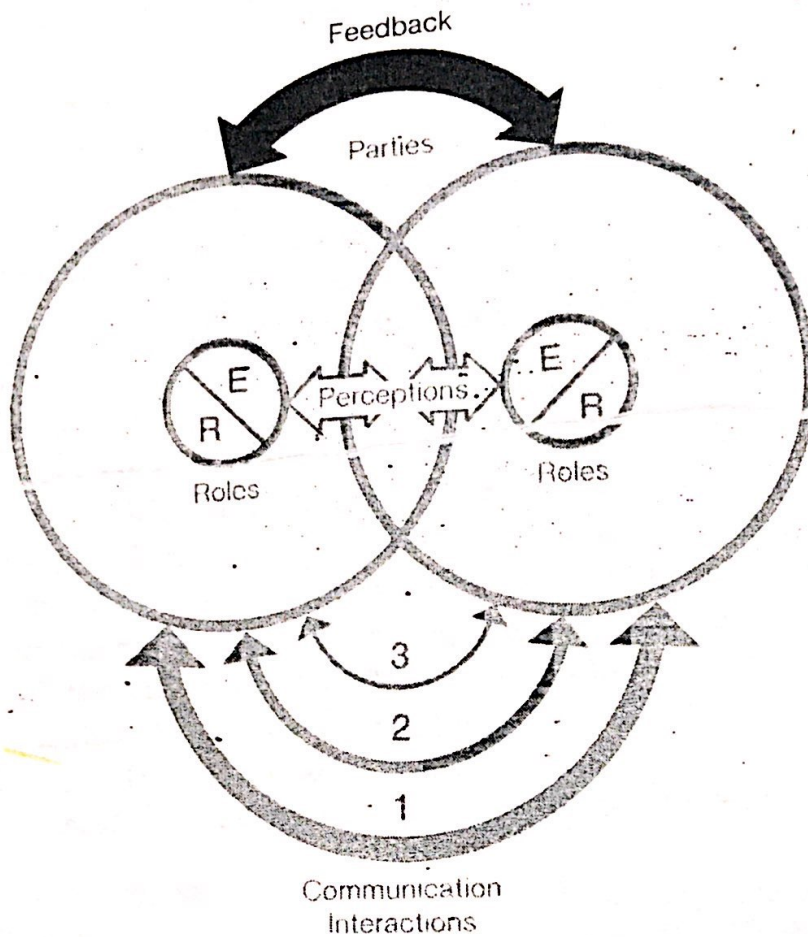
Remember, any behavioral act, verbal or nonverbal, may be interpreted in a meaningful way by the person receiving it. The message may be intentional or unintentional, and the fact that you did not intend to communicate boredom with a yawn is irrelevant if the other person interprets it that way. A counselor, for instance, may agree with a solution but communicate disagreement nonverbally. As noted in chapter 1, perhaps the greatest single problem with communication is the assumption of it. Faulty assumptions and transmissions are revealed when a person replies, "But I didn't mean it *that way*."

## Feedback

Feedback, represented by the large arrow at the top of the interviewing model (see Figure 2.6), verifies what is communicated to the other party and how that party is reacting. Feedback between interviewer and interviewee is continuous and more immediate and pervasive than in any other form of communication. A cartoon in the *Wall Street Journal* showed an angry husband



Figure 2.6 Feedback



whose wife was saying, "If you would only view my comments as feedback rather than nagging, you'd find them easier to take." **No interview can be successful without meaningful feedback.**

### **Feedback Options**

**Feedback is more than a means of checking word translation. It is a knowledge of results that may be inferred or observed.** A response to a question may signal whether or not the correct message got through. Based on your own perceptions and your relationship with the other party, you compare the response to your intended message and then decide how to react. The three feedback alternatives are to (1) **confirm that the message got through,** (2) **readjust the message,** or (3) **deny reception and try again.** Imagine that a supervisor states, "I need you to work the second shift on Saturday." You may frown, an apparent rejection of the request. The supervisor may then deny the feedback message and reply, "I was hoping you would not react that way," or adjust to your feedback by saying, "I know you had planned to go to the football game, but this is the first time I have asked you to work on Saturday in more than a year." You may confirm the feedback, "Yes, I've had these tickets for more than a month;" or deny the feedback, "No, it's not that big a deal;" or adjust to the feedback, "I'm sorry; you have given me a break on weekend shifts. I'll see if someone else can use the tickets."



