



# An Analysis of Communication Theories

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**Abstract:** Communication depicts human behavior and the structures of society. It is said as a slippery concept that is used casually in different frequencies. Communication is a two way process that helps in exchange of information (in other words transmitting information). Thus the communication theory itself explains and describes precisely what communication is (Wikibooks, 2006). There are many theories developed on human communication. Analyzing all theories is a vast and difficult task so this study has selected five communication theories Attribution theory, Groupthink theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, FIRO theory of needs and Social exchange theory and tries to identify the advantages, weaknesses and critiques. For studying the major concepts of the selected theories Em Griffin book titled "A first look at communication theory" has been chosen. Em Griffin's extensive researches on communication theories have brought a great impact in the patterns of world of communication. The complete study is based on the analysis of the chosen book.

**Keywords:** Attribution theory, Communication theories, FIRO theory of needs, Groupthink theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Social theory.

## 1. ATTRIBUTION THEORY

The process of drawing inferences is called attribution. In attribution process a person thinks, acts and reaches to a conclusion very fast and it is said to go beyond sensory information. According to Heider, "attribution is an effort to predict and control the world assigning transient behavior to relatively unchanging disposition". People are asked not to judge others but according to attribution theory this situation cannot be helped. Attribution is a process that is done in three steps; through this process a person can perceive others as informal agents. The three steps can be attributed as

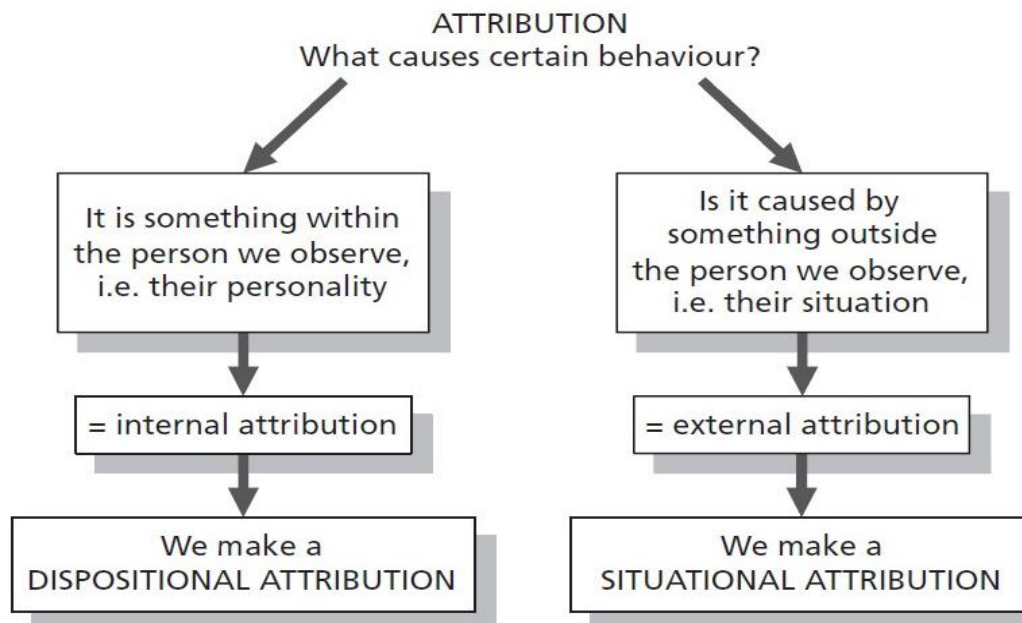


FIGURE 1 Attribution theory

(Source: <http://interaction.dundee.ac.uk/~mchisholm/wordpress/?p=116>)

- (i) Perception of action – this stage identifies as what actions were observed,
- (ii) Judgment of intention – this stage identifies whether the actions were intended. Here the author identifies five sliding scale positions of personal causation (a) Association (b) Causality (c) Justifiability (d) Foresee ability and (e) Intentionality.

There are few bias in the judging intention. For example generally people tend to blame or make others responsible

- o When there are any negative outcomes when compared to positive outcomes.

