



# Business Communication

10e



# Business Communication

PROCESS & PRODUCT

10e

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# Business Communication

## PROCESS & PRODUCT 10e

### Dear Business Communication Instructors and Students:

Welcome to the Tenth Edition of *Business Communication: Process and Product*! We are eager to invite you to examine this substantially revised edition that focuses on developing job-ready and recession-proof skills for students entering today's complex mobile and social workplace. After leading the business communication textbook market for nearly thirty years, this book has become an even more valuable teaching/learning package.

All the features that made this award-winning book so successful over the decades have been updated with relevant, current research converted to stimulating content and learning activities. Our goal is to help students develop much-needed communication skills while also easing the instructor's workload in delivering superior online and classroom resources. A few key features of the Tenth Edition are listed here:

- **Trusted content.** This new edition reflects the prevalence of communication technologies in today's social and mobile workplace. We have thoroughly revised the book to present best practices for e-mailing, texting, instant messaging, blogging, podcasting, working in face-to-face and remote teams, and using social media.
- **Development of job-ready and recession-proof skills.** Students will find special emphasis on emotional intelligence, professionalism, listening, teaming, critical thinking, and other skills that cannot be replaced by artificial intelligence and other technological advances, thus making them recession-proof and future-ready.
- **MindTap.** A multimedia learning experience, MindTap provides a complete ebook combined with unparalleled resources to achieve success in the course. Those resources include abundant grammar/mechanics review including a pre-course diagnostic, Learn It activities featuring narrated lessons coupled with comprehension-check questions, chapter assignments with rich feedback, model document videos, skills-based activities, and flashcards. This multimedia learning experience seamlessly integrates chapter content with your college's preferred learning management system allowing instructors to customize activities.
- **Latest trends in job searching and interviewing.** True to our goal of making students job ready, Chapters 15 and 16 provide countless tips on today's job search, how to build a personal brand, and how to network. Students benefit from knowing the latest trends in résumé and interview practices, including tips for successful one- and two-way interviewing.

For additional helpful instructor resources such as ready-to-use exercises with solutions, please visit the Guffey Team blog at <https://bizcombuzz.com>, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter (@danaloewy).

Cordially,

Mary Ellen Guffey and Dana Loewy



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# Business Communication

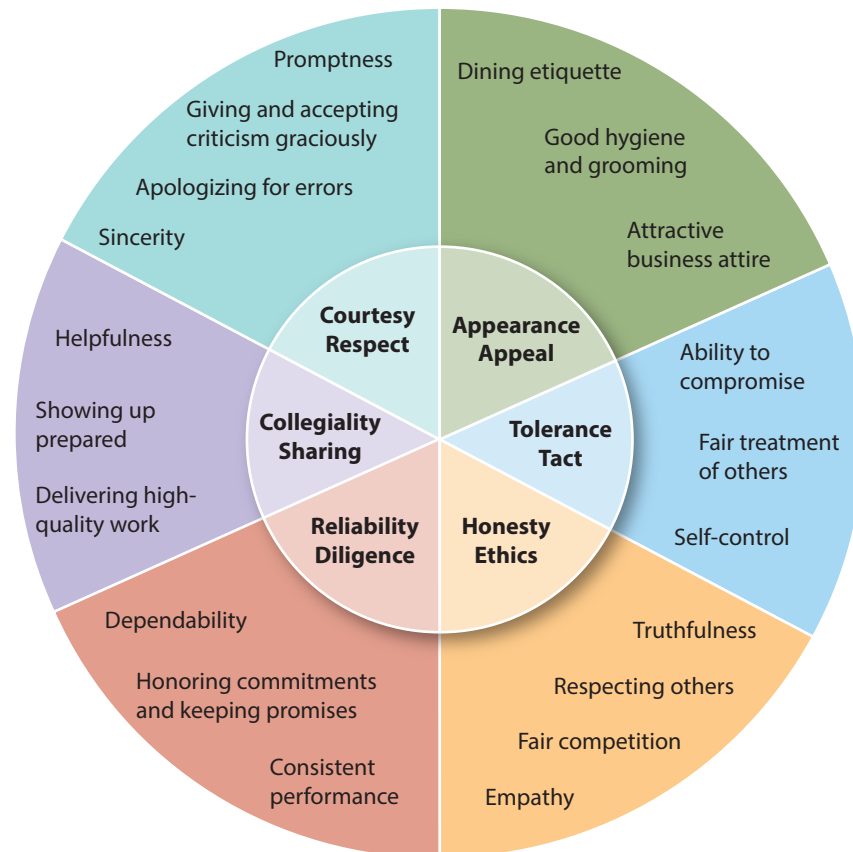
## PROCESS AND PRODUCT 10e

This book and this course may well be the most important in your entire college curriculum!

This leading text and MindTap guide you in developing the communication competencies most important for professional success in today's hyperconnected digital age. Refine the skills that employers value most, such as superior writing, speaking, presentation, critical thinking, and teamwork skills.

Survey after survey reveals that employers are seeking new-hires with these key skills:

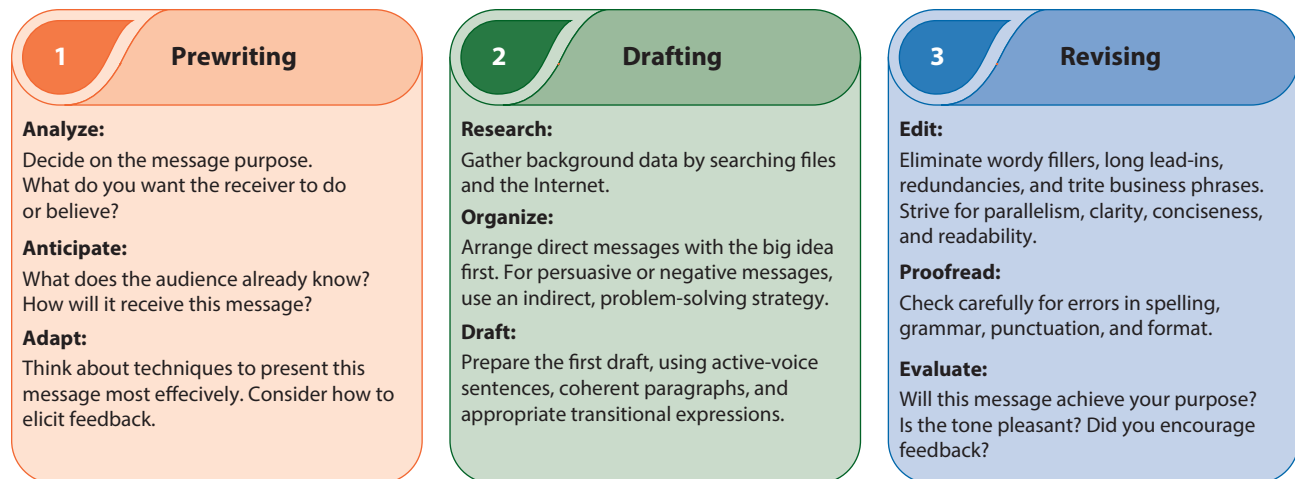
- Written and oral communication skills
- Critical thinking and analytical reasoning
- Ethical decision making
- Teamwork skills
- Professionalism



No other college course gives you training in all of these skills at once! Based on interviews with successful practitioners and extensive research into the latest trends, technologies and practices, this edition offers synthesized advice on building your personal brand, using LinkedIn effectively, and résumé writing. A signature 3-x-3 writing process, meaningful assignments, and digital practice tools further equip you with the communication skills to stand out in business today.

# Business Communication

## PROCESS & PRODUCT 10e



*Business Communication: Process and Product, 10e*, covers the following topics you will find indispensable in the digital-age workplace:

- Expert writing techniques geared to developing your writing skills plus interactive Documents for Analysis, authentic model documents, and engaging activities in which you apply your skills
- Presentation skills featuring contemporary examples including coverage of smartphone best practices to prepare you for the realities of workplace communication and technology
- Critical-thinking questions and activities in every chapter to stimulate and develop skills
- Ethics Checks in addition to guidance and tools provided through discussion questions and ethical dilemma scenarios
- Teamwork skills with a heavy emphasis on professionalism and etiquette in the workplace so that you will know how to meet employer expectations
- Coverage of social media and mobile technology showing how their explosive growth has sparked disruptive new business models in the new sharing economy
- Two updated employment chapters providing tips for a labor market that is more competitive, mobile, and technology-driven than ever before

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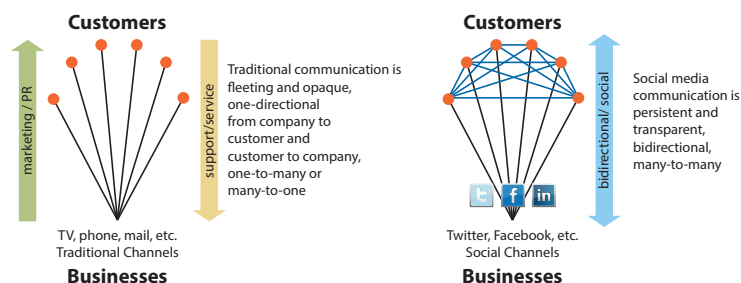
### Premium Online Resources with Mindtap

- **MindTap for *Business Communication: Process & Product*, 10th Edition** helps you see the importance of communication skills in practice. Each unit opens with a “Why Does This Matter to Me?” activity, showcasing how each unit you’re learning about connects to your future business success.
- “**Learn It**” modules cover the basic concepts for each section of a chapter in digestible video tutorials. These brief videos are coupled with questions that reinforce understanding of each learning objective and provide immediate feedback about your performance.
- “**Apply It**” activities include the comprehensive **Chapter Assignment** that challenges you to apply what you’re learning within examples and business communication scenarios—delivering detailed immediate feedback to underscore chapter concepts in context. Flex your growing communication skills muscle with **video activities** challenging you to apply what you’re learning in real time.
- A comprehensive **Grammar/Mechanics Diagnostic** provides an opportunity to assess your basic language skills in key areas and receive a custom report about your proficiency in each, with options for further review. Upon reviewing your results, you can continue to hone your language skills with targeted Grammar/Mechanics tutorials and put those skills into practice with additional Grammar/Mechanics Check-Ups.
- **Model Document Videos** included throughout the chapters explain and illustrate many concepts and walk you through how to create model documents including positive, bad-news, persuasive, and sales messages.
- The **Cengage Mobile App** enables you to learn on your terms. Read or listen to your textbook on your mobile device and study with the included tools.

