Chapter 5

The social context

In this chapter, I shall:

• discuss the meaning and significance of the social context
• define and discuss each of the components of the social context
• discuss how these components interact with one another, using examples from research into the relationships we have with others
• discuss the way these components develop over time, again using examples from research into personal relationships

What is the social context and how does it affect communication?

If you read any number of recent texts about human communication, you will probably find a strong emphasis on the social aspects of communication. Authors are very insistent that communication is a ‘social process’ and
that communication always takes place within a given society at a given time. But what does this actually mean when we come to try to analyse communication?

One reason why modern authors place a strong emphasis on the social context is simply because early authors tended to neglect it. For example, there is little concern for the social context in early models of communication which simply concentrated on encoder–channel–decoder propositions. There is also something of a battle which is carried on within the social sciences between those who regard society as the backdrop against which humans choose to act and those who feel that society creates or determines the ways in which we act. If you follow the first viewpoint then you are likely to believe that there are features of human experience which are universal or common to all races and cultures. If you follow the latter viewpoint then you are likely to believe that all human action is relative to the society in which it occurs, i.e. that there are no universal features of human nature or experience.

These arguments may seem very abstract or remote but you will find that they do have very concrete practical implications. For example, communication between different cultures depends on the different cultures being able to develop a common understanding. If all experience is relative to your own culture then this communication could be impossible.¹

I have oversimplified this argument simply because I do not have the space to explore it fully. If you want to put me on the spot for an opinion then I will argue that there are some aspects of human experience which are virtually universal. If this was not the case then communication would be impossible. On the other hand I also maintain that you cannot fully understand any process of human communication without understanding the social context in which it occurs. But if I simply say that communication is affected by the social context then that does not take us very far. What we need is a more systematic definition of the social context:

- What are the relevant components?
- What are the specific factors which affect us?
- How do they operate?

Unfortunately many authors have been at great pains to emphasise the importance of the social context but have been rather less painstaking at
saying what that means! Thus, my definition reflects a collection of rather disparate areas of research which have yielded important results.

**Environment and social structure**

Firstly I shall make a distinction between environment and the social structure.

*Environment*

The environment is the setting or background and has both physical and social elements. For example, one research study found that experimental subjects saw the experimenter as more ‘status-ful’ if the laboratory was untidy. Another study showed that people judged faces differently depending on whether they were in a ‘beautiful’ or ‘ugly’ room.²

*Social structure*

By social structure, I mean the ways in which the particular event we are looking at is organised. For example, if you attend a British wedding you will notice that people behave in fairly predictable ways as if they were following particular rules or codes of behaviour. You will notice that some people are behaving in very specific ways – for example, the best man – as they are fulfilling specific roles. If their performance goes wrong in some way then chaos and embarrassment is likely to follow. Consider the best

![Figure 5.1 Components of the social context](image-url)
man at a very formal wedding who tried to relax the groom as they were standing at the altar by whispering ‘This is your last chance to escape. I’ll cover if you want to make a run for it!’ This comment was not so well received when the bride’s parents proudly played back the tape of the ceremony at the reception. The best man had been standing almost next to the microphone so the comment came out loud and clear.

There is also a very definite sequence of events, e.g. the order of speeches at the reception. All these facts will vary depending on the location and status of the participant: for instance, compare a high-society upper-class wedding with a typical church wedding or with a registry office wedding. In a different culture you will notice even more dramatic differences. But the important point I want to make here is that the participants recognise the invisible ‘rules of the game’, i.e. they know what is required of them and act out their parts. People can feel very uncomfortable if they are unsure of the proceedings, and a lot of humour is based upon careful observation of the idiosyncrasies or ironies of some of our more formal occasions, e.g. as in the British film *Four Weddings And A Funeral* or the American film by Robert Altman, *A Wedding*.

**What are the components of the social context?**

I have already distinguished between the environment and the social structure but I need further to subdivide these categories in order to arrive at a more comprehensive definition. This is illustrated in Figure 5.1. I shall now discuss each of these latter categories individually.