Feedback is continuous, but correct detection and interpretation depend upon the sensitivity, receptivity, and perceptiveness of each party. For example, an interviewee may display uneasiness through lowered eyes, fidgeting, or trembling voice every time an interviewer gets close to a particular sensitive area. The skilled interviewer will detect these signals and decide whether to probe into the area or avoid it.

## **Listening**

Poor listening habits guarantee loss of information, failure to detect feedback clues, and failure to motivate the other party to respond, express feelings, listen, and interact. You cannot hear and assess the steady stream of feedback in interviews when you have your mouth open and your ears closed. Even when spending half or more of an interview listening, few people listen well. In a series of studies during the 1950s, Ralph Nichols discovered that the average white collar worker demonstrated only about 25 percent listening efficiency. Recent surveys have found poor listening to be rated as the number one communication barrier for accountants and first-line supervisors.<sup>6</sup>

The three approaches to listening are (1) listening for comprehension, (2) listening for empathy, and (3) listening for evaluation. Each approach has a particular emphasis that may help you receive and process information during interviews, and any one approach may dominate all or part of an interview. Physicians, sales representatives, journalists, and counselors, for instance, may use all three approaches in a single interview.<sup>7</sup>

Listening for comprehension is primarily a method of receiving content and requires little or no feedback from the listener. The purpose is to understand and remain objective, not to inspect critically each question, answer, or reaction. This listening approach is common during the first minutes of interviews when both parties are trying to determine how to react. Here are some guidelines for listening for comprehension:

1. Clarify questions and answers through repetitions and reflective questions.  
Why should you act now?  
You say now is not a good time for you to act?  
Which policy is selected most often by people in your field?  
Are you concerned about what might happen in the future if. . . ?
2. Obtain additional information through probing questions.  
Tell me more about. . . .  
Why do you think this program is not for your firm?  
And then?  
What do you know about. . . ?
3. Ask for specific information when a question or response is vague.  
What do you mean by APR financing?  
When do you think an employee's performance should be appraised?  
Which issue was that report in?  
Where have you worked before?



4. Identify types and nature of beliefs, attitudes, and feelings.  
 Why do you feel that way?  
 How would you describe your feelings at this time?  
 Why do you think diversification is the way to go today?  
 How do you feel about beginning a new career at age fifty?
5. Listen for critical content and main ideas, no matter how difficult they are to understand.
6. Be patient, particularly when information seems irrelevant or uninteresting.
7. Listen to the answer before planning your next question.

*Listening with empathy* is a method of responding beyond merely receiving messages. It tells the other party that you understand his or her concerns and limitations. Empathic listening is total response, not a series of principles. It reassures, comforts, and expresses warmth. Highly personal and emotional issues such as divorce, retirement, bankruptcy, changing careers, or leaving school call for empathic listening. The genuineness of empathic listening is a measure of its success. Empathic listening and responses point the way to possible actions. Listening for empathy is not synonymous with showing sympathy. Sympathy implies feeling sorrow, while empathy is the ability to put oneself in the situation of the other party. The empathic listener says verbally and nonverbally, "As much as I can, I will try to put myself in your place in order to understand your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and limitations." Here are some guidelines for listening with empathy:

1. Respond to questions and answers with candor.  
 Yes, there are some unprofessional organizations involved in direct mail advertising today. However . . .  
 I can understand your concern about investing several thousand dollars at this time, but . . .  
 No, I don't like to talk about cancer either; on the other hand, . . .
2. Try to remain nonevaluative unless you have no choice.  
 (evaluative) That's not a good choice because . . .  
 (nonevaluative) That's one option, of course. Another is . . .  
 (evaluative) Well, if you want my opinion, I must say that I think you're making a big mistake in choosing . . .  
 (nonevaluative) You must realize that my situation is not exactly like yours, but if I were choosing, I would probably select . . . because . . .
3. Listen carefully with an eye toward giving options and directions.  
 If you are trying to keep the total cost below \$3,500, here are some selections available at this time.  
 I can understand your financial problems since many of our clients have been affected by the layoffs. Perhaps you could consider . . .



