Understanding Business Communication in Today's Workplace

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

1. Define *communication,* and explain the importance of effective business communication.
2. Explain what it means to communicate as a professional in a business context.
3. Describe the communication process model and the ways that social media are changing the nature of business communication.
4. Define *ethics*, explain the difference between an ethical dilemma and an ethical lapse, and list six guidelines for making ethical communication choices.
5. Explain how cultural diversity affects business communication and describe the steps you can take to communicate more effectively across cultural boundaries.
6. List four general guidelines for using communication technology effectively.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

"To connect with staff around the world, we use many different channels to communicate as effectively as we can—but nothing replaces face-to-face discussions."

—Judi Hess
CEO, Copperleaf Technologies

Copperleaf Technologies provides global consulting services in planning, analysis, and asset management. Though Copperleaf staff use the latest technology to communicate with clients and employees, the leadership team also believes in the power of face-to-face communication. They bring clients from across Canada and around the world to Vancouver for annual user group sessions, including the "Bull Pen," an open forum and conversation they use to build relationships and listen to client needs.

Understanding Why Communication Matters

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1
Define *communication,* and explain the importance of effective business communication.

Successful professionals such as Hess understand that achieving success in today's workplace is closely tied to the ability of employees and managers to communicate effectively with each other, with people outside the organization, and with people from many cultures. **Communication** is the process of transferring information and meaning between *senders* and *receivers*, using one or more written, oral, visual, or electronic channels. The essence of communication is sharing. As Figure 1.1 indicates, this sharing can happen in a variety of ways, including a simple and successful transfer of information, a negotiation in which the sender and receiver arrive at an agreed-upon meaning, and situations in which the receiver creates a different message than the one the sender intended to convey.

FIGURE 1.1   Sharing Information
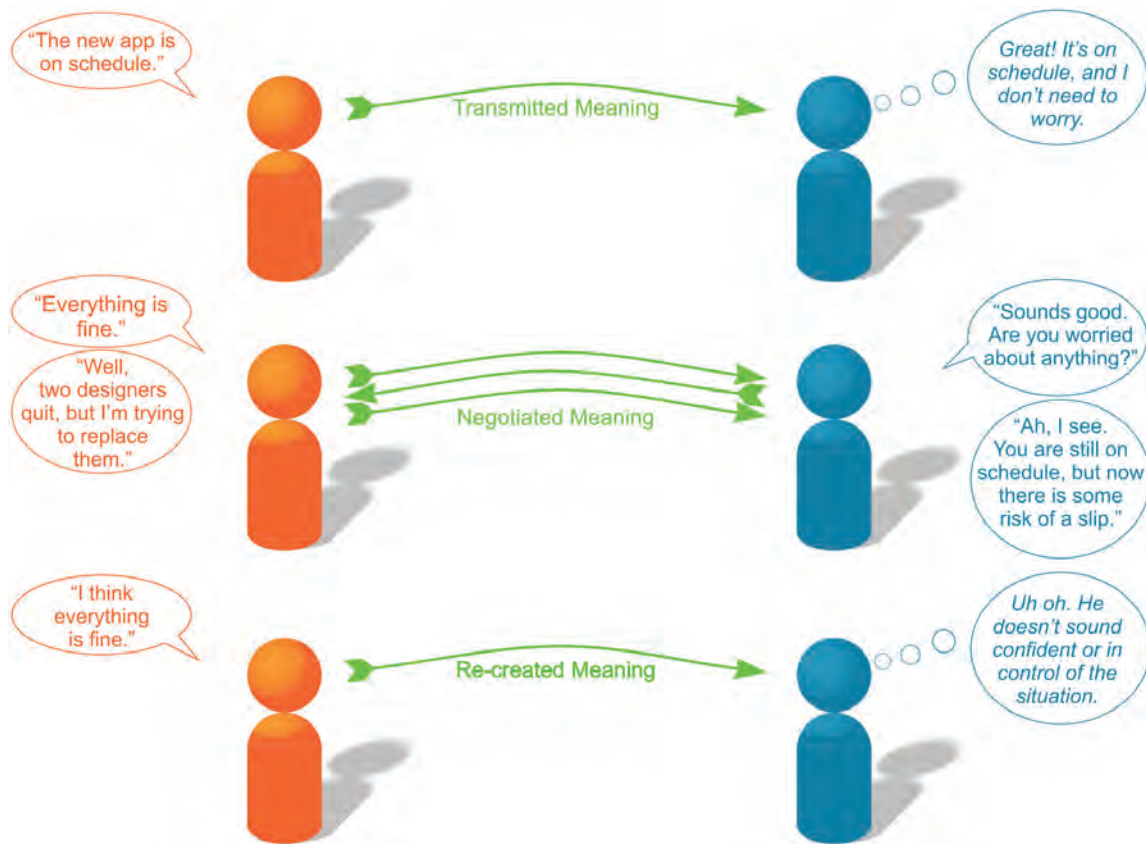
You will invest a lot of time and energy in this course to develop your communication skills, so it's fair to ask whether it will be worthwhile. This section outlines the many ways in which good communication skills are critical for your career and for any company you join.

Communication Is Important to Your Career

No matter what career path you pursue, communication skills will be essential to your success at every stage. You can have the greatest ideas in the world, but they're no good to your company or your career if you can't express them clearly and persuasively. Some jobs, such as sales and customer support, are primarily about communicating. In fields such as engineering or finance, you often need to share complex ideas with executives, customers, and colleagues, and your ability to connect with people outside your field can be as important as your technical expertise. If you are an entrepreneur, you will need to communicate with a wide range of audiences, from investors, bankers, and government regulators to employees, customers, and business partners. As you take on leadership and management roles, communication becomes even more important.

In fact, improving your communication skills may be the single most important step you can take in your career. The world is full of good marketers, accountants, engineers, and lawyers, but it is not full of good communicators. View this as an opportunity to stand out from your competition in the job market. Communication skills ranked highest on the list of employability skills in the Conference Board of Canada report *Employability Skills 2000+*.[1]

> Improving your communication skills could be the single most important thing you do for your career.

Many employers express frustration at the poor communication skills of some employees, particularly recent college graduates who haven't yet learned how to adapt their communication styles to a business environment. If you learn to write well, speak well, listen well, and recognize the appropriate way to communicate in any situation, you'll gain a major advantage that will serve you throughout your career.[2]

This course teaches you how to send and receive information more effectively. It helps you improve your communication skills through practise in an environment that provides honest, constructive criticism. You will discover how to collaborate in teams, listen effectively, master nonverbal communication, and participate in productive meetings. You'll learn about communicating across cultural boundaries. You'll learn a three-step process to help you write effective business messages, and you'll get specific tips for crafting a variety of business messages using a wide range of media, from social networks to blogs to online presentations. Develop these skills, and you'll start your business career with a clear competitive advantage.

Communication Is Important to Your Company

Aside from the personal benefits, communication should be important to you because it's important to your company. Effective communication helps businesses in numerous ways. It provides[3]

Effective communication delivers a variety of important benefits.

- Closer ties with important communities in the marketplace.
- Opportunities to influence conversations, perceptions, and trends.
- Faster problem solving and stronger decision making based on timely, reliable information.
- Increased productivity and steadier work flow.
- Greater employee engagement with their work, leading to higher job satisfaction and lower employee turnover.

What Makes Business Communication Effective?

Effective communication strengthens the connections between a company and all of its **stakeholders**, those groups affected in some way by the company's actions: customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, neighbours, the community, the nation, and the world as a whole.[4]

MyBCommLab
- Make your own business decisions! Try the simulation **Successful Business Communication**.

