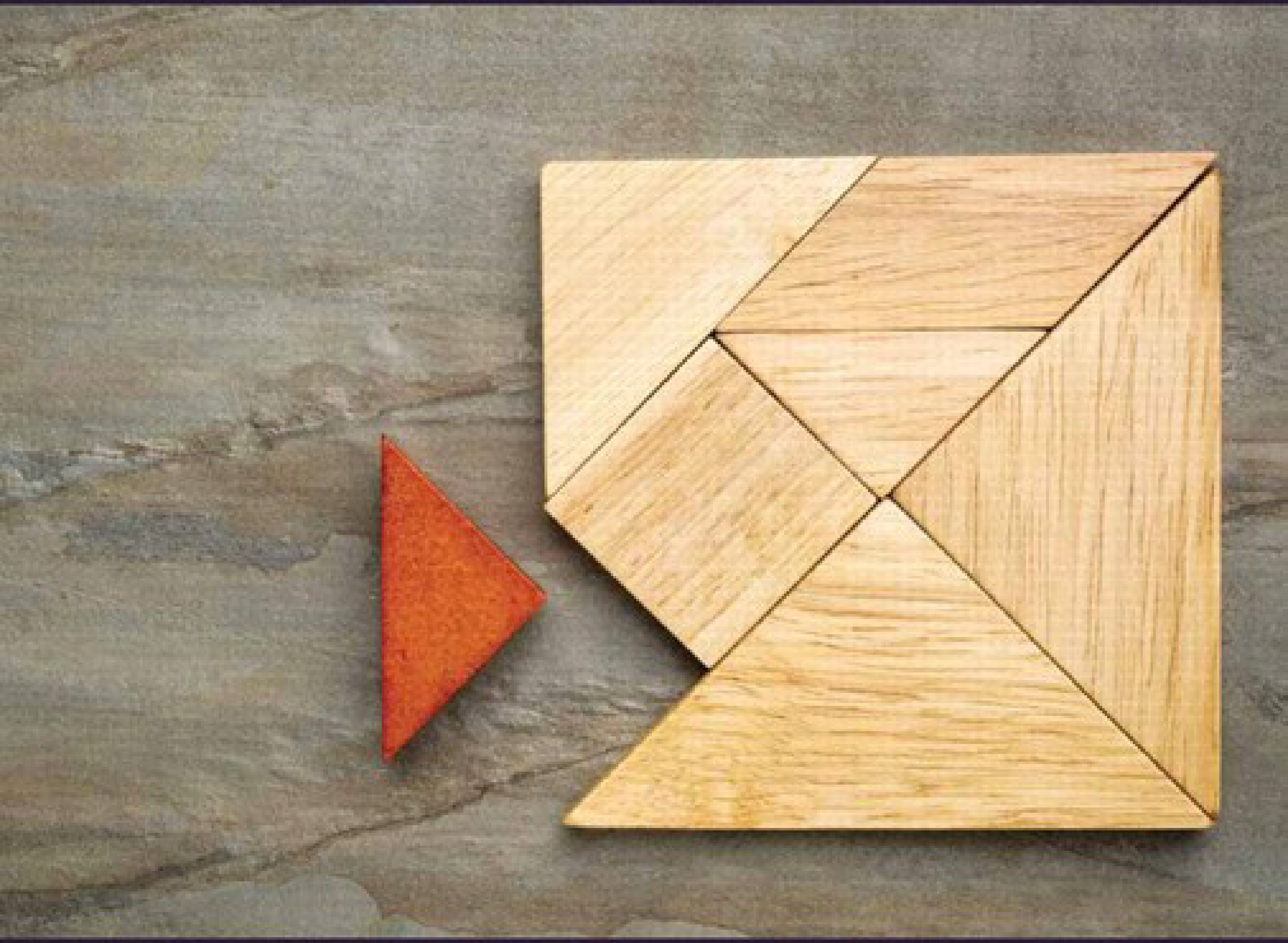
EIGHTH EDITION

STRATEGIC Communication

in Business and the Professions



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Strategic Communication in Business and the Professions

EIGHTH EDITION

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Preface

The eighth edition of *Strategic Communication in Business and the Professions* represents our combined effort to produce a text that enables students to address daily professional challenges through the lens of communication skills. We know well that business and professional worlds consistently evolve as they adapt to change. As a result, students must stay knowledgeable of new advances in order to excel in their careers. This Revel edition alerts students to recent changes and challenges. Included are vivid discussions and examples of situations where ideas and loyalties have shifted in the global marketplace, work habits have changed, employees' private and public lives are seen in new light, technologies are more sophisticated, and cultural diversity has more impact than ever.

In the workplace, a person's ability to express thoughts and ideas efficiently and articulately to others across all domains and barriers, from one-on-one interactions through conflict management to large-scale presentations, is the backbone of a successful business model. Consequently, competent communication is one of the most important foundations of career success. The goal of *Strategic Communication* is to develop fundamental communication tools for students as they prepare to enter the business and professional worlds.

Meeting the needs of college-level courses that focus on oral communication within an organizational context has been the primary goal of this text over all of its editions. While crafting a well-written proposal is an important business communication skill, many students discover that presentations, personal interviews, and group meetings represent their first—and sometimes their biggest—communication challenges. *Strategic Communication in Business and the Professions* emphasizes the most essential skills in business and professional communication:

- Adapting to changes in the business or professional environment
- Embracing cultural diversity
- Thinking critically
- Promoting ethical communication
- Listening
- Communicating in managerial and leadership roles
- Managing conflict
- Communicating in teams and groups
- Making public presentations.

