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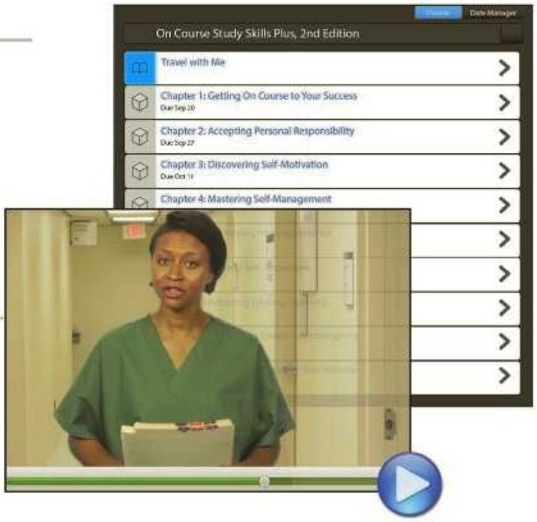
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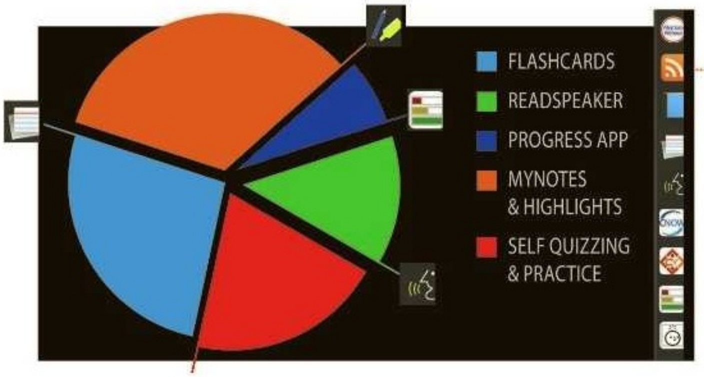
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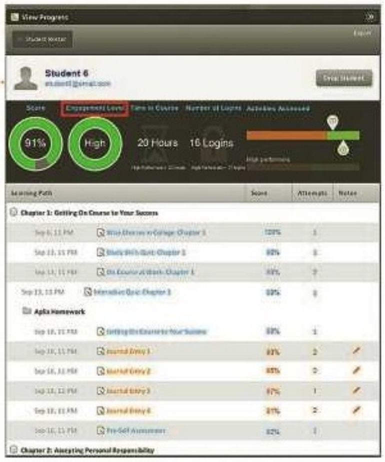
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About Amy Newman

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Several business communication instructors devoted time and energy to making this edition a success. Because of their professionalism and creativity, the tenth edition will provide an enhanced teaching and learning experience for adopters. Elizabeth Christensen of Sinclair Community College and David Lennox of Cornell University wrote a comprehensive test bank to reinforce students' learning. In addition, I value the excellent contributions of Karen Howie, Northwestern Michigan College, who developed digital content for the CourseMate website.

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10e

BUSINESS communication

in person, in print, online

PART 1

Foundations of Business Communication

CHAPTER

1

Understanding Business Communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After you have finished this chapter, you should be able to

LO1 Identify the components of communication.

LO2 Identify the major verbal and nonverbal barriers to communication.

LO3 Describe criteria for choosing communication media.

LO4 Avoid potential legal consequences of communication.

LO5 Communicate ethically.

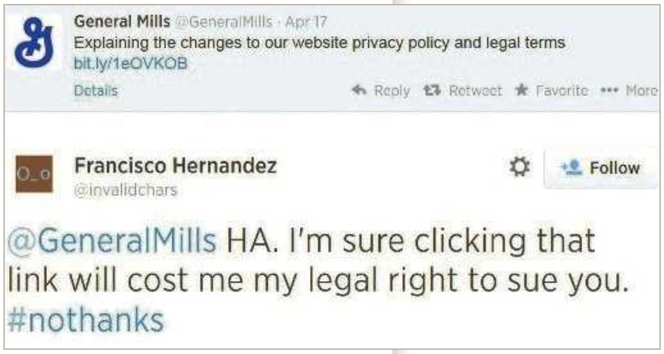
The Learning Objectives (LOs) will help you learn the material. You'll see references to the LOs throughout the chapter.