*Physical environment*

The physical environment is the collection of physical objects and factors which surround us, such as the shape and size of the room, colour, lighting, heating, etc. All of these can influence our behaviour in ways we might not necessarily be aware of. For example, different types of neon bulb give off rather different qualities of light and it has been suggested that one type creates a more friendly atmosphere than others. At first sight this may seem a rather unlikely effect but you can easily suggest a chain of events which could lead to such a result. Harsh lighting can lead to eye strain and
fatigue – this will make people feel irritable and unsettled; irritable people will tend to be short tempered and grumpy; this will lead to arguments etc.; and this will create an unfriendly atmosphere.

Consider how different physical environments influence you in terms of your mood feelings. And consider how designers try to create a particular atmosphere in buildings:

- the fast food restaurant with a ‘bright, cheerful’ colour scheme, and fast ‘cheerful’ music
- the ‘posh’ restaurant with subdued lighting and very soft background music
- the dentist’s waiting room set out like a front room so that you ‘forget’ where you really are!

The physical environment can affect us in a number of different ways which influence our behaviour and communication, as follows.

**Direct physical effects**

The environment can have direct physiological effects. If specific neon bulbs, or specific levels of heating, do have predictable consequences upon us, then this could be because these have direct effects on our physiology.

**Symbolic meaning**

The environment can have symbolic meaning. Manufacturers of products are often very concerned about the colour of packaging because of the way certain colours have certain associations or symbolic meanings. White and blue seem to be associated with cleanliness whereas red and yellow have associations of warmth and excitement. Green is becoming a more widespread colour because of its connotations of ‘environment-friendliness’. There is no direct physical effect here – although some types of light may be more arousing to our nervous system, this arousal could be interpreted in different ways. We respond to the different colours primarily because of their symbolic meaning. Thus, the colour of decorations or the feel of different furniture materials can have significant effects on how we feel and how we decide to behave.
Impact on behaviour

The physical environment can make certain behaviours easier or more difficult. In both the UK and the USA, high-rise flats were once regarded as the answer to urban housing problems. They were relatively cheap to build and could accommodate large numbers of people. They were seen as the ‘modern’ replacement for inner-city slums, with many advantages and no real disadvantages.

Now most high-rise flats either are problem areas or have been demolished. They have a reputation for vandalism, hooliganism, social isolation, etc. Many people put up with much poorer physical home conditions rather than move into one of the flats. And yet these social problems were not characteristics of the housing areas they replaced, where people seemed to suffer mainly from poor physical conditions, such as damp and lack of hygiene.

One major problem with high-rise flats is that they are designed in such a way as to make casual social meetings rather difficult. In the old properties they replaced, you usually met someone the moment you opened your front door. It was easy to have a casual chat over the back fence or on the doorstep. Local shops were at the end of the street where again you would inevitably meet neighbours and local residents. There were often very strong feelings of local community. In contrast, the high-rise developments unwittingly destroyed many of these features. And they replaced them with the worst possible compromise.

Rather ironically the high-rise flat creates problems of social isolation and also lack of privacy. You are surrounded by people you have probably not met but you cannot find a place to be on your own because you are always liable to be disturbed. The partition walls are often very thin so you know exactly what TV channel the neighbours next door are listening to!

Social environment

I can talk about some places which have a warm or cold physical environment because of the way they are designed and built. In the same way I can distinguish different types of social environment or social climate. Just as you might perceive another person as supportive or controlling you may also perceive a social environment as supportive or controlling or any other adjectives which suit. But one important finding is that we do
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seem to make consistent judgements about particular environments. And particular environments do have measurable effects. For example, a number of studies have shown that a very supportive social climate is associated with a reduction in stress or tension. And there is a good deal of research relating social factors to measurable physiological changes.

One major reason why the social environment can affect our behaviour is simply that we are continually looking for information from our environment which will help us to decide what to do. Schachter illustrated this point with a rather devious set of experiments where subjects were given an injection of what they thought was a vitamin with various explanations about what effect it should have. For my purposes I shall concentrate on those subjects who were not told what physical effects the ‘vitamin’ would have. The vitamin was in fact adrenaline, which has a number of predictable physiological effects – heart rate increases etc.

Each of these subjects was sitting in a waiting room thinking they were waiting for the real experiment to begin. Each thought that the other person was another waiting subject. In fact the other person was a stooge who had been instructed to act either very angrily or very elatedly. The real subjects experienced the strange physiological feelings brought on by the drug and had no explanation for them. They noticed the behaviour of the stooge and, without being consciously aware of it, they interpreted their own feelings in the same way. For example, the subjects who had been left with an ‘angry’ stooge reported feelings of anger and hostility. Thus, these subjects were subconsciously influenced by their social environment both to feel and act in a specific way.