4. Strive to be comfortable with strong displays of emotion.

Let a person talk out hostilities toward you or others. Do not interrupt or become defensive without hearing everything the person wants to say.

If a person begins to cry, be silent and give the person adequate time to become composed. Little that you can say will help the situation; phrases such as "I know" do not help much.

If a person launches into a morbid account of a problem, hear it out without showing discomfort or impatience.

5. Let the other party know you are listening and interested.
6. Do not react too quickly to comments and questions that contain controversial or emotional ideas.

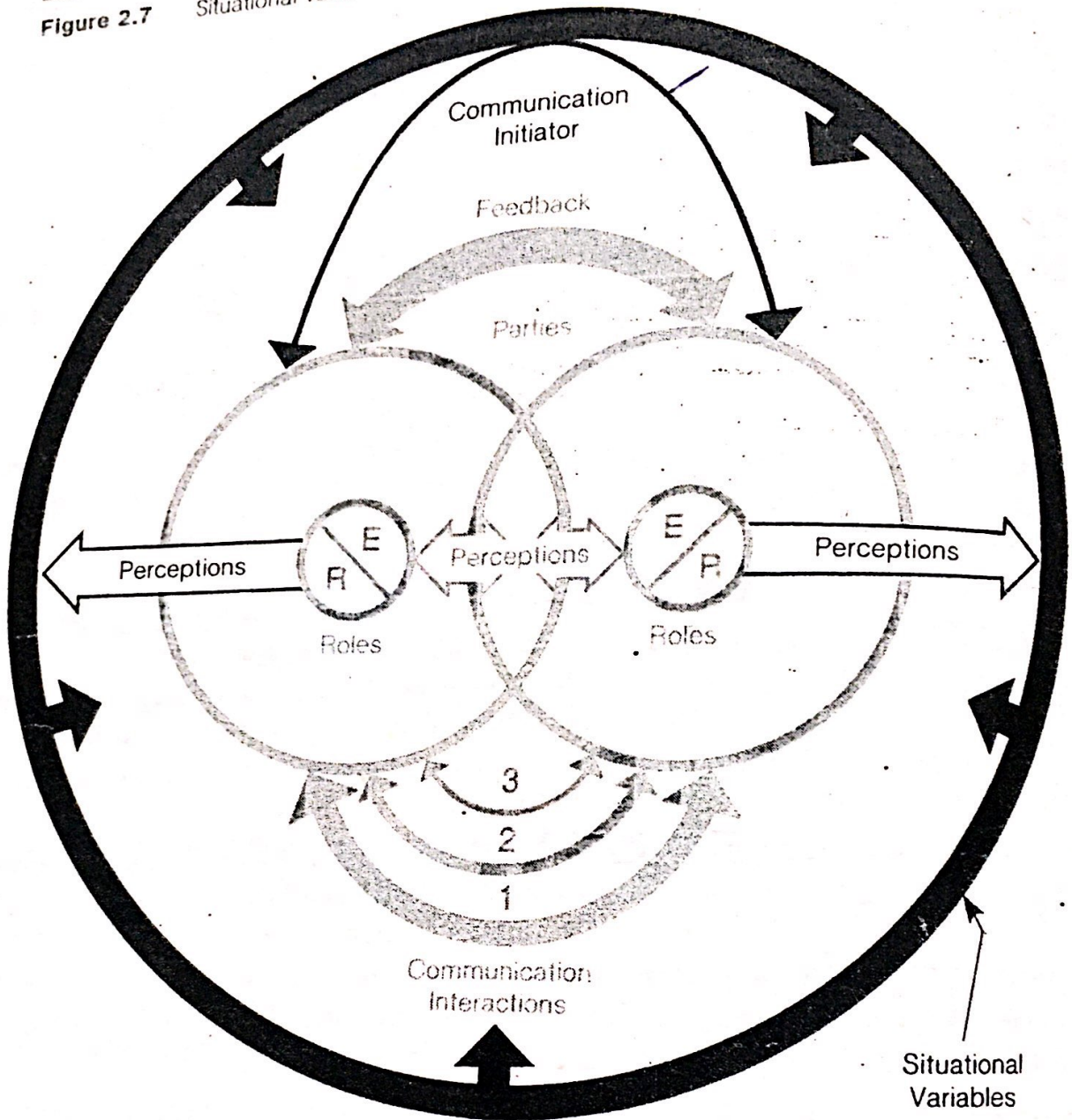
*Listening for evaluation* should follow comprehension and empathy in most interviews because you are not ready to judge information until you have comprehended it. *Evaluative listening is crucial*, but you must guard against expressing evaluations verbally and nonverbally during interviews if you desire continued cooperation and disclosure. Above all, do not become defensive. Here are some guidelines for evaluative listening:

1. Listen carefully to the entire question or response before making any judgment or drawing any conclusions.
2. Observe all nonverbal clues and behavior for nuances that will give you a clear idea of how to proceed.
3. If you have any doubts about a question or answer, ask for clarification before evaluating and responding.
4. Withhold final evaluations until an entire point of the interview is concluded. Only then can you understand adequately and judge appropriately.

Although insightful listening is critical to both interviewer and interviewee, most people find it difficult to listen, let alone to choose the appropriate listening approach. Listening is an invisible skill. Many people learn to be passive listeners as children, students, employees, and subordinates. They do not react verbally or nonverbally, but merely sit and accept (or appear to accept) what they hear. You have had experiences with people who would not listen to you. Friends of one of the authors recently wanted to purchase an insurance policy from an agent who was determined to discover the specifics of their business income, mortgage, debts, and so on. Even when they dodged such questions and asked the agent to show possible plans by using national averages, he continued to ask personal questions. This agent made the couple angry and did not make the sale.



Figure 2.7 Situational variables



### The Interview Situation

No interview takes place in a vacuum tube in which parties interchange behavior oblivious to the world beyond the rarefied atmosphere of the tube. Each interview occurs at a given time and place and is subjected to a variety of situational variables: type of interview, interviewing approach, time of day and week, events that precede and follow, location, architecture, temperature, seating arrangement, furniture, distance between parties, territoriality, noise, interruptions, and privacy. The interviewing situation is symbolized in Figure 2.7 by the circle that encloses all other variables. The arrows pointing inward symbolize the "implosive" effect of situational variables on the interviewing process.



## Type of Interview

The atmosphere of a screening or placement interview is very different from that of a separation or reprimand interview. A survey creates an atmosphere different from a grievance, sales, or interrogation interview. Each type of interview places special restraints on the initiation of the process, the parties, and the levels of interactions. The type of interview also determines the roles played by interviewer and interviewee and how these roles may switch.

## Interviewing Approach

The situation may dictate whether the interviewing approach is directive or nondirective. For example, persuasive interviews tend to be directive; counseling interviews tend to be nondirective; and employment interviews may be a little of each. The organization controlling the interview may also dictate the approach. Survey groups, for instance, prescribe in detail how, when, and where each interview is to be conducted.

## Time of Day and Week

People communicate best at different times of the day and week. For example, some prefer to deal with important matters early in the morning, while others prefer late morning, early afternoon, or evening. Monday mornings and Friday afternoons are times when moods tend to be dark and motivation low. Know the other party before picking the ideal time for an interview.

imp matter → in morning

## Events that Precede or Follow the Interview

Events related or unrelated to the interview topic, such as a plant accident, a personal problem, or a previous interview, may affect concentration, mood, and ability to communicate. An applicant facing another interview immediately afterward may be thinking of the next interview instead of listening. Monday afternoons may ordinarily be good times for a particular manager, but not *this* Monday afternoon. Holidays such as Christmas, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, and Yom Kippur are good times for some types of interviews (sales, selection, journalistic) but bad times for others (dismissals, reprimands, surveys). Counselors note marked increases in crisis interviews with lonely people during family-oriented seasons such as Christmas and Thanksgiving.

## The Location of the Interview

Architecture, comfort, noise, privacy, distance between parties, seating arrangement, and territoriality affect interviews. You can enhance the other party's concentration and motivation with a well-lighted, pleasantly painted, moderate-sized room that has a comfortable temperature and proper ventilation. Noise, movements, and interruptions—especially telephone calls—disrupt concentration, thought patterns, and the mood of the interview. People

⇒ sitting arrangement

⇒ comfort temp.

