

Intrapersonal Communication

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Intrapersonal communication is language use or thought internal to the communicator. It can be useful to envision intrapersonal communication occurring in the mind of the individual in a model which contains a sender, receiver, and feedback loop.

Although successful communication is generally defined as being between two or more individuals, issues concerning the useful nature of communicating with oneself and problems concerning communication with non-sentient entities such as computers have made some argue that this definition is too narrow.

In *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*, Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson argue that intrapersonal communication is indeed a special case of interpersonal communication, as "dialogue is the foundation for all discourse."

Intrapersonal communication can encompass:

Day-dreaming

Nocturnal dreaming, including and especially lucid dreaming

Speaking aloud (talking to oneself), reading aloud, repeating what one hears; the additional activities of speaking and hearing (in the third case of hearing again) what one thinks, reads or hears may increase concentration and retention. This is considered normal, and the extent to which it occurs varies from person to person. The time when there should be concern is when talking to oneself occurs outside of socially acceptable situations.

Internal monologue, the semi-constant internal monologue one has with oneself at a conscious or semi-conscious level.

Writing (by hand, or with a wordprocessor, etc.) one's thoughts or observations: the additional activities, on top of thinking, of writing and reading back may again increase self-understanding (How do I know what I mean until I see what I say?) and concentration. It aids ordering one's thoughts; in addition it produces a record that can be used later again. Copying text to aid memorizing also falls in this category.

Writing need not be limited to words in a natural or even formal language. Doodling also falls into this category. Children may be communicating intrapersonally when they doodle and adults sometimes argue that they do.

Making gestures while thinking: the additional activity, on top of thinking, of body motions, may again increase concentration, assist in problem solving, and assist memory.

Again, routinely observed in children, the equivalent of doodling without writing. Everyday images are transformed by gestures that form a new lens through which to view the images.

Sense-making (see Karl Weick) e.g. interpreting maps, texts, signs, and symbols

Interpreting non-verbal communication (see Albert Mehrabian) e.g. gestures, eye contact

Communication between body parts; e.g. "My stomach is telling me it's time for lunch."

Avoidance of silence

Joseph Jordania suggested that talking to yourself can be used to avoid silence. According to him, our ancestors, like many other social animals, used contact calls to maintain constant contact with the members of the group, and a signal of danger was communicated through becoming silent and freezing. Because of our evolutionary history prolonged silence is perceived as a sign of danger and triggers a feeling of uneasiness and fear. Jordania suggested talking to yourself is only one of the ways to fill in prolonged gaps of silence in humans. Other ways of filling in prolonged silence are humming, whistling, finger drumming, or having TV, radio or music on all the time.

Criticism of the concept

In 1992, a chapter in Communication Yearbook #15, argued that "intrapersonal communication" is a flawed concept. The chapter first itemized the various definitions. Intrapersonal communication, it appears, arises from a series of logical and linguistic improprieties. The descriptor itself, 'intrapersonal communication' is ambiguous: many definitions appear to be circular since they borrow, apply and thereby distort conceptual features (e.g., sender, receiver, message, dialogue) drawn from normal inter-person communication; unknown entities or person-parts allegedly conduct the 'intrapersonal' exchange; in many cases, a very private language is posited which, upon analysis, turns out to be totally inaccessible and ultimately indefensible. In general, intrapersonal communication appears to arise from the tendency to interpret the inner mental processes that precede and accompany our communicative behaviors as if they too were yet another kind of communication process. The overall point is that this reconstruction of our inner mental processes in the language and idioms of everyday public conversation is highly questionable, tenuous at best.