To make your communication efforts as effective as possible, focus on making them practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive:

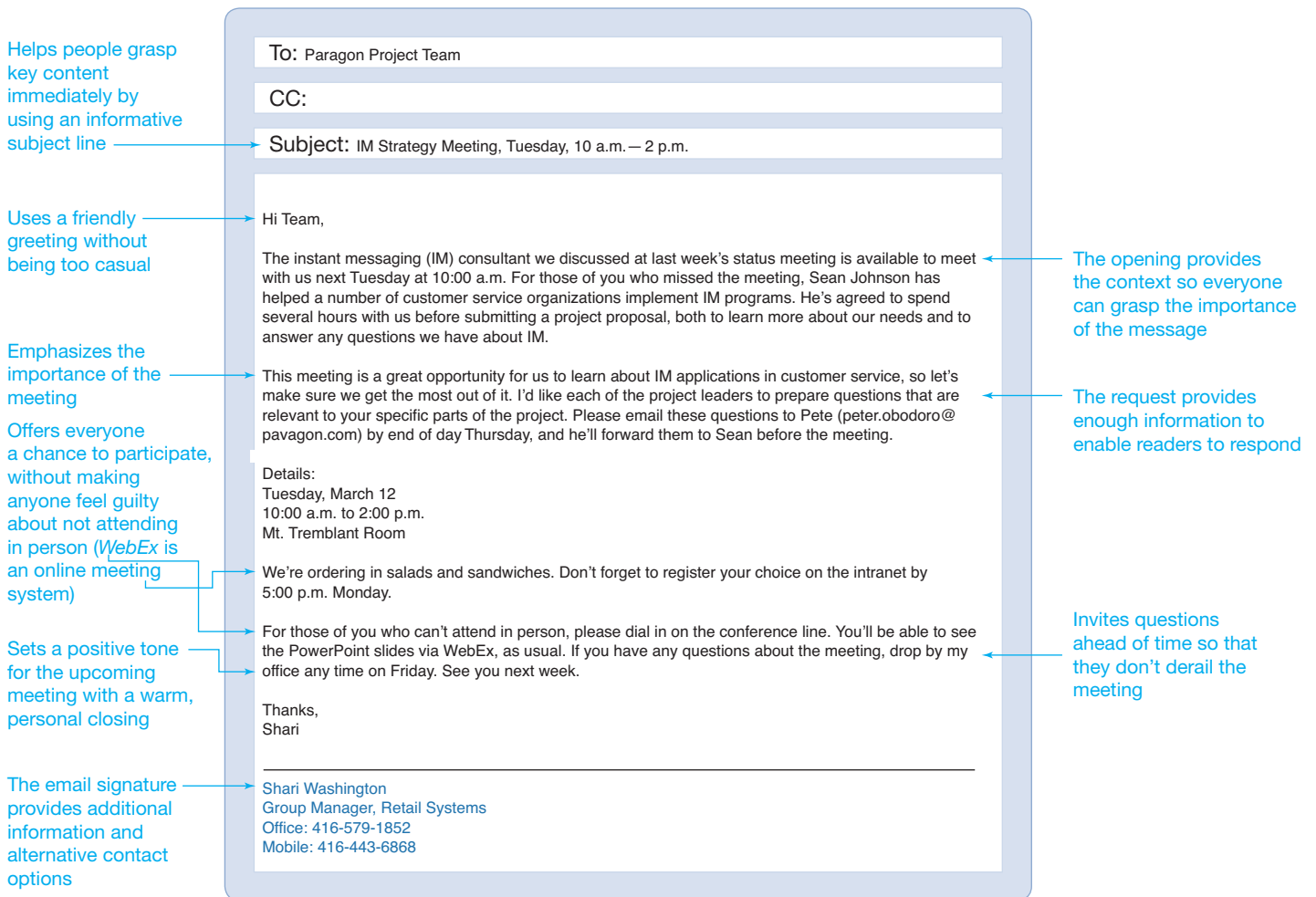*Effective messages are practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive.*

- **Provide practical information.** Give recipients useful information, whether it's to help them perform a desired action or understand a new company policy.
- **Give facts rather than vague impressions.** Use concrete language, specific detail, and information that is clear, convincing, accurate, and ethical. Even when an opinion is called for, present compelling evidence to support your conclusion.
- **Present information in a concise, efficient manner.** Concise messages show respect for people's time, and they increase the chances of a positive response.
- **Clarify expectations and responsibilities.** Craft messages to generate a specific response from a specific audience. When appropriate, clearly state what you expect from audience members or what you can do for them.
- **Offer compelling, persuasive arguments and recommendations.** Show your readers precisely how they will benefit from responding to your message the way you want them to.

Keep these five characteristics in mind as you review Figure 1.2. You might notice that it is more formal and "professional sounding" than many of the messages you send now. Employers expect you to be able to communicate with a similar style.

FIGURE 1.2 Effective Business Communication

Helps people grasp key content immediately by using an informative subject line

Uses a friendly greeting without being too casual

Emphasizes the importance of the meeting

Offers everyone a chance to participate, without making anyone feel guilty about not attending in person (*WebEx* is an online meeting system)

Sets a positive tone for the upcoming meeting with a warm, personal closing

The email signature provides additional information and alternative contact options

To: Paragon Project Team

CC:

Subject: IM Strategy Meeting, Tuesday, 10 a.m. — 2 p.m.

Hi Team,

The instant messaging (IM) consultant we discussed at last week's status meeting is available to meet with us next Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. For those of you who missed the meeting, Sean Johnson has helped a number of customer service organizations implement IM programs. He's agreed to spend several hours with us before submitting a project proposal, both to learn more about our needs and to answer any questions we have about IM.

This meeting is a great opportunity for us to learn about IM applications in customer service, so let's make sure we get the most out of it. I'd like each of the project leaders to prepare questions that are relevant to your specific parts of the project. Please email these questions to Pete (peter.obodoro@ pavagon.com) by end of day Thursday, and he'll forward them to Sean before the meeting.

Details:
Tuesday, March 12
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Mt. Tremblant Room

We're ordering in salads and sandwiches. Don't forget to register your choice on the intranet by 5:00 p.m. Monday.

For those of you who can't attend in person, please dial in on the conference line. You'll be able to see the PowerPoint slides via WebEx, as usual. If you have any questions about the meeting, drop by my office any time on Friday. See you next week.

Thanks,
Shari

Shari Washington
Group Manager, Retail Systems
Office: 416-579-1852
Mobile: 416-443-6868

The opening provides the context so everyone can grasp the importance of the message

The request provides enough information to enable readers to respond

Invites questions ahead of time so that they don't derail the meeting

Communication is an essential part of being a successful professional.

Communicating as a Professional

You've been communicating your entire life, of course, but if you don't have a lot of work experience yet, meeting the expectations of a professional environment might require some adjustment. A good place to start is to consider what it means to be a professional. **Professionalism** is the quality of performing at a high level and conducting oneself with purpose and pride. It means doing more than putting in the hours and collecting a paycheque; true professionals go beyond minimum expectations and commit to making meaningful contributions. Professionalism can be broken down into six distinct traits: striving to excel, being dependable and accountable, being a team player, demonstrating a sense of etiquette, making ethical decisions, and maintaining a positive outlook.

Professionalism depends on effective communication. For example, to be a team player, you have to be able to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and interact with a wide variety of personalities. Without strong communication skills, you won't be able to perform to your potential—and others won't recognize you as the professional you'd like to be. See Table 1.1.

This section offers a brief look at the skills that employers will expect you to have, the nature of communication in an organizational environment, and the importance of adopting an audience-centred approach.

TABLE 1.1	Elements of Professionalism

TRAIT	WHAT IT MEANS TO PROFESSIONALS
Strive to excel	Do their best at everything they do.
	Commit to continuous improvement.
Are dependable	Keep promises and meet commitments.
	Learn from mistakes and take responsibility for their errors.
Are team players	Keep the focus on the larger cause.
	Make others around them better.
Are respectful	Show respect for those around them.
	Understand that respecting others is not only good etiquette, it's good for one's career.
Are ethical	Strive to avoid ethical lapses.
	Weigh their options carefully when facing ethical dilemmas.
Are positive	Believe in what they're doing and in themselves.
	Don't complain about problems; they find them and fix them.

Understanding What Employers Expect from You

Given the importance of communication in business, employers expect you to be competent at a wide range of communication tasks:[5]

- Organizing ideas and information logically and completely
- Expressing yourself coherently and persuasively in a variety of media
- Building persuasive arguments to gain acceptance for important ideas
- Evaluating data and information critically to know what you can and cannot trust
- Actively listening to others
- Communicating effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse experiences
- Using communication technologies effectively and efficiently
- Following accepted standards of grammar, spelling, and other aspects of high-quality writing and speaking
- Adapting your messages and communication styles to specific audiences and situations
- Communicating in a courteous manner that reflects contemporary expectations of business etiquette
- Communicating ethically, even when choices aren't crystal clear
- Respecting the confidentiality of private company information
- Following applicable laws and regulations
- Managing your time wisely and using resources efficiently

Employers expect you to have strong communication skills and you can practise these in this course.

REAL-TIME UPDATES

Learn More by Reading This Article

Will your social media habits kill your career?

Follow these tips to make sure your social media habits don't keep you from getting a job or derail your career after it has begun. Go to **http://real-timeupdates.com/bce6** and click on Learn More. If you are using MyBCommLab, you can access Real-Time Updates within each chapter or under Student Study Tools.

This is a long list, to be sure, but all these skills can be practised and developed over time. Start by taking advantage of the opportunities you'll have throughout this course, and you'll be well on your way to making a successful transition to the professional environment.

Communicating in an Organizational Context

In addition to having the proper skills, you need to learn how to apply those skills in the business environment, which can be quite different from the social and scholastic environments you are used to. Every company has a unique communication system that

You will need to adjust your communication habits to the more formal demands of business and the unique environment of your company.

connects people within the organization and connects the organization to the outside world. The "system" in this broad sense is a complex combination of communication channels (such as the internet and department meetings), company policies, the organizational structure, and personal relationships.