### Social Media Networks and Mobile Technology

The authors address workplace social media and communication technology in a chapter solely dedicated to best practices on the job. Because these skills are fundamental in the contemporary world of work, social media and communication technology are integrated in each chapter.

Every chapter reflects the pervasive influence of communication technology on business writing. This state-of-the-art coverage makes it clear that writing and speaking are more important than ever in the rapidly changing world of work. Careers are made or thwarted based on one’s online digital persona.





# Business Communication

## PROCESS & PRODUCT 10e

- New sections discussing current digital workplace tools are complemented by brand-new coverage of social media's dark side to help you hone your critical thinking skills.
- New activities, identified with the Social Media and Communication Technology icon, reflect the preeminence of writing in the digital workplace and prompt you to develop your professional social networking skills.

| SOCIAL NETWORKERS VS. OTHER U.S. WORKERS:<br>COMPARING ATTITUDES TOWARDS QUESTIONABLE BEHAVIOR  |                          |                    |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Do you feel it is acceptable to...?   | Active Social Networkers | Other U.S. Workers |
| "Friend" a client/customer on a social network  | 59%                      | 28%                |
| Blog or tweet negatively about your company or colleagues                                       | 42%                      | 6%                 |
| Buy personal items with your company credit card as long as you pay it back                     | 42%                      | 8%                 |
| Do a little less work to compensate for cuts in benefits or pay                                 | 51%                      | 10%                |
| Keep a copy of confidential work documents in case you need them in your next job               | 50%                      | 15%                |
| Take a copy of work software home and use it on your personal computer                          | 46%                      | 7%                 |
| Upload vacation pictures to the company network or server so you can share them with co-workers | 50%                      | 17%                |
| Use social networking to find out what my company's competitors are doing                       | 54%                      | 30%                |

- Opening scenarios in each chapter illustrate social media and technology use, teamwork, meetings, persuasion, and more by companies that you know and interact with, such as Nordstrom, Lyft, Walmart, Taco Bell, Volkswagen, Seventh Generation, Jeep, Netflix, and Juul.

### Zooming In

#### Juul—Suspensions Unlikely to Evaporate

"We created ridiculous enthusiasm for the hashtag 'Vaporized,'" bragged marketing agency Cult Collective about its Juul campaign. On its website, Cult gushed that its strategy promoting the popular e-cigarette vaporizer "aligned perfectly with those we knew would be our best customers."<sup>1</sup> But who exactly were Juul's intended customers?

The Federal Trade Commission wants to know. It's investigating whether e-cigarette startup Juul Labs used social media and influencers to appeal to minors, as vaping among teens surged by 78 percent from 2017 to 2018, and one in five high schoolers admitted to having vaped in the last 30 days, according to the CDC.<sup>2</sup> Regulators, parents, schools, and public health advocates are alarmed by what the Food and Drug Administration has called an "epidemic of e-cigarette use among teenagers."<sup>3</sup> At least three lawsuits are pending against Juul Labs for deceptively marketing its products as safe.<sup>4</sup> Stanford researchers found that Juul's colorful ads showing attractive twentysomethings having fun while "Juuling" appeared to mimic tobacco industry marketing in style and content. Most important, though, was that Juul "regimented social media" to reach young users, the researchers said.<sup>5</sup> Since its inception in 2015, Juul has rocketed past competitors to own 75 percent of the e-cigarette market.<sup>6</sup>

Users love the small, sleek vaporizer that produces little odor. Juul is a fad that's seemingly everywhere. "I saw everyone doing it, so I wanted to try it," said one teenager. Most of all, the "pod" flavors—e.g., fruit, crème, cucumber, or mango—appear to be a factor. A young man explained Juuling is "like having a cookies-and-cream milkshake, that's what it tastes like in your mouth."<sup>7</sup> All fruit flavors are now banned in the United States leaving only mint and menthol to mask the harshness of the aerosol.<sup>8</sup> Many Juul users believe they are inhaling harmless flavored water vapor, unaware of the nicotine in the pods, each of which equals 20 regular cigarettes. Nicotine is highly addictive and particularly harmful to the developing brain. In addition, toxic metals, potentially leeching from the metal coil that's heating the e-liquid, were discovered in the aerosol users inhale.<sup>9</sup> Recent regulation mandates highly visible health warnings on all vaping products.

Juul strenuously denies having deliberately targeted young people: "We were completely surprised by the youth usage of the product," Ashley Gould, chief administrative officer at Juul Labs, asserted and claimed, "Juul is a switching product, not a cessation product, and it is intended for adult smokers to enable them to switch from combustible cigarettes."<sup>10</sup> Juul's stated mission is "improving the lives of the one billion adult smokers."<sup>11</sup> When e-cigarettes were first introduced, they were touted as smoking cessation devices or less harmful smoking alternatives. You will learn more about Juul and be asked to complete a relevant task at the end of this chapter.

#### Critical Thinking

- Why might teenagers and young adults be susceptible to Juul, and what type of appeal was the e-cigarette startup using?
- What could explain the huge success of Juul, the startup that burst onto a crowded e-cigarette scene in 2015 and within three years grabbed a 75-percent share of the vaping market?
- The marketing agency Cult Collective has removed the Juul case study from its website, and it's available only in the Internet Archive. Why may Cult have pulled the case from its e-portfolio?

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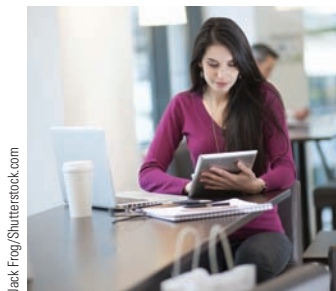
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UNIT

# 1

# Communication Foundations

## CHAPTER 1

Business  
Communication in the  
Digital Age

## CHAPTER 2

Professionalism: Team,  
Meeting, Listening,  
Nonverbal, and Etiquette  
Skills

## CHAPTER 3

Intercultural  
Communication



# CHAPTER 1

# Business Communication in the Digital Age

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 1 Explain how communication skills fuel career success in a technology-driven, social, and mobile workplace.
- 2 Understand the impact of powerful interpersonal skills and a college education for your professional success in the hyperconnected digital age workplace.
- 3 Describe significant communication trends in today's dynamic, networked work environment.
- 4 Identify how information flows internally and externally in organizations through formal and informal channels.
- 5 Recognize the tools for doing the right thing as an ethical business communicator.



# Zooming In

## Nordstrom: A Century-Old Retailer Keeps Reinventing Itself

Management giant Peter Drucker's maxim "Innovate or die" may explain the longevity of Nordstrom, a 118-year-old clothing retailer that is keeping its brand fresh and its customers happy. While other clothing retailers are shuttering stores, Nordstrom is defying trends by opening new retail outlets and upgrading existing stores. The company's co-presidents Blake, Erik, and Peter Nordstrom know that to future-proof their business, they must resist conventional wisdom. At the same time, the great-grandsons of the founder uphold a proud tradition of exceptional customer service while adapting to their customers' changing needs.

So far, Nordstrom's winning formula has been to combine extraordinary concierge in-store service with cutting-edge technology. After spending more than \$500 million to establish an exclusive men's store in Manhattan, the retailer has most recently opened a unique flagship store for women and children in Manhattan.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the company established several "service hubs" in New York City and Los Angeles called Nordstrom Local. These boutique-style stores provide pampered service and convenience—but no clothes! Shoppers buy online and pick up their items in the store, where stylists and tailors stand by. Customers can enjoy refreshments and visit a nail salon, shoe repair, or other services. "There aren't store customers or online customers," Erik Nordstrom describes the company's concept, "there are just customers who are more empowered than ever to shop on their terms."<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, the retailer has invested heavily in technology, for example, to allow shoppers to integrate its inventory management system with its website and the Nordstrom app. As a result, the company's online and offline worlds are seamlessly linked, and customers can find what they want in one place. Salespeople track customer requests and needs online. A strong social media engagement is key to Nordstrom's strategy to provide superb customer experiences and drive traffic to its e-commerce site. As one of America's most connected companies,<sup>3</sup> it relies on crowdsourcing to learn which items to

stock, and it responds rapidly to queries, in Spanish when needed. Nordstrom has also pioneered the use of popular social media influencers to capture younger audiences.<sup>4</sup>

With such public engagement, it's not surprising that Nordstrom has clearly defined social media use guidelines. Approved employees may connect with customers during working hours and even after hours, if allowed. They are asked to use good judgment and abide by all corporate policies. They are told to be respectful, responsible, and ethical. Furthermore, the policy forbids the sharing of confidential corporate information as well as employees' and customers' personal information. Conflicts of interest are to be avoided, and compensated endorsements must be disclosed.

Whether Nordstrom's strategy will succeed remains to be seen, and the retailer's recent lackluster stock performance has irked Wall Street. In response, the family attempted to take Nordstrom private but was unable to raise enough capital. You will learn more about Nordstrom and be asked to complete a relevant task at the end of this chapter.

### Critical Thinking

- Wall Street analysts have criticized Nordstrom for its lagging profits in recent months; the company's bold new ventures have been called a "gamble." What explains this clash between the Nordstrom family's vision and the reaction of the stock market?
- Why does Nordstrom allow only *approved and trained* employees to use company-owned social media accounts, logos, and videos on behalf of Nordstrom?
- Why do Nordstrom's social media guidelines emphasize ethical behavior and ethical communication?



## 1-1 Thriving in a Digital, Mobile, and Social Workplace

What will the workplace of the future look like, and will you have the skills to succeed in it? Technologies in many disciplines are rapidly evolving and transforming how we work and communicate. In his book *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, renowned economist Klaus Schwab describes changes that can be expected. Robots, automation, and artificial intelligence (AI) are already radically reshaping and even destroying some occupations. Consider self-driving vehicles, automated supermarket checkout stands, devices reading X-rays, or algorithms flagging fraudulent bank transactions—many tasks formerly performed by humans can be executed by machines. Experts estimate that close to half of all present jobs will disappear in the next decade, although new jobs are likely to emerge.<sup>5</sup>

### LEARNING OUTCOME

- 1 Explain how communication skills fuel career success in a technology-driven, social, and mobile workplace.

