

Workbook Chapter Twenty-Eight Learn to Cooperate

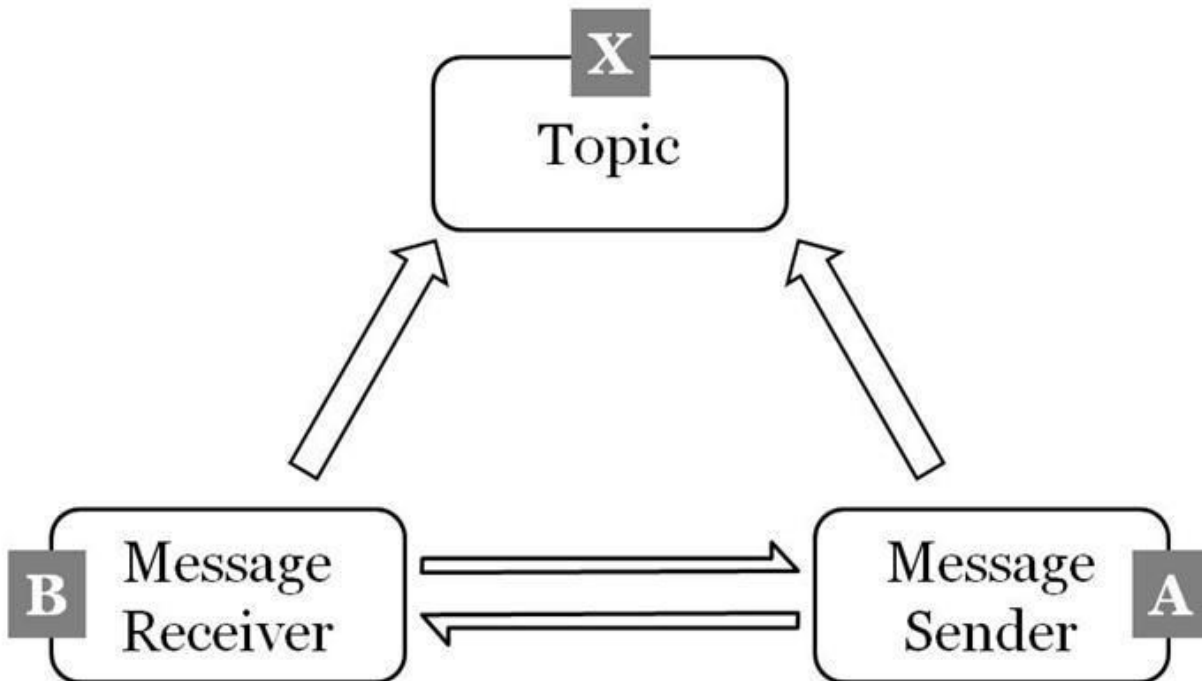
Self-Assessment Tools:

Newcombe's A-B-X Theory

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When you meet someone for the first time, the goal is to find something you have in common. You share things about what you like, where you grew up, what are your favorite foods or what is your favorite music, until you find something in common. This is how relationships start. After you have found something in common, then you can interact extensively about what you found you have in common. This is called Newcome's A-B-X Theory. This is how cooperative relationships begin.

This theory of communication was introduced by social psychologist Theodore M Newcomb of the University of Michigan in 1953. It gives different approach to the communication process. The main purpose of this theory is to introduce the role of communication in a new social relationship. He does not include the message as a separate entity in his diagram, implying it only by use of directional arrows. He concentrates on the social purpose of communication, showing all communication as a means of beginning and sustaining relationships between people. Sometimes it's called the "ABX" model of communication.



The Newcomb's Model

The Newcomb's model works in a triangular format or A-B-X system

A – Sender

B – Receiver

X – Matter of Concern

The relationship between A and B is like student and teacher, government and public or newspaper and readers. Sender and Receiver may work in a same flow, but the same time some factor like "X" may affect their flow of relationship. "X" may also be a third persons, issue, topic or policy.

FN Newcombe, T. (1953) <https://www.communicationtheory.org/the-newcomb's-model/>

Case Example

I developed a program that involved people with diverse religious values and beliefs I called "Interfaith Dialogue Dinners." This was a follow up to an "Interfaith Celebration of Kindness" that involved representatives from all major religions and spiritual traditions, who met together to publicly acknowledge the role of kindness in their religious or spiritual tradition.

We organized follow-up groups of eight people to participate in three dinners together in different participant's homes. The topic was to explore their differences in religious or spiritual values and beliefs. Again, it was not designed to get people to change their values or beliefs, but rather to provide more understanding and acceptance of their differences. These dinners were highly successful and many of the participants felt safe because we used dialogue as the main communication skill.

Participants said in their feedback that it was the first time they felt safe enough to discuss their religious or spiritual beliefs in a group that clearly did not believe the same way as they did. The first meeting involved each person sharing the highlights of his/her religious or spiritual journey. The ground rule was that after one person shared, the next person to share had to repeat back what they had heard this person say and get an agreement that was what they said. This had a profound effect on the participants and allowed them to share freely their experiences.

One man described himself as a "Cradle Catholic" meaning he just adopted the same religious beliefs that his parents had. Many others shared the same experience as to why they had adopted their religious beliefs. Once the safety was established, participants even felt free to talk about some of their "big" questions related to their current religious beliefs. One participant said, "I wish I could be this open with the people in my church. We never talk about these things together."

An earlier program with similar intentions grew out of my program called the Kindness Campaign designed to curb community violence in Colorado Springs, Colorado in the mid 1990's. In that program, community leaders, inspired by the goals of the Kindness Campaign, decided to get people with very divergent values and beliefs together for three meals to together called with a trainer facilitator called "Dialogue Dinners." Later it was called "Food for Thought/Breaking Bread, Building Bridges."³⁶