> *"We're sorry we even started down this path. And we do hope you'll accept our apology."*[1]
>
> —Kirstie Foster, Director of Corporate and Brand Communications for General Mills

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

General Mills Reverts Back to Its Former Legal Terms

Business communication is more complex and more highly criticized than ever. General Mills discovered this when the company changed its legal terms to ward off lawsuits.



General Mills @GeneralMills · Apr 17

Explaining the changes to our website privacy policy and legal terms bit.ly/1eOVKOB

Francisco Hernandez @invalidchars

@GeneralMills HA. I'm sure clicking that link will cost me my legal right to sue you. #nothanks

COURTESY OF TWITTER, INC.

The company's new legal terms restricted customers' right to sue if they subscribe to an email, download a coupon, "like" a brand on Facebook, or enter an online contest. As you can imagine, General Mills' popular brands—Cheerios, Progresso, Pillsbury, and others—inspire consumers to interact online, and people didn't respond well. One attorney summed up the problem: "It's essentially trying to protect the company from all accountability, even when it lies, or say, an employee deliberately adds broken glass to a product."[2]

In what *The New York Times* called "a stunning about-face," the company reverted its legal terms back to what they were.[3] In the statement, you can almost hear the discussion between the corporate communication staff, who protect the company's brand, and the lawyers, who protect the company financially. Most of the statement has a conversational tone ("So we've listened"), but one part has legal jargon and this disclaimer: "That last bit is from our lawyers."[4]

Like most companies, General Mills clearly is struggling with how to balance the incredible opportunities of social media with the inevitable challenges.

1-1 Communicating in Organizations

Walk through the halls of any organization—a start-up company, a *Fortune* 500 giant, a state government office, or a not-for-profit organization—and what do you see? Managers and other employees drafting emails, attending meetings, writing reports, conducting interviews, talking on the phone, and making presentations. In short, you see people *communicating*.

Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages—sometimes through spoken or written words, and sometimes nonverbally through facial expressions, gestures, and voice qualities. If someone sends a message to you, and you receive it, communication will have taken place. However, when Jamie Dimon, Chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase, testified before the U.S. Senate Banking Committee about billions of dollars in trading losses, he used a common U.S. business expression. But was his communication universally understood?[5]

"We generally are open kimono with the regulators and tell them what they want to know."

SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Jamie Dimon uses a common but potentially misunderstood business expression, which means revealing information to outside parties. Some consider the term sexist and racist.[6]

1-1a Employers' Perspective

People in organizations must communicate to share information, coordinate activities, and make better decisions. In most jobs, people communicate more than they do any other activity. Employers know the value of good communication:

- Communication skills—oral, listening, written, and presentation—are the top four most important skills in new graduate business school hires. According to a Graduate Management Admission Council survey of corporate recruiters, "[E]mployers ranked communications skills twice as important as managerial skills."[7]
- Written and oral communication skills are among the top skills and qualities employers look for on college students' resumes, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers' Job Outlook Survey, shown in Figure 1.[8]
- "People who cannot write and communicate clearly will not be hired and are unlikely to last long enough to be considered for promotion," according to The College Board, based on a survey of human resource directors.[9]

But many employees lack essential communication skills:

- The College Board also reports that one-third of employees in U.S. blue-chip companies write poorly, and companies spend as much as $3.1 billion each year on remedial writing training.[10]
- Eighty percent of employers say colleges should put more emphasis on written and oral communication, according to a survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities.[11]

- A *Wall Street Journal* articles reports that, although “M.B.A. students’ quantitative skills are prized by employers, their writing and presentation skills have been a perennial complaint. Employers and writing coaches say business-school graduates tend to ramble, use pretentious vocabulary, or pen too-casual emails.”[12]