To succeed in a job, you need to figure out how your company's system operates. For example, one company might rely heavily on instant messaging, social networks, and blogs that are used in an open, conversational way by everyone in the company. In contrast, another company might use a more rigid, formal approach, in which information and instructions are passed down from top managers, and employees are expected to follow the "chain of command" when seeking or distributing information.

Adopting an Audience-Centred Approach

Focus on the needs of your audiences to make your messages more effective.

Successful business professionals take an **audience-centred approach** to communication, meaning that they focus on understanding and meeting the needs of their audiences (see Figure 1.3). Providing the information your audiences need is obviously an

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FIGURE 1.3 Audience-Centred Communication in a Blog Post

The headline doesn't try to be clever or cute; instead, it instantly conveys important information to readers

The graph shows which terms generated the fastest payments (shortest blue bars) and highest percentage paid (orange dots)

This bold header quickly summarizes the nature of the analysis

These clearly written paragraphs explain the two aspects of the analysis, and they speak the same language as business accounting professionals

The article continues beyond here, but notice again the concise, straightforward wording of this subheading (the section explains that polite wording on invoices improves customer responsiveness)

Fast access to reader comments and a retweet button that makes it easy for readers to share this post via Twitter help FreshBooks build a sense of community

One minor improvement would be to label (with words placed directly on the graph) the two best combinations, indicated with the green arrows, and the worst combination, indicated with the red circle, to save readers the time required to interpret the meaning of the colours and shapes

The opening paragraph explains the analysis was undertaken in order to help customers make more money in less time—a vital concern for every business

Bold terms in the paragraph correspond to the variables in the graph above

Notice that even though the writer uses the word "we" (the company) in several places, this message is fundamentally about "you" (the customer)

The best invoice terms to get you paid faster
by Zach - March 2/2016

We compared different invoice terms to see what impact they had on likelihood and time to get paid.

Recently, we looked at our data to see if we could extract some insights that might really help FreshBooks customers get paid faster. Our question: how does the wording of the "terms" section of an invoice impact the number of days it takes you to get paid and the percent of invoices you actually collect on.

In the graph above we've mapped two key things gleaned from the data of our paying FreshBooks users. In the bar graph, we've looked at how long it takes to get paid based on various wordings used in the Terms field on an invoice (e.g. "Please pay within 21 days" or "Payment terms: net 30. Interest accrued at 1.5% per month thereafter"). On this chart of **days to pay** vs. **terms used**, the shorter the bar, the better.

The second thing we've charted is the **percentage of invoices actually paid** vs. **terms used** (the data points in the top section of the graph). On this scale, higher is better. Another way of thinking about this is: the wider the gap between the bar and the data point above it, the better the wording (in general, although there are a handful of exceptions).

Be Polite
The first thing we noticed in the data is that being polite really matters! A simple

important part of this approach, but your ability to listen, your style of writing and speaking, and your ability to maintain positive working relationships are also key. You'll have the chance to explore all these aspects throughout this course.

An important element of audience-centred communication is **etiquette**, the expected norms of behaviour in a particular situation. In today's hectic, competitive world, the notion of etiquette might seem outdated and unimportant. However, the way you conduct yourself can have a profound influence on your company's success and your career. When executives hire and promote you, they expect your behaviour to protect the company's reputation. The more you understand such expectations, the better chance you have of avoiding career-damaging mistakes.

Long lists of etiquette "rules" can be overwhelming, and you'll never be able to memorize all of them. Fortunately, you can count on three principles to get you through just about any situation: respect, courtesy, and common sense. As you encounter new situations, take a few minutes to learn the expectations of the other people involved. Don't be afraid to ask questions, either. People will respect your concern and curiosity. You'll gradually accumulate knowledge, which will help you feel comfortable and be effective in a wide range of business situations. Chapter 2 offers more information about business etiquette.

> Respect, courtesy, and common sense will help you avoid etiquette mistakes.

Exploring the Communication Process

Even with the best intentions, communication efforts can fail. Messages can get lost or simply ignored. The receiver of a message can interpret it in ways the sender never imagined. In fact, two people receiving the same information can reach different conclusions about what it means.

Fortunately, by understanding communication as a process with distinct steps, you can improve the odds that your messages will reach their intended audiences and produce their intended effects. This section explores the communication process in two stages: first by following a message from one sender to one receiver in the basic communication model, and then expanding on that with multiple messages and participants in the social communication model.

The Basic Communication Model

Many variations of the communication process model exist, but these eight steps provide a practical overview (see Figure 1.4):

> The communication process starts with a sender having an idea and then encoding the idea into a message that can be transferred to a receiver.

1. **The sender has an idea.** Whether a communication effort will ultimately be effective starts right here and depends on the nature of the idea and the motivation for sending it. For example, if your motivation is to offer a solution to a problem, you have a better chance of crafting a meaningful message than if your motivation is merely to complain about a problem.
2. **The sender encodes the idea as a message.** When someone puts an idea into a **message**, he or she is **encoding** it, or expressing it in words or images. Much of the focus of this course is on developing the skills needed to successfully encode your ideas into effective messages.
3. **The sender produces the message in a transmittable medium.** With the appropriate message to express an idea, the sender now needs a **communication medium** to present that message to the intended audience. To update your boss on the status of a project, for instance, you might have a dozen or more media choices, from a phone call to a text message to a slideshow or video presentation.
4. **The sender transmits the message through a channel.** Just as technology-continues to increase the number of media options, it also continues to provide **new communication channels** senders can use to transmit their messages. The distinction

FIGURE 1.4 The Basic Communication Process

1. Sender has an idea
2. Sender *encodes* that idea in a *message*
3. Sender produces that message in a *medium*
4. Sender transmits the message through a *channel*
5. Audience receives the message
6. Audience *decodes* the message
7. Audience responds to the message
8. Audience might also provide *feedback* to the sender

> Decoding is a complex process; receivers often extract different meanings from messages than the meanings senders intended.

between medium and channel can get a bit murky, but think of the medium as the *form* a message takes (such as a Twitter update) and the channel as the system used to *deliver* the message (such as the internet).

5. **The audience receives the message.** If the channel functions properly, the message reaches its intended audience. However, mere arrival is not enough. For a message to truly be received, the recipient has to *sense* the presence of a message, *select* it from all the other messages clamouring for attention, and *perceive* it as an actual message (as opposed to random noise).[6]

6. **The receiver decodes the message.** After a message is received, the receiver needs to extract the idea from the message, a step known as **decoding**. Even well-crafted communication efforts can fail at this stage because extracting meaning is a highly personal process that is influenced by culture, experience, learning and thinking styles, hopes, fears, and even temporary moods. Moreover, audiences tend to extract the meaning they expect to get from a message, even if it's the opposite of what the sender intended.[7] In fact, rather than extracting the sender's meaning, it's more accurate to say that receivers re-create their own meanings from the message.

7. **The receiver responds to the message.** In most instances, senders want to accomplish more than simply delivering information. They often want receivers to respond in particular ways, whether it's to invest in a new business venture or to accept an explanation. Whether a receiver responds as the sender hopes depends on the receiver *remembering* the message long enough to act on it, being *able* to act on it, and being *motivated* to respond.

8. **The receiver provides feedback.** If a mechanism is available, receivers can "close the loop" in the communication process by giving the sender **feedback** that helps the sender evaluate the effectiveness of the communication effort. Feedback can be verbal (using written or spoken words), nonverbal (using gestures, facial expressions, or other signals), or both. Just like the original message, however, this feedback also needs to be decoded carefully. A smile, for example, can have many different meanings.

Considering the complexity of this process—and the barriers and distractions that often stand between sender and receiver—it should come as no surprise that communication efforts frequently fail to achieve the sender's objective. Fortunately, the better you understand the process, the more successful you'll be.

REAL-TIME UPDATES

Learn More by Reading This Infographic

See how small businesses are using social media

Small businesses are some of the most enthusiastic adopters of new media tools. Go to **http://real-timeupdates.com/bce6** and click on Learn More. If you are using MyBCommLab, you can access Real-Time Updates within each chapter or under Student Study Tools.

The Social Communication Model

The basic model presented in Figure 1.4 does a good job of illustrating how a single idea moves from one sender to one receiver. In a larger sense, it also helps represent the traditional nature of much business communication, which was primarily defined by a *publishing* or *broadcasting* mindset. Externally, a company issued carefully scripted messages to a mass audience that often had few options for responding to those messages or initiating messages of their own. Customers and other interested parties had few ways to connect with one another to ask questions, share information, or offer support. Internally, communication tended to follow the same "we talk, you listen" model, with upper managers issuing directives to lower-level supervisors and employees.