- For not trying to do a work than identifying their incompetence (in other words it is said *it is worst to be lazy than to lack ability*).
  - When they try to improve their position rather than to avoid loss
  - For outcomes feeling that it may occur to us or may happen with us
  - Than ourselves (give an excuse for ourselves but see others as informal agents)
- (iii) Attribution of disposition - this stage identifies what actions were forced. The tendency when judging others is less on the external factors and more on the character scale of the person, but assessing ourselves is different where in a person assesses himself on how much an action is which is due to the environmental pressures that is been opposed

One of the best examples can be given as when a person is responding to traffic lights and his actions at that moment. When a person sees red light he suddenly stops the car and waits for the next signal to come. In this gap he tries to take the last sip of soda and throw the can in the garbage nearby (actions – what he saw (garbage), his actions (thought to have last sip and throw the can in garbage) and judgment (throwing the can in garbage)). Next as the signal changes he gets ready and starts driving the car unintentionally (here unintentionally refers to his next responsibility that comes automatically when driving a car following the signals).

According to Heider it is suggested that *people systematically evaluate causes of behavior in a commonsense search to understand why things happen*. There is a critique on attribution theory that general tendency of people is to understand or think that other people are more responsible for their actions and they are free to do any actions. If they were enough evidences there would be a clear judgment of the attributions and actions related to it and the truth could be seen clearly (considering the environmental constraints). In view of Griffins (2008) *most people are not poor but they are too lazy to work*. Despite of the criticisms on the related side of relationships, attribution theory helps in giving clear analysis on the way we praise or blame others.

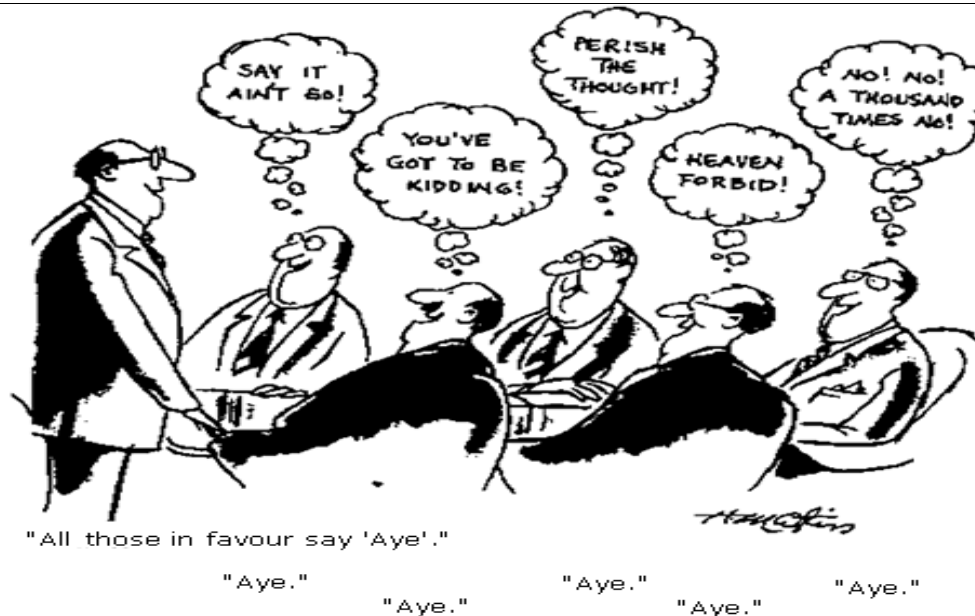
Thus attributions are said to be dependent on perceived freedom of choice. The attribution theory discusses how listeners deduce certain things about a speaker by the body language and speech pattern used; often these conclusions are incorrect or unjustified. Here the major issue is choice, wherein the choice is forced to act that could be a result of circumstances beyond their control, and here behavior and character are seen as to assign with each other. Further casual inferences are considered to be subconscious judgments made when people see others. Actions cannot be presumed and the three steps as explained will be vital and needs to be considered when any actions are performed

## 2. GROUPTHINK THEORY

According to Janis group think *is a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members striving for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action*. Groupthink occurs when there is high cohesiveness. It needs the members of the group to have strong feeling of cohesion (team spirit) and intends to maintain relationships with the group at any cost. Team members when collate in thinking on a group thinking mode they generally consider to preserve group harmony and test to every decision they face. This type of group think is considered to have a warm clubby atmosphere. According to a research study the effectiveness of groupthink is more when there is high cohesiveness when considered to low cohesiveness (in low cohesive environment the group members think or aim at reaching or achieving goals).