1-1b Personal Perspective

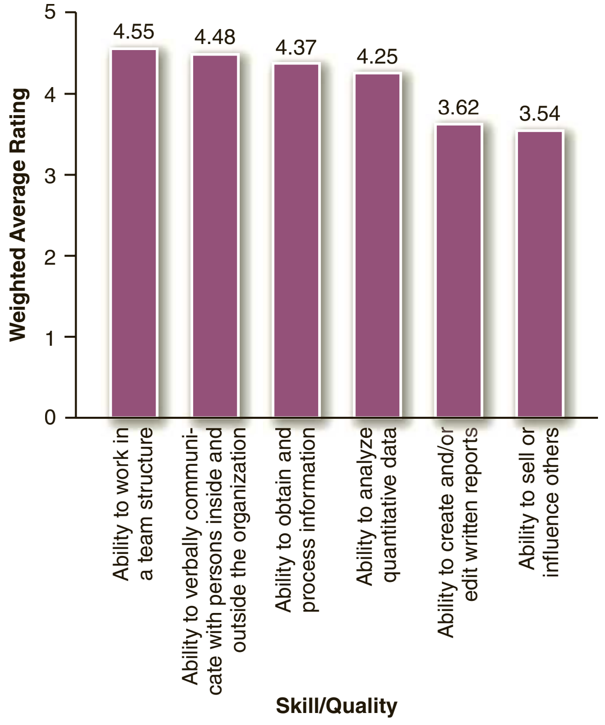
Clearly, good communication skills are crucial to your success in an organization. Competence in writing and speaking will help you get hired, perform well, and earn promotions. If you decide to go into business for yourself, writing and speaking skills will help you find investors, promote your product, and manage your employees. These same skills will also help you in your personal life with family, friends, and partners.

Knowing yourself is critical to your development as a skilled business communicator. How do others perceive you, and how do you react to others? A recent study showed that jerks don’t know they’re jerks. People who were overly aggressive during negotiations had no clue how they were perceived. Equally troublesome, people who were viewed as appropriately assertive thought they came across too strongly.[13]

Having an accurate view of yourself is part of emotional intelligence. People with high emotional intelligence (or EQ, for emotional quotient) share four competencies (Figure 2).[14]

Employers Rate Importance of Candidates’ Skills/Qualities

Figure 1



1 = Not at all important; 2 = Not very important; 3 = Somewhat important; 4 = Very important; 5 = Extremely important

Emotional Intelligence Competencies

Figure 2

- **Self-Awareness:** Understanding one’s own emotions and how they affect others, recognizing one’s strengths and limitations, and demonstrating self-confidence.
- **Self-Management:** Keeping emotions in check, acting with integrity, being adaptable, striving for excellence, taking initiative, and demonstrating optimism.
- **Social Awareness:** Demonstrating empathy by recognizing others’ perspectives and taking them into consideration, understanding group dynamics, and considering customers’ needs.
- **Relationship Management:** Developing others, inspiring people, initiating or managing change, influencing, managing conflict, and working with others toward shared goals.

Emotional
INTELLIGENCE

How do you feel about your own communication skills? What messages and feedback about your writing and oral presentations have you received from your family and teachers that may affect how you approach this course?

In each book chapter, look for questions with the “Emotional Intelligence” icon in the margin. Responding honestly will improve how well you understand yourself and how your communication affects your relationships with others.