Social norms

In most social situations, we have a fairly clear idea of how others expect us to behave – in other words, social norms are in operation. And this demonstrates the most important feature of group norms, namely that a norm acts as a guide on how to behave. If you obey the norms then you are likely to be accepted by others in the situation and your behaviour will be seen as normal. If you break the norms then you may run the risk of being rejected by others and your behaviour will be seen as ‘odd’ or even hostile. Exactly what will happen if you break a norm will depend upon a whole variety of circumstances. I shall outline a few of these later, but first I shall describe a few examples of norms to make the concept clearer.
The fair day’s work

One of the earliest studies on a real workgroup found that members of the group had a very clear idea of what counted as a ‘fair day’s work for a day’s pay’. Each member of the group consistently produced 6,000 units per day even if he could have earned more by producing more. Management continually tried to persuade the men to produce more but this was ignored. The group were suspicious of management as a result of previous events. They felt they would probably lose out in the long run if they did produce more and so they kept to the norm. If a worker did produce more than his target one day then he would adjust the following day’s work to make sure he kept to the average.

The collective illusion

Sherif was one of the first researchers to demonstrate a group norm in a controlled experimental setting. He used a well-established visual illusion – the autokinetic phenomena.

If you sit in a completely darkened room and look at a tiny and stationary spot of light at one end of the room then that spot of light will appear to move. Different people see the spot move consistently different distances. For each individual, you can find out the average movement which they perceive. Sherif found that if you then put a group of three people in the room and asked them how far the spot moved then their three judgements would tend to converge and stabilise on a particular value. This group norm would then carry over to the situation where the three people later sat in the room individually. The group norm influenced their behaviour not only in the group but also outside the group.

This norming effect does not happen if the subjects are told about the illusion beforehand, presumably because they then have a rational explanation for their differences. As a result they do not experience any pressure to accommodate to the views of the other subjects. From these examples, you can see that norms exist at different levels. The most important are cultural and group norms.

Cultural norms

These are norms which apply to all members of a given culture. For example, there are very powerful norms of politeness in Japanese culture which
mean that it is considered very rude to say ‘no’ to another person. If you wish to refuse something then you have to do it indirectly, perhaps by simply delaying your answer until the other person has given up! Many foreign businessmen who have failed to do business with the Japanese have complained how much time they have wasted in negotiations. They probably failed to recognise the ‘no’ signals when they first appeared.

**Group norms**

These only apply to members of a specific group. For example, teenage gangs often develop strong norms for behaving and communicating. In another of Sherif’s experiments (see Chapter 13), two groups of boys from virtually identical backgrounds were observed at summer camp. One group developed norms of loud, aggressive behaviour which included swearing and shouting. The other group developed contrasting norms which emphasised polite restrained behaviour and outlawed swearing.

Unfortunately, the concept of norm is not always as clearly defined or as consistent as it could be:⁶

- Many people do seem constantly to break specific norms and yet this is ignored or even accepted.
- It is very difficult to find any generalisation about how people should behave in a given situation which everybody agrees with. So this leaves the problem of deciding what level of agreement constitutes a norm – is it 70 per cent, 80 per cent, 90 per cent, or what?
- There is often a discrepancy between what people say they will do in a situation and what they do actually do. What counts as the norm?

**Social rules**

Our social behaviour is guided not simply by group or cultural norms but also by specific rules which seem to apply in specific situations. The distinction between rules and norms is best illustrated by using the analogy of a team game, like football. The rules of football have mostly been written down in formal documents and specify such things as how many players can participate, how long the game is, how you score a goal, what counts as foul play, etc. Even if every team obeys all the rules, they may still
develop different norms. English football fans used to be very critical of ‘continental’ players for their habits of shirt pulling and overacting when tackled. Judging by the televised footage of the 1998 World Cup, these practices have now become international norms. And televised coverage of the English Premier League shows they are now a regular part of the game over here as well! I shall illustrate this distinction between norms and rules again later in the chapter when we look at studies of our relationships.

**Social relationships**

Any communication between two people will be influenced by the relationship which exists between them. This relationship can be of different types which reflect different roles (e.g. friend, brother) and of different quality (e.g. close and informal as opposed to distant and formal). The relationship can also be affected by a number of important factors – cultural differences, gender differences, and social class differences. So in order to understand what is going on you need to take all these factors into account.

