



Getting the Message Across

Chapter Overview

Communicating effectively is important in business and the need to be good at it has increased as the business world has become more **diverse, global, and technology-based**. The growth and development of social networking sites, Web 3.0, and mobile apps for business significantly affects communication. The way you communicate using new and traditional methods reflects on you and on your organization and it impacts your success in the professional world.

It is important to learn how to communicate for a changing workplace. The Canadian workplace is affected by factors such as the knowledge economy, the concept of the risk society, flatter organizations, sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR), business on a global scale, diverse employee base, team work environments, advancing communication technologies, and connectivity through the World Wide Web.

We know that good communication is important, but what does that mean? Communication refers to “a transactional and relational process involving the meaningful exchange of information.” This process can easily break down, and when it does, communication theory can help explain what happens when we communicate and why certain symbols interpreted in different ways.

Different theoretical frameworks are used to discover what we can do to communicate more effectively. These frameworks include the study of rhetoric, the use of language to persuade an audience; semantics, the study of the words and symbols we choose; semiotics, the study of how meaning is assigned and understood; and cybernetics, the study of how information is processed and how communication systems function.

For a communicator, it is vital to understand the communication process. The sender is the person with the idea to communicate to the receiver. The sender decides how to word the message and

then how to send it. You can use e-mail, letters or memos, social media, telephone calls, or face-to-face or virtual meetings. If the receiver understands the message the way the sender intended it, then the communication is successful. However, there are many reasons for this not to occur; for instance, the receiver might not understand the wording. There are many reasons why the message might not get through; you will find explanations of several barriers to communication on pages 14–15 of the text.

Communication occurs not only through words, but also through the use of verbal clues (paralanguage), body language (kinesics), space (proxemics), and image.

Does your use of volume indicate that you are angry when you speak? Do you use a lot of “umms?” Do you end your sentences with uptalk (making statements sound like questions) or use the word “like” a lot? If you do, paralanguage is affecting your message.

Eye contact and posture can also send a conflicting message to your listener. If you look away from your listener when you talk, he or she might assume you are not interested in what you are saying.

Proxemics can also affect your message. When people stand too close or too far away from each other when conversing, it affects how comfortable people are with one another.

Finally, the way we dress, the gadgets we use, and our personal grooming can affect how people perceive us and our message.

You also need to consider whether you are communicating internally (e.g., to employees, your peers, or your boss) or externally (e.g., to customers or the public). With the exception of memos, which are used only for internal communication, communication channels for internal and external communication are the same, but the words and tone you use may differ depending on your reader and goals. Are you trying to attract new customers? Are you responding to the government? Are you writing to co-workers?

Business and professional communication, regardless of whether it is internal or external, must follow company standards and ethics. What you say reflects on the company and affects those around you. It is important to remember that written documents can also be used in court and are considered legal contracts. Pages 24 and 25 of the text discuss lapses in ethical behaviour and should be studied carefully. You should also pay close attention to the Ethical Writing Checklist on page 26.

As many companies are now dealing with suppliers, clients, and competition from around the world, it is important to remember that not everyone shares our views of what is culturally appropriate. North Americans may value individuality and directness in speech, but other cultures value the group, or the elders in an organization, and find directness offensive. The key rules for international communication involve respect for others, awareness of what the other cultures value, and the patience for possible misunderstandings. When communicating for international audiences, also remember to avoid slang or clichés that may not make sense to others.

Finally, it is important to be aware of privacy issues in the workplace, as doing business often involves the collection and retention of the personal information of customers, clients, patients, and employees. In Canada, the major piece of legislation covering privacy issues is called PIPEDA, or the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act of Canada.

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn to

1. identify the link between effective business communication and personal career success;
2. recognize key changes and trends in the workplace, especially those influenced by technology;
3. describe the communication process;
4. identify communication barriers and apply strategies for overcoming them;
5. explain the importance of non-verbal communication;
6. analyze the systems and mechanisms for communicating inside and outside organizations;
7. examine the flow of communication within organizations;
8. identify the goals of ethical business communication and apply standards to avoid ethical lapses;
9. contrast the communication differences between high-context and low-context cultures;
10. ease the flow of communication between and across cultures;
11. identify workplace privacy issues and apply strategies to safeguard personal information.