1-2 The Components of Communication

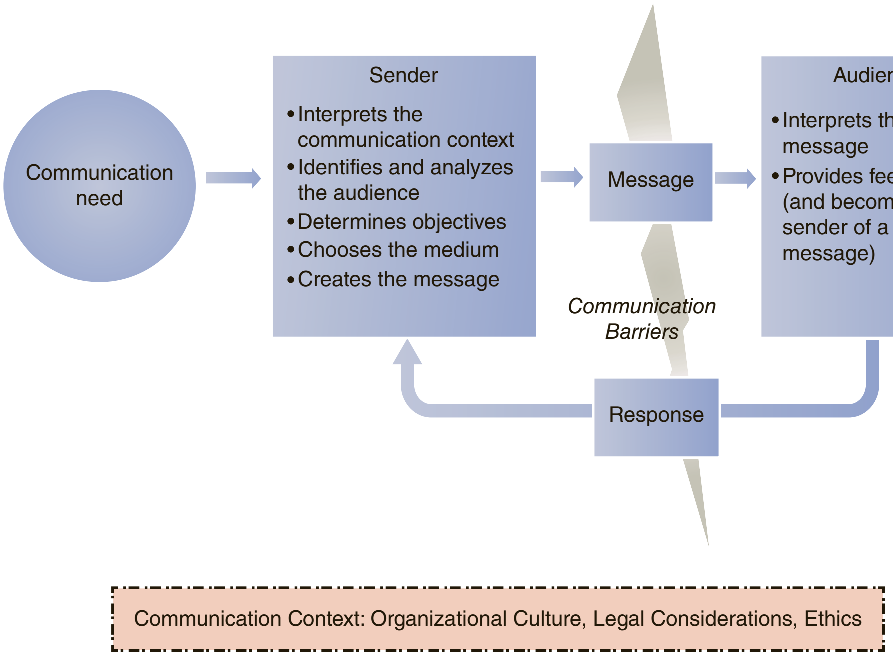
How does communication happen among people and throughout an organization? In this section, we’ll discuss the communication model (or process) and the directions of communication within a company.

LO1 Identify the components of communication.

1-2a The Communication Model

The communication model consists of the communication need, sender, message, audience, and response, as shown in Figure 3. Consider the example of one company acquiring another. Imagine that you are the VP, business development, and need to announce this decision to all employees. Other stakeholders—for example, customers and investors—will have to be informed, too, but let's use the example of internal communication here.

Figure 3 The Communication Model


Communication need
Sender
• Interprets the communication context
• Identifies and analyzes the audience
• Determines objectives
• Chooses the medium
• Creates the message
Message
Audience
• Interprets the message
• Provides feedback (and becomes the sender of a new message)
Communication Barriers
Response
Communication Context: Organizational Culture, Legal Considerations, Ethics

COURTESY OF AMY NEWMAN

Communication Need

A communication need—either from the sender's mind or from an organizational situation—starts the process of communication in organizations. After you and the rest of the executive management team decide to acquire a company, you agree that you'll announce the decision to employees.

Sender

As the message sender, you have a lot of work to do to ensure that the message is received as you intend:

- **Interpret the communication context**: You'll consider the organizational culture (e.g., how formal the language should be), legal constraints (e.g., whether you should avoid making certain statements in writing), and the ethical circumstances (e.g., whether employees will be worried about losing their jobs).
- **Identify and analyze the audience**: You'll think about the wide range of employees who will receive the message. What is important to them, and how are they likely to react?
- **Determine objectives**: You'll specify what you want employees to think, do, or feel about your message.
- **Choose the medium**: You'll choose a way to convey your message, for example, by email.
- **Create the message**: Finally, you'll write the email and get it ready for distribution.

Message

Whether a communication achieves the sender's objectives depends on how well you construct the message (the information to be communicated). Oral messages might be transmitted through a staff meeting, individual meeting, telephone conversation, voice mail, podcast, conference call, videoconference, or even less formally, through the company grapevine. Written messages might be transmitted through an email, a report, a blog, a web page, a brochure, a tweet, a post, or a company newsletter. Nonverbal messages might be transmitted through facial expressions, gestures, or body movement. As we'll discuss later in this chapter, choosing the right medium for your audience, message, and objectives is critical to the success of your communication.

The purpose and content of your message may be clear, but messages often are obstructed by verbal and nonverbal barriers. Employees may misinterpret your email or not read it at all.