However, thanks to the efforts of media innovations such as Facebook, a variety of technologies have enabled and inspired a new approach to business communication. In contrast to the publishing mindset, this new **social communication model** is interactive, conversational, and usually open to all who wish to participate. Audience members are no longer passive recipients of messages; now they are active participants in a conversation. Social media have given customers and other stakeholders a voice they did not have in the past, and businesses are listening. One of the most common uses of social media among businesses is monitoring online discussions about a company and its brands.[8]

> The social communication model is interactive, conversational, and usually open to all who wish to participate.

Instead of transmitting a fixed message, a sender in a social media environment initiates a conversation by sharing valuable information. This information is often revised and reshaped by the web of participants as they share it and comment on it. People can add to it or take pieces from it, depending on their needs and interests.

Just as **Web 2.0** signifies the second generation of World Wide Web technologies (blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other *social media* tools that you'll read about in Chapter 6), **Business Communication 2.0** is a convenient label for this new approach to business communication. Figure 1.5 lists some of the important differences between traditional business communication and this new approach.

The social communication model offers many advantages, but it has a number of disadvantages as well. Potential problems include information overload (see page 16), fragmented attention, social media fatigue, information security risks, distractions that hurt productivity, and the blurring of the line between personal and professional lives, which can make it difficult for people to feel disconnected from work.[9]

> Social media tools present some potential disadvantages that managers and employees need to consider.

FIGURE 1.5 Business Communication: 1.0 Versus 2.0

Business Communication 1.0
"We Talk, You Listen"

Tendencies
Publication, broadcast
Lecture
Intrusion
Unidirectional
One to many
Control
Low message frequency
Few channels
Information hoarding
Static
Hierarchical
Structured
Isolated
Planned
Resistive

Business Communication 2.0
"Let's Have a Conversation"

Tendencies
Conversation
Discussion
Permission
Bidirectional, multidirectional
One to one, many to many
Influence
High message frequency
Many channels
Information sharing
Dynamic
Egalitarian
Amorphous
Collaborative
Reactive
Responsive

Of course, no company, no matter how enthusiastically it embraces the social communication model, is going to be run as a club in which everyone has a say in every business matter. Instead, a hybrid approach is emerging in which some communications (such as strategic plans and policy documents) follow the traditional approach, while others (such as project management updates and customer support messages) follow the social model.

You can learn more about business uses of social media in Chapter 6.

Committing to Ethical Communication

Ethics are the accepted principles of conduct that govern behaviour within a society. Put another way, ethical principles define the boundary between right and wrong. Ethics is "knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is the right thing to do."[10] To make the right choices as a business communicator, you have a responsibility to think through not only what you say but also the consequences of saying it.

Ethical behaviour is a companywide concern, but because communication efforts are the public face of a company, they are subjected to particularly rigorous scrutiny from regulators, legislators, investors, consumer groups, environmental groups, labour organizations, and anyone else affected by business activities.

> Ethical communication avoids deception and provides the information audiences need.

Ethical communication includes all relevant information, is true in every sense, does not violate the rights of others, and is not deceptive. By contrast, examples of unethical communication include the following:[11]

- **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is using words and ideas you have taken from another source and presenting them as your own without giving credit to the original source. For example, if you were to copy phrasing from a website and include it in your report as if you had written it yourself, without citing the source, you would be plagiarizing. Besides being dishonest, presenting someone else's work as your own could also violate the legal rights of the original author. Theft of intellectual property is protected in Canada by patents and copyright. As a communicator, take care to give credit to the original sources of the material you use. In Chapter 10, you can find methods for proper source citation.
- **Leaving out information that is needed to fully understand a situation or misquoting someone in a way that misrepresents his or her intent.**
- **Misrepresenting numbers.** Statistics and other data can be unethically manipulated by increasing or decreasing numbers, exaggerating, altering statistics, or omitting numeric data.
- **Distorting visuals.** Images can be manipulated in unethical ways, such as making a product seem bigger than it really is or changing the scale of graphs and charts to exaggerate or conceal differences.
- **Failing to respect privacy or information security needs.** Failing to respect the privacy of others or failing to adequately protect information entrusted to your care can also be considered unethical (and is sometimes illegal).

> Transparency involves giving audiences access to the information they need in order to make effective decisions.

The widespread use of social media has increased the attention given to the issue of **transparency**, which in this context refers to a sense of openness, of giving all participants in a conversation access to the information they need to accurately process the messages they are receiving. A key aspect of transparency is knowing who is behind the messages one receives. Consider the promotional event Netflix staged in Toronto to announce the launch of its streaming video service in Canada. The outdoor news conference seemed to attract dozens of curious people who were excited about the availability of Netflix. However, many of the people who "spontaneously" showed up were actually paid actors with instructions to "look really excited, particularly if asked by media to do any interviews about the prospect of Netflix in Canada." The company apologized when the stunt was exposed.[12]

Some governments are taking steps to protect consumers from practices they consider unethical. The European Union, for instance, outlaws a number of online marketing tactics, including "fake blogs," in which an employee or a paid agent posing as an independent consumer posts positive stories about a company's products.[13] Aside from the ethical and legal concerns involved, trying to fool the public is simply bad for business.[14]

Distinguishing Ethical Dilemmas from Ethical Lapses

Some ethical questions are easy to recognize and resolve, but others are not. An ethical dilemma involves choosing among alternatives that aren't clear-cut. Perhaps two conflicting alternatives are both ethical and valid, or perhaps the alternatives lie somewhere in the grey area between clearly right and clearly wrong. Every company has responsibilities to multiple groups of people inside and outside the firm, and those various groups often have competing interests. Unlike a dilemma, an ethical lapse is a clearly unethical (and frequently illegal) choice.

If you must choose between two ethical alternatives, you are facing an ethical dilemma.

If you choose an alternative that is unethical or illegal, you have committed an ethical lapse.

Making Ethical Choices

Ensuring ethical business communication requires three elements: ethical individuals, ethical company leadership, and the appropriate policies and structures to support ethical decision making.[15] Many companies establish an explicit ethics policy by using a written **code of ethics** to help employees determine what is acceptable.

Responsible employers establish clear ethical guidelines for their employees to follow.

Even the best codes and policies can't address every unique situation, however. If you find yourself in a situation in which the law or a code of ethics can't guide you, answer the following questions:[16]

- Have you defined the situation fairly and accurately?
- What is your intention in communicating this message?
- What impact will this message have on the people who receive it, or who might be affected by it?
- Will the message achieve the greatest possible good while doing the least possible harm?
- Will the assumptions you've made change over time? That is, will a decision that seems ethical now seem unethical in the future?
- Are you comfortable with your decision? Would you be embarrassed if it were printed in tomorrow's newspaper or spread across the internet?

REAL-TIME UPDATES

Learn More by Watching This Presentation

Tips for avoiding ethical problems with social media

New media choices have created a new set of ethical dilemmas and challenges. This presentation will help you recognize and avoid ethical lapses. Go to **http://real-timeupdates.com/bce6** and click on Learn More. If you are using MyBCommLab, you can access Real-Time Updates within each chapter or under Student Study Tools.

Six questions can act as guidelines for making an ethical choice.

Communicating in a World of Diversity

Throughout your career, you will interact with colleagues from a variety of cultures, people who differ in race, age, gender, sexual orientation, national and regional attitudes and beliefs, family structure, religion, native language, cognitive and physical abilities, life experience, and educational background. This section looks at the advantages and challenges of a diverse workforce from a communication perspective, examines key differences among cultures, and offers advice for communicating across cultures.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 5
Explain how cultural diversity affects business communication and describe the steps you can take to communicate more effectively across cultural boundaries.

The Advantages and Challenges of a Diverse Workforce

A diverse workforce offers a broader spectrum of viewpoints and ideas, helps companies understand and identify with diverse markets, and enables companies to benefit from a wider range of employee talents. "It just makes good business sense," says Gord Nixon, CEO of Royal Bank of Canada.[17] According to IBM executive Ron Glover, more-diverse teams tend to be more innovative over the long term than teams composed of people from the same culture.[18]

Diverse workforces offer numerous benefits, but they also pose some important communication challenges.

Cultural symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, and norms for behaviour influence communication.

For all their benefits, diverse workforces and markets do present some communication challenges, and understanding the effect of culture on communication is essential. **Culture** is a shared system of symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, and norms for behaviour. Culture is often viewed as a matter of race, but it is much broader in scope. You are a member of several cultures, based on your national origin, religious beliefs, age, and other factors.

Culture influences the way people perceive the world and respond to others, which naturally affects the way they communicate as both senders and receivers. These influences operate on such a fundamental level that people often don't even recognize the influence of culture on their beliefs and behaviours.[19]

This subconscious effect of culture can create friction because it leads people to assume that everybody thinks and feels the way they do. However, differences between cultures can be profound.