There are different symptoms that bring a group loyalty that is brought about by group mentality. There were eight major symptoms that shows concurrence seeking that has led to group off course. Of the eight symptoms the first two develop due to overconfidence in the group skills. Later two symptoms reflect the channel vision which the members use to identify the problem (in other sense the way they view the problem). The last four symptoms occur when there is a strong conformity pressure in the group. Griffin puts forward few symptoms of groupthink as following

- Illusions of invulnerability – here the group focus on the group members skills and have overconfidence. This attitude considers that everything is going to work well because they are a special group (may be overconfident of their skills and abilities and think they nothing will go wrong)
- Belief in inherent mortality of the group – here the group members thinks for causes of rightness of their decisions. In other sense the group members bring out causes and reasons for their strong confident group decisions.
- Collective rationalism – here group members do not show interest in listening any misconceptions on their decision. They have a collective rationalization that supports their mindset. Here the group is towards the saying “hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil”. This clearly depicts the high cohesive mind set of the group.
- Out group stereotype – here the group intends to go with their decision and do not intend to have a second thought even though they have options (they do not opt)
- Self censorship – here few of the group members have strong opinion but tend to put forward when some negative outcomes are seen.



**FIGURE 2.** Group thinking

(Source: <http://haacked.com/archive/2007/11.aspx>)

- Illusion of unanimity – the group members group think admits the mistake but in silence. They try to put forward the illusions (may be recommendations they wanted to say or said during discussion, but were overridden due to group cohesiveness) they had during the work process which were defended due to group thinking.
- Direct pressure on dissenters – here the group members think of the external pressures they could face and the issues or problem they could face from either management side or outsiders. Due to this situation and so as to keep up their pace they go on with their intended work schedules or group thinking.
- Self appointed mind guards – the group thinking is completely based on managing the problem (in other sense trouble shooting the assaulted ideas), this is predicted to bring positive opinions on the group.

Griffin puts forward the antecedents and consequences of the symptoms of groupthink aspects. Primarily the antecedent conditions include

- Decision makers who constitute a cohesive group (as stated earlier high cohesiveness in groups leads to more effectiveness of work processes)
- Structural faults of organization that include identification of
  - Insulation of group
  - Lacking the tradition of impartial leadership
  - Lacking norms that are required for methodical procedures
  - Homogeneity of members social background and ideologies
- Provocative situational context that includes
  - Increased stress from external threats and less hopes
  - Low self esteem (moral dilemmas, more problems on tasks taken on current decisions, failures that make members silent)

Probable consequences include

- Symptoms of group think – this relates to
  - overestimation of group that includes illusions of invulnerability and belief in inherent mortality of the group
  - closed mindedness of the group that includes collective rationalism and out group stereotype
  - pressure towards uniformity that includes self censorship, illusion of unanimity, direct pressure on dissenters and self appointed mind guards
- Symptoms of defective decision making – this consequence includes majorly on incomplete survey alternatives and objectives, failure to workout contingency plans, examine risk of preferred choice and initially rejected alternatives and finally poor information search, bias in selecting information processing.
- Low probability of successful outcomes

A great example could be given as the launch of the world's cheapest car "Tata Nano" for economy class people especially in India. The cost of the car was 8000 dhs. Initially this car was launched with high expectation to reach the common man, the first year the sales reached unexpectedly high but later the car faced many on road issues such as car facing major fire accidents on roads. Due to this the sales went down 25% in one year. The company initially overlooked the issue but when it became a

national issue the group started revising the issues related to the failure and then provided extra electrical fixture so as to make it safer to the customer.

Research studies on groupthink suggest that decisions on consequences raised on groupthink should not be based on the poor decision making of the group but see if the theory applies to as per the historical records. In this case it is important to consider the grand opportunity, decisions, the reality, and finally the assessment. Critiques on avoiding uncritical acceptance of groupthink have been put forward. Description on groupthink theory has received great approval may be because people are fascinated to huge failures. The efforts on validating the group thinking theory is very little and not particularly successful. It is seen that most of the researchers take up high profile cases on decision making so as to bring out the reasons for terrible wrong decisions the case has chosen then use the Janis model to analyze the disaster. This led to identify, warn and suggest the ways to avoid failures. This type of presentation analysis is found to be good for constructing the theory (on theoretical basis) but does not provide any comparative basis for accepting or rejecting the theory.