Automation will gobble up work that machines can do better and faster, for example, food preparation, operating machinery, and data processing. On the other hand, future-proof occupations include those that require communication, managing people, creativity, and specialized knowledge. This radical transformation of the workplace demands a well-trained workforce equipped with so-called **soft skills**, sometimes also called **emotional intelligence**. However, these powerful social and interpersonal skills are anything but “soft” or inferior. To reflect their growing importance, we prefer to use the terms **interpersonal skills** or **professional skills**, which may be defined as a combination of communication, logical reasoning, critical thinking, teamwork, and time management skills.<sup>6</sup>

The contemporary workplace is a fast-paced, competitive, and highly connected digital environment. Communication technology provides unmatched mobility and connects individuals anytime and anywhere in the world. Technology-savvy businesses such as Nordstrom have recognized the power of social media and created a seamless customer experience that’s integrated across all channels. These businesses know that to survive, they must innovate and constantly reinvent themselves. Individuals, too, must remain flexible, ready to remake themselves when needed. The COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point. It has devastated the economy and forced millions to work from home. Confronting such a major crisis requires a robust skill set.

In an increasingly complex, networked, and mobile environment, communication skills matter more than ever.<sup>7</sup> Job candidates with exceptional communication skills immediately stand out. In this chapter, you will learn about communication skills in the digital era and about the contemporary world of work. Later you will study tools to help you negotiate ethical minefields and do the right thing. Each section covers the latest information about communicating in business while also providing tips to help you function effectively in today’s fast-moving, technology-driven workplace.

## 1-1a Communication Skills: Your Ticket to Work

When we discuss communication skills, we generally mean reading, listening, nonverbal, speaking, and writing skills. In addition, workers today must be media savvy and exercise good judgment when posting messages on the Internet and writing e-mails. To be successful, they must guard their online image and protect the reputation of their employers.

In making hiring decisions, employers often rank communication skills among the most desirable competencies.<sup>8</sup> No wonder. According to one survey, the average worker spends almost 12 hours per week answering e-mail at the office and another five hours from home.<sup>9</sup> Many employees also write reports, memos, presentations, social media posts, and more. As one writing coach puts it: “Having excellent writing skills can make you an indispensable member of your team or company. And it’s one of the best ways to remain consistently employable—no matter your profession.”<sup>10</sup> The ability to communicate well is an always-in-demand, transferable skill.

Writing has been variously called a “career sifter,” a “threshold skill,” and “the price of admission,”<sup>11</sup> indicating that effective writing skills can be a stepping-stone to great job opportunities. Poorly developed writing skills, however, may derail a career. Writing is a marker of high-skill, high-wage, professional work, according to Bob Kerrey, former university president and chair of the National Commission on Writing. If you can’t express yourself clearly, he says, you limit your opportunities for many positions.<sup>12</sup>

If interpersonal skills matter greatly, writing effectively can be even more critical. Ever since the digital revolution swept the workplace, most workers write their own messages. New communication channels appeared, including the Internet and e-mail, followed by instant messaging, blogs, and social media networks. We communicate more than ever. With our smart devices, we communicate on the go. Americans now devote almost 70 percent of their waking hours to screen time. According to market research firm Nielsen, adults in the United States on average spend more than 11 hours daily interacting with all kinds of media, primarily TV, but almost four hours on their smartphones and tablets.<sup>13</sup>

The mobile revolution is stimulating huge economic growth and has profoundly changed how we communicate; it has become the fastest-adopted technology of all time.<sup>14</sup> Figure 1.1 displays the emergence of new technology and the rapid growth of Internet users over the last two decades. So far, the number of Internet users has roughly doubled every five years.

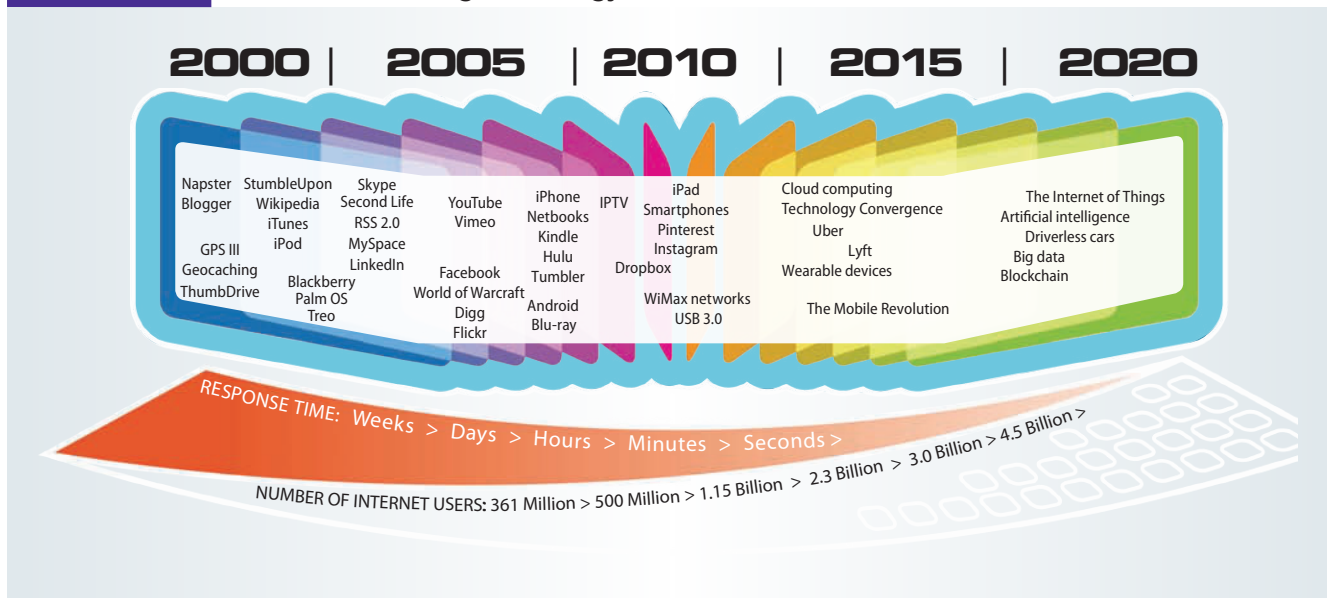
Writing matters more than ever because online media require more of it, not less. An important PayScale study revealed an unexpected finding. The skill most lacking among recent college

**Note:** Because this is a well-researched textbook, you will find small superscript numbers in the text. These announce information sources. Citations are located in the References section at the end of the book. This edition uses a modified American Psychological Association (APA) reference citation format.

**Note:** Following major publication guides, in this book direct quotations will be presented verbatim, i.e., exactly as the words and punctuation appeared in the original text. Occasionally, the quotation style may clash with the book style. For example, the authors prefer *e-mail*, but the quotation shows *email*.



**FIGURE 1.1** Time Line: Evolving Technology and Social Media



graduates, said 44 percent of the managers polled, was writing proficiency.<sup>15</sup> Dan Schawbel, research director at Future Workplace, agreed: “No working day will be complete without writing an email or tackling a new challenge, so the sooner you develop these skills, the more employable you will become.”<sup>16</sup> Breaking with the norm, PayScale considers writing and speaking skills to be “hard” skills, perhaps as a nod to their tremendous importance.

## 1-1b It's Up to You: Communication Skills Can Be Learned

By enrolling in a business writing class, you have already taken the first step toward improving or polishing your communication skills. The goals of this course and this book include teaching you basic business communication skills, such as how to write an effective e-mail, a short message on a mobile device, or a clear business letter, and how to make a memorable presentation with various digital media.

Thriving in the challenging interconnected work world depends on many factors, some of which you cannot control. However, one factor that you do control is how well you communicate. You are not born with the abilities to read, listen, speak, and write effectively. These skills must be learned. This book and this course may well be the most important in your entire college curriculum because they will equip you with the skills most needed in today's fast-paced information- and data-driven workplace.

### Reality Check

#### Robot-Proof Workplace Survival Skills

“Many jobs require ... very human qualities like communication, empathy, creativity, strategic thinking, questioning, and dreaming. Collectively, we often refer to these qualities as ‘soft skills,’ but don’t let the name fool you; these soft skills are going to be hard currency in the job market as AI and technology take over some of the jobs that can be performed without people.”<sup>17</sup>

—Bernard Marr, author, consultant, futurist

## 1-2 Building Future-Proof Skills for the Twenty-First-Century Workplace

Information technology has changed how we work, play, and communicate. It has never been easier to access and share information via various digital media from a vast network of sources and distribute it nearly instantly and to widespread audiences. What hasn't changed is that communication skills need time and effort to develop. To achieve literacy in the digital age means not only using multimedia applications and snazzy late-model gadgets but also thinking critically

### LEARNING OUTCOME

**2** Understand the impact of powerful interpersonal skills and a college education for your professional success in the hyperconnected digital age workplace.



## Reality Check

## Wake-Up Call for Grads

"Technical skills turn over fast, so employers are looking for fast learners who can quickly evolve and have exceptional soft skills—the ability to write, listen and communicate effectively."<sup>25</sup>

—Lauren Weber and Chip Cutter, business reporters, *The Wall Street Journal*

about new media. It means using technology thoughtfully and in a professional manner to achieve success in a hyperconnected world.

The twenty-first-century economy depends mainly on information and knowledge. Previously, in the Industrial Age, raw materials and physical labor were the key ingredients in the creation of wealth. Today, however, individuals in the workforce offer their knowledge, not their muscles. **Knowledge workers** (a term first coined by management guru Peter Drucker) get paid for their education and their ability to learn.<sup>18</sup>

More recently, we are hearing the term **information worker** to describe those who produce and consume information in the workplace.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of the terminology, knowledge and information workers engage in mind work. They must make sense of words, figures, and data. At the same time, according to professional services firm Deloitte, roughly 90 percent of all existing data generated on our planet was created just in the last five years. The data that humans create and copy annually in the “digital universe” is doubling every 12 months.<sup>20</sup> This exponential growth of knowledge is expected to continue and accelerate.

In this light, it may not surprise you that jobs in the information technology sector are likely to increase 13 percent by 2026.<sup>21</sup> Mobile technology generated almost \$3.3 trillion in revenue globally in one year alone and is responsible for 11 million jobs, according to Boston Consulting.<sup>22</sup> However, even in a strong economy and a very tight U.S. labor market, hundreds of thousands of jobs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) remain unfilled, primarily in sought-after fields such as data analytics, AI, cloud computing, and IT security.<sup>23</sup> Experts also worry about domestic talent shortages in skilled manufacturing.<sup>24</sup> In such a quick-changing environment, continuous, lifelong learning will make you more competitive and valuable to future employers. Only an adaptable, highly skilled workforce is well equipped to weather any economic climate as well as global competition.

## 1-2a Why Should You Care?

As an information worker in the digital age, you can expect to be generating, processing, and exchanging information. You will need to be able to transmit it effectively across various communication channels and multiple media. You might be called on to use e-mail, multimedia slide presentations, podcasts, or Instagram and Facebook as well as other social media in a professional setting. With added job responsibilities, you will be expected to make sound decisions and solve complex problems. Yet in a PayScale survey, half of the employers said new-hires are not workplace ready, mainly lacking critical-thinking and reasoning skills.<sup>26</sup> As you can see, if you possess or develop your critical thinking ability, you will thrive.