The first step to making sure cultural differences don't impede communication is recognizing key factors that distinguish one culture from another. **Cultural competency** is an appreciation for cultural differences that affect communication and the ability to adjust one's communication style to ensure that efforts to send and receive messages across cultural boundaries are successful. It requires a combination of attitude, knowledge, and skills.[20]

Key Aspects of Cultural Diversity

Improving your cultural sensitivity starts with recognizing the major ways in which cultures differ.

You don't need to become an expert in the details of every culture with which you do business, but you do need to attain a basic level of cultural proficiency to ensure successful communication.[21] You can start by recognizing and accommodating the differences described in the following sections. Be aware that this is an overview only, so some generalizations won't be accurate in every situation. Always consider the unique circumstances of each encounter when making communication decisions.

Cultural context plays a critical role in the communication process. In high-context cultures, communication relies less on the explicit content of a message than on the context of the message.

CULTURAL CONTEXT Every attempt at communication occurs within a **cultural context:** the mixture of traditions, expectations, and unwritten social rules that help convey meaning between members of the same culture. Cultures vary widely in the role that context plays in communication.

In a **high-context culture,** people rely less on verbal communication and more on the context of nonverbal actions and environmental setting to convey meaning. Examples of high-context cultures include Japan, China, and many Middle Eastern and Southern European countries.[22] In such cultures, the rules of everyday life are rarely stated explicitly. Instead, as individuals grow up, they learn how to recognize situational cues (such as gestures and tone of voice) and how to respond as expected.[23] In a high-context culture, the primary role of communication is often building relationships, not exchanging information.[24]

In low-context cultures, communication relies more on the explicit content of a message than on the context of the message.

In a **low-context culture**, people rely more on the explicit content of the message and less on circumstances and cues to convey meaning. In other words, more of the conveyed meaning is encoded into the actual message itself.[25] Canada and many Northern European countries are considered low-context cultures.[26] For example, an English speaker feels responsible for transmitting the meaning of a message and often places sentences in strict chronological sequence to establish a clear cause-and-effect pattern.[27] In a low-context culture, rules and expectations are usually spelled out through explicit statements such as "Please wait until I'm finished."[28] Exchanging information is the primary task of communication in low-context cultures.[29]

The different expectations of low- and high-context cultures can create friction and misunderstanding when people try to communicate across cultural boundaries. The indirect style can be a source of confusion during discussions with people from low-context cultures, who are more accustomed to receiving direct answers. For example, people

from a low-context culture might view the high-context emphasis on building relationships as a waste of time. Conversely, people from a high-context culture might view the low-context emphasis on information exchange and task completion as being insensitive to group harmony.[30] Discussing the differences between North American and Chinese business cultures, for instance, a North American executive working in China explained that "in the West, there is such a premium on getting things done quickly, but when you come to work in China, you need to work on listening and being more patient and understanding of local ways of doing business."[31]

Contextual differences are apparent in the way businesspeople approach situations such as decision making, problem solving, negotiating, interaction among levels in the organizational hierarchy, and socializing outside the workplace.[32] For instance, in low-context cultures, businesspeople tend to focus on the results of the decisions they face, a reflection of the cultural emphasis on logic and progress. In comparison, higher-context cultures emphasize the means or the method by which a decision will be made. Building or protecting relationships can be as important as the facts and information used in making the decisions.[33] Consequently, negotiators working on business deals in such cultures may spend most of their time together building relationships rather than hammering out contractual details.

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LEGAL AND ETHICAL DIFFERENCES Cultural context influences legal and ethical behaviour, which in turn can affect communication. For example, the meaning of business contracts can vary from culture to culture. While a manager from a North American company would tend to view a signed contract as the end of the negotiating process, with all the details hammered out, his or her counterpart in many Asian cultures might view the signed contract as an agreement to do business—and only then begin to negotiate the details of the deal.[34] As you conduct business with colleagues and customers around the world, you'll find that legal systems and ethical standards differ from culture to culture.

Members of different cultures sometimes have different views of what is ethical or even legal.

Ethical principles are based to a large extent on cultural values, so trying to make ethical choices across cultures can be complicated. When communicating with people in other cultures, keep your messages ethical by applying four basic principles:[35]

- Actively seek mutual ground.
- Send and receive messages without judgment.
- Send messages that are honest.
- Show respect for cultural differences.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS Social behaviour is guided by numerous rules, some of them formal and specifically articulated (table manners are a good example) and others more informal and learned over time (such as the comfortable standing distance between two speakers in an office). The combination of formal and informal rules influences the overall behaviour of everyone in a society in areas such as manners, attitudes toward time, individual versus community values, attitudes toward status and wealth, and respect for authority. Understanding the nuances of social customs takes time and effort, but most businesspeople are happy to explain the habits and expectations of their culture. Plus, they will view your curiosity as a sign of respect.

Whether formal or informal, the rules governing social customs differ from culture to culture.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION Nonverbal communication (communicating without words) is a vital part of the communication process. Factors ranging from facial expressions to style of dress can influence the way receivers decode messages, and the interpretation of nonverbal signals can vary widely from culture to culture. Gestures or clothing

The meanings of gestures and other nonverbal signals can vary widely from culture to culture.

choices that you don't think twice about, for example, might seem inappropriate or even offensive to someone from another culture. You'll learn more about nonverbal communication in Chapter 2.

AGE DIFFERENCES   In some cultures, youth is associated with strength, energy, possibilities, and freedom, while age is often associated with declining powers and a loss of respect and authority. In contrast, in cultures that value age and seniority, longevity earns respect and increasing power and freedom.

In addition to cultural values associated with various life stages, multiple generations in the workplace present another dimension of diversity. For the first time in Canadian history, many workplaces employ up to four generations of workers.[36] Each of these generations has been shaped by dramatically different world events, social trends, and technological advances, so it is not surprising that they often have different values, expectations, and communication habits. For instance, Generation Y workers (those born between 1981 and 1995), also known as the Millennials, have a strong preference for communicating via short electronic messages, but baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and Generation X workers (1965 to 1980) sometimes find these brief messages abrupt and impersonal.[37]

Each generation can bring particular strengths to the workplace. For instance, older workers can offer broader experience, the benefits of important business relationships nurtured over many years, and high degrees of "practical intelligence"—the ability to solve complex, poorly defined problems.[38] However, gaining the benefits of having multiple generations in a workplace may require some accommodation on everyone's part because of differing habits and perspectives.

GENDER   Gender influences workplace communication in several important ways. First, the perception of men and women in business varies from culture to culture, and gender bias can range from overt discrimination to subtle and even unconscious beliefs.

Second, although the ratio of men and women in entry-level professional positions is roughly equal, the percentage of management roles held by men increases steadily the further one looks up the corporate ladder. This imbalance can significantly affect communication in such areas as mentoring, which is a vital development opportunity for lower and middle managers who want to move into senior positions.

Third, evidence suggests that men and women tend to have somewhat different communication styles. Broadly speaking, men emphasize content and outcomes in their communication efforts, whereas women place a higher premium on relationship maintenance.[39] As one example, men are more likely than women to try to negotiate a pay raise. Changing these perceptions could go a long way toward improving communication and equity in the workplace.[40]

RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES   As one of the most personal and influential aspects of life, religion brings potential for controversy in a work setting.[41] Some employees feel they should be able to express their beliefs in the workplace, but companies try to avoid situations in which openly expressed religious differences cause friction between employees or distract employees.

ABILITY DIFFERENCES   People whose hearing, vision, cognitive ability, or physical ability is impaired can be at a significant disadvantage in today's workplace. As with other types of diversity, it is important to show respect for individuals and be sensitive to differences. Employers can also invest in a variety of *assistive technologies* such as speech recognition software, touch screens, or ergonomic equipment to help employees with disabilities. These technologies give employees opportunities to pursue a greater range of career paths and give employers access to a broader base of talent.

Age is an important aspect of culture, both in the way different age groups are treated in a culture and in the cultural differences between age groups.

As with age, perceptions of gender roles differ among cultures.

Assistive technologies and other adaptations can help people with ability differences.

Advice for Improving Intercultural Communication

In any cross-cultural situation, you can communicate more effectively if you remember the following tips:[42]

- Avoid **ethnocentrism**, the tendency to judge all other groups according to the standards, behaviours, and customs of one's own group. When making such comparisons, people too often decide that their own group is superior.[43]
- Similarly, avoid **stereotyping**, or assigning a wide range of generalized—and often inaccurate—attributes to an individual on the basis of membership in a particular group, without considering the individual's unique characteristics.
- Don't automatically assume that others think, believe, or behave as you do.
- Accept differences in others without judging them.
- Learn how to communicate respect in various cultures.
- Tolerate ambiguity and control your frustration.
- Don't be distracted by superficial factors such as personal appearance.
- Recognize your own cultural biases.
- Be flexible and be prepared to change your habits and attitudes.
- Observe and learn; the more you learn, the more effective you'll be.