Audience

As the receiver of your message, the audience filters the communication and reacts by doing the following:

- **Interprets the message:** Each audience member (in this situation of acquiring a new company, each employee) will filter the message according to his or her knowledge, experience, background, and so on. When communication is successful, the message is interpreted as originally intended.
- **Provides feedback:** Employees may be happy about the news and apply for a job to work in the new company, or they may believe the company is expanding too rapidly and will gossip about it during lunch.

At this point, the audience becomes the sender of a new message—the response.

Response

As a new message, the audience's response to your communication begins the cycle again—and is subjected to the same complexities of the original process.

The Dynamic Nature of Communication

You probably know from your own experience that communication rarely flows neatly from one stage to the next, with the sender and audience clearly identified at any given point. Two or more people often send and receive messages simultaneously. For example, the look on your face when you receive a message may tell the sender that you understand, agree with, or are baffled by the message being sent. And your feedback may prompt the sender to modify what he or she says. The model helps us understand each step of the process—but communication is far more complicated than presented in the graphic.

1-2b Directions of Communication

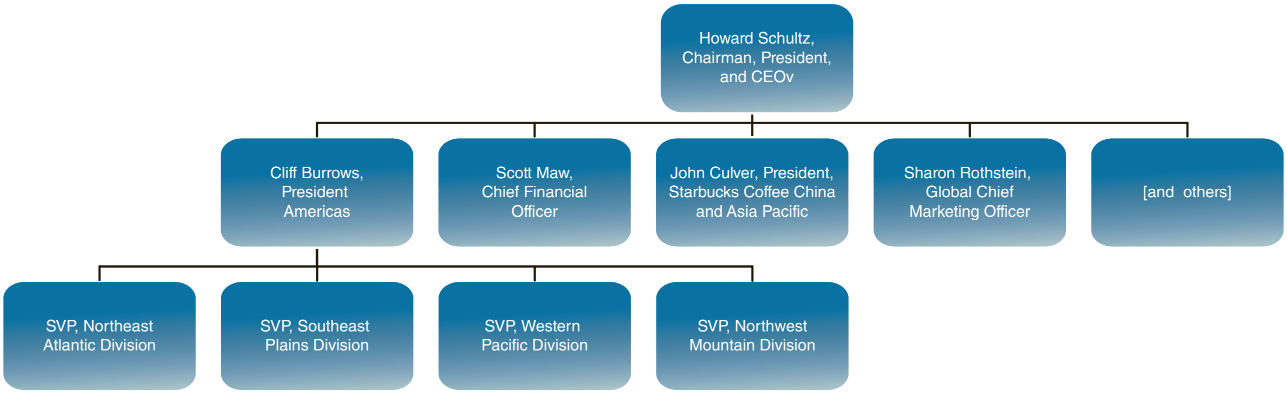
For an organization to be successful, communication must flow freely through formal and informal channels.

The Formal Communication Network

Three types of communication make up an organization's formal communication network: downward, upward, and lateral. Information may be transmitted in these directions, which we'll illustrate with Starbucks' organization chart, shown in Figure 4.[15]

Downward Communication. Downward communication is the flow of information from managers to their employees (people who report to them). From the Starbucks organization chart, we could assume that Howard Schultz, as CEO and president, communicates downward to his

Figure 4 Starbucks’ Organization Chart


Howard Schultz, Chairman, President, and CEOv
Cliff Burrows, President Americas
Scott Maw, Chief Financial Officer
John Culver, President, Starbucks Coffee China and Asia Pacific
Sharon Rothstein, Global Chief Marketing Officer
[and others]
SVP, Northeast Atlantic Division
SVP, Southeast Plains Division
SVP, Western Pacific Division
SVP, Northwest Mountain Division

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direct reports. When Starbucks decides to close stores, for example, he would likely communicate this message to Cliff Burrows (president, Americas), who would then communicate the bad news to his direct reports, the divisional senior vice presidents. This is called cascading communication, which directs information from one level in an organization down to another.