Students and instructors alike will find that *Strategic Communication in Business and the Professions* thoroughly integrates communication theory and practice. Our goal is to help instructors teach students to recognize the basic similarities among all forms of communication. Throughout a typical business day, one form of communication leads to another, can impact another, or cannot exist without another. Understanding how communication is interconnected leads to a better understanding of business itself. A broad and in-depth knowledge of communication theory and practice provides students with the skills and tools they need to overcome any challenge.

The Model of Strategic Communication

Our Model of Strategic Communication, which has been integrated into all chapters of this textbook, provides students with an easy-to-use framework for mastering oral communication skills. Introduced in Chapter 2, the model emphasizes that effective communicators must master four basic skills. They are:

- Set goals
- Understand the communication situation and the audience
- Demonstrate competence
- Manage anxiety effectively.

As in previous editions, we integrate these four essential elements throughout the text within the strategic model. We have taken special care in this edition to introduce new examples and provide more opportunities for application. By practicing the skills of effective communicators, students can approach any communication situation with confidence. In continually exercising this skill set, students will have their own pool of experiences to reference when faced with a communicative challenge. Our strategic approach helps students *understand*, *remember*, and *use* essential communication skills in any business or professional setting.

New to This Edition

The eighth edition of *Strategic Communication in Business and the Professions* takes into consideration:

- Current environment and business practices
- New and updated research and examples from contemporary organizations

- Trends in communication technology
- Clear viewpoints on communication variables
- Increased emphasis on problem-solving
- An even more robust strategic communication framework.

REVEL™

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Learn more about REVEL

Features of the Edition

Our text is designed for introductory business and organizational communication classes. To help students master the basics, features in each chapter emphasize the following:

Relevant Real-World Examples

- *Practicing Business Communication* is a recurring feature that examines communication practices in a range of businesses, broadening student awareness of communication tools in use. To describe how business and professional communication works today, the companies profiled range from small businesses to global corporations.
- *Strategic Scenarios* open each chapter, setting the stage by presenting a hypothetical situation with a problem similar to one students could easily face as they make the transition from the classroom to the world of work. Students are asked to be alert for solutions as they read the chapter. Then, at the end of the chapter in the *Strategic Scenario Wrap Up*, students revisit the situation for a possible solution and a chance to further extend learning.

Critical Thinking

- *What Do You Think?* and *What Would You Do?* journal exercises give students the opportunity to think through and write about communication situations and problems that they may eventually encounter.
- *Think Critically* journal exercises, which conclude each *Practicing Business Communication* feature, encourage students to examine the connections between concepts in the text and communication in actual companies and organizations.

Focus on Ethical and Unbiased Communication

- *Ethical Issues* challenge students to think critically about the role ethics take in business communication.
- *Diversity coverage.* United States demographics continue to evolve, and this edition has particularly strong coverage on how to refine communication skills with diversity in mind.

Effective In-Chapter Learning Aids

- *Learning Objectives* allow students to know what they are expected to master in each chapter.
- *Chapter Summaries* are presented in a bullet-point format to help readers identify and focus on essentials within the chapter.
- *Key Terms* show instant definitions for easy reference.
- *Shared Writing* assessments promote debate and discussion and further test understanding of concepts.

Available Instructor Resources

The following resources are available for instructors. These can be downloaded at http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc. Login required.

- **PowerPoint**—provides a core template of the content covered throughout the text. Can easily be added to customize for your classroom.
- **Instructor's Manual**—includes a description, in-class discussion questions, and a research assignment for each chapter.
- **Test Bank**—includes additional questions beyond the REVEL in multiple choice and open-ended—short and essay response—formats.
- **MyTest**—an electronic format of the Test Bank to customize in-class tests or quizzes. Visit: http://www.pearsonhighered.com/mytest.

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D.O., G.W.F., L.D.D.

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Chapter 1

Communication in Organizations

Learning Objectives

1.1 Recognize the importance of competent communication skills in today's information age

1.2 Review the elements of an effective interactive communication process

1.3 Report some of the reasons why communication may fail

1.4 Examine the structure of an organization in relation to its communication techniques

Strategic Scenario: A Business Evolves

Kate Hullison and Jeremy Sandusky were relaxing after work one day during happy hour. Both worked for online businesses, Jeremy as a software designer and Kate as a mid-level manager. They liked the type of work they did, but both really wanted to work for themselves. All they needed was a sound business plan, some guts, and a venture capitalist who believed in their ideas. After honing the details of their business strategy, they found a venture capitalist in DaKysha Masaal, who wanted to invest in a start-up.

Their new business began as a consulting company for other Internet businesses and quickly grew to seven employees (DaKysha, Kate, Jeremy, and four others). They managed themselves without much hierarchy or bureaucracy in part because they were small but more so because that is the way they liked it—especially Jeremy.

Rapid growth caused the ranks of their employees to swell to fifty-five, forcing them to move out of their comfortable digs in a converted apartment complex into a high-rise office building. The way that DaKysha, Kate, and Jeremy organized and managed their work and employees changed quickly as well. More structure, hierarchy, meetings, plans, and, as Jeremy puts it, "administrivia" have become the norm. DaKysha and Kate seem to thrive on the excitement of success that the company is experiencing, but Jeremy feels differently. He now finds himself in the same type of organization he left for the start-up—except now he is one of the bosses. His communication with others has expanded 100-fold, and he doesn't feel prepared for the responsibility. It seems to him that his interactions with others are different, more formal—exactly why he left his old company in the first place.

As you read through the chapter, think about the issues involved with managing, organizing, and communicating in various types of organizations. At the end of the chapter, we will revisit this scenario and discuss some solutions.

1.1: Overview

Communication in Organizations

1.1 Recognize the importance of competent communication skills in today's information age

What does your Facebook wall say about your business savvy? Does your Twitter feed provide you with professional advice? Is your technology quotient (TQ) up to snuff? We ask these questions in a business and professional communication course because communication technology plays a role, front and center, in our professional lives. Advances in communication technology may have blurred any lines there once were between work and daily life, and yet strategic business communication has specific, measurable goals and qualities. Are you up to the task?