Travel guidebooks are a great source of information about norms and customs in other countries. Also, check to see whether your library has online access to the Culture-Gram database or review the country profiles at **www.kwintessential.co.uk.** (look for Country Etiquette Guides under Resources).

> Effective intercultural communication starts with efforts to avoid ethnocentrism and stereotyping.

WRITING FOR MULTILINGUAL AUDIENCES Ideally, businesses can communicate with employees, customers, and other stakeholders in their native languages, and many companies invest a lot of time and money in translating print and online communication to achieve this. However, translation isn't always cost effective or possible. To write effectively for people who may not be comfortable using your language, remember these tips (see Figure 1.6):[44]

- **Use plain language.** Use short, precise words that say exactly what you mean.
- **Avoid words with multiple meanings.** For example, "assess" can mean to analyze or to impose a fee.
- **Be clear.** Rely on specific terms and concrete examples to explain your points.
- **Cite numbers carefully.** Use figures (such as 27) instead of spelling numbers out (twenty-seven).
- **Avoid slang and be careful with technical jargon and abbreviations.** Slang and other nonstandard usages can be difficult or impossible for your audience to translate.
- **Be brief.** Construct sentences that are short and simple.
- **Use short paragraphs.** Each paragraph should contain one topic.
- **Use transitions generously.** Help readers follow your train of thought. You'll learn more about transitions in Chapter 4.

> Important tips for improving your intercultural writing include using plain language, avoiding slang, and using short sentences and short paragraphs.

SPEAKING WITH MULTILINGUAL AUDIENCES When speaking to people whose native language is not your own, you may find these tips helpful:

- **Speak clearly, simply, and relatively slowly.** Pronounce words clearly, stop at distinct punctuation points, and make one point at a time.
- **Look for feedback, but interpret it carefully.** Nods and smiles don't necessarily mean understanding.
- **Rephrase if necessary.** If someone doesn't seem to understand you, rephrase using simpler words.
- **Clarify your meaning with repetition and examples.** Use concrete and specific examples to illustrate difficult or vague ideas.

> Important tips for speaking with multilingual audiences include speaking clearly and slowly, looking for feedback, and listening carefully.

FIGURE 1.6 Writing for Multilingual Audiences

Poor

Assessing the Office Merger: Bad, Bad, and Not Good

APRIL 22, 2015 BY CYNTHIA MARTIN   LEAVE A COMMENT (EDIT)

When we folded the Brampton office into Toronto headquarters last year, we anticipated some significant challenges during and after the consolidation. Closing a facility and combining two teams into one is never easy, but as I explained at the time, economic pressures—primarily the need to improve our all-important average profit per client metric—forced us to make a difficult decision.

I wish I could say that we hit this one out of the park. If one were to judge from the three most important indicators, we have not yet accomplished our goals. Our performance has actually declined in two of the three. The latest customer satisfaction survey shows a fifteen-percent increase in the number of customers who say they will consider other service providers when their current contracts expire. Employee satisfaction scores have also dropped since the offices were merged. Only seventy-two percent of employees rate their job satisfaction as "high" or "very high," compared to eighty-seven percent before the merger. The only measure of the three that has stayed steady is our average profit per client. While this might sound like good news in comparison to the other two, improving this variable was the primary reason for combining the offices in the first place.

I'll be blunt: This ain't gonna cut it, folks.

FILED UNDER: STRATEGIC PLANNING

The headline tries to be clever regarding the three factors discussed in the post, but the message is not clear.

"Folded" is an example of an English word with multiple meanings; these multiple possibilities make translation more difficult and can lead to confusion.

Complicated sentences are difficult to translate and force readers to follow multiple ideas at once.

The idiomatic phrase "hit one out of the park" might not make sense to readers who aren't familiar with baseball.

Spelling out numbers instead of using numerals creates more work for readers.

Long paragraphs are visually intimidating and more difficult to process.

Nonstandard language ("ain't") and the idiomatic phrase "cut it" will confuse some readers and the tone will be offensive.

Improved

The clear, direct headline leaves no question about the content of the message.

Simpler sentence structures are easier to translate and create fewer chances for misunderstanding.

Breaking the long paragraph into a brief introduction and three bullet points simplifies reading and makes it easy to find the key points.

Numerals are easier to read quickly than spelled-out quantities.

Standard English and plain language decrease the potential for confusion.

We Have Not Met Our Goals for the Office Merger

APRIL 22, 2015 BY CYNTHIA MARTIN   LEAVE A COMMENT (EDIT)

When we merged the Brampton office with Toronto headquarters last year, we knew the move would be challenging. Closing a facility and combining two teams is never easy, but economic pressures forced us to make a difficult decision.

Unfortunately, we have not met the three goals we had for the merger: improving customer satisfaction, improving employee satisfaction, and increasing the average profit per client. In fact, our performance has actually *declined* in two of the three areas:

- The latest customer satisfaction survey shows a 15-percent increase in the number of customers who say they will consider other service providers when their current contracts expire.
- Employee satisfaction has also dropped since the offices were merged. Only 72 percent of employees rate their job satisfaction as "high" or "very high," compared to 87 percent before the merger.
- The only indicator of the three that has remained steady is our average profit per client. While this might sound like good news in comparison to the other two, improving this variable was the primary reason for combining the offices.

Clearly, we need to take a closer look at this situation to see where we went wrong and where we can make improvements.

FILED UNDER: STRATEGIC PLANNING

Pointers for Writing for Multilingual Audiences
- Use plain language.
- Be clear.
- Cite numbers carefully.
- Avoid slang and be careful with technical jargon and abbreviations.
- Be brief.
- Use short paragraphs.
- Use transitions generously.

- **Don't talk down to the other person.** Don't blame the listener for not understanding. Say, "Am I going too fast?" rather than "Is this too difficult for you?"
- **Learn important phrases in your audience's language.** Learning common greetings and a few simple phrases simplifies initial contact and shows respect.

- **Listen carefully and respectfully.** If you don't understand a comment, ask the person to repeat it.
- **Adapt your conversation style to the other person's.** For instance, if the other person appears to be direct and straightforward, use that style as well.
- **Check frequently for comprehension.** After you make each point, pause to gauge the other person's comprehension before moving on.
- **Clarify what will happen next.** At the end of a conversation, be sure that you and the other person agree on what has been said and decided.

Finally, remember that oral communication can be more difficult for audiences because it happens in real time and in the presence of other people. In some situations, written communication will be more successful because it gives a reader the opportunity to translate in private and at his or her own pace.

Using Technology to Improve Communication

Today's businesses rely heavily on technology to facilitate the communication process. In fact, many of the technologies you might use in your personal life, from Facebook to Twitter to video games to virtual worlds, are also used in business (see Figure 1.6).

The benefits of technology are not automatic, of course. To communicate effectively, you need to keep technology in perspective, use technological tools productively, guard against information overload, and disengage from the computer frequently to communicate in person.

Keeping Technology in Perspective

Don't let technology overwhelm the communication process.

Remember that technology is an aid to communication, not a replacement for it. Technology can't think for you, make up for a lack of essential skills, or ensure that communication really happens. No matter how exciting or popular it may be, a technology has value only if it helps deliver the right information to the right people at the right time.

Using Tools Productively

You don't have to become an expert to use most communication technologies effectively, but you do need to be familiar with the basic features and functions of the tools your employer expects you to use. For instance, if you don't know the basic functions of your word processing or wiki software, you could spend hours trying to format a document that a skilled user could format in minutes.

Guarding Against Information Overload

The overuse or misuse of communication technology can lead to **information overload**, in which people receive more information than they can effectively process. Information overload makes it difficult to discriminate between useful and useless information, inhibits the ability to think deeply about complex situations, lowers productivity, and amplifies employee stress both on the job and at home—even to the point of causing health and relationship problems.[45]

Everyone has an important role to play in reducing information overload.

As a sender, make sure every message you intend to send is meaningful and important to your receivers. As a recipient, take steps to control the number and types of messages you receive. Use the filtering features of your communication systems to isolate high-priority messages. Also, be wary of following too many blogs, Twitter accounts, and other sources of recurring messages. Take care when expanding your social networks online so that you don't get buried in too many posts and updates and suffer social media fatigue.[46]

No matter how much technology is involved, communication will always be about people connecting with people.

Reconnecting with People Frequently

Even the best technologies can hinder communication if they are overused. For instance, a common complaint among employees is that managers rely too heavily on email and don't communicate face-to-face often enough.[47] Speaking with people over the phone or in person can take more time and effort, and can sometimes force you to confront unpleasant situations directly, but it is often essential for solving tough problems and maintaining productive relationships.[48] For example, Cory Edwards, director of social media and company reputation at Dell, regularly organizes gatherings of key customers because, as he says, "in person relationships always trump online relationships."[49]

Even the best communication technologies can't show people who you really are. You might be funny, bright, and helpful, but you're just a voice on the phone or a name on a screen until people can interact with you in person. Remember to step out from behind the technology frequently to learn more about the people you work with, and to let them learn more about you.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Check Your Progress

❶ OBJECTIVE Define *communication*, and explain the importance of effective business communication.