**Social roles**

I shall discuss the various components of social roles in more detail in the next chapter. Here I do need to emphasise how important this concept is.

Every social situation incorporates some definition of the roles that are expected of the participants. And these expected roles influence how and what people will communicate. Sometimes the roles will be rather vague or ambiguous and you have to ‘negotiate’ with the other participants what role to adopt. For example, if you go to a party held by people you do not really know very well, what role will you take on? It is probably unwise to go thundering in as the life and soul of the party in case that violates the norms. On the other hand many a party has died a death because no one was willing to take on an active role in the proceedings.

There are other situations where the role requirements appear to be so strong that they do determine how individuals behave. One rather frightening example of this is Philip Zimbardo’s prison experiment. Zimbardo was interested in the effects of prison life on the individual and so he set up a mock prison. All the subjects were very carefully chosen after a series
of psychological tests to make sure they were a representative group of intelligent middle-class youths. They were divided at random into prisoners and guards. The guards were equipped with typical American guards’ uniforms and hats and were told that they were in charge. The only definite rule was a ban on the use of physical violence. To add realism, the prisoners were arrested by real local policemen and put through the usual signing-in procedure. They were given a uniform – a plain long smock – and left in the care of the guards. Neither group was given any training or instruction in how to behave.

Zimbardo and his colleagues sat back to observe but were soon forced to intervene. In his own words:  

once the experiment began, we, as experimenters, had very little input into the guard–prisoner interaction. At that point, we were simply videotaping, and observing the drama unfold. We had intended it to last for two weeks, but the pathology we observed was so extreme, we ended the study after only six days. By ‘pathology’ I mean that half the students who were prisoners had emotional breakdowns in less than five days. On the other hand, the guards behaved brutally, sadistically; the only difference among them was their frequency of brutal, sadistic, dehumanizing behaviour. But they all did it to some degree.

These astonishing results were not the product of sadistic or cruel minds. The ‘guards’ after the experiment were themselves shocked and disgusted at the way they had behaved. And yet during the experiment they had been so caught up in the experience that they had been able to disregard their normal moral values. The roles had ‘won’.

The experiment did have one very positive outcome: Zimbardo started to campaign for penal reform in the USA and has since been responsible for a number of worthy developments.

**Relationship type and quality**

The last few decades have seen a dramatic upsurge in research on personal relationships. Some of this research has focused on different qualities of relationship, e.g. love, friendship, acquaintance, etc. One general conclusion concerns the relationship between certain types or styles of communication and certain types of relationship. For example, self-disclosure has already been mentioned as an important component in developing relationships
(see Chapter 3). There have been other important lines of research which relate to themes mentioned in this book, as follows.

**Skills**

Research has shown that there are a number of social skills differences which are associated with the ability to develop relationships. For example, it has been suggested that lonely and isolated people are not very good at sending non-verbal signals, particularly signals of liking via face and voice. Of course this does beg a very important question: what are the original causes of such deficiency? Do people become lonely simply because they lack skills, or do their skills deteriorate as a result of their experience and feelings?

**Rules and social knowledge**

As I said in Chapter 4, being able to perform a skill depends on knowing what to do as well as having the ability to carry out the behaviour. People who find it difficult to strike up relationships may simply lack the knowledge and experience of the acceptable ways of doing it (they don’t know the rules). For example, one study asked college students how they would try to get to know someone. Their ‘plans’ were then rated by independent judges on how likely they were to be successful. Students who were more socially isolated tended to produce plans which were seen as less effective. Their lack of social knowledge seemed to be one factor which contributed to their loneliness.

**Cultural differences**

There are some very important differences in the way different cultures regard different relationships. There are different rules associated with the same relationship and this can have major differences in what and how the participants communicate. I talk about social rules below. To illustrate the influence of cultural background, Argyle reached the following conclusions after a study of differences between British, Italian, Hong Kong and Japanese informants:

It seems we place more emphasis on expressing emotions, giving opinions on intimate topics, affection and requests for help and advice than our
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Hong Kong and Japanese counterparts, at least as far as intimate relationships are concerned. Close relationships, whether spouses, family, friends, or kin by marriage, or even by virtue of heterosexual intimacy (as in dating or cohabitation), are viewed as sources of support, and rules exist about using them as such. We ask for material help, disclose our personal problems and feelings, and ask for personal advice in our intimate relationships. And to a lesser extent, we apply similar rules to our less intimate acquaintances such as work colleagues and neighbours – and also use them as sources of social support. While the Hong Kong informants endorse very similar rules for husbands and wives, Japanese marriages are characterised by less emphasis on the overt expression of intimacy. And the same is true of other Japanese and Hong Kong intimate relationships.