Surveys of businesses confirm what we have been hearing for years: employers are looking for people who possess competent communication skills.[1] Oral presentations and report briefings, interviews, small-group communication, listening, and leadership are just a few of the communication activities you will perform in the real world. Your career success depends on your ability to communicate effectively within an organization.

Over the years, studies of working professionals have uncovered the value, and continuing necessity, of effective communication to business success. Without exception, these executives have reported that communication, especially the practice of good oral skills, is a key component of success in the business world. Interestingly, these executives have indicated that college courses (rather than in-house training or input from outside consultants) provide the best oral communication training. Furthermore, executives who hire college graduates believe that the importance of oral communication skills for career success is going to increase. In distressed economic times, communication is all the more important.[2] Thus, our goal is to integrate you into a successful career by providing you with the information necessary to become an effective organizational communicator.

The increasing importance of communication skills grows out of one feature of the present time: the amount of information that must be transmitted, consumed, analyzed, returned, or discarded. The information age of the present is considerably different from the industrial age of years past. Played out on the global stage, today's information age supports an organizational style that emphasizes constant, interactive management of knowledge among organizations and individuals, without geographical boundaries. Given that the amount of human knowledge *doubles* every year, organizational styles must focus on how to empower employees with information.

The shift in the value and volume of knowledge in the marketplace means a shift in the criteria that determine business success. Successful companies today integrate new technologies without alienating employees, handle information so efficiently that they are not swamped by data, and actively seek to enhance their communication through technology. None of this can be accomplished unless employees—from the president to the shipping clerk—know how to communicate effectively.

Communication skills are central to promoting excellence now and in the coming years.[3]

Creative Insights

Creative insight is the ability to ask the right questions. Asking tough questions may not be the most pleasant task, but such inquiries are necessary if a business is to deal with a dynamic work force and economy.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity means a business practices the Golden Rule with its workers: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In communication, it means paying attention to the needs of others, listening empathetically, and monitoring others' reactions when you speak.

Vision

Vision means being able to imagine the future. Leaders of organizations must have a clear picture of where their organizations are going in turbulent times. In a more everyday sense, business speech should have a point—such as an idea, response, or vision to convey—that the speaker focuses on making in the talk or presentation.

Shared Meaning

Shared meaning concerns how you engage others. Can you connect to your listeners on their level and they on yours? Do you understand their perspective? Do you have common language?

Integrity

Integrity builds trust and confidence in relationships. If people trust you, they will believe what you say. If that trust has been damaged, and people don't believe what you say, it won't matter how well you communicate your point.

Globalization, the trend toward conducting business with and in foreign countries, is a fact of life. We live in an international marketplace, where the Internet places foreign businesses, services, and interactions with businesspeople at our fingertips. Globalization today means that every business, no matter how big or small, operates within a worldwide community. International trade, immigration, and the flow of information in real time have created a diverse work force, requiring communication skills that can bridge cultural gaps and reach far-flung locations. Businesses have to adapted to varied communication media: email, document transfer, Web communication, social networking, and more advanced forms. The global employee is skilled at using media, flexible and adaptive to rapidly changing communication technologies, and culturally aware. International organizations employ a dynamic communication rhetoric, focusing primarily on cultural adaptation and long-distance technological implementation. Each of the five communication skills implicitly include effective cultural communication. They also depend upon the interactive communication process.

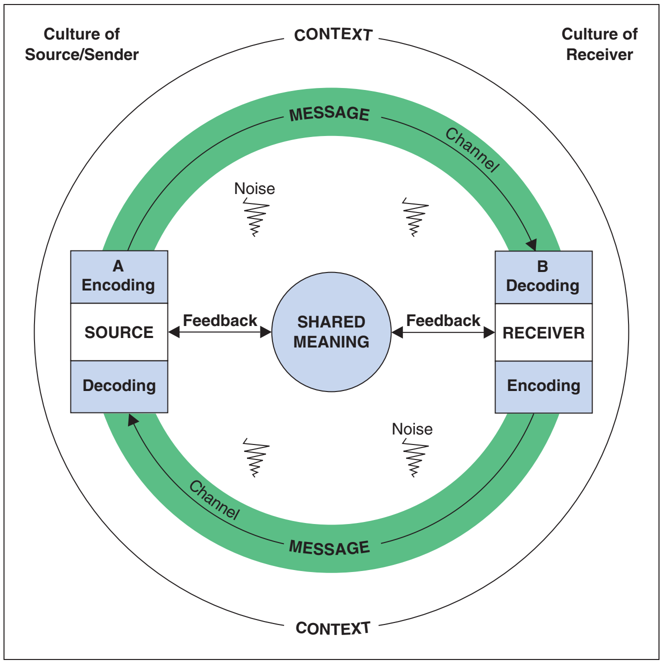
1.2: The Interactive Communication Process

1.2 Review the elements of an effective interactive communication process

The essence of communication in all contexts is that people exchange messages to accomplish goals and objectives. Because people bring different goals, backgrounds, styles, habits, and preferences to the process, truly effective communication is **interactive:** each person takes part in the communication, listens, and responds to the others. Each element of the communication process contributes to making communication interactive. The cultures of the sender and the receiver affect all areas of interactive communication. Figure 1.1 diagrams the interactive communication process, and a brief explanation follows.

Figure 1.1 Interactive Communication Process

Shared meaning is the mutual understanding that results when the sender and all intended receivers interpret the message in the same way.



