

Studying Communication Competence Level and the Enneagram Type

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Abstract

This thesis explicates the importance of communication competence and the Enneagram personality test. It also describes how both have been studied and measured. Although both concepts are difficult to define and have not been studied together, this thesis will work to clarify each concept and argue the importance of studying each concept together. The research question in this thesis will ask if there is a relationship between communication competence and the Enneagram. Scholarly research was conducted via academic journal articles. The conclusion of this research is that communication competence and the Enneagram could have a relationship. This conclusion was based on the similar features both variables share, which are cognitive and behavioral indicators of both communication competence and an Enneagram personality type.

Keywords

communication competence, communication, enneagram, personality type

Introduction

Communication competence is a construct widely studied in the communication discipline. Being able to comprehend communication and adjust behavior based on the situation are the main components of communication competence. However, communication competence is not clearly defined or measured, due to researchers' lack of agreement concerning these elements. The Enneagram is a personality test that incorporates nine different personality types. These categories describe how an individual most likely lives their life, expresses emotions, and sees the world.

Each of these are important on its own, but studying these two together can fill a knowledge gap on how people with different personalities may communicate and perform in communication situations. Studying these two constructs together is important because an individual's personality type may be able to explain their level of communication competence. The knowledge of these two topics together is very limited. Apart from each other, there is a lot of research on each topic. However, researchers have not yet studied communication competence and the Enneagram together. These two concepts each have behavioral and cognitive features that connect them to each other, and studying each concept further, and together, will clarify the potential relationship.

There is a lot of confusion surrounding communication competence. Scholars that have studied communication competence form their own idea of what communication competence is and define the construct in their own way. There is a lot of disagreement among scholars on what communication competence is, how it is measured, and if it can change over time. Many communication scholars argue about whether communication competence can change over time (Rubin et al., 1990). Some scholars assume that communication competence is stable and unchanging (Cegala, 1981; McCroskey, 1986a), while others assume that it changes based on each situation (Rubin, 1982a; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Most usually agree that communication competence "consists of cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor domains" (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995, p. 259). It is also recognizable, identifiable, and measurable (Chua, 2004). Communication competence, as a term, originated from Hymes in 1972 (Hymes, 1972). Hymes argued that communication competence consists of two factors: knowledge and use (Hymes, 1972).

Monge, Bachman, Dillard, and Eisenberg in 1982 believed that communication competence consisted of two behavioral constructs: encoding and decoding (Chua, 2004). According to these researchers, "encoding and decoding skills refer to expressing ability and listening ability" (Chua, 2004, p. 135). They also emphasize achieving goals through effective communication. Their belief was that specific communication behaviors and communication in specific relationships were needed to achieve goals (Chua, 2004).

Wiemann and Backlund's (1980) interpretation was that communication competence consisted of cognition and behavior. They believed that only studying communication competence from the cognition point of view ignores the performance and behavior portions of communication competence. They also believed that communication competence consists of ability and skill. Wiemann and Backlund's interpretation was supported by Zimmerman and Whitehurst's (1979) cognitive psychology, which also interpreted communication competence as incorporating function (behavior) along with structure (cognition). During the early stages of studying communication competence, research was conducted by structuralists who ignored the performance aspects of communication competence (Almeida, 2004). Communication competence does not only encompass cognitive factors, but also behavioral factors. Only studying certain parts of a construct, especially in the early stages of research, risks false conclusions.

McCroskey (1982) critiqued the theories of communication competence by saying that their theories undermined the significance of the cognitive and affective aspects. The researcher also labeled the other scholars to be behaviorists. McCroskey did not comment on the debate between functionalists and structuralists, and their theories, in the critique, although these debates continue to influence theoretical research (Almeida, 2004). Although debates can be detrimental to research, debates and critiques within the research of communication competence are important because there is no one definition of communication competence, which makes comparing findings across studies difficult.

Communication competence can be interpreted by its characteristics. One of the most universal characteristics of communication competence is adaptability (as cited in Brunner & Phelps, 1979; Duran & Kelly, 1984; Foote & Cottrell, 1955; Hale & Delia, 1976; Hart & Burks, 1972). Individuals face a variety of situations and interactions, and one of the characteristics of communication competence is being able to adjust behavior and communication to the appropriate manner (Hinner, 2020). An individual must also evaluate the situation for rules and norms, and then mirror that in their behavior (Chua, 2004). Making these adjustments must also be effective and appropriate to the situation (Goldman, 2019).