### 3. FIRO THEORY OF NEEDS

Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) is an elaborated theory that discusses the interpersonal needs which claim to explain what and why of individuals actions towards others. Three major needs (greater or lesser) of individuals are identified in humans and are classified as needs for inclusion, needs for control and needs for affection.

## The FIRO Theory

	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>CONTROL</b>	<b>OPENNESS</b>
Need	Contact	Influence	Sharing inner thoughts and feelings
Origin of feeling (the extremes being)	Significance (fame)	Competence (power)	Likability (love)
Behavior towards self	Alive	Self-determining	Self-aware
Fear (secondary)	Ignored	Humiliated	Rejected
Fear (primary)	Not being able to cope		
Polarities: High/low	Extrovert/introvert	Dominant/submissive	Warm/cold

FIGURE 3. FIRO theory of needs

(Source adopted from: <http://www.petrinaconsulting.com/downloads/firo-material/firo-the-colour-jpeg/view>)

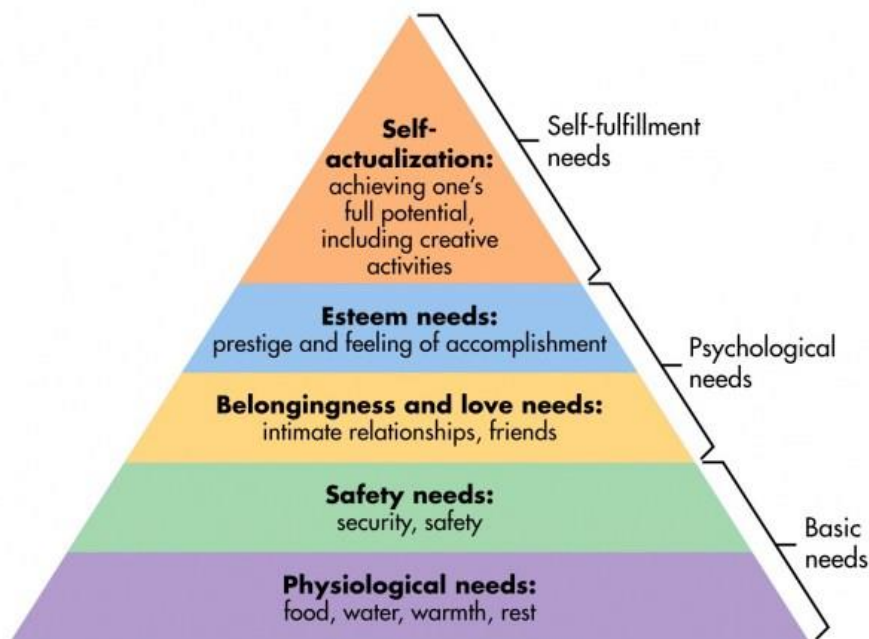
- Need for inclusion – *It is the inner drive to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with people with respect to interaction and association.* It related to either being in or being out. Need for inclusion is two ways where in a person wants inclusion from others and relatively making others feel important. Need to give attention is proportionality related to need for getting recognition (give attention, receive recognition).
- Need for control – *an inner drive to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with people with respect to power and control.* It related to either being at top or being at bottom. This is also a two way process. Schutz states that some people intend to be passive and dependent so that their way will be laid by others. But then this is viewed negatively such people with inclination to allow others are seen as wimp. These types of people are more trusting, respectful, and obedient and are willing to serve. It is uncommon to find a person who give and get power.
- Need for affection – *an inner drive to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with people with respect to love and affection.* It related to either being close or being far.

There are three different techniques or methods explained for fast diagnosis of FIRO needs. Primarily *blind milling* procedure where in few members are sent into a dark pitch room and encourage them to move around bumping each other. Then the discussions about the touch, barriers, invasion of space, belonging desires of inclusions are revealed. Second technique is known as *dominance line*, where in participants are asked to form a single file line with most dominant at the first and the most submissive at the last and ask them if they would like to lead the winner. Finally the third technique is *high school dance* where in the participants are asked to pair up with the most attractive they like. Here the intentions such as anxiety, sexuality, jealousy, intimacy and rejection are observed.