Communication is the process of transferring information and meaning between senders and receivers, using one or more written, oral, visual, or electronic media. The ability to communicate well will play a key role in your success as a business professional. Communication is essential to every function in business, and poor communication skills will limit your career prospects, no matter how ambitious or skilled you are in other areas. Communication skills also give you an important competitive advantage in the job market.

As an effective communicator, you will be more valuable to your company as well, because good communication skills help companies in many ways: building closer ties with important communities in the marketplace; influencing conversations, perceptions, and trends; increasing productivity and solving problems in less time; attaining better financial results and higher return for investors; enabling earlier warning of potential problems; making better decisions; creating more compelling promotional messages; and improving employee engagement.

To make your communication efforts as effective as possible, focus on making them practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive.

❷ OBJECTIVE Explain what it means to communicate as a professional in a business context.

Communicating as a professional starts with being a professional, which embodies striving to excel, being

dependable and accountable, being a team player, demonstrating a sense of etiquette, making ethical decisions, and maintaining a positive outlook.

As a professional, you will be expected to bring a wide range of communication skills, including organizing ideas and information; expressing yourself coherently and persuasively in a variety of media; building persuasive arguments; evaluating data and information critically; actively listening to others; communicating effectively with diverse audiences; using communication technologies; following accepted standards of grammar, spelling, and other aspects of high-quality writing and speaking; adapting your messages and communication styles as needed; demonstrating strong business etiquette; communicating ethically; respecting confidentiality; following applicable laws and regulations; managing your time wisely; and using resources efficiently.

Communicating in an organizational context involves adapting your skills to a professional environment and using the company's communication system (in the broadest sense of the word) to gather and distribute information. An audience-centred approach to communication means focusing on understanding and meeting the needs of all your audience members, rather than focusing on your own needs.

❸ OBJECTIVE Describe the communication process model and the ways that social media are changing the nature of business communication.

Communication can be modelled as an eight-step process: (1) the sender has an idea, (2) encodes that

idea in a message, (3) produces the message in a transmittable medium, and (4) transmits the message through a channel. The audience (5) receives the message, (6) decodes the message, (7) responds to the message, and (8) provides feedback to the sender.

Social media have given customers and other stakeholders a voice they did not have in the past by giving them the tools to gather information from multiple sources, to respond to companies and other organizations, and to initiate conversations in the marketplace. Social media are also changing the nature of messages. A message initiated by one party is often revised and reshaped by the web of participants as they share it and comment on it.

❹ OBJECTIVE Define *ethics*, explain the difference between an ethical dilemma and an ethical lapse, and list six guidelines for making ethical communication choices.

Ethics are the accepted principles of conduct that govern behaviour within a society; they define the boundary between right and wrong. Ethical communication includes all relevant information, is true in every sense, does not violate the rights of others, and is not deceptive.

An ethical dilemma involves choosing among alternatives that aren't clear-cut; an ethical lapse is a clearly unethical (and frequently illegal) choice. To ensure the decisions you make are ethical, follow these six guidelines: make sure you have defined the situation fairly and accurately, make sure your intentions are honest and fair, understand the impact your messages will have on others, ensure that your messages will achieve the greatest possible good while doing the least possible harm, make sure your underlying assumptions won't change over time, and make sure you are comfortable with your choices.

❺ OBJECTIVE Explain how cultural diversity affects business communication and describe the steps you can take to communicate more effectively across cultural boundaries.

Cultural diversity affects business communication because culture influences the way people create, send, and interpret messages. Moreover, the influences of culture can be profound, and they are often unrecognized by the people involved. Major aspects of culture that affect communication include cultural context, legal and ethical differences, social customs, nonverbal communication, age differences, gender, religion, and ability.

To communicate effectively across cultures, avoid ethnocentrism and stereotyping, don't make assumptions about others' beliefs and values, avoid judgment, learn to communicate respect, tolerate ambiguity, don't be distracted by superficial elements, recognize your own cultural biases, be flexible, and learn about cultures in which you do business. Also, follow the advice for writing and speaking (page 15) in multilingual environments.

❻ OBJECTIVE List four general guidelines for using communication technology effectively.

To help avoid the potential drawbacks of using communication technology, (1) keep technology in perspective so that it doesn't overwhelm the communication process, (2) learn to use your tools productively, (3) guard against information overload by sending only those messages of value to your audiences and by protecting yourself from too many low-value incoming messages, and (4) disengage from the computer frequently to communicate in person.

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Practise Your Grammar

Effective business communication starts with strong grammar skills. To improve your grammar skills, go to MyBCommLab or Grammar-on-the-Go, where you'll find exercises and diagnostic tests to help you produce clear, effective communication.

Test Your Knowledge

To review chapter content related to each question, refer to the indicated Learning Objective.

1. What are the six traits of professionalism? **L.0.❷**
2. Why should communicators take an audience-centred approach to communication? **L.0.❷**

3. Define *ethics* and explain what ethical communication involves. **L.0.❹**
4. How does cultural context affect communication? **L.0.❺**
5. Why is it important to also connect in person when using technology to communicate? **L.0.❻**

Apply Your Knowledge

To review chapter content related to each question, refer to the indicated Learning Objective.

1. Why do you think communication is vital to the success of every business organization? Explain briefly. **L.0.❶**
2. How does the presence of a reader comments feature on a corporate blog reflect audience-centred communication? **L.0.❷**
3. Because of your excellent communication skills, your boss always asks you to write his reports for him. But when the CEO compliments him on his logical organization and clear writing style, your boss responds as if he'd written all those reports himself. What kind of ethical choice does this represent? What can you do in this situation? Briefly explain your solution and your reasoning. **L.0.❹**
4. Your company has relocated to Vancouver, where a Vietnamese subculture is strongly established. Many employees will be from this subculture. As a member of the human resources department, what suggestions could you make to improve communication between management and the Vietnamese Canadians your company is hiring? **L.0.❺**
5. What kinds of workplace challenges could arise in communications among employees of different generations (for example, between Millennials, Boomers, and Generation X)? How could generational differences influence these employees' choices about methods for communicating? **L.0.❻**

Practise Your Skills

ACTIVITIES

Each activity is labelled according to the primary skill or skills you will need to use. To review relevant chapter content, you can refer to the indicated Learning Objective. In some instances, supporting information will be found in another chapter, as indicated.

1. **Writing: Compositional Modes: Summaries L.0.❶, Chapter 3** Write a paragraph introducing yourself to your instructor and your class. Address such areas as your background, interests, achievements, and goals. Submit your paragraph by email, through a blog, or using a social network, as indicated by your instructor.
2. **Media Skills: Microblogging L.0.❶, Chapter 6** Write four messages of no more than 140 characters each (short enough to work as Twitter tweets) to persuade other students to take a business communication course. Think of the first message as the "headline" of an advertisement that makes a bold promise about the value this course offers every aspiring business professional. The next three messages should be support points that provide evidence to back up the promise made in the first message.[50]
3. **Fundamentals: Analyzing Communication Effectiveness L.0.❶** Identify a video clip (on YouTube or another online source) that you believe represents an example of effective communication. It can be in any context, business or otherwise, but make sure it is something appropriate to discuss in class. Post a link to the video on your class blog or discussion forum, along with a brief written summary of why you think this example shows effective communication in action.

4. **Planning: Assessing Audience Needs** L.O.**❷**, **Chapter 3** Choose a business career that sounds interesting to you and imagine that you are getting ready to apply for jobs in that field. Naturally, you want to create a compelling, audience-focused resumé that answers the key questions a hiring manager is most likely to have. Identify three personal or professional qualities you have that would be important for someone in this career field. Write a brief statement (one or two sentences) about each quality, describing in audience-focused terms how you can contribute to a company. Submit your statements via email or class blog.

5. **Communication Etiquette: Communicating with Sensitivity and Tact** L.O.**❷** Potential customers often visit your production facility before making purchase decisions. You and the people who report to you in the sales department have received extensive training in etiquette issues because you frequently deal with high-profile clients. However, the rest of the workforce has not received such training, and you worry that someone might inadvertently say or do something that would offend one of these potential customers. In a two-paragraph email, explain to the general manager why you think anyone who might come in contact with customers should receive basic etiquette training.

6. **Fundamentals: Evaluating Communication Effectiveness** L.O.**❸** Use the eight phases of the communication process to analyze a miscommunication you've recently had with a co-worker, supervisor, classmate, instructor, friend, or family member. What idea were you trying to share? How did you encode and transmit it? Did the receiver get the message? Did the receiver decode the message as you had intended? How do you know? Based on your analysis, what do you think prevented your successful communication in this instance? Summarize your conclusions in an email message to your instructor.