Key Concepts

active listening listening that demands close attention to a message's literal and emotional meaning and a level of responsiveness that shows the speaker the message was both heard and understood. (p. 22).

body language (kinesics) non-verbal communication conveyed by gestures, eye contact, posture, and facial expressions. (p. 19)

business ethics the socially accepted moral principles and rules of business conduct. (pp. 23–24)

bypassing misunderstanding that results from the receiver inferring a different meaning from a message based on the different meanings of the words that are used (p. 15)

channel a communication pathway or medium over which a message travels. (p. 13)

channel barriers inappropriate choices of channel that impede communication (p. 15)

channel overload the inability of a channel to carry all transmitted messages. (p. 14)

chronemics the study of time in non-verbal communication. (p. 19)

cognitive dissonance the tendency to reject messages based on personal value systems. (p. 22)

communication a transactional and relational process involving the meaningful exchange of information. (p. 8)

communication barriers problems that can affect the communication transaction, leading to confusion or misunderstanding. (p. 14)

communication theory a system of ideas for explaining communication. (p. 11)

corporate social responsibility (CSR) a company's voluntary contributions to sustainable development through the support of non-profit organizations and/or the creation of socially conscious corporate policies. (p. 6)

culture the shared customs and patterns of behaviour of a particular group or society, including its language, rules, beliefs, and structures. (p. 28)

cybernetics the study of how information is processed and how communication systems function. (p. 12)

cyberwarfare a form of information warfare, usually the conducting of politically motivated sabotage through hacking. (p. 5)

decoding the act of extracting meaning from spoken, written, and non-verbal communication. (p. 14)

diversity the understanding, acknowledging, valuing, and celebrating of differences among people with respect to gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religious belief, and physical ability. (p. 8)

downward communication flow the movement of information from superiors to subordinates. (p. 23)

dyadic the form of communication that involves a group of two (pp. 15–16)

emotional interference a psychological factor that creates problems with the communication transaction. (p. 14)

encoding the act of converting ideas into code in order to convey a written, oral, or non-verbal message. (p. 13)

environmental interference interference that results from preconceptions and differing frames of reference. (p. 15)

ethnocentrism the tendency to make false assumptions, based on limited experience, that one's own cultural or ethnic group is superior to other cultural or ethnic groups. (p. 28)

external communication communication with audiences who are part of an external environment. (p. 21)

feedback the receiver's response to a message that confirms whether the original message was received and understood. (p. 14)

formal communication channels official internal communication pathway that facilitates the flow of information through an organization's hierarchy. (p. 22)

formal communications network a system of communication sanctioned by organizational management. (p. 22)

hard skill a technical skill a person requires for a specific job. (p. 3)

high-context cultures cultures in which communication depends not only on the explicit wording of a message but on its surrounding context. (p. 30)

horizontal communication flow the movement of information that enables individuals at the same organizational level to share ideas and exchange information. (p. 23)

identity theft the act of acquiring and collecting an individual's personal information for criminal purposes. (p. 5)

informal oral network unofficial internal communication pathways that carry gossip and rumours—

sometimes accurate, sometimes not (also known as a *grapevine*) (p. 22)

information and communication technologies (ICTs) technologies, such as mobile phone systems and the Internet, used for transmitting, manipulating and storing data by electronic means. (p. 5)

information overload a condition whereby a receiver cannot process all messages due to their increasing number. (p. 14)

internal communication communication through the channels of an organization. (p. 21)

libel a false published statement that is damaging to a person's reputation. (p. 25)

low-context cultures cultures that favour direct communication and depend on explicit verbal and written messages exclusive of context. (p. 30)

message any type of oral, written, or non-verbal communication that is transmitted by a sender to an audience. (p. 12)