Effectiveness of needs can be brought through matching needs. FIRO needs assumes of compatibility states compatible groups are more effective when compared to groups with clashes. Here compatibility is defined in two different ways. Primarily the similarity where in give and receive approach is intended. Secondly the compatibility that comes from mixing the reciprocal needs. Critiques on FIRO needs theory states that discovering the fixed needs is not helpful. Separating the postulates of persons and evaluating FIRO theory is found to be very difficult. The theory forces emotionally fragile people and make them feel more insecurity and the theory does not seem to relate to his original theory. The questionnaire used for assessing needs represented more of social needs which only helps in identifying interpersonal behavior and the three needs inclusion, control and affection are common and helps in motivating people.

#### 4. HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Maslow approached through a radical departure for studying the human nature in other sense the theory emphasizes on the reasons of human disruptive tendencies (selfishness, jealous, harsh, ugly, unsatisfied etc.). Every person has needs but the ways in which the needs are satisfied is different. According to Maslow's theory there are four major types of needs that needs to be fulfilled before a person can act unselfish. The needs are arranged in a hierarchal manner. At the bottom level are the satisfying needs and these are physiological. Then comes needs of safety, then the desire of love, next esteem needs and finally self actualization needs (hierarchy from bottom to top – ladder model). When a human meets all his needs he could depict love, affection, fairness, relaxed, self sufficient, creative, nice etc. but when the needs are not satisfied at any level a person is in a deficit mode and tries to attain the needs to fulfill his self esteem. Hierarchy of needs theory states that the needs that are deficient must be satisfied so as to have growth.



**FIGURE 4.** Maslow's hierarchy of needs  
(Source: <http://datadesign.wordpress.com/2011/01/14/maslows-pyramid/>)

The basic and psychological needs are considered as deficiency needs and if these needs are lacked in a person it creates tensions. As long as a person works to satisfy his needs it means he is moving towards growth. As mentioned in the hierarchal model the lowest needs (basic and psychological needs) are given more priority until they are met. Once the desires are fulfilled another pops up so there is no limit to meet all the needs even though at the highest level. Psychological needs are basic and includes food, liquids, sleep, oxygen, sex, freedom of moment etc. when these are not fulfilled it leads to thirst, fatigue, tensions, frustration, consignment or discomfort. When these needs are fulfilled it is said that the system is balanced or at rest. Safety needs operate at a psychological level where individuals try to keep themselves safer. Love and belongingness needs come once the psychological and safety needs are satisfied.

Even though the basic, psychological and safety needs are met at the next level a person feels deficit and desires for love and belongingness. Esteem needs are of two different types (i) self esteem – this comes as a result of competence (also referred to as need for achievement), it looks for attention and recognition that comes from others and (ii) need for power – here it is assumed that individual needs are related with the personality that may change slowly. According to Maslow *self actualization is the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming*. This maximizes the potential in people and makes them feel gentle but only when they are satisfied with the basic, psychological and safety needs. Depending on the individual self actualization takes different forms that could include understanding, search for knowledge, peace, self fulfillment, beauty etc. this is considered as the highest human attainment.

Critiques on Maslow's theory accuses that he is providing intellectual justification in relation to selfish individuals. It is seen that people with self actualization needs fulfilled never felt the deficit of needs and also helped others and this component is missing in Maslow's principles and he was over optimist on human goodness and this idea is hard to accept, certainly people have the capacity to be good but history states that being loyal, trustworthy, helpful, courteous, kind etc. are dominant features of humans. Further there is less emphasis on the unselfish commitments and responsible to others. Thus it is said that most speakers focus on the needs of their audience but do not concentrate on their own desires.

## 5. SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

Interaction between groups or individuals is potential where one gains from the others expense. Social exchange theory *assumes that it can accurately anticipate the payoffs of a variety of interactions*. Human being mind is compared to a computer where information is put in and data is stored only that data comes out (whatever is put in comes out). Despite the complexity many individuals encounter on either or decisions and there are many options brought out as a result of this from different groups. Here the participants have a choice to choose the best they like even though not associated with more number on the board. Here it could be said that despite of the complexities or unwillingness or decision of others individuals choose the best they intend. So it can be said that freedom is the most desirable outcome in this case but it is important to see that strategy of anticipation leads to this exchange and is known as 'game theory'.

Here it is important to see whether if everyone is happy on the choice or results. Social exchange theory puts forward two methods of comparison by which we can evaluate the outcomes or results.

- In the first case it is the relative satisfaction – this is used to evaluate how happy or sad is an interpersonal outcome makes a participant feel. This is referred to as comparison level (CL). Is a person's CL is above that it means the outcome is effective.
- Next satisfaction is dependent on expectations – this is brought about by the previous experiences especially riveting the events in the recent past. If the outcomes are bad it results in distasteful results.