One reason to have effective communication is that it should help reach the interlocutor's goals in ways such as persuasive ability (Hinner, 2020). Effective communication should allow the interlocutor to persuade the other participant(s) in the conversation to do whatever it is the persuasive interlocutor is asking. Effectiveness includes using "verbal and nonverbal behaviors to obtain preferred outcomes" (Goldman, 2019, p. 78). Effectively communicating is an important factor of communication competence. Adjusting behavior or communication to have higher communication competence is completed to have effective communication and reach goals, such as a higher position in a career.

Appropriateness, in the communication field, refers to using the most suitable behaviors, gestures, tone, and other verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Appropriateness includes using verbal and nonverbal communication (Hinner, 2020). The key is using the correct "verbal and nonverbal messages" that are considered the most suitable for that "specific situation and the specific relationship that exists between the interlocutors" (as cited in Hinner, 2020, p. 41). A portion of appropriateness is also perception (as cited in Goldman, 2019). Perceiving behavior based on the established norms already established by the individuals involved is a big part of understanding what is considered appropriate and what is not (as cited in Goldman, 2019).

Empathy is helpful in selecting the correct behavior and communication. Being empathetic in communication means putting oneself in the other participant's situation. Once one is able to put themselves in the other participant's situation, one is able to achieve cognitive complexity and make the correct selections for behavior and communication. It also allows one to understand situations from different perspectives, which include self-monitoring, a concept referring to the awareness of an individual's behavior and communication, and other-monitoring, a concept that encompasses monitoring how a partner will perceive how an individual behaves and communicates (Hinner, 2020).

One must also be motivated, have the knowledge, and skills to be a competent communicator (as cited in Goldman, 2019). Having knowledge of rules and language allows one to create and comprehend lan-

guage (as cited in Chua, 2004). However, communication competence does not encompass solely language use, but also performance and skill in situations (Chua, 2004). The skills consist of behaviors used in communication that communicate a certain message (Goldman, 2019)..

It was Rubin and Martin (1994) that argued for 10 interpersonal skills that are consistent with communication competence (Goldman, 2019). The skills Rubin and Martin listed were: “self-disclosure, empathy, social relaxation, assertiveness, interaction management, altercentrism, expressiveness, supportiveness, immediacy, and environmental control” (Goldman, 2019, p. 78). While communication competence is not defined, these skills help researchers and individuals understand what communication competence can be represented as.

Although the definition of communication competence is not agreed upon in the literature, scholars do agree it can be characterized and achieved by skill, and “communication competence can be learned” (Hinner, 2020, p. 40). In a study of nursing students, Santos et al. (2019) found that behaviors related to communication competence can be learned “during an educational process[,]” which builds “knowledge, skills and attitudes for professional practice” (p. 2). Communication competence consists of cognition and a certain bit of knowledge that represents “knowing what to say and do in communication contexts” (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995, p. 263). Becoming a competent communicator can be a long process, but it will lead to higher levels of communication competence and development of the skills needed to communicate competently.

Regardless of one’s situation or types of relationships, communication competence is important in interpersonal relationships (Lee, 2015). The importance of communication competence begins at an early age (Arroyo & Segrin, 2011). In early childhood and adolescent years, peer acceptance is greatly related to social skills. Additionally, these early relationships, and even adult relationships, help one cope with stress and distress (as cited in Arroyo & Segrin, 2011).

Competent communicators experience more advantages than those who are not competent and active communicators. An advantage of

having a concrete support system, social network, and social skills is better mental health. Those that have social skills are more satisfied in their relationships (Flora & Segrin, 1999). Additionally, competent communicators that are committed to building relationships have more authentic and reciprocal communication and behavior (Hinner, 2020). In 1977, Wiemann argued that competent communicators can accomplish their own goals, while also helping their partners pursue and reach theirs (Arroyo & Segrin, 2011).

Those that are more anxious and avoidant in their relationships have lower levels of communication competence (Anders & Tucker, 2000). People who have more of an anxious attachment style have smaller support systems and report having less satisfaction with received support. Smaller network sizes are associated with lower levels of interpersonal communication competence. Although individuals with anxious attachment styles desire close relationships and support, they simply lack the skills needed to competently communicate (Ander & Tucker, 2000). Therefore, those that have lower levels of communication competence will be likely to have challenges with managing relationships and achieving goals (as cited in Arroyo & Segrin, 2011).