⇒ distance

⇒ f

⇒





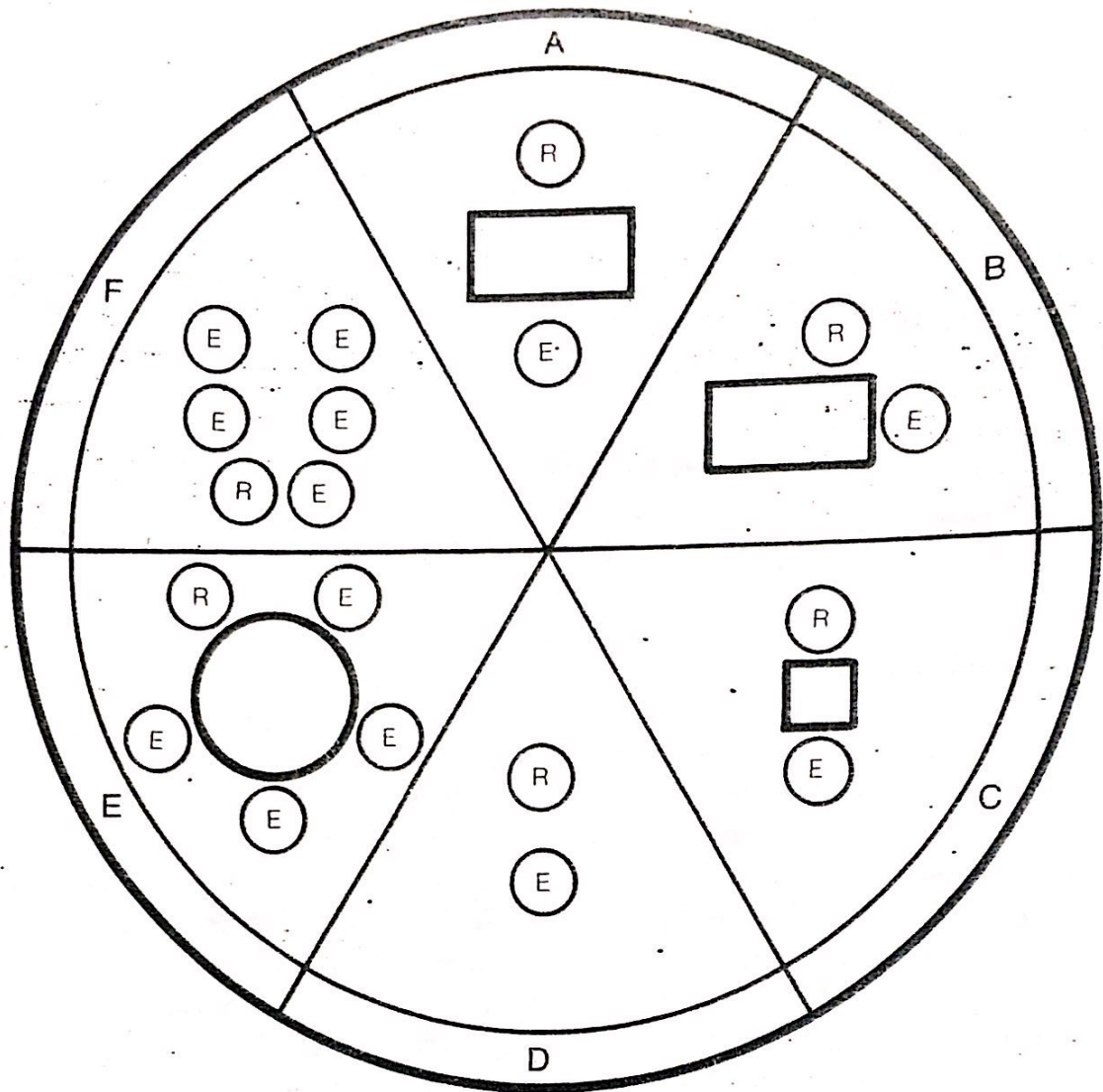
have difficulty listening and thinking when they can see cars on the street outside a window, persons moving about in the outer office, or secretaries coming and going. You must provide privacy and a good atmosphere if you desire to get beyond Level 1 communication exchanges.