Messages are the content of communication with others—the ideas people wish to share. Messages may be expressed verbally—in spoken (oral) or written form—or nonverbally through gestures, posture, facial expressions, and even clothing. The **source** creates the message. Sometimes referred to as the sender, the source determines what type of message is to be sent and the best way to send it. When deciding how and what to send, a sender practicing interactive communication takes into account the needs of those who will be receiving the message.

Encoding is the physical process of organizing elements of the message for transmission to the receivers. In oral communication, encoding is the act of choosing and vocalizing words or sounds. In nonverbal communication, encoding means gesturing, smiling or nodding, and so on. Effective interactive communicators continually monitor the verbal and nonverbal cues from their audience to improve the accuracy and meaning of the messages they intend to send. Adding visual aids to written messages and friendly gestures to spoken messages make them more understandable and accessible, as do graphics in a computer-generated message. Emojis allow you to "smile" at someone by simply typing **:-)** on your keyboard, for example.

The **channel** is the medium that carries a message once it is encoded by a source. Channels include live meetings, which range from personal one-on-one interactions and group meetings to online chat sessions, telephone calls, and videoconferencing. In other, non-live communication channels, such as letters, memos, emails, faxes, and some Web communication, the parties don't interact simultaneously. Texting can be seen as an interesting hybrid; with senders and receivers simultaneously active it functions like a phone call, but since texts are not reliably received and responded to in real-time, texting is therefore a non-live channel. There is no question that channels affect the communication process.

The destination of the message is the **receiver**. The receipt of the message is the primary determinant of whether communication ever takes place. In other words, messages become communication only when a receiver picks up the message. Receivers include *all* persons who pick up the message, regardless of whether they were the sender's intended targets. "Sidestream listening"—where some receivers get messages inadvertently—can create problems, particularly in terms of breached confidentiality.

Fast-moving communication technology increases the chance that unintended receivers will pick up messages, but the risk has always been there. Examples range from old school indiscretions, such as overheard conversations in the break room or a forgotten paper memo at the copy machine or printer, to the classic misdirected email, to the modern malady of having data-heavy computer files broken into by hackers. And we know that one must be especially careful with messages posted on the Web since these messages are public and can be traced back to the sender.

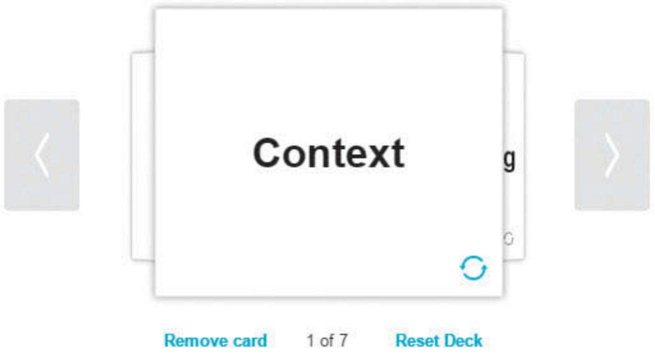
The counterpart of encoding, **decoding** is the process that receivers go through to make sense of the message. Decoding is influenced by many factors, including cultural background, listening abilities, and attitudes toward the source or channel.

Feedback is any response, verbal or nonverbal, that a receiver makes to a message. Most senders seek feedback during the communication process because it lets them know whether the message has been understood correctly. Feedback can take the form of a verbal or nonverbal responses. Verbal responses include a listener's spoken questions or replies through email, phone calls or texts, or an organized forum such as a status meeting or quality circle; nonverbal responses can include a listener nodding in agreement on one hand or a puzzled facial expression on the other.

Noise is anything that interferes with communication. The common definition of *noise* is distracting sounds that prevent people from hearing or making themselves heard, but noise may take several forms. Noise is a more encompassing phenomenon than this description suggests. It includes psychological distractions such as nervousness or tension, emotional distractions such as extreme happiness or sadness, and physiological distractions such as fatigue or illness. Bias and prejudice are forms of psychological noise because bias against a speaker can interfere with a listener's reception of a message. All of these affect the quality of the message sent and received. Noise can occur at any point in the communication process.

Context is the situation or setting in which communication occurs. Whenever communication takes place, it does so within a context. Context can influence the content, the quality, and the effectiveness of a communication event. This may include the *physical context*, or the actual physical place (office, conference room, cafeteria) in which communication occurs; the *chronological context*, or the time/date at which an interaction takes place (after work hours, during a peak business cycle, first thing in the morning); the *cultural context*, or the ethnic/national and/or organizational backgrounds of the people communicating (New Englanders and Southwesterners, managers and staff, Native Americans and Asians); and the *social context*, or the social histories and relationships among communicators (age differences or similarities, out-of-the-office friendships, personality harmonies or conflicts). No matter what form it takes, context is an important and ever-present component of the communication process.

Interactive Communication Components



Notice the term **shared meaning** in the center of Figure 1.1. Shared meaning is the mutual understanding that results when the sender and all intended receivers interpret the message in the same way. It is the primary desired outcome of any communication. Even though sources and receivers nearly always try to share meaning with one another, they do not necessarily succeed in doing so. There are degrees, or stages, of shared meaning attained through this process.

> Imagine that you and your supervisor are in a crowded and noisy elevator. Your supervisor tells you the location, time, and agenda for an upcoming meeting, but because you can barely hear, you exit the elevator certain only of the location and time. You know enough to be able to get to the meeting, but your supervisor intended for you to know what was going to be discussed so that you could prepare some notes.

Shared meaning was not fully achieved in this example even though the meeting was held, it did not accomplish all that the supervisor expected. Communication is not an either/or concept; rather, varying degrees of communication are possible, depending on how the message is treated at each point. A great deal of communication can occur without the benefit of fully shared meaning, but enough information must be exchanged between sources and receivers so they can function together in a minimal fashion. Although business and professional communicators strive for shared meaning, there are many obstacles to achieving it.