Communication competence has been measured and studied in various ways. Most of the research has been focused on the behavioral aspects of communication competence, and the psycho-motor and affective domain, which studies things like communication apprehension (Almeida, 2004; Duran & Spitzberg, 1995). Surveys and experiments are among the most popular ways of studying behavior in communication competence (Almeida, 2004). Observing and asking individuals about behavior can provide specific information that may not be learned via other measures, such as academic research. However, some measures, such as the Communication Competence Assessment Instrument (CCAI) (Rubin, 1982b), Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) (McCroskey, 1982), and Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS) (Cegala, 1981) are not explained within studies, which makes replicating the findings impossible. Figure 1 lists measures of communication competence and briefly describes these measurements.

Figure 1 Communication Competence Measures

NAME of SCALE	DESCRIPTION
Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (ICCS; Rubin & Martin, 1994)	This scale consists of 30 items that investigate different skills that would be used in effective communication. The ICCS assesses the ability to communicate using nonverbal and verbal communication (Santos et al., 2019). Responses are calculated on a 5-point scale that include almost never to almost always (Anders & Tucker, 2000). There is also a shortened ten-item version (Santos et al., 2019).
Escala de Competência em Comunicação Interpessoal	This scale is the Brazilian version of the ICCS (Santos et al., 2019). It has seventeen items that are grouped into five groups: “environment control, self-disclosure, assertiveness, interaction management, and availability” (Santos et al., 2019, p. 3).
Guerrero’s (1994) Communication Competence Scale	This 6-item scale assesses the ability to form effective messages that will fulfill the needs of relationships (“Friends’ Disclosures about Stressors: How Does Communication Competence Matter?,” n.d.)
Cognitive Communication Competence Scale (CCCS)	The CCCS measures cognitive communication competence. It is a twenty-seven-item scale that assesses cognitive aspects of communication interactions (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995).
Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) scale (McCroskey, 1986c;1988)	This scale measures an individual’s communication competence by asking the individual to estimate their competence in twelve contexts (Richmond et al., 1989). The twelve contexts were formed by incorporating four types of settings to communicate in: “public speaking, talking in meetings, talking in small groups, [and] talking to one other person” (Richmond et al., 1989, p. 29). Those settings are then crossed “with three types of receivers[:] strangers, acquaintances, [and] friends” (Richmond et al., 1989, p. 29)..

NAME of SCALE	DESCRIPTION
Workplace Communication Competence Questionnaire (WCCQ)	This questionnaire was developed in Malaysia (Chua, 2004). The WCCQ differs from other questionnaires because it focuses “on self-relational aspects over task” and respect (Chua, 2004, p. 131).
Burgoon and Hale's Relational Communication Scale (RCS)	This scale is focused on relational communication and an individual's verbal and nonverbal communication. It specifically measures interpersonal communication competence in dyadic relationships with methods of self-report and other-report.
Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000)	This model studies “how communication competence is associated with satisfaction and commitment” (Arroyo & Segrin, 2011, p. 551).
Wiemann's (1977) Communication Competence Scale	This thirty-five-item scale was used to measure “self-perceptions and other-perceptions of communication competence” (Arroyo & Segrin, 2011, p. 552).
Hur's Comprehensive Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale	This scale is a revised version of Rubin's Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (ICCS) (Lee, 2015). The scale consists of fifteen sub-factors within communication competence like self-disclosure and empathy.
Medical Communication Competence Scale (MCCS)	This scale is used within the medical field and “assesses patients' and physicians' perceptions of communication” (“A Validity Study of the Medical Communication Competence Scale (MCCS)”).

Next, the Enneagram personality test will be discussed. The Enneagram is a personality test that groups individuals into one of the nine personality types. The Korean Enneagram Personality Type Indicator (KEPTI) is an Enneagram personality test that consists of eighty-one questions. Those questions are divided into nine categories, which are the Enneagram types, so each type gets nine questions that represent that type (Lee, 2015). The Enneagram can describe “speci[fi]c patterns of thought, speaking styles, feelings, emotions, sensations, and belief

systems that are universal to the type” (Divine, n.d., p. 56). The Enneagram describes nine different ways “people engage in the human experience” (Spencer, 2020, p. 7). The nine different Enneagram types, sometimes referred to as “Enneatypes,” are held within a symbol that visually depicts the energy and interactions of the types. The symbol represents the complexity and unity of the types, but also represents how each type is unique and at the same time, allows an individual to be similar to other people. Each person may hold attributes of each type, but typically rests in one particular type (Spencer, 2020).

The purpose of the Enneagram is to provide a personality test and model to help one conceptualize their personality type. The Enneagram also helps identify and understand their personality through an overview of the character of the type. It is also a great tool for identifying the potential of an individual due to their personality type (Lee, 2015). The most humanizing part of the Enneagram is that it offers others a view of the individual that helps them understand how they see and relate to the world (Divine, n.d.).