Next is the comparison of the results to see if all the participants are going to stick to the same choice. This is referred to as comparison level of alternatives. Based on the outcomes CL is considered as satisfied or not satisfied. CL is referred to as satisfied and CL (alt) is referred to as not satisfy and here instability increases. This method states the interpersonal relationships (also referred to as theory of economic behavior). The state of relationship and relative value of outcomes of CL are depicted in the following table

**TABLE 1.** State of relationship and relative value of outcomes of CL

Relative Value of Outcomes, CL and CL (alt)	State of relationship
Outcome > CL > CL (alt)	Satisfying, stable and dependent
Outcome > CL (alt) > CL	Satisfying, stable and non dependent
CL (alt) > CL > Outcome	Not satisfying, break relationships, happy elsewhere
CL (alt) > Outcome > CL	Satisfying, unstable and happy elsewhere
CL > CL (alt) > Outcome	Not satisfying, break relationships, continue unhappy
CL > Outcome > CL(alt)	Highly unsatisfying, cannot break away, dependent and unhappy

(Source: Social exchange theory, Griffin, 2008)

It is seen that extremely low CL (alt) is seen in non voluntary relationships. At the last level [CL > Outcome > CL (alt)] of comparison the expectations and desires are greater than the actual outcomes they receive. Thus it is seen that the level of outcomes impact the state of relationships.

Social exchange theory states that distinction in attractiveness and stability there are different types of power that separates the relationship types. Power includes three different types of control.

- Reflexive control – it is the ability to reward our own self. Here the individual takes up the responsibility of the outcomes
- Fate control – it is the ability through which one can effect others outcomes, regardless of others and assumes as fate control. Situation of low power arises which leads to break off the relations.
- Behavior control – it is the ability to change others behavior through different various in their own behavior control.

Social exchange *theory assumes that once the outcomes values of a situation are known prediction of player's moves is automatic*. That is if we know the outcomes of a situation we can predict the persons next move. It is also speculated that people who are caught in conflict revise the situation so as to relieve from tensions. Participants who are anxious try to alter the numbers (calculate the situation) so as to respond to the situation. Here transformational process takes place where reframing takes place and this helps in resolving interpersonal conflicts, reduces distress. Competitive mindset helps in bringing out effective and good personal outcomes. Socially rewarded transformations are aimed at reducing the use of raw power.

Critiques on social exchange theory focuses on calculating the interpersonal relationships through quantifying and calculations as used in a similar theory reward cost analysis of social penetration theory. It is seen that most of the interpretation is done on

the outcome matrix and works through the comparison levels, transformation and control. Unanswered queries of this theory include do individuals respond so selfishly so that they are opting of what they think in their mind and are these transformations testable.

Overlooking the critiques it is seen that social exchange theory helps in conflict resolution, gives change to communicate which increases cooperation. Research on social exchange theory brings out various reasons for non cooperation and how participants defend through adopting defensive strategy thus stating that selfish behavior provides less personal benefits than through a thought of general welfare and this makes social exchange theory more exciting.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Most communication theories aims at bringing effectiveness in the process of information sharing, motivating individuals to perform well, express their desires, views, ideas so as to being effective communicational outcomes. As in case of attribution theory persons actions are based on what they see, intend to do and what they do. In an attribution the major issue is choice, wherein the choice is forced to act that could be a result of situations beyond their control, where behavior and character are seen as to assign with each other. In groupthink theory the groups are involved that intend to show up their confidence levels (sometimes results in over confidence), and the skills they have based on which they make decision which they think are the best. After looking at the outcomes, if positive feel great of their skills and decisions and if negative they find reasons for failure and try to cover the outcomes. In FIRO theory of needs interpersonal needs are claimed to explain what and why of individuals actions towards others. FIRO needs assumes of compatibility states compatible groups are more effective when compared to groups with clashes. Maslow's hierarchy of needs emphasizes on the reasons of human disruptive tendencies and states that most speakers focus on the needs of their audience but do not concentrate on their own desires. Finally the social exchange theory despite of the complexities or unwillingness or decision of others individuals choose the best they intend and this shows impact on the interpersonal relationships. Thus this study has given ample information and brought up an understanding on the chosen theories of communication.

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