1.3: Reasons for Communication Failure

1.3 Report some of the reasons why communication may fail

In your everyday communication with others, you have probably noticed that some messages, despite the best intentions of the sender, are not decoded by the receiver as expected. Errors are so common that one expert has likened communication to Murphy's Law—"If communication can fail, it will." "If you are sure that communication cannot fail, it necessarily will fail." "There is always someone who knows better than you what you meant by your message."[4] Errors can occur at any step in the communication process.

Inadequate, poorly timed, or too much information can have an impact on decoding; the feedback loop may fail; a channel may be inappropriate; cultural or psychological factors may create too much noise; or a sender may simply be ineffectual.

1.3.1: Inadequate Information

One manager, Sarah, intentionally withholds information from her subordinates because she feels that they will be confused by "too much information." In fact, managers and employees frequently complain that they do not receive enough information to do their jobs effectively. In some cases, upper management provides too little information when issuing orders. In other cases, information is provided, but it is not the right type. In our example, Sarah is actually working at cross-purposes with her employees because they usually have to get needed information from other sources.

1.3.2: Information Overload

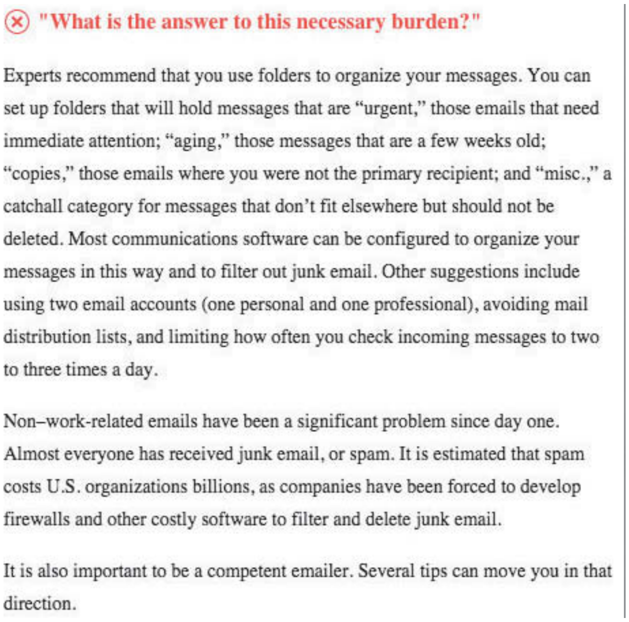
Khan owns and runs a successful used-car business. He believes it is good business to tell and text all his sales associates when new shipments of used cars arrive from various destinations. Khan, however, goes into great detail, even providing vital statistics about vehicles that are not yet on the lot.

Employees at all levels of an organization can be overwhelmed by information. To ensure that people get enough information, managers often overcompensate and provide employees with more information than necessary (especially in situations where they are not sure what is useful). To be safe, they, like Khan, send so much information that much of it winds up being ignored.

TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

How Much Email Do You Get at Work?

If you work full-time or even part-time, you already understand how taxing voluminous emails can be, especially when you're busy. Roughly 91 percent of all people who use the Internet are emailers. In the next couple of years, you will likely spend more than four hours per day dealing with fifty or more work-related email messages and by 2017 it is estimated that businesses will send over 127 billion emails a day. However, of the 57 million American workers who use email, most agree that the service is essential to their work and improves teamwork. Email has become an indispensable part of organizational communication.

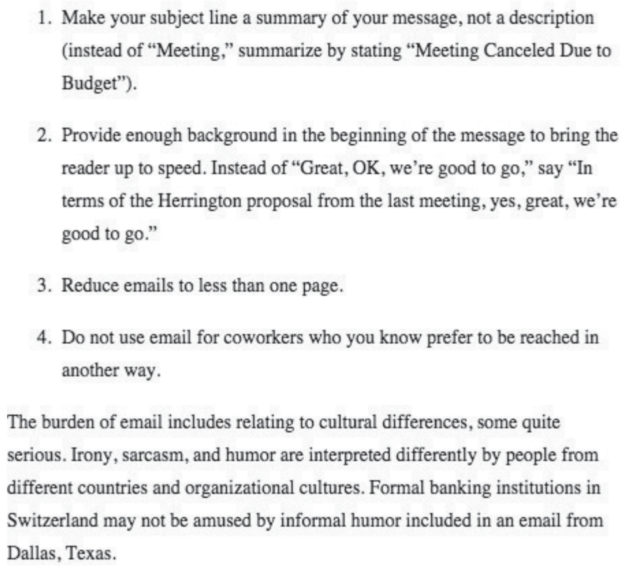


⊗ "What is the answer to this necessary burden?"

Experts recommend that you use folders to organize your messages. You can set up folders that will hold messages that are "urgent," those emails that need immediate attention; "aging," those messages that are a few weeks old; "copies," those emails where you were not the primary recipient; and "misc.," a catchall category for messages that don't fit elsewhere but should not be deleted. Most communications software can be configured to organize your messages in this way and to filter out junk email. Other suggestions include using two email accounts (one personal and one professional), avoiding mail distribution lists, and limiting how often you check incoming messages to two to three times a day.

Non–work-related emails have been a significant problem since day one. Almost everyone has received junk email, or spam. It is estimated that spam costs U.S. organizations billions, as companies have been forced to develop firewalls and other costly software to filter and delete junk email.

It is also important to be a competent emailer. Several tips can move you in that direction.



1. Make your subject line a summary of your message, not a description (instead of "Meeting," summarize by stating "Meeting Canceled Due to Budget").
2. Provide enough background in the beginning of the message to bring the reader up to speed. Instead of "Great, OK, we're good to go," say "In terms of the Herrington proposal from the last meeting, yes, great, we're good to go."
3. Reduce emails to less than one page.
4. Do not use email for coworkers who you know prefer to be reached in another way.