In college, you are learning to think, read, and ask questions to function in a complex networked world. The avalanche of information that engulfs you daily requires you to evaluate all sources critically because not all news outlets were created equal. Some engage in deliberate disinformation as they pursue a hidden political agenda. Others may be purposely manipulated by hostile powers engaging in a cyber war. Bots and fake accounts have been found to spread propaganda via social media—untruths planted to divide Americans and disrupt public discourse.

As a discerning businessperson and voter in a democracy, you will be challenged to stay informed, detect fake news stories, and withstand attempts at manipulation. However, even the very definition of the catch phrase **fake news** is complex. After



all, many types of misinformation (accidental untruth) and disinformation (intentional untruth) exist. Two U.S. economists have presented research defining fake news as “news stories that have no factual basis but are presented as facts.”<sup>27</sup> In partisan politics, the term *fake news* has also been used to describe unwelcome evidence that some people find uncomfortable because it clashes with their convictions. The key ability to accurately evaluate new information—a hallmark of **information literacy**—will be discussed in Chapter 11. A questioning, critical-thinking mindset is an important interpersonal skill in any profession.

## 1-2b Thinking Critically in the Digital Age

In an age of automation that will devour millions of jobs, positions that require thinking, brainpower, and decision-making skills are likely to remain plentiful. Whether you work in **m-commerce** (mobile technology businesses), **e-commerce** (Internet-based businesses), or **brick-and-mortar commerce**, nearly three out of four jobs involve some form of mind work. To be successful in these jobs, you will need to be able to think critically, make decisions, and communicate those decisions.

Management and employees work together in such areas as product development, quality control, and customer satisfaction. All workers, from executives to subordinates, need to think creatively and critically. Toyota’s corporate culture of continuous improvement (**kaizen**) by engaged and empowered workers has been the envy of the manufacturing world. Competing with Google and Uber Technologies in the race for connected, autonomous, and electric cars, Toyota created a centralized group of 200 workers to adapt continuous improvement to new business such as car sharing and consumer robots.<sup>29</sup> When your boss or team leader says, “What do you think we ought to do?” you want to be able to supply good ideas and demonstrate that you can think critically. This means having opinions that are backed by reasons and evidence.

Faced with a problem or an issue, most of us do a lot of worrying before separating the issues or deciding. Figure 1.2

## Reality Check

### Leadership Skills of the Future

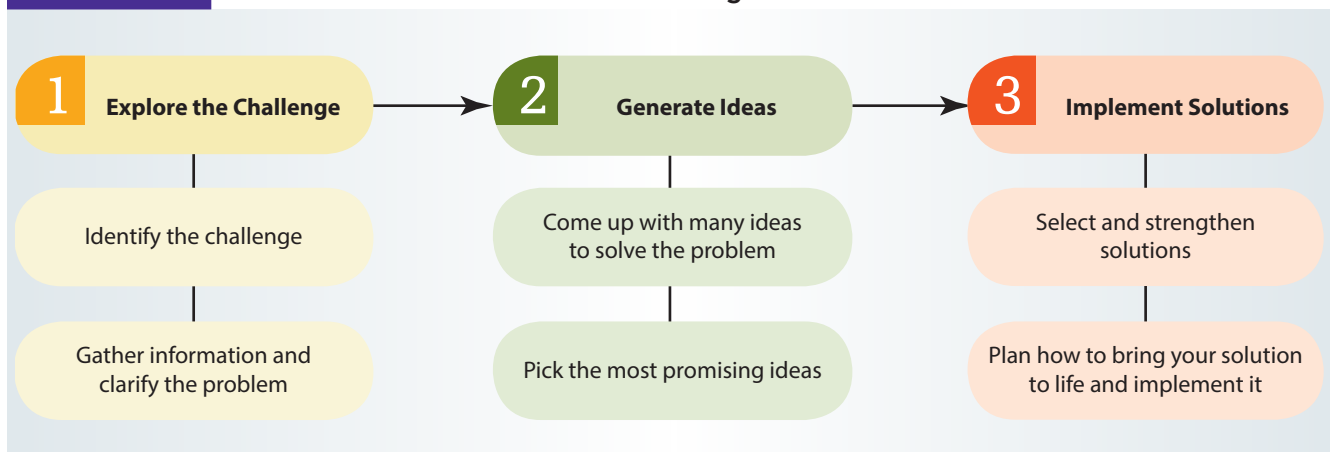
“The skills necessary at the higher echelons will include especially the ability to efficiently network, manage public relations, display intercultural sensitivity, marketing, and generally what author Dan Goleman would call ‘social’ and ‘emotional’ intelligence. [This also includes] creativity, and just enough critical thinking to move outside the box.”<sup>28</sup>

—Simon Gottschalk, *sociologist, author*



Toyota’s futuristic electric vehicle Concept-i is equipped with an AI assistant, dubbed Yui, designed to interpret drivers’ emotions and learn to adjust to the passengers’ needs, foreshadowing an AI companion capable of a full-fledged natural-language conversation.

**FIGURE 1.2** Osborn–Parnes Creative Problem-Solving Process



provides a three-point plan to help you think critically and solve problems competently. As you can see, understanding the problem is essential and must come first. Generating and selecting the most feasible ideas is the intermediate step. Finally, the problem-solving model prompts you to refine, justify, and implement the solution. At the end of each chapter in this text, you will find activities and problems that will help you develop and apply your critical-thinking skills.

## 1-2c Managing Your Career Well: Guarding Your Credibility

To find an entry-level job and advance, you will need to be proactive and exercise greater control over your career than college graduates before you did. Like most workers today, you will not find nine-to-five jobs, predictable pay increases, lifetime security, and even conventional workplaces. Quite likely, your future employer may first observe your online presence before deciding to invite you for an interview.

Don't presume that companies will provide you with a clearly defined career path or planned developmental experiences. Your opportunities may broaden when the economy is humming, even if your skills are not up to speed. However, only adequate skills will recession-proof your career. In the private sector, you will most likely work for multiple employers, moving back and forth between work and education, and between work and family responsibilities. Increasingly, the workplace and your career will resemble not a vertical corporate ladder but a more intricate, open, fluid, and interconnected framework—a **corporate lattice**.<sup>30</sup>

To keep up with evolving technologies and procedures, you can expect lifelong learning and career training. After all, you might have to pursue four or five different careers (not just jobs) in your lifetime.<sup>31</sup> Primarily because technology is changing lightning fast, traditional colleges and universities cannot keep pace; often their graduates are not workplace ready. Therefore, in a tight job market, some companies have started to offer boot camp-style academies to nontraditional candidates. For example, Capital One Financial and health-care company DaVita are trying to attract and train the skilled workers they need before hiring the best of them.<sup>32</sup> Scrambling to fill its 150,000 vacant IT support jobs, Google is partnering with a Texas community college to develop an IT certification program.<sup>33</sup> Whether you are currently employed or about to enter today's demanding workplace, you must be willing to continually learn new skills that supplement the basic skills you are acquiring in college.

In addition, in a hyperconnected professional environment, you must manage and guard your reputation—at the office and online. How you present yourself in the virtual world, meaning how well you communicate and protect your **brand**, may very well determine how successful your career will be. Your credibility is a precious asset. Well-crafted tweets, astute comments on LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook, competent e-mails, and thoughtful blog posts will help you continually make a positive impression. As one career advisor explains: "Every interaction—from how you greet your coworkers in the morning to how you summarize a status update in an email—contributes to how people view you."<sup>35</sup> In short, you will need to nurture and safeguard your professionalism online and off. You will learn more about interpersonal skills and professionalism in Chapter 2.

## 1-2d Acquiring Crisis-Proof Skills to Weather Any Job Market

The upheaval of the economy following the COVID-19 pandemic turned the job market upside down. Recent college graduates and entry-level workers were especially hard hit. However, as the economy recovers, new grads who are flexible and well-prepared are finding opportunities even in a tough job market.<sup>36</sup> In one of its much-noted Job Outlook studies, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) recently asked employers what attributes they seek in new college graduates.

### Reality Check

#### Constant Career Readiness

"As work moves from climbing a career ladder to navigating a career lattice, people have to be in a mode of constant career readiness."<sup>34</sup>

—Jason Swanson, futurist, director of strategic foresight at KnowledgeWorks



**FIGURE 1.3** Powerful Job Skills Employers Seek



First, a prospective employee must meet the employer's fundamental criteria, including having the required major, course work, and GPA. By the way, fewer employers screen candidates by GPA than just five years ago; however, GPA continues to serve as a crucial distinguishing factor in most industries, with 3.0 (a B average) as a cutoff.<sup>37</sup> If a candidate passes these hurdles, then employers look for interpersonal and professional skills such as problem solving, teamworking, and writing ability, as shown in Figure 1.3.<sup>38</sup>

Although employers seek these skills, they are not always pleased with what they find. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) asked executives and hiring managers about graduates' career readiness. The employers noted that students were adequately trained for entry-level jobs but were not equipped for advancement. In their view, promotable graduates excel at oral communication, critical thinking, ethical judgment, teamwork, independent work, self-motivation, writing, and real-world application of learning. However, only 40 percent are well prepared, said the executives.<sup>39</sup> To make sure you don't disappoint future employers, take advantage now of opportunities to strengthen your writing, presentation, and critical-thinking skills.

## 1-2e Understanding How Your Education Drives Your Income

As college tuition rises steeply and student debt mounts, you may wonder whether going to college is worthwhile. The American public seems to share this skepticism, as a Gallup poll suggests. Fewer than half of adults in the United States expressed confidence in higher education.<sup>40</sup> Yet the effort and money you invest in earning your college degree will most likely pay off. College graduates earn more, suffer less unemployment, and can choose from a wider variety of career options than workers without a college education. Moreover, college graduates have access to the highest-paying and fastest-growing careers, many of which require a degree. A college education also correlates positively with better health care and longer life expectancy.<sup>41</sup>

### Reality Check

#### "New-Collar Skills" Needed Beyond a College Degree

"[Many jobs at IBM] require a certain set of skills; we call them new-collar skills that maybe require a two-year degree or just different skill sets. We think the capabilities and the skills are even more important than the degree because things change so quickly in a lot of hot new fields: cybersecurity, analytics, cognitive, even things we're doing within marketing or design."<sup>44</sup>

—Jennifer Ryan Crozier, former president of IBM Foundation and VP, IBM Corporate Citizenship



**FIGURE 1.4** The Education Bonus: Higher Income, Lower Unemployment

| Education                    | Median Weekly Earnings (\$) | Unemployment Rate (Percent) |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| High school dropout          | 520                         | 6.5                         |
| High school diploma          | 712                         | 4.6                         |
| Some college, no degree      | 774                         | 4.0                         |
| Associate's degree           | 836                         | 3.4                         |
| Bachelor's degree            | 1,173                       | 2.5                         |
| Master's degree              | 1,401                       | 2.2                         |
| Professional/doctoral degree | 1,790                       | 1.5                         |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017). Employment projections: Unemployment rates and earnings by educational attainment.