Gender differences

Unfortunately social scientists have not always been very sensitive to differences between men and women. Researchers have assumed that the results from a study using male subjects can also be directly applied to females. Happily, more recent research has been much more careful in examining gender differences. I shall review the number of differences that have been found between males and females in their communication in Chapter 11. However, interpretations and explanations of differences here must be approached with extreme caution for at least two fundamental reasons:

1. The dangers of stereotyping Discussions of male/female differences seem to rely on social stereotypes rather than direct observations. This is especially unfortunate at a time when traditional sex roles and stereotypes seem to be in a greater state of flux or change than has been the case for some time. We return to this issue in the next chapter where roles and stereotypes are discussed in more detail.

2. Methodology Many of the often-quoted studies in this area are very limited in terms of their procedures and choice of subjects, as we shall see in Chapter 11.

Social class differences

Although class barriers may be changing, we can still argue that social
class is one of the main sources of variation in our way of life. There are a wide range of social behaviours which vary in different social classes, covering just about every type of relationship you can mention. As with gender differences, there has been fierce debate over the extent and explanations of these differences. Particular debates which are especially important for interpersonal communication concern:

- **The issue of language** The suggestion that middle- and working-class people use different language codes has received particular attention for its significance to education (where of course most teachers are middle class).\(^{10}\)
- **Cultural and subcultural differences** Given that different classes live under very different material conditions, it is not surprising if these differences are reflected in their perceptions and expectations.
- **Perceptions and stereotypes** Different stereotypes may well influence ‘cross-class’ communication in ways which are discussed in the next chapter.

I have tried to refer to the role of cultural, gender and class differences wherever possible in this book. However, these issues could fill a book on their own and do deserve more extended research.

**Relating the components of the social context**

Although it is useful to identify the separate components of the social context to explain how they work, they never work in isolation in real situations. The best way of illustrating the sorts of interactions which occur is to look at practical examples, so I shall highlight one area of research which has important practical implications for all of us – the nature of social relationships.

I have already suggested that social contact is very important for human beings, yet I can be more specific – it is not just the quantity but also the quality of social contact which is important. There is ample evidence that the quality of relationships we have with other people can influence our health and happiness. Good relationships affect these variables in positive ways; poor or non-existent relationships can have serious harmful effects. One aspect of this is whether we follow the rules which others recognise as
important in the particular relationship. There are some important differences here, as follows.

**Generality**

Rules differ in their general application. For example, Argyle found that:⁹

- there are a small number of rules which can apply to all these relationships (e.g. respect the other person’s privacy)
- there are rules which are important to some relationships but not to others (e.g. ‘Engage in joking and teasing with the other person’ is an important friendship and marriage rule but is not a significant neighbour rule).

**Cultural differences**

Different cultures may observe different rules for the same relationship. Once again the work of Michael Argyle and colleagues can illustrate this point. They distributed the same questionnaire on relationship rules to men and women in Italy, Hong Kong, Japan and the UK. Each respondent was asked their opinion on how far thirty-three rules could be applied to a range of relationships, e.g. husband–wife, doctor–patient. Only four of the rules were rated important in all relationships in all cultures:

1. Respect the other person’s privacy.
2. Look the other person in the eye during conversation.
3. Do not discuss that which is said in confidence with the other person.
4. Do not criticise the other person publicly.

**Group differences**

Different groups within one society or culture will endorse rules differently. Argyle found both sex and age differences in the endorsement of specific rules for virtually all the relationships studied:

- There were interesting sex differences in relation to rules of intimacy. Although in many relationships women feel it is more important to express and share emotions, they also endorse rules about privacy more than men. This was true for all four cultures.
• You would probably expect to find age differences in adherence to rules, given the rate of social change which has occurred over the last twenty to thirty years. This role of change has also affected our relationships, as current statistics and attitudes on marriage, divorce and living together will illustrate. Argyle found the greatest discrepancy between young and old subjects in the British sample. One fairly consistent difference across this culture concerned intimacy rules – younger subjects felt you should express emotions more generally.