The burden of email includes relating to cultural differences, some quite serious. Irony, sarcasm, and humor are interpreted differently by people from different countries and organizational cultures. Formal banking institutions in Switzerland may not be amused by informal humor included in an email from Dallas, Texas.

SOURCES: D. Fallows (2007), "Spam 2007" Pew Internet: http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/2007/spam=2007.aspx (accessed May 20, 2009).

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Adam Sobieski, "An Anti-Spam Hueristic": http://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.26.3.87

1.3.3: Poor-Quality Information

Information that is readily available to employees may be of little use because of its poor quality. When Ryan asks Margaret, the in-house computer expert, for assistance and he gets a long, jargon-filled, disorganized response, both Ryan and Margaret have wasted time and are frustrated.

Other examples of poor-quality information include outdated, erroneous, misleading, overemphasized, and disorganized information. Many business blogs have become ineffective because they do not provide quality information.

1.3.4: Poor Timing

Having the right amount of information at the wrong time does little good. Sales reports, marketing figures, or consumer trends are of little value to decision makers if the information arrives too late to be used. Information timing is just as important as information quantity or quality.

For example, if you purchase a sound system on Saturday from one store and find out on Monday that the same system is on sale at another store, you have received information too late. Similarly, if information arrives too early, the receivers may set it aside for later use but then forget that they have it.

1.3.5: Lack of Feedback or Follow-up

Frequently a sender forwards a message with the expectation that the receiver will respond with feedback or a follow-up message. If the receiver does not recognize that a response is requested or does not bother to reply to the message, the sender is forced to waste time waiting for a follow-up or sending a second message asking for feedback. In either case, time and effort are wasted. Even with email, it is a good idea to reply to a sent message. This way the sender is assured that the message has been received. In one instance, Anniwake called Charlie to inform him about the next budget meeting. Charlie was not in, so his secretary took the message about the meeting. “Tell him to let me know” was the last thing Anniwake said to the secretary. Charlie did not respond, so Anniwake did not schedule Charlie’s report for the meeting. When Charlie showed up expecting to make his report, both he and Anniwake were angry, blaming each other for the feedback error.

1.3.6: Problems with Channels

The communication channels that carry organizational messages include face-to-face conversation, telephone, email, letters, public speeches, memos, real-time videoconferencing, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, and company intranets. Problems can occur when senders use the wrong channels to convey information—for example, using the phone to notify an employee that he is not going to get a promotion or has been fired. Issues that are very personal and sensitive require face-to-face contact; any other channel would be inappropriate. Likewise, contacting ten people separately about a new dress code is an inefficient use of time and resources because they can be informed collectively by email or during a meeting.

1.3.7: Incompetent Communication

Some organizational members do not possess the communication skills necessary to be effective in today’s professional world. For instance, a multimedia presentation will be ineffective if the presenter does not know how to use the equipment, experiences technical difficulties, or tries to liven up a dull topic merely by adding flashy graphics rather than by improving the content of the presentation. People who attend meetings unprepared waste others’ time. People with poor listening skills frustrate those who have to repeat information for them. Those who make inappropriate grammatical or vocabulary choices embarrass themselves and those around them. Incompetent communicators hurt the organization they represent. This has especially been the case with hastily sent messages composed in a moment of anger.

1.3.8: Ineffective Goal Setting

One of the most important skills in effective communication is setting appropriate goals. When goals are too low, the communicator wastes the opportunity to influence, motivate, or inform the audience effectively. When goals are too high, the communicator becomes disappointed or disillusioned because the audience fails to grasp the message or simply dismisses what was said.

For example, after you make a *C* on the first two tests, a final grade of *A* for the course might be an unrealistic goal. More realistic goals would be to turn in all remaining assignments on time and to begin studying for the remaining tests at least one week before they are scheduled. What other examples of ineffective goal setting have you encountered?

1.3.9: Communication Anxiety

When communication situations cause you to feel nervous, stressed, or apprehensive, the effectiveness of your efforts is at risk. Anxiety can hamper the ability to think, talk, gesture, or even listen. Not all communication situations cause anxiety however; each person reacts differently. To minimize your own communication anxiety, recognize the situations in which you experience it and use the techniques described here to control your nervousness.

Some people may suffer communication anxiety surrounding certain technologies. For example, most people who have been exposed to email embrace it as efficient and helpful. However, a small percentage of people face anxiety when using newer technology, such as texting or webinars. The technology gap can be a serious problem for employees who have not adapted to all possible communication advances, but it cuts both ways. For example, what happens when an older worker chooses to default to more "traditional" methods of communicating, such as picking up the phone? A voice message may be left for a receiver who prefers texting and rarely checks voicemail. And does the younger, more tech-savvy worker perhaps have any issues about answering calls in real time, about being "on the spot"? On still another note, too much information can create communication anxiety for workers of any age. How do they pick out the important messages?

When communication failures occur in social situations, at worst the communicators wind up confused, embarrassed, or annoyed. But when communication fails within a business organization, the results can be much worse—inefficiency, loss of morale, decreased productivity, or job termination. The specter of such negative results highlights the importance of studying organizational communication, particularly when it is possible to do so before you join an organization.

The need for communication may arise anywhere, and technology should help you to facilitate communication, not create communication anxiety.

SOURCE: Danielescalise/Fotolia

1.3.10: Cultural Barriers

Cultural barriers may also contribute to communication failure. Biases and prejudices against cultures other than your own can interfere with listening to and understanding a message. An accent may influence your perception of a coworker or manager. Sometimes individuals are afraid to ask a sender who is from a different culture to repeat a message that is not understood. Sensitivity to diverse cultures and culturally different ways of communicating is essential for effective business communication.