As Figure 1.4 shows, graduates with bachelor's degrees earn more than twice as much as high school dropouts and are almost three times less likely to be unemployed. As long as you choose your major wisely and finish school, college will pay off and provide you with more than technical skills. As we have seen, interpersonal skills are highly prized but often in short supply. Workers who lack them are fired. One researcher even claims that half of all terminations are attributable to poor "soft" skills.<sup>42</sup> A survey of employers confirms that interpersonal skills such as communication ability can tip the scales in favor of one job applicant over another.<sup>43</sup> Your ticket to winning in any job market and launching a successful career is good communication skills.

#### LEARNING OUTCOME

**3** Describe significant communication trends in today's dynamic, networked work environment.

## 1-3 Trends and Challenges Affecting You in the Information Age Workplace

As a businessperson and especially as a business communicator, you will undoubtedly be affected by many trends. Some of those trends include new, disruptive technologies and social media, expectations of around-the-clock availability, and global competition. Other trends include flattened management hierarchies, team projects, a diverse workforce, and the mobile or virtual office. The workplace continues to change rapidly and profoundly. The following overview reveals how communication skills are closely tied to your success in a constantly evolving networked workplace.

### 1-3a Social Media Use in Business and Disruptive Technologies

Interacting with others on Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, FaceTime, or Twitter may be a daily necessity to you, and once employed, you will be expected to keep up with new technology. In the twenty-first-century workplace, technology savvy is so important that businesses are unlikely to thrive without it. Despite security risks and the precarious handling of user data by organizations such as Google and Facebook, technology will remain central to organizations. Most large enterprises are completely plugged in and have created a positive presence with the help of both traditional and social media.

New platforms that predominantly function via **smartphone apps** have given rise to the **sharing economy**. Consider Uber and Lyft. These app-based ride-sharing platforms are **disrupting** long-established business models to the delight of their core passengers—young, affluent urbanites. However, ride-hailing apps are testing labor laws and local ordinances; they irk cab drivers and city officials around the world, leading to bans and lawsuits. Other new players in urban transportation are bike-sharing, car-sharing, and now e-scooter-sharing apps such as

Bird, Lime, and Spin. Similarly, the home-sharing platform Airbnb has disrupted the hospitality industry worldwide and encouraged a growing host network.

Sparking new radical technologies, social media continue to connect vast numbers of people all over the world. The 336 million monthly active Twitter users clock an average 500 million tweets per day.<sup>45</sup> Ordinary citizens can organize protests and boycotts within hours, even minutes. Bad customer service experiences or overt political leanings can damage an organization's reputation with long-term economic consequences.<sup>46</sup> In short, word of mouth, positive and negative, can travel instantly at the speed of a few taps on a smartphone keyboard. The various social media channels offer undeniable advantages. However, even their most avid users are learning that their go-to technologies also come with significant downsides—for example, data breaches, invasion of privacy, identity theft, manipulation, and disinformation, as Figure 1.5 illustrates.

Tech-savvy companies are embracing digital tools to connect with consumers, invite feedback, and improve their products and services. They may announce promotions and events in blog posts, in tweets, on their company websites, and by social media. Above all, plugged-in businesses realize that to manage public perceptions of their brands, they need to be proactive but also respond quickly and deftly within social media when a crisis hits. They need to go where their customers are and attempt to establish and keep a loyal following. It has never been easier to interact so fast with so many people at once.

Even if they still have not mastered their social media strategies, nearly all businesspeople today in some way rely on the Internet to collect information, serve customers, and sell products and services. Figure 1.6 illustrates many common office and communication

**FIGURE 1.5** Communication Technology in a Mobile and Social World—Costs and Benefits



## Communication Technologies at Work

Becoming familiar with communication technology in business can help you succeed on the job. Today's digital workplace is shaped by mobile devices, mobile apps, social media, superfast broadband and wireless access, and other technologies that allow workers to share information, work from remote locations, and be more productive in or away from the office. With today's tools you can exchange ideas, solve problems, develop products, forecast future performance, and complete team projects any time of the day or night anywhere in the world.

### Cloud Computing, Web 2.0, and Beyond: A Social, Mobile, and Smart Future

Increasingly, applications and data are stored in remote locations online, *in the cloud*. This ability to access data on remote servers with a computer or mobile device is called *cloud computing*, and it has helped fuel unparalleled mobility and information sharing. All social media platforms are cloud-based, as are typical workplace applications such as Microsoft's Office 365 or Adobe's Creative Suite. Websites and Internet-based applications have shifted from one-way, read-only communication to multidirectional, social, read-write communication. This profound change, dubbed Web 2.0, has allowed workers to collaborate and network in unprecedented ways.

More changes on the horizon beyond Web 2.0 will transform our lives and communication; they include intelligent devices and appliances—the *Internet of things*—*artificial intelligence* (AI), *augmented reality* (AR) and *virtual reality* (VR), voice-activated digital assistants such as Alexa or Siri, and self-driving vehicles. The emergence of the digital currency Bitcoin has introduced *blockchain technology*, a decentralized network of shared and continuously reconciled information, a vast database hosted by millions of computers at once. Some believe that blockchain will revolutionize the Internet.

### VoIP Phone Systems

Savvy businesses are switching from traditional phone service to voice over Internet protocol (VoIP). This technology allows callers to communicate using a fast Internet connection, thus eliminating long-distance and local telephone charges. Higher-end VoIP systems now support unified voice mail, e-mail, click-to-call capabilities, and softphones (Internet-based applications or mobile apps, such as Google Voice, for calling and messaging). Other free or low-cost options include Skype and FaceTime. Most messaging apps—such as WhatsApp and

Facebook Messenger—now offer wireless voice calling and recorded voice messages.

### Smart Mobile Devices and Digital Convergence

Lightweight, ever-smaller devices provide phone, e-mail, Web browsing, and calendar options anywhere there is a cellular or Wi-Fi network. Tablets and smartphones such as Android devices and the iPhone and iPad allow workers to tap into corporate databases and intranets from distant locations. Users can check customers' files, complete orders, collect payment, and send out receipts remotely. The need for separate electronic gadgets is waning as digital smart devices are becoming multifunctional. With streaming video, connectivity between smart TVs and computers, and networked mobile devices, technology is converging, consolidating into increasingly more powerful devices. Many smart devices today can replace digital point-and-shoot still photography and video cameras. Mobile smart devices are also competing with TVs and computers for primacy. Mobile apps rival the capabilities of full-fledged software applications on laptops, on desktops, and in the cloud.



### Wearable Devices: Smartwatches, AR and VR Headsets

A growing trend in mobile computing is wearable devices. Activity trackers such as Fitbit, Apple Watch, and similar accessories do more than record fitness activities. They are powerful mobile devices that can sync with other smart electronics. Google Glass failed to capture a larger consumer market; however, with Google Lens, the company continues to pursue innovative augmented-reality head-mounted devices. More affordable virtual-reality goggles, for example, Oculus Rift, are popular with gamers, but VR headsets are also used in simulations, in training, and in patient therapy.

## Speech Recognition

Computers and mobile devices equipped with speech-recognition software enable users to dictate hands-free with accurate transcription. Speech recognition is particularly helpful to disabled workers and professionals with heavy dictation loads, such as physicians and attorneys. Users can create documents, enter data, compose and send e-mails, search the Web, and control their notebooks, laptops, and desktops—all by voice. Smart devices can also execute tasks with voice command apps—for example, to dial a call, find a route, or transcribe voice mail.

## Electronic Presentations and Data Visualization

Business presentations in PowerPoint, Prezi, or Keynote can be projected from a laptop, tablet, or smartphone. They can be posted and accessed online. Sophisticated presentations may include animation, sound effects, digital photos, video clips, or hyperlinks. In some industries, PowerPoint and other electronic slides (decks) are replacing or supplementing traditional hard-copy reports. Data visualization tools such as SAS help businesses make sense of increasing amounts of complex data.

## Social Media

The term *social media* describes technology that enables participants to connect and share in social networks online. For example, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter allow users to post their latest news, photos, other media, and links. Businesses use microblogging services such as Twitter and Tumblr to message the public, drive traffic to their blogs and websites, or announce events and promotions. Twitter and Tumblr also allow businesses to track what is being said about them and their products and to respond immediately.

Similarly, organizations use social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and others to interact with customers

and build their brands. Companies may also prospect for talent using social media networks, LinkedIn in particular. Many companies are using corporate social networks for messaging, collaboration, project management, and data storage. Various popular enterprise-grade platforms include Slacker, Yammer, Asana, Atlassian HipChat, and SharePoint.

## Blogs, Podcasts, and Wikis

Businesses use *blogs* to keep customers and employees informed and to receive feedback. Company news can be posted, updated, and categorized for easy cross-referencing. *Podcasts* are popular audio files played back from a website or downloaded to a digital audio player, typically a smart device. A *wiki* is an Internet or intranet site that allows multiple users to collaboratively create, edit, and store digital files. Information can get lost in e-mails and chat threads, but wikis provide easy access to important organizational documents and serve as a knowledge management tool. Wikis for business are often integrated within powerful enterprise social networks, for instance, in Slack.

## Web Conferencing and Videoconferencing

With services such as Zoom, WebEx, GoToMeeting, and Skype for Business, users need only a computer or smart device and an Internet connection to hold a meeting (*webinar*) with customers or colleagues in real time. Although the functions are constantly evolving, Web conferencing incorporates screen sharing, chats, slide presentations, text messaging, and application sharing. All services also provide voice and video, making them videoconferencing tools as well. Best of all, they can be accessed across all devices.

Some companies have invested in sophisticated videoconferencing rooms equipped with HD video cameras and large video screens. Two to 200 individuals can see each other and interact in real time, although they may be far apart.