Seating arrangement may help or hinder an interview. You are likely to feel uncomfortable with a person who insists upon talking nose-to-nose, and you may react by backing up, placing furniture between you and the other person, or terminating the interview. Three or four feet—approximately an arm's length—seems to be an optimum distance. Status, sex, furnishings, cultural norms, relationship between the parties, and personal preferences may influence the seating arrangement in an interview. For example, a superior and a subordinate may sit across a desk from one another (arrangement A in Figure 2.8), providing appropriate distance in a formal setting where one party desires to maintain a superior position. Two chairs at right angles near the corner of a desk or table (arrangement B) create a less formal atmosphere and a feeling of equality. Many students have remarked that they prefer this arrangement with college professors. You may remove physical obstacles and reduce the superior-subordinate atmosphere further by placing chairs on opposite sides of a small table or by omitting the table altogether (arrangements C and D). A circular table (arrangement E) is growing in popularity, especially in counseling interviews or interviews involving more than two people, because it avoids a head-of-the-table position, allows participants to pass around materials, and provides a surface on which to write, review materials, or place refreshments. Arrangement F is suitable when one or both parties consist of several persons.

open ventilation  
movements.  
no interruption by  
telephone calls.



Figure 2.8 Seating arrangements



### Perceptions of the Situation

Perceptions of the situation are symbolized in the interviewing model (see Figure 2.7) by the arrows that run from the parties to the situational circle. Each person comes to an interview with unique perceptions of the situation. A supervisor may view the conference room as a neutral setting, while an employee may see it as a hostile environment, particularly if workers tend to get fired there. Both parties have vested interests in the outcome of an interview, and often their goals are different. The sales representative wants to sell a set of encyclopedias and the customer wants to spend available money on a stereo; a journalist wants to produce a news story and a campaign worker does not want to embarrass a candidate; a recruiter wants to hire a hard worker and an applicant wants a good salary with fringe benefits. An interviewer may see the interview as a routine and not very exciting daily activity, while the interviewee sees it as a major event likely to affect future career, marriage, and financial plans.

*Handwritten initials*



### Initiating the Interview

The overlapping circles that emerge from the top of the situational circle in the interviewing model and touch each party (see Figure 2.7) signify that either party may initiate the interview. For example, a student may walk into a counselor's office and ask for help with a class schedule, or a counselor may call in a student to talk about a problem. A political candidate may contact a journalist about a change in campaign strategy, or the journalist may contact the candidate to verify a rumor about the strategy change.

The situation often determines who initiates an interview; conversely, who initiates the interview may affect the situation—when, where, and how the interview takes place and its emotional climate. For example, an appraisal interview may be very different when a supervisor stops an employee and says, "See me in my office at three o'clock!" from when an employee approaches a supervisor and asks, "Could I meet with you at three o'clock?" One is a threatening situation, and the other is not. People feel secure in *their* homes, offices, and familiar surroundings. When arranging and conducting interviews, take all situational variables into account. Initiating the interview is dealt with at length in chapter 3.

---

### Summary

This chapter presents a model of the interviewing process and explains the many variables that interact. Interviewing is a dynamic, complicated process between two complex parties operating with imperfect verbal and nonverbal symbols and often guided and controlled by the situation. A thorough understanding of the interviewing process and the relationship that exists between the parties is a prerequisite for successful interviewing. Both parties must be aware that perceptions of self, the other party, and the situation determine how interviews progress and outcomes are achieved. The abilities to listen (for comprehension, empathy, and evaluation) and to employ silence strategically are often more important than the ability to talk.

---

### An Interview for Review and Analysis

Joe is a production foreman with twenty-five years of experience and a very good record. The boss is considering him for a promotion, but company policy stipulates that a foreman is *not* to be informed when being actively considered for a promotion. Hence, Joe does not know he is promotion material. Furthermore, because of company policy, the boss is compelled to avoid tipping his hand. Company policy does allow mentioning, in general terms, overall considerations related to the current work force situation and to established company criteria for promotions. This interview is exploratory rather than decision-making. Two hours prior to the interview, Joe receives a call from the boss's secretary asking him to report to the boss. No reason is given.