

Applying Griffin's 10 Common Theoretical Threads

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The Importance and Relevance of Communication Theories

There's a realization that every student of communication must come to, at some point, in their academic journey: almost nothing in this world gets done without communication. Businesses, public events, governments, eating and drinking, families, sports, and mass media are areas of life which are inseparable from communicating. Therefore, it makes sense that various communication theories could be applied to the way that people interact within these types of situations. Our textbook provided a terrific overview of a plethora of theories. Em Griffin has studied these things for a very long time and has an important perspective on human communication. By the last chapter of *A First Look at Communication Theory*, Griffin has finished covering other people's theories and essentially creates one of his own. He posits that there are 10 reoccurring themes in communication theories. He terms them the "Common Threads", and explains how they fit into the rest of the theories in his book.

Griffin's 10 Common Threads

The first thread is Motivation. Humans are driven by certain needs and desires which influence how we behave. One motivator is the need to reduce uncertainty. People want to become familiar with you, your faith, or your product and brand before they'll trust anything you say. So, in our evangelism, prior to laying out every logical argument for Christianity (for which there are many), we might consider starting with engaging conversations that build trust. And before anybody becomes a loyal customer, a brand must implement communication that displays their trustworthiness and qualifications.

The second thread is Self-Image. How humans view themselves is, in large part, due to their cultural surroundings. Sadly, many people's self-image falls short of their

ideal self. Hence, messages that promise to raise a listener's self-image are often highly persuasive.

The third thread is credibility. Audiences will listen to and act on messages delivered by a credible source. When a communicator can present himself in a manner that proves he is qualified, competent, ethical, and honest, his message will be heeded more often than not. Aristotle figured this out thousands of years ago in his rhetorical principles; calling *ethos* (establishing credibility) the most important persuader.

The fourth thread that Griffin presented was expectation. In reality, most of human interaction consists of reactions. Audiences frequently have particular expectations and they suspect most speakers to meet them. However, disproving an anticipation can prove to be valuable for companies and interpersonal communicators alike. Jonah Berger conveys the idea that unique and special products (that violate expectations positively) tend to be discussed in manners that benefit brands and leave big impressions on consumers (2014, p. 591).

The fifth thread is audience adaptation. A message will travel much further and far deeper when it is targeted. You'll never convince lactose-intolerant folks to eat a tub of ice cream. Likewise, when sharing the Gospel, our delivery should be targeted. Someone who is ignorant about Jesus will not have the same attitude as a false convert, and preachers must anticipate these discrepancies with various sections of Scripture that speak to different types of listeners.

Then, he presents the thread of shared meaning. Communicators can rely on establishing a shared meaning to make their arguments more convincing. One of the easiest ways to communicate through shared meaning is by employing the 'narrative' thread. Our commonalities and our shared experiences are best realized through stories. Sharing stories that are familiar to another's circumstances can be a very

moving tactic towards persuasion and relatability. For instance, when we see a TV commercial for laundry detergent, we can recognize the need for a product's stain fighting capabilities when an on-screen character has a stain on their shirt.

Subconsciously, we all know how much of a headache that situation is, and we become more open to buying the stain-fighting product.

Final Thoughts

Additionally, Griffin presents the thread of social construction, which is defined as "the communal creation of the social world in which we live" (Griffin et al, 2019, p. 469), the thread of conflict, which is often a struggle between communicators with opposing values (Griffin, 2019, p. 471), and the dialogue thread; which represents the transparent conversation that results in profound relational outcomes (Griffin et al, 2019, p. 472). In the end, understanding all 10 of Griffin's "common threads" will help students, professional communicators, and others, who are curious about the field of study, in sharpening their focus.

References

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