1.4: Understanding Organizational Communication

1.4 **Examine the structure of an organization in relation to its communication techniques**

Organizational communication is the exchange of oral, written, and nonverbal messages among people working to accomplish common tasks and goals. This definition encompasses much of the activity that occurs at work. It includes such tasks as alerting workers to production goals, scheduling meetings within and between departments, planning how the company will communicate with its customers and respond to their messages, and producing in-house informational material about policies and goals. A good understanding of organizational communication provides you with options when you face tasks that need to be accomplished efficiently and effectively. When you understand how an organizational context affects communication, you will be in a much better position to achieve the goals you have set for yourself.

Communicating in organizations is not an easy task. Obstacles to effective communication are always present. Assumptions about what others are doing can be wrong ("I thought you were going to cover the *southeastern* sales territory this month!"), and closed communication channels can inhibit the exchange of messages ("I only want to hear good news about sales figures!"). Reluctance to receive new ideas and information—especially when they differ from your own ideas—can be detrimental to organizational goals ("I own this business, and I think I know best what it needs").

Many theories have been advanced to explain how organizations work, what relationship exists between management and labor, and what function, if any, communication performs in the working of an organization. Theories also explore how the structure of an organization relates to its communication techniques. These concepts, which sometimes overlap, have had significant, and in some cases continuing, influences on organizational practices.

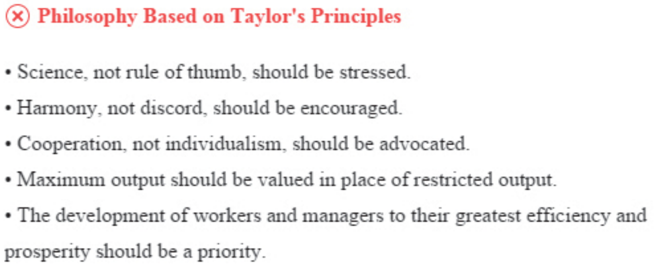
1.4.1: Classical Theory

The classical school of thought includes theories that emphasize structure, rules, and control. Included in this category are scientific management theory and bureaucracy theory. Although developed near the turn of the twentieth century, many of the principles of classical theory are still in use.

SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT Frederick Taylor published *The Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911 and revolutionized the way managers thought about work in general and employees in particular.[5] Taylor had a great deal of respect for workers and was one of the first advocates of systematic training and development to improve workers' proficiency in their duties. He also encouraged organizations to match workers' abilities with the duties and responsibilities of their jobs. According to Taylor, four principles promote good management:

1. Development of a true science of work
2. Scientific selection of the worker
3. Scientific education and development of the worker
4. Friendly cooperation between management and labor.

From these principles grew a philosophy that advocates the goals of support for science, harmony, cooperation, maximum output, and employee development.

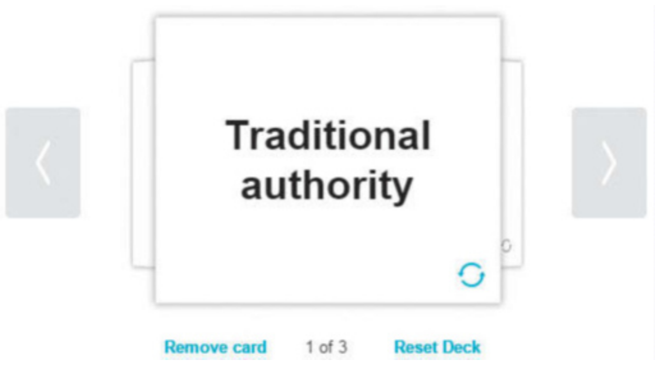


⊗ **Philosophy Based on Taylor's Principles**

- Science, not rule of thumb, should be stressed.
- Harmony, not discord, should be encouraged.
- Cooperation, not individualism, should be advocated.
- Maximum output should be valued in place of restricted output.
- The development of workers and managers to their greatest efficiency and prosperity should be a priority.

BUREAUCRACY Max Weber, generally considered the father of the study of bureaucracy, worked to understand how authority and control were used in groups and organizations. His major contribution was a description of authority structures. He proposed three types: charismatic, traditional, and rational-legal.[6]

Weber's Authority Structures



Traditional authority

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1 of 3
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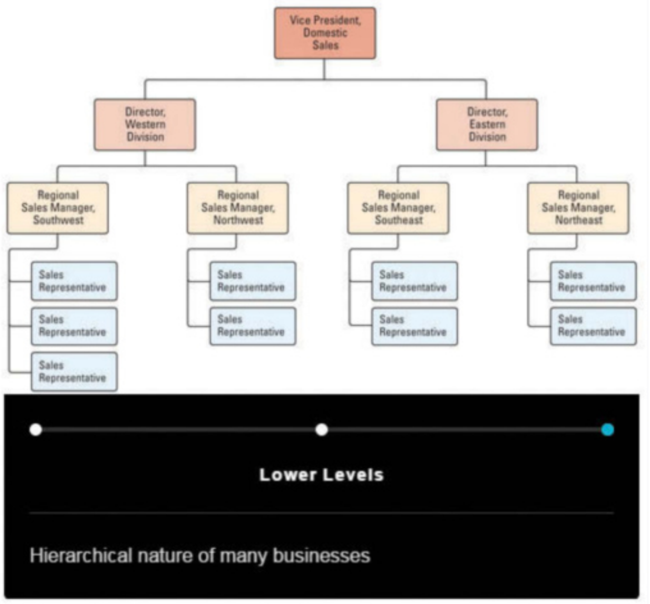
Rational-legal authority is the basis for bureaucracy (Weber is best known for this aspect of his theory). Government agencies, large corporations, and even the college or university you are now attending are good examples of bureaucracies. A bureaucratic structure enables organizations to define very clearly what behavior in employees is acceptable and expected. Bureaucratic authority structures concentrate a great deal of power at the top of a hierarchy. Successive, or lower, levels get their power from upper layers. Look at the typical hierarchical shown in Figure 1.2. Notice how each succeeding layer is dependent on and subservient to the previous level of authority.