## Gamification

*Gamification* is the application of game design techniques to increase motivation and engagement. Much like computer games, gamification platforms in business are designed to be fun and in turn increase productivity as well as revenue. Gamification techniques include using badges or points to tap into workers' natural desires for competition, status, and achievement but also altruism and collaboration. Gamification is used in marketing, sales, customer retention, and training, allowing employers to collect large amounts of productivity data.





## Reality Check

### Saying No to Always-On Work Culture

"Always-on is weird. It's not how humans thrive. It's not how productive people break through to the next level. ... We have to dismantle always-on before it dismantles us."<sup>47</sup>

—Greg McKeown, bestselling author of *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*

technologies you will find in today's workplace. To make the most of these resources, you, as a skilled business communicator, must develop a tool kit of new communication skills. You will want to know how to select the best communication channel, how to use each channel effectively, and how to build and safeguard your **credibility**. All of these topics are covered in later chapters.

## 1-3b Anytime, Anywhere: 24/7/365 Availability

The dizzyingly fast connectedness across time zones and vast distances has a downside. In the last two decades, the line between work and leisure has become increasingly blurry. In many industries, information workers are expected to remain tethered to their workplaces with laptops, tablets, and smartphones around the clock and on weekends. As you rise on the career ladder, you may be expected to work long hours without extra compensation and be available practically anytime and anywhere should a crisis strike at work.


The physical office is extending its reach, sometimes overreaching, perhaps. Compared to workers in most European countries, Americans put in the longest hours (about 50 percent more). They also receive the shortest paid vacations. In contrast, workers in the European Union enjoy four to six weeks of paid time off per year. Most are also protected from working more than 48 hours per week. In France, a labor law guarantees workers the right to disconnect from work communication.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the Japanese government enacted a law at least partially limiting work hours after a young employee of an advertising firm committed suicide. Her death was blamed on **karoshi**, death by overwork.<sup>49</sup>

In the United States, workers tend to be always plugged in. Employees spend eight hours a week on average answering work e-mails after hours. Almost a third of males and nearly a quarter of females regularly bring work home, to social outings, and even on vacation.<sup>50</sup> Recently, the Global Wellness Summit issued a report cautioning that constant connectedness may lead to depression and anxiety.<sup>51</sup> Sociologist Simon Gottschalk cites research showing that "digital overload" after hours is a major stressor, leading to burnout.<sup>52</sup> Be that as it may, the office today and in the future is mobile, social, and always on.

In a global economy in which corporations own far-flung operations around the world, a networked information-driven workforce never goes off duty or offline. Managers exert power beyond the physical office. Moreover, work in the digital age demands that participants stay on until the project is finished, not when the clock strikes five or six at the end of the day. As your professional responsibilities grow, you can expect not only to be accessible 24/7 but also to feel the significant impact of globalization.

## 1-3c Global Markets and Competition

New communication technologies, free-trade agreements, falling transportation costs, and saturated local markets—all these developments have encouraged companies to enter emerging markets around the world. Small, medium, and large companies in the United States and abroad have expanded and created supply chains overseas. Wealthy countries gained new markets, and formerly poor nations such as China rose and became integrated into the global economy. Consumers everywhere benefited from affordable goods. A global middle class arose.



New communication technologies, free-trade agreements, low transportation costs, and saturated domestic markets have given rise to globalization.



Globalization also caused negative outcomes, however. Entire industries and regions manufacturing low-tech products were devastated. As a result, opposition against globalization by those who felt left out has grown, leading to calls for protectionism in the United States and elsewhere. Still, even as trade barriers are beginning to rise again, globalization is unlikely to experience a serious reversal, experts believe.<sup>53</sup> Most likely it will just change. Advances in cross-border communication and connectivity will likely lead to global competition for high-end technology jobs and more complex products, such as automobiles or microprocessors. David Autor, a prominent economist, believes that the real challenge in the future will be struggles over intellectual property and innovative industries.<sup>54</sup>

The consequences of this shift should alarm anyone who lacks an advanced education and faces a career that can be automated or outsourced. Even highly educated Americans will be competing with their smart counterparts across the globe, many of whom will be willing to work for less money. Routine, blue-collar jobs will continue to be outsourced, but high-end research, marketing, and design work will gravitate to the United States.<sup>55</sup>

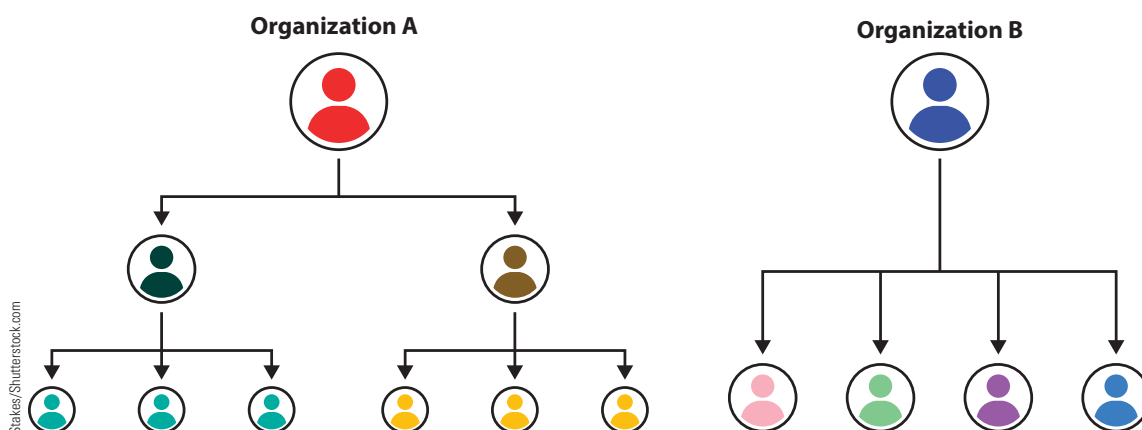
Many traditional U.S. companies are global players now and generate more profit abroad than at home. Coca-Cola, Accenture, Mars, 3M, Intel, Medtronic, and American Express are admired multinational corporations with U.S. headquarters. International carmakers Volkswagen and Toyota produce vehicles in the United States to sell them domestically and export them to China. Global interconnectedness is here to stay.

Doing business in faraway countries means dealing with people who may be very different from you. They may practice different religions, follow different customs, have different lifestyles, and rely on different approaches in business. Now add the complications of multiple time zones, vast distances between offices, and different languages.

Successful communication in new markets requires developing new skills and attitudes. These include cultural awareness, flexibility, and patience. Because these skills and attitudes may be difficult to achieve, you will receive special communication training to help you deal with intercultural business transactions.

### 1-3d Flattened Management Layers

In traditional companies, information flows through many levels of managers. In response to intense global competition and other pressures, however, innovative businesses have for years been cutting costs and flattening their management hierarchies. This flattening means that fewer layers of managers separate decision makers from line workers. In flat organizations,



The simple chart is showing Organization A with middle management and Organization B with a flat management structure without middle managers.

## Ethics Check

### Too Informal?

Executives typically spend 80 percent of their workday communicating. Thanks to Slack and other internal communication platforms, some top managers come close to 90 percent. One CEO complained that an entry-level hire pinged him on Slack to find out where his kids go to school.<sup>61</sup> Why was the CEO unhappy?

in which the lines of communication are shorter, decision makers can react more quickly to market changes. Removing middle management, the belief was, would make companies more agile; it would encourage collaboration and spark creativity by banishing bureaucracy. It would save costs, too.

Not surprisingly, tech firms—start-ups in particular—gravitate toward a **bossless organizational structure**. Chief among them, online shoe retailer Zappos introduced a radical experiment—a system of self-management its CEO Tony Hsieh called **holacracy**. He abolished job titles and managers. Zappos workers digitally tracked decisions and outcomes with an app.<sup>56</sup> Hundreds of businesses adopted the model. Like Zappos, tech firm Bonitasoft created “circles” to tackle work projects autonomously. California tomato processor Morning Star has no formal management and a happy staff.<sup>57</sup> Most recently, electric carmaker Tesla decided to go lean, too.

However, in the absence of midlevel bosses to keep workers on track and motivated, some companies have started to struggle. Zappos suffered substantial staff departures. Bonitasoft learned that its members became too passive and experienced “almost too much democracy.”<sup>58</sup> Studies found that workers prefer structure and perceive overly flattened workplaces as disorienting.<sup>59</sup> Hierarchies seem to provide clarity and direction. Critics point to one major disadvantage for executives of thinning management layers: “interaction fatigue.” Internal social platforms and companywide Slack channels force top managers to spend ever more time communicating and collaborating. CEOs may become too accessible to the rank-and-file.<sup>60</sup>

Today’s flatter organizations pose communication challenges. In the past, authoritarian and hierarchical management structures did not require that every employee be a skilled communicator. Managers simply passed along messages to the next level. Today, however, frontline employees as well as managers participate in critical thinking and decision making. Nearly everyone is a writer and a communicator.

## 1-3e Collaborative Environments and Teaming

Teamwork has become a reality in business. Many companies have created cross-functional teams to empower employees and boost their involvement in decision making. Such stable teams of people have learned to work well together over time. Traditional teams helped turn around Simmons Bedding Company a decade ago by reducing waste in operations, boosting sales, and improving the relationships with dealers. Customer satisfaction and employee morale also soared.<sup>62</sup> Eager to speed up innovation, global conglomerate Siemens AG bypassed its own research and development arm. Instead, the company launched Next47, an independent product-innovation unit, to invite creative collaboration in its medical equipment and electrical gear business. For its first project, Next47 teamed up with aircraft manufacturer Airbus to build a quiet, fuel-efficient hybrid-powered jet engine.<sup>63</sup>

The complex and unpredictable challenges in today’s workplace require rapid changes in course and greater flexibility, says Harvard management professor Amy Edmondson. She argues that the new era of business requires a new strategy she calls **teaming**: “Teaming is teamwork on the fly: a pickup basketball game rather than plays run by a team that has trained as a unit for years.”<sup>64</sup> This means that instead of traditional standing teams, organizations are now forming **ad hoc teams** to solve problems. Such project-based teams disband once they have accomplished their objectives. Although the challenges of making such diverse and potentially dispersed teams function well are many, teaming is here to stay.

Not surprisingly, the independent workforce is growing, enabled by digital platforms. Much has been written about the **gig economy**, a sector of the labor market relying on free agents hired on a project basis or doing other short-term, independent work. Some economists estimate that 20 to 30 percent of working-age American adults hold nontraditional jobs.<sup>65</sup> Online platforms facilitate a marketplace in which independent contractors are moonlighting as Lyft and Uber drivers or as odd-jobbers for TaskRabbit. Gloomy predictions describe a contingent workforce of the future without well-defined credentials, benefits, and job security. The upside of nontraditional work is flexibility; most independent workers

report being highly satisfied with their work arrangements.<sup>66</sup> In certain sectors, such as aerospace and entertainment, employers will continue to rely on a network of contractors for short-term projects.