7. **Writing: Compositional Modes: Persuasion** L.O.**❸**, **Chapter 9** Social media use varies widely from company to company. Some firms enthusiastically embrace these new tools and new approaches. Others have taken a more cautious approach, either delaying the adoption of social media or restricting their use. You work for a manufacturing firm that prohibits employees from using social media during work hours. Company management believes that social media offer little or no business value and distract employees from more important duties. In a brief email message to your boss, identify the ways that social media are changing the communication process and relationships between companies and their employees, customers, and communities. Provide at least one example of a real manufacturing company that uses social media.

8. **Communication Ethics: Distinguishing Ethical Dilemmas and Ethical Lapses** L.O.**❹** In a report of no more than one page, explain why you think each of the following is or is not ethical:
   a. De-emphasizing negative test results in a report on your product idea
   b. Taking an office computer home to finish a work-related assignment
   c. Telling an associate and close friend that she should pay more attention to her work responsibilities or management will fire her
   d. Recommending the purchase of excess equipment to use up your allocated funds before the end of the fiscal year so that your budget won't be cut next year

9. **Communication Ethics: Protecting Company Resources** L.O.**❹** Blogging has become a popular way for employees to communicate with customers and other parties outside the company. In some cases, employee blogs have been quite beneficial for both companies and their customers, providing helpful information and putting a human face on otherwise formal and imposing corporations. However, in some cases, employees have been fired for posting information that their employers said was inappropriate. One particular area of concern is criticism of the company or individual managers. Should employees be allowed to criticize their employers in a public forum such as a blog? In a brief email message, argue for or against company policies that prohibit this type of information in employee blogs. What could companies include in social media policies to prevent problems?

10. **Communication Ethics: Resolving Ethical Dilemmas** L.O.**❹** Knowing that you have numerous friends throughout the company, your boss relies on you for feedback concerning employee morale and other issues affecting the staff. She recently approached you and asked you to start reporting any behaviour that might violate company policies, from taking office supplies home to making personal long-distance calls. List the issues you'd like to discuss with her before you respond to her request.

11. **Intercultural Communication: Recognizing Cultural Variations** L.O.**❺** Your company represents a Canadian toy company that is negotiating to buy miniature truck wheels from a manufacturer in Osaka, Japan. In the first meeting, your boss explains that your company expects to control the design of the wheels as well as the materials that are used to make them. The manufacturer's representative looks

down and says softly, "Perhaps that will be difficult." Your boss presses for agreement, and to emphasize your company's willingness to buy, he shows the prepared contract he's brought with him. However, the manufacturer seems increasingly vague and uninterested. In an email message to your instructor, identify the cultural differences that may be interfering with effective communication in this situation.

12. **Intercultural Communication: Recognizing Cultural Variations; Collaboration: Solving Problems L0.❺, Chapter 2** Working with two other students, prepare a list of 10 examples of slang (in your own language) that would probably be misinterpreted or misunderstood during a business conversation with someone from another culture. Next to each example, suggest other words you might use to convey the same message. Do the alternatives mean exactly the same as the original slang or idiom? Summarize your findings in an email message or post for a class blog.

13. **Intercultural Communication: Recognizing Cultural Variations L0.❺** Choose a specific country or First Nations culture in Canada that you are not familiar with. Research the culture and write a one-page report outlining what a Canadian businessperson would need to know about concepts of personal space and rules of social behaviour in order to conduct business successfully in that culture.

14. **Intercultural Communication: Recognizing Cultural Variations L0.❺** Differences in gender, age, and physical and cognitive abilities contribute to the diversity of today's workforce. Working with a classmate, role-play a conversation in which
    a. A woman is being interviewed for a job by a male human resources manager.
    b. An older person is being interviewed for a job by a younger human resources manager.
    c. A person using a wheelchair is being interviewed for a job by a person who can walk.

    How did differences between the applicant and the interviewer shape the communication? What can you do to improve communication in such situations? Summarize your findings in an email message or post for a class blog.

15. **Technology: Using Communication Tools L0.❻** Find a free online communication service that you have no experience using as a content creator or contributor. Services to consider include blogging (such as Blogger), microblogging (such as Twitter), community Q&A sites (such as Yahoo! Answers), and user-generated content sites (such as Flickr). Perform a basic task such as opening an account or setting up a blog. Was the task easy to perform? Were the instructions clear? Could you find help online if you needed it? Is there anything about the experience that could be improved? Summarize your conclusions in a brief email message to your instructor.

16. **Intercultural Communication: Recognizing Differences, Collaboration L0.❺, Chapter 2**
    Part One Work in a group of three. Each group member should research one of the following generations: Generation Y/Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers.

    Have each group member summarize facts about the generation he or she researched. Cover the following main topics:
    a. Range of birth years
    b. Age range now
    c. Two famous people of this generation
    d. Big events that occurred when this generation was between the ages of 5 and 20
    e. Common values attributed to the generation
    f. Preferences this generation has in receiving information and communicating

    Include a list of your sources and bring them, along with your notes, to the next class.

    Part Two Form a new group with all the classmates who researched the same generation that you did. Compare your notes to gain even more insights about your topic. What points did you find in common?

    Part Three Return to your original group of three and deliver a two- to three-minute oral presentation on the generation you researched.

    Part Four Write a reflection in an email message to your instructor summarizing what you learned from the presentations and your own research. Include your own experience of working with others from different generations. How could a business professional use this type of knowledge to be an effective communicator?

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION NOTEBOOK

Intercultural Communication

Test Your Intercultural Knowledge

Never take anything for granted when you're doing business in a foreign country. All sorts of assumptions that are valid in one place can cause you problems elsewhere if you fail to consider that customs may vary. Here are several true stories about businesspeople who blundered by overlooking some simple but important cultural differences. Can you spot the wrong assumptions that led these people astray?

1. You're tired of the discussion and you want to move on to a new topic. You ask your Australian business associate, "Can we table this for a while?" To your dismay, your colleague keeps right on discussing just what you want to put aside. Are Australians that inconsiderate?

2. You finally made the long trip overseas to meet the new German director of your division. Despite slow traffic, you arrive only four minutes late. His door is shut, so you knock on it and walk in. The chair is too far away from the desk, so you pick it up and move it closer. Then you lean over the desk, stick out your hand, and say, "Good morning, Hans, it's nice to meet you." Of course, you're baffled by his chilly reaction. Why?

3. Your meeting went better than you'd ever expected. In fact, you found the Japanese representative for your new advertising agency to be very agreeable; she said yes to just about everything. When you share your enthusiasm with your boss, he doesn't appear very excited. Why?

4. You've finally closed the deal, after exhausting both your patience and your company's travel budget. Now, two weeks later, your Chinese customers are asking for special considerations that change the terms of the agreement. How could they do this? Why are they doing it? And, most important, what should you do?

In each case, the problems have resulted from inaccurate assumptions. Here are explanations of what went wrong:

1. To "table" something in Australia means to bring it forward for discussion. This is the opposite of what North Americans usually mean. The English that's spoken in Australia is closer to British than to North American English. If you are doing business in Australia, become familiar with the local vocabulary. Note the tendency to shorten just about any word whenever possible and adding "*ie*" to it is a form of familiar slang: for example, *brolly* (umbrella) and *lollie* (candy). And yes, it's true: "G'day" is the standard greeting. Use it.

2. You've just broken four rules of German polite behaviour: punctuality, privacy, personal space, and proper greetings. In time-conscious Germany, you should never arrive even a few minutes late. Also, Germans like their privacy and space, and they adhere to formal greetings of "Frau" and "Herr," even if the business association has lasted for years.

3. The word yes may not always mean "yes" in the Western sense. Japanese people may say yes to confirm they have heard or understood something but not necessarily to indicate that they agree with it. You'll seldom get a direct no. Some of the ways that Japanese people say no indirectly include "It will be difficult," "I will ask my supervisor," "I'm not sure," "We will think about it," and "I see."

4. For most North American businesspeople, the contract represents the end of the negotiation. For Chinese businesspeople, however, it's just the beginning. Once a deal is made, Chinese negotiators view their counterparts as trustworthy partners who can be relied on for special favours—such as new terms in the contract.

Applications for Success

Learn how to improve your cultural savvy and gain an international competitive advantage. Visit Cultural Savvy (www.culturalsavvy.com) and read the country reports and cultural tips. Follow the site's links to tips, articles, books, and more.

Answer the following questions:

1. Why should you avoid humour when communicating with people of a different culture?

2. Every culture has its own business protocol. What should you know about a culture's business protocol before you do business within that culture?

3. What are some examples of cultural gift-giving taboos?