mixed messages conflicting perceptions of a signal or message that may result in miscommunication. (p. 15)

noise any form of physical or psychological interference that distorts the meaning of a message. (p. 14)

non-verbal behaviours communication that takes place through gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and posture. (p. 17)

non-verbal communication communication that does not use words but takes place through gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. (p. 17)

paralanguage (vocalics) non-verbal vocal qualities of communication. (p. 19)

physical and technical interference interference external to the sender and receiver. (p. 15)

piracy the unauthorized reproduction and distribution of copyrighted material, including video games, software, music, and films. (p. 5)

proxemics the study of the use and perception of space. (p. 18)

receiver the person for whom a message is intended, who decodes the message by extracting meaning from it. (p. 14)

risk communication an interactive exchange of information and opinion on risk among risk assessors, risk managers, and other interested parties. (p. 5)

rhetoric the use of language to persuade an audience. (p. 12)

semantics the study of the words and symbols we choose. (p. 12)

semantic interference interference caused by ambiguity, jargon, language, or dialect differences, and different ways of assigning meaning. (p. 14)

semiotics the study of how meaning is assigned and understood (p. 12)

sender the participant in the transaction who has an idea and communicates it by encoding it in a message. (p. 13)

soft skill a social, interpersonal, or language skill that complements a person's technical skills. (p. 3)

sustainable development economic development that maintains natural resources for future generations and recognizes the relationship between economic, social, and environmental issues. (p. 6)

upward communication flow the movement of information from subordinates to superiors. (p. 23)

Review Questions

For sample answers, see below.

1. What are three elements of the changing workplace?
2. What are the risks associated with information and communication technologies (ICTs)?
3. How do sustainable development initiatives affect corporate communications?
4. What are four barriers to effective communication?
5. What is the difference between internal and external communication?
6. What are the characteristics of active listening?
7. What are three possible types of information flow in an organization?
8. What are business ethics?
9. What are the five key ways in which cultures differ from one another, according to Geert Hofstede?
10. What is the main difference between high-context and low-context cultures?

Review Questions

1. Elements of the changing workplace include the knowledge economy, the concept of the risk society, flatter organizations, sustainability and corporate social responsibility, business on a global scale, more diverse employee base, team work environments, advancing communication technologies, and connectivity through the World Wide Web. (pp. 4–9)
2. Data stored and transmitted using mobile phone systems and Internet technologies are at risk of being a target of reproduction without permission (piracy), sabotage through hacking (cyberwarfare), or identity theft. (p. 5)
3. Because interest in maintaining natural resources has grown, most organizations now complete mandatory and voluntary sustainability reporting. Communicating sustainability initiatives can improve a company’s reputation and profits. (pp. 6–7)
4. Some barriers to effective communication are channel overload, information overload, emotional interference, semantic interference, physical and technical interference, mixed messages and channel barriers, and environmental interference. (p. 14)
5. Internal communication goes through the channels of an organization; external communication involves audience members who are not part of the writer’s organization. (p. 21)
6. In active listening, the listener pays close attention to the literal and emotional meaning of the message and responds in a way that tells the speaker that the message was heard and understood. (pp. 21–22)
7. Three types of information flow in an organization are *upwards*, *downward*, and *horizontal*. (p. 23)
8. Business ethics are the socially accepted moral principles and rules of business conduct. (pp. 23–24)
9. Cultures may differ in the way or degree they expect and accept unequal power (power distance), handle or tolerate new or unknown situations (uncertainty avoidance), integrate into groups (individualism vs. collectivism), balance gender roles and values (masculinity vs. femininity), and value either the future or the past and present (short-term vs. long-term orientation). (p. 29)
10. In a high-context culture, communication relies heavily on non-verbal, contextual, and shared cultural meanings; they do not say “no,” and meaning depends on how something is said; social standing is important. In a low-context culture, meaning depends on what is said, not the context; “no” is said directly, and individualism and self-assertion are valued. (p. 30)