The Enneagram, although a popular personality test, has not been studied in a wide variety of contexts. In a study of nursing students, the Enneagram was used in a counseling setting. The Enneagram counseling encouraged self-exploration and self-growth. Also included in the study were self-consciousness and communication competence (Lee, 2015). The Self-Consciousness Scale developed by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) played a part in the study to assess how one pays attention to themselves and thinks about themselves. After the Enneagram group counseling, self-consciousness increased in the students (Lee, 2015).

In the Enneagram group counseling study on nursing students, interpersonal relationships were also measured using the Relationship Change Scale developed by Guerney (1977). This scale has 25 questions based on seven subfactors like openness and intimacy. The higher these subfactors are indicated the more positive relationship. The study also assessed communication competence and the results indicate that communication competence increased in the students after the Enneagram group counseling was complete (Lee, 2015).

The Enneagram type is the way in which an individual experiences and sees the world, and it does not change its main characteristics based on circumstances (Spencer, 2020). Our type will change due to external circumstances, and it will interact with environmental factors (Labanauskas, 2010). It is important to understand the Enneagram type because a type reveals so many personal attributes like fears, desires, and vulnerabilities (Spencer, 2020). The Enneagram type can also provide insight on “how we process information” (Labanauskas, 2010, p. 2).

The 9 different types described in the Enneagram personality test are: “type 1 ... reformer, type 2 helper, type 3 achiever, type 4 artist, type 5 thinker, type 6 loyalist, type 7 optimist, type 8 leader, and type 9 mediator” (Lee, 2015, p. 237). Spencer describes three centers the Enneagram types fall: head, heart, and gut. These are 3 categories that describe how the personality types feel and make choices. Having a deep understanding of all three centers welcomes balance, as well as discernment (Spencer, 2020). According to Spencer (2020), Types 1 (i.e., reformer), 8 (i.e., leader), and 9 (i.e., mediator) are considered the gut center. These three types want to control and have a very direct, and often defensive, communication style. Their decisions are often based on instinct (Spencer, 2020). Types 2 (i.e., helper), 3 (i.e., achiever), and 4 (i.e., artist) are the heart center. They are personality types that feel a lot and often experience shame. Their story-filled communication style can often be filled with unspoken meaning. The decisions they make are often impacted by their emotions and relationships, while also considering their image. Finally, types 5 (i.e., thinker), 6 (i.e., loyalist), and 7 (i.e., optimist) are in the head center. These types are often filled with anxiety and are considered the “thinkers” of the Enneagram types. Their communication style is complicated and analytical. They make decisions that are logical and secure.

The Enneagram has impacted many people and their perceptions. Focusing on a specific Enneagram type allows one to objectively view the emotions and behaviors of others. It also impacts interpersonal relationships and how participants support and sympathize with other participants (Lee, 2015). Additionally, as individuals change and grow as human beings, the core structure of our personality type remains

the same. Perceiving an individual through their Enneagram type helps create an understanding of the attributes that remain at the core of the individual's personality (Divine, n.d.).

There is not only a lack of research on the Enneagram, but also a lack of research on the Enneagram and communication competence together. The Enneagram type describes communication style. Each type consists of different communication style elements and there is a possibility a specific type can exhibit communication competence. Communication competence is a skill that can be learned. It consists of behavioral and cognitive factors, and the Enneagram can describe behavioral and cognitive aspects of a personality type. Due to the connection between the behavioral and cognitive aspects of each variable, it is possible that the Enneagram and communication competence have a relationship together. Future researchers should examine if there is a relationship between Enneagram type and level of communication competence to help scholars better understand how personality may contribute to communication competence level.

Conclusion

In conclusion, communication competence and the Enneagram both may be related to one's ability to communicate effectively. If an individual knows their Enneagram type and how it relates to communication competence, they may be able to learn skills to help them be more effective communicators. Communication competence is how an individual adapts to a communication situation and understands communication. Communication competence is an important skill to have and develop, to have effective communication. It has been included in a variety of studies and there are multiple instruments and scales that can measure communication competence, or other related variables. However, the Enneagram is not widely studied. The Enneagram personality test consists of 9 personality types that describe how an individual experiences the world, communicates, and feels emotions. Understanding the types allows one to understand another individual more deeply.

The research on these two subjects together is lacking, but due to the shared cognitive and behavioral factors, future research may find an informative relationship between communication competence and the Enneagram.

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