Employees have many justifiable complaints about their managers’ communication. A study of more than 60,000 employee satisfaction surveys led the authors to conclude, “. . . many firms rely on a ‘cascade’ mechanism. . . . Our results suggest that this faith in cascades may be misplaced. Employees need to hear from senior managers themselves—through straight talk, and ideally in reciprocal exchanges, so that workers feel their own views are heard.”[16]

Upward Communication. Upward communication is the flow of information from lower-level employees to upper-level employees or managers. Upward communication provides management with feedback about their communication, suggestions for improving the business, and information needed for decision making.

In the example of Starbucks closing stores, Scott Maw, as chief financial officer, probably gave oral and written financial reports to Howard Schultz to tell him which stores were underperforming. Lower-level employees may have expressed their frustration about the closings through formal upward communication channels, for example, during team meetings.

Lateral (or Horizontal) Communication. Lateral communication (also called horizontal communication) is the flow of information among peers within an organization. Through lateral communication, employees coordinate work, share plans, negotiate differences, and support each other. At Starbucks, managers responsible for closing a store probably communicate with each other to coordinate messages and timing—and perhaps to console each other during the process.

Lateral communication can be challenging in an organization because you’re trying to influence people but have no management authority over them. This is particularly difficult when the lateral communication is cross-functional—across different departments, divisions, or branches. In these situations, you’ll need to rely on your relationship-building and persuasive communication skills to rally support and accomplish your goals.

The Informal Communication Network

Employees share information through the informal communication network (or grapevine). Without good formal communication, the grapevine will take over. People need information, particularly when they fear change that may affect them: layoffs, benefit cuts, or organizational restructurings. Although the grapevine is surprisingly accurate,[17] managers who let the grapevine function as employees' main source of information miss out on the chance to convey their own messages.

Websites such as Glassdoor.com provide a public forum for current and former employees to voice their opinions about companies. As you can imagine, employees posted negative comments when Starbucks closed stores. This is potentially embarrassing for a company, but there's little management can do about the site—or any informal communication network.

Rather than trying to eliminate the grapevine (a futile effort), competent managers pay attention to it and act promptly to counteract false rumors. They use the formal communication network (meetings, email, the intranet, and newsletters) to ensure that all news—positive and negative—gets out to employees as quickly and as completely as possible. Savvy managers also identify key influencers in an organization to get accurate messages infused into the grapevine.

The free flow of information within the organization allows managers to stop rumors and communicate their own messages to employees. However, managers face additional challenges at work: verbal and nonverbal barriers to communication.

1-3 Communication Barriers

LO2 Identify the major verbal and nonverbal barriers to communication.

Considering the complexity of the communication process and the many communication channels, your messages may not always be received exactly as you intend. As mentioned earlier, verbal and nonverbal barriers can interfere with the communication process (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Verbal and Nonverbal Barriers to Communication

Verbal

- Inadequate Knowledge or Vocabulary
- Differences in Interpretation
- Language Differences
- Inappropriate Use of Expressions
- Overabstraction and Ambiguity
- Polarization

Nonverbal

- Inappropriate or Conflicting Signals
- Differences in Perception
- Inappropriate Emotions
- Distractions

1-3a Verbal Barriers

Verbal barriers are related to what you write or say. They include inadequate knowledge or vocabulary, differences in interpretation, language differences, inappropriate use of expressions, overabstraction and ambiguity, and polarization.

Emotional **INTELLIGENCE**

Which of the verbal and nonverbal barriers do you find most challenging? What can you do to overcome these barriers at work and in your personal life?

Inadequate Knowledge or Vocabulary

Assume that you're Sharon Rothstein, global chief marketing officer for Starbucks. In your role, you'll need to inform international employees that several U.S. stores will be closed. The decision may not affect stores in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa directly, but employees should be aware of the move and should hear the rationale from you—not public news organizations. You know all of the background information and are ready to announce the change to staff. Or are you?

Have you analyzed your audience? Do you know whether international employees already know about the closings, so you can decide how much background information to include? Do you know how much detail about the decision to provide? Employees should know why certain