Figure 1.2 Typical Organizational Chart

This "org chart" shows the hierarchical nature of many businesses, in which each layer of workers is dependent on and subservient to a higher level.



Vice President, Domestic Sales
Director, Western Division
Director, Eastern Division
Regional Sales Manager, Southwest
Regional Sales Manager, Northwest
Regional Sales Manager, Southeast
Regional Sales Manager, Northeast
Sales Representative
Sales Representative
Sales Representative
Sales Representative
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Sales Representative
Lower Levels
Hierarchical nature of many businesses

Bureaucracies adhere to formalized rules and policies that they put in place for themselves, and communication within a bureaucracy goes by the book. Workers cannot skip levels of authority when sending messages to superiors or inferiors—the message must pass through each layer on its journey to the receiver. Communication in a bureaucracy is highly routine. Procedures, probably written ones, regulate oral and written communication.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CLASSICAL THEORY **Classical theory** describes an organization that functions like a machine.[7] Machines perform repetitious tasks in specific and unchanging ways that are determined by their structures. The classical theory of management is appropriate in an organization when the same product is produced time and again, precision is at a premium, and the human "machine" parts are compliant and behave as they have been designed to do.

Think of organizations with which you are familiar. Do any of them have these characteristics? It would not be surprising if your response is "no." Changes in the American work force—larger numbers of college graduates and white-collar workers and larger business organizations—have lessened the popularity of classical theory and few contemporary organizations rely strictly on its principles. The theory's views now seem overly mechanistic and impersonal, unsuited to the developing view of workers as human beings with needs rather than as faceless, impersonal parts of a business machine.

1.4.2: Humanistic Theory

A school of thought known as **humanistic theory** gained popularity in response to classical theory's mechanistic approach. It focused on the needs of labor rather than on the structure of management.

HUMAN RELATIONS THEORY In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a number of studies on productivity were conducted at the Western Electric Hawthorne plant in Cicero, Illinois, under the leadership of Elton Mayo, a Harvard professor.[8] One of the first studies examined the effect of lighting in the workplace on workers' productivity.

As researchers increased the lighting of the experimental group in the Hawthorne plant, productivity increased, not just in the experimental group but also in the control group (which did not get increased lighting). Furthermore, when the experimenters *reduced* the illumination for the experimental group, productivity *continued* to increase. The engineers at the plant were delighted but puzzled.

The researchers concluded that increases in productivity were the result not of the changes in lighting but rather of the special attention being paid to the workers. Thus, the researchers proved that technical factors are not the only influences on work efficiency. Human factors, they discovered, also affect the work of employees.

According to Mayo, "Social study should begin with careful observation of what may be described as communication: that is, the capacity of an individual to communicate his feelings and ideas to another, the capacity of groups to communicate effectively and intimately with each other."[9] Mayo's most important finding, which stood in stark contrast to classical theory, was that informal groups and camaraderie among workers; supervisors' demonstrated interest, encouragement, praise, and recognition; and the ability to form relationships on the job were more effective than economic incentives in increasing workers' productivity and morale.

HUMAN RESOURCES APPROACH Human relations theory came under criticism for focusing too narrowly on workers' happiness and for not taking into account that happy workers might be unproductive. A reevaluation of human relations began, based on one of the most influential motivational theory books ever written: *The Human Side of Enterprise* by Douglas McGregor.[10] This book struck a compromise between classical theory and human relations theory: McGregor suggested that productivity will increase if workers not only are happy but also are given the proper working conditions.

McGregor proposed two theories of motivation that have become part of everyday language in business, government, and even academia: theory X and theory Y. According to theory X, workers are unproductive and unmotivated and must be coerced through constant supervision to perform their tasks. According to theory Y, workers are creative and motivated persons who do not require coercion (except in rare circumstances) and, when given the chance, can perform exceedingly well. These theories have generated a great deal of debate between supporters of their competing viewpoints (see Table 1.1).

Are You Being Watched?

Ethical Issues

Surfing the Web and sending emails are pretty routine activities in the workplace. Many jobs require these kinds of communication tasks as part of an employee's duties. But what about personal emails and browsing the Internet for personal reasons, such as buying concert tickets or checking to see if you are still the high bidder on an auction? One estimate suggests that non–business-related Web surfing by employees costs U.S. firms $63 billion every year (that's $2,000 a second!). Many organizations have become so concerned about productivity losses from personal electronic communication at work that they have implemented surveillance processes to determine what employees are doing when they are on their computers. According to the American Management Association, three-fourths of employers use systems to monitor employees' Web site visits. About a third of these organizations monitor keystrokes as well. While most organizations have published policies on employee monitoring, 20 percent do not let employees know that monitoring is being conducted. Employee Internet management (EIM) is a growing software industry. This software can monitor email messages, Web surfing, software usage, computer idle-time, and even individual keystrokes. Currently, employees have very few privacy rights at the workplace. The courts tend to support the employers' sovereignty over company-owned computers and networks. An employer can legally monitor nearly everything involving workers' computers, and they can do it with no notification to employees whatsoever.

SOURCES: "Employee Monitoring: Is There Privacy in the Workplace?": http://www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs7-work.htm (accessed March 13, 2006).

"Trying to Measure Your Surfing at Work": http://www.cnn.com/2001/CAREER/trends/08/14/employee.net.use.idg/ (accessed July 31, 2003).

B. Petersen (May 26, 2008), "Employee Monitoring: It's Not Paranoia—You Really Are Being Watched!": http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2308369,00.asp.