*The time factor – how relationships develop*

As well as identifying how the various components of the social context can interrelate, we must not forget that these factors can change over time. Again, the study of our relationships can illustrate this point. Communication is an essential ingredient in all stages of a relationship and most investigators have suggested that any relationship is likely to pass through a series of stages.

We can see different aspects of communication at each of these different stages. To explain the stages, we can look at some of the factors involved in making friends.

* Becoming aware of others

Before you can establish a relationship with someone you obviously need to be aware of their existence. And you need to have developed an impression of them. Factors which I have already discussed under the heading of social perception are also relevant here. Particularly important is the influence of physical proximity, social similarity and physical attractiveness. If we are placed in close physical proximity with other people, as in the corridor of a student hall of residence or a workgroup in a department, then we are likely to develop friendships within that group of people.

We are also likely to notice others who seem to come from similar social backgrounds, and we shall be looking for verbal and non-verbal codes such as dress, mannerisms, accent, etc. Physical attractiveness is a further powerful influence. Of course, you may not judge physical attractiveness in the way that I do, but we may be strongly influenced by stereotypes. Psychologists have found that there is a clear and positive stereotype of ‘physically attractive persons’ which gives them a number of advantages
over us lesser mortals – for example, they are usually seen as more competent and more intelligent.

Making contact

You are in your first morning of a new job. Your boss introduces you to a person who will be one of your main team members. You go to the coffee machine with him or her. What do you talk about? How do you get the relationship off to a good start? First meetings like this are likely to have a fairly predictable pattern of communication with the following characteristics:

- people exchange non-controversial information about themselves
- they talk about their background and tend to stick to facts rather than opinions
- the initial few minutes will involve fairly rapid turn-taking using question–answer sequences

This pattern is not very surprising: exchanging background information is a fairly interesting way of passing time and is not likely to lead to any conflict. More importantly it allows each person to gather information which will enable them to decide whether to develop the relationship. If I find from this initial encounter that you have a similar background to me then I may well decide to try to develop a close relationship. Or I may decide that you are a bit ‘wet’, perhaps because you seem to live up to one of my negative stereotypes.

There are some other interesting points about these initial exchanges:

- if one person in the conversation does not follow the typical pattern then confusion or conflict will develop
- we can be heavily influenced by stereotypes (and gender/sex stereotypes may be especially important as discussed in the next chapter)
- the context may well mean that we can safely assume that the other person has certain attitudes

If I happen to meet you dressed in your famous Captain Picard disguise or wearing your Vulcan ears or perhaps even a Ferengi skull cap in the lobby of a hotel where a ‘trekkies’ convention is being held, then I can start the
conversation on a rather different basis than if we meet in the same attire in a dentist’s waiting room.

**Developing contact into friendship**

This is the next stage in developing a relationship. There are a number of interesting aspects to this process:

- We need to self-disclose to each other so that we can deepen our understanding of each other. If I self-disclose to you then I will expect you to reciprocate. In fact you will probably feel obligated to respond. And I can use this to push the relationship along. If you do not want to push the relationship along at the same pace, you will have to ‘slow me down’.
- We can use particular strategies to express our commitment to the other person, e.g. we develop mutual trust when I trust you with some information which I see as private and vice versa.
- We need to adapt to each other’s styles of communication.
- Both verbal and non-verbal cues are important.
- We need to act in a way which is appropriate to the level of relationship we have reached.
- We need to achieve ‘balance’. In order to make the relationship mutually satisfying, we need to agree on what each of us is going to put in to the relationship. This is probably never consciously discussed but problems will soon emerge if one of us feels the other is not ‘playing fair’.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps the most important conclusion to emerge from this chapter is simply to reaffirm the importance of the social context. However, it is also important to try to consider the social context in more detail and identify the components which are influencing particular examples of communication. For example, several important principles were identified in the last discussion of how friendships develop. These principles are not absolute and will vary depending upon context. What is considered to be ‘fair’ or ‘balanced’ will depend upon a range of social rules, norms and perceptions. And this highlights my final point: the factors identified in this chapter are interdependent and so their impact in any given situation may well be the result of quite a complicated process.