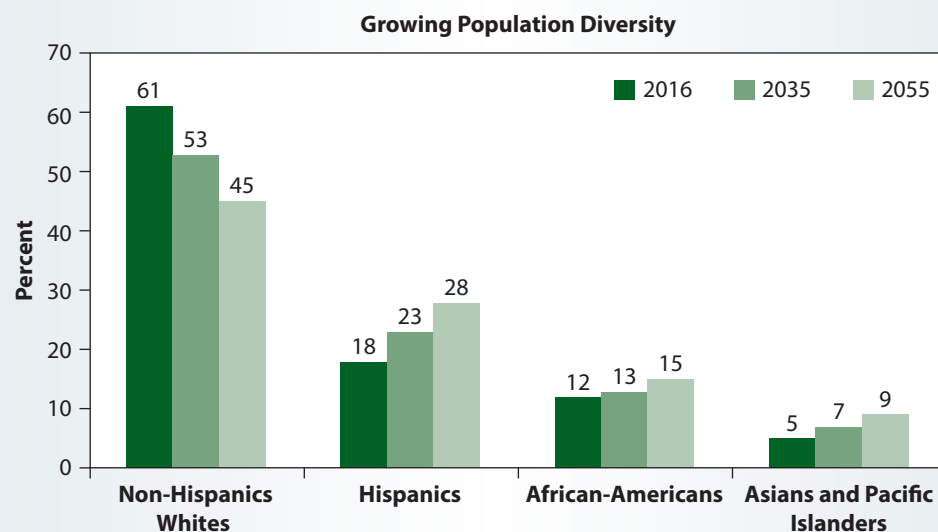
Whether companies form standing or ad hoc teams, individuals must work together and share information. Working relationships can become strained when individuals don't share the same location, background, knowledge, or training. Some companies even hire communication coaches to help teams get along. Such experts work to develop interpersonal, negotiation, and collaboration techniques. However, companies would prefer to hire new workers who already possess these skills. That is why so many advertisements for new employees say "must possess excellent communication skills"—which you are learning in this book and this course.

## 1-3f Growing Workforce Diversity

In addition to pervasive communication technology, advanced team management, and distant work environments, today's workplace is changing in yet another area. The U.S. workforce is becoming increasingly diverse. As shown in Figure 1.7, the population of non-Hispanic whites in the United States is expected to drop from 61 percent in 2016 to 53 percent in 2035. Hispanics will climb from 18 percent to 23 percent, while African Americans will hold steady at around 13 percent relative to the growing total U.S. population within that time period. Asians and Pacific Islanders will probably rise from 5 percent to 7 percent by 2035.<sup>67</sup>

Women attain higher education in greater numbers than men do; 39 percent of women ages twenty-five to twenty-nine earned a bachelor's degree, as opposed to 32 percent of men. In other words, women earn 57.34 percent of all bachelor's degrees, resulting in a gender gap of 25.6 percent for men, as they earn 74.4 degrees for every 100 degrees earned by women.<sup>68</sup> However, in many industries and in executive positions, females are still the minority. According to the National Science Foundation, the gender gap is most pronounced in the high-tech industry (26 percent) and science and engineering (28 percent).<sup>69</sup> The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that, overall, women will peak at 47 percent of the labor force in 2025 and then level off to 46 percent by 2060.<sup>70</sup>

**FIGURE 1.7** Racial and Ethnic Makeup of U.S. Population, 2016–2055 (Projected)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division; Statista, 2020.



## FOR THE RECORD

### Digital Nomads Check in From Paradise

Are you dreaming of becoming a digital nomad working from home, in a café, or on the beach? If so, you may get your wish. Smartphones, tablets, and ever smaller netbooks have given rise to mobile workers who can do their jobs from any place that provides connectivity. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic instantly confined many workers to their home offices, experts believed that within a few years, more than 105 million Americans will work remotely in some form. That's nearly 75 percent of the domestic labor force!<sup>75</sup>

Studies show that mobile workers are happier and more productive. However, working without traditional offices creates unique challenges, including the lack of face-to-face communication with colleagues. What are some ways virtual workers can effectively communicate with stakeholders?

In addition to increasing numbers of minorities, the workforce will see a big jump in older workers. By 2024, the number of workers aged fifty-five and older will have grown to a quarter of the labor force, almost double the number in 2000.<sup>71</sup> Aging baby boomers are healthier and enjoy greater longevity than previous generations. Because they are also better educated, mature workers tend to work later in life and bring invaluable know-how and experience to the table.<sup>72</sup> Workers with disabilities are another group benefiting from a tight labor market as they must overcome prejudice.<sup>73</sup> However, businesses such as Ford Motor, Microsoft, JPMorgan Chase, and SAP have formed a task force to boost the hiring of autistic workers because tech workers on the spectrum more than make up for their lack of social skills with analytical skills, tenacity, and focus.<sup>74</sup> As a result of these and other demographic trends, businesses must create work environments that value and support all people.

Communicating in this diverse work environment requires new attitudes and skills. Acquiring these new employment skills is certainly worth the effort because of the benefits diversity brings to consumers, work teams, and business organizations. A diverse staff is better able to read trends and respond to the increasingly diverse customer base in local and world markets.

In the workplace, diversity also makes good business sense. Teams made up of people with various experiences are more likely to create the products consumers demand. Customers also want to deal with companies that respect their values. They are more likely to say, "If you are a company whose ads do not include me, or whose workforce does not include me, I will not buy from you." Learning to cooperate and communicate successfully with diverse coworkers should be a major priority for all businesspeople.

## 1-3g Virtual and Nonterritorial Offices

Today's physical work environments are changing profoundly. You may have heard people refer to the **virtual office**, a workspace that's mobile and decentralized. Thanks largely to nearly ever-present Internet access, millions of workers telecommute. They no longer report to nine-to-five jobs that confine them to offices. They have flexible working arrangements, so they can work remotely at home, on the road, and at the customer's place of business. The **anytime, anywhere office** a teleworker needs requires only a smartphone, a laptop, and an Internet connection. Perhaps the most untethered type is the **digital nomad**, a worker with a wandering lifestyle enabled by technology, who often travels to exotic locales for extended periods of time.

Reliable data tracking office road warriors are lacking, but according to Gallup, 43 percent of employed adults work remotely at least some of the time and increasingly longer. In finance, health care, client services,

### Open Office Rules



Rules for sharing open workspaces:

1. Don't hang around.
2. Limit chitchat.
3. Don't sneak up on anyone.
4. Don't eavesdrop or otherwise spy on others.
5. Speak in a soft voice.
6. Wear headphones.



transportation, and IT, intermittent telework is common among more than half of the workforce.<sup>76</sup> Yahoo under Marissa Mayer's leadership famously pulled the plug on telecommuting, but companies such as Amazon, Dell, Xerox, Toyota, and UnitedHealth Group lure applicants with a better work-life balance. Matt Welsh, vice president of global recruiting at Hilton, believes that "Offering our Team Members flexibility in their work schedule and location is one way that we can help them thrive."<sup>77</sup> The concerns about telework include plummeting productivity, social isolation, and lagging promotions.

To save on office real estate, a number of companies such as American Express and drug maker GlaxoSmithKline provide **nonterritorial workspaces**. Also known as mobile platforms and hot desks, these unassigned workspaces are up for grabs. The first to arrive gets the best desk and the corner window. But some workers rebelled against corporate penny-pinching and generic open office layouts, and now several IT businesses are experimenting with a **palette of places**, to cater to the various work tasks knowledge workers tackle. Such variable spaces include tiny soundproof rooms for intense concentration, team spaces, standing desks, and even technology-free lounges.<sup>78</sup>

Increasingly, telecommuters and home office workers resort to **coworking** as an alternative to holding business meetings at the local coffee shop or in the living room. Coworkers are professionals who share a communal office space on an as-needed basis. Although most coworking spaces provide monthly memberships, some offer day or hourly passes. Not just small businesses, but also major corporations, such as GE, KPMG, PepsiCo, and Merck, are moving workers into trendy shared offices.<sup>79</sup> WeWork and LiquidSpace are doing for office real estate what Uber has started for ride sharing—a platform for users to offer and seek flexible access to workspaces. Digital nomads benefit from new **co-living** platforms such as Roam or PodShare that provide coworking spaces and accommodations in the United States and around the world.<sup>80</sup>

Even in more traditional offices, employees work in open-plan spaces with flexible workstations, shared conference rooms, and boomerang-shaped desks that save space and discourage territorial behavior while encouraging casual interactions as well as spontaneous collaborations.



Although Facebook bet on building the largest open-office space in the world, many knowledge workers prefer quiet spaces when they must concentrate.

## 1-4 Communication Channels in Organizations and Media Richness

Businesspeople almost always communicate strategically—that is, purposefully, hoping to achieve a desired outcome. Business communication functions can be summarized in three simple categories: (a) to inform, (b) to persuade, and/or (c) to promote goodwill. Most business messages have one of these functions as their purpose. Informing or sharing information is perhaps the most common communication function in all organizations today. On the job, you will have a dizzying array of channels to help you share information and stay connected both internally and externally. You will need to know which media are most suitable to accomplish your goal and be able to distinguish between formal and informal channels.

### 1-4a The Workplace in a Hyperconnected World

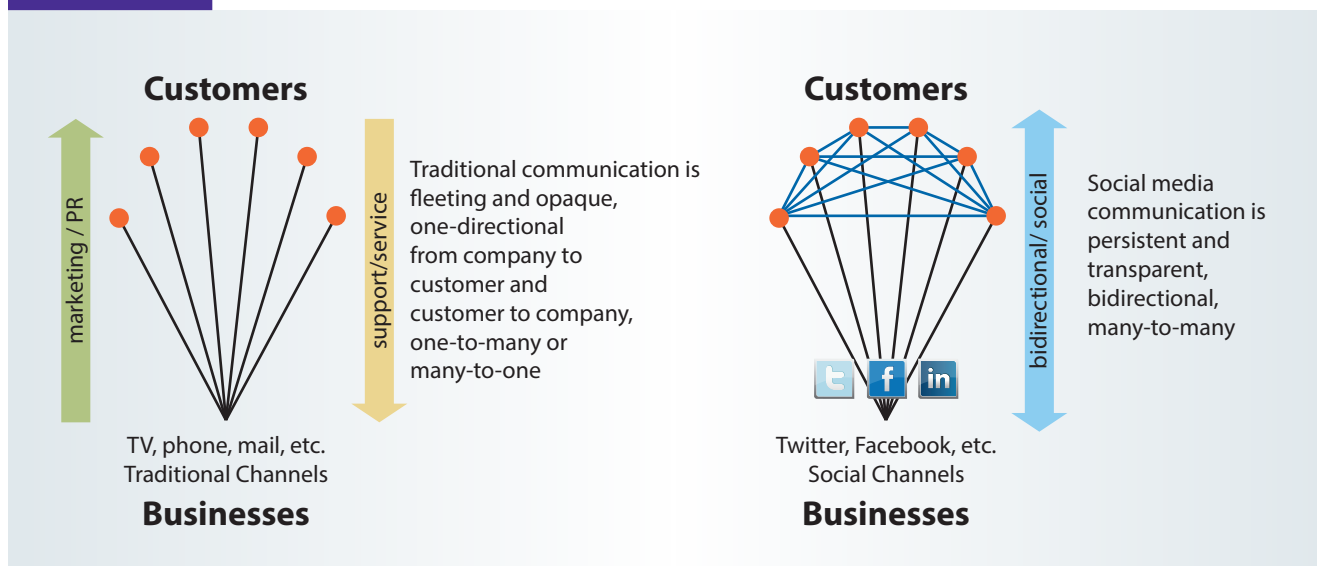
Social media and other information technology coupled with flatter hierarchies have greatly changed the way people communicate internally and externally at work. One major shift is away from one-sided, slow forms of communication such as hard-copy memos and letters to interactive, instant, less paper-based communication. Speeding up the flow of communication in organizations are e-mail, instant messaging (IM) and collaboration platforms, texting, blogging, and interacting with social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Figure 1.8 shows a side-by-side comparison between the traditional one-directional business communication model and today's hyperconnected, many-to-many social media communication model.

#### LEARNING OUTCOME

**4** Identify how information flows internally and externally in organizations through formal and informal channels.



**FIGURE 1.8** Traditional vs. Social Media Communication Between Businesses and Customers



Fearing openly accessible social networks, many large organizations have developed their own internal social media platforms behind corporate firewalls. These enterprise social networks (e.g., Adobe's Unicom) combine e-mail, phone, chat, presence technology, and other communication tools, as you will study in Chapter 7. Collaboration platforms such as Slack, Google Hangouts, Cisco Spark, Hive, Fuze, or Yammer allow messaging, file sharing and editing, and project management. To stay connected on the go, business communicators rely on mobile electronic devices and mobile apps that enhance work productivity.

**Mobility and Interactivity.** Mobility has revolutionized the way we communicate on the job. Internet access is nearly ever present, whether provided by cell phone companies or wireless networks. Wireless access is increasingly blanketing entire office buildings, airports, hotels, hospitals, restaurants, school and college campuses, cities, and other public spaces.

Other forms of interactive and mobile communication in the contemporary workplace are intranets (secured local area networks within organizations), corporate websites, audio and video podcasting, videoconferencing, and live chats. The latter is rapidly becoming the preferred communication channel for online customer service. Consumers shopping online or inquiring about billing or technical support use the company website and chat with customer service representatives in real time by typing their questions. Live service agents respond with typed replies. Some companies are experimenting with automated chat bots for routine tasks.

**Smart Devices.** The revolution in mobile communication technology that we have come to depend on is fueled by smart mobile electronics. They include smartphones, tablets, notebooks, and, more recently, wearable technology such as the Apple Watch, activity trackers, and Google Glass.

To understand the pervasiveness of mobile technology, consider that the world population now stands at 7.7 billion people; of those, 5.1 billion are mobile device users who own 8.5 billion smart electronic gadgets. Mobile access reached a tipping point in 2014, overtaking traditional stationary Internet access; today the share of Web traffic now stands at almost 53 percent for mobile phones (without tablets) to 45 percent for laptops and desktops.<sup>81</sup> When Apple launched its phenomenally successful iPad, the gadget was hailed as a game changer. Although consumer sales of the most popular tablet have slowed, many businesses choose iPads on the go because they are lighter and cheaper than laptops.

Ahead of the iPhone, Google's Android platform has taken the smartphone market by storm worldwide. Android, primarily represented by Samsung devices, has grabbed a global market share of 88 percent; Apple's iOS market share has fluctuated between 14 and 21 percent.<sup>82</sup> Low-cost Android handsets also dominate the smartphone market in Africa, India, and China. Thus,

millions of people access the Internet by mobile phone not only in industrialized nations but also in regions of the world where smartphones provide the only online access.

## 1-4b Internal and External Communication

Digital age businesspeople communicate with many stakeholders outside their organizations, and internally with coworkers and other employees. They must anticipate public scrutiny and potential leaks of information that may reach unintended audiences. Although most businesses rely on e-mail and digital files for communication, they still produce some paper-based documents, as will be discussed in later chapters.

Internal communication includes exchanging ideas and messages with superiors, coworkers, and subordinates. When those messages must be written, you will probably choose e-mail—the most prevalent communication channel in the workplace today. Some of the functions of internal communication are to issue and clarify procedures and policies, inform management of progress, develop new products and services, persuade employees or management to make changes or improvements, coordinate activities, and evaluate and reward employees. Brief messages and status updates may be conveyed by text message or IM especially when the writer is traveling.

External communication is also handled by e-mail in most routine cases. When you are communicating externally with customers, suppliers, the government, and the public, e-mail correspondence is generally appropriate. Hard-copy letters sent by traditional snail mail are becoming increasingly rare, especially under time constraints. However, some businesses do create signed paper documents to be faxed, or they scan and e-mail them. External functions involve answering inquiries about products or services, persuading customers to buy products or services, clarifying supplier specifications, issuing credit, collecting bills, responding to government agencies, and promoting a positive image of the organization.

When communicating with internal and external audiences, businesspeople must now also consider leaks and the backchannel. **Backchannel communication** is a simultaneous electronic background conversation during a conference presentation, lecture, or entertainment program. For example, when you live tweet or IM your friends while watching the latest episode of *Game of Thrones*, you are having a backchannel conversation.

In business, backchannel describes the synchronous digital interactions that run in the background parallel to a meeting or presentation. When AOL chief Tim Armstrong infamously fired a subordinate during an internal conference call in front of 1,100 colleagues, the audio was instantly leaked and went viral. Business communicators must always anticipate unintended audiences and public criticism.

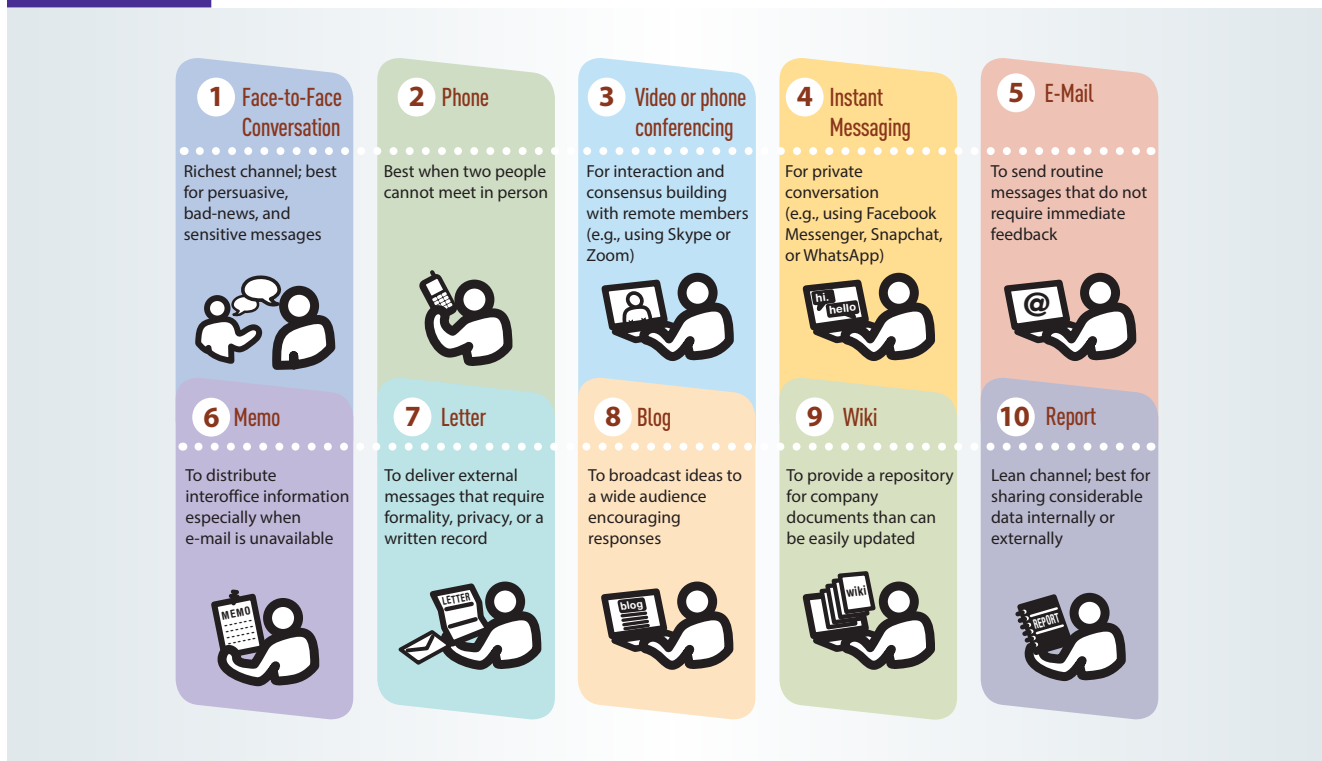
## 1-4c Media Richness and Social Presence

Business communicators must be able to choose from a wide range of communication channels the one most suitable to get the job done—that is, most likely to elicit the desired outcome. How to choose the appropriate medium to avoid ambiguity, confusing messages, and misunderstandings has long been studied by researchers. Media richness theory and the concept of social presence are particularly useful for evaluating the effectiveness of old and new media in a given situation.

**Media Richness.** Daft and Lengel's media richness theory attempts to classify media in organizations according to how much clarifying information they are able to convey from a sender to a recipient.<sup>83</sup> The more helpful cues and immediate feedback the medium provides, the richer it is; face-to-face and on the telephone, managers can best deal with complex organizational issues. For routine, unambiguous problems, however, media of lower richness, such as memos, reports, and other written communication, usually suffice. Figure 1.9 displays contemporary and traditional media based on their richness and, hence, their likely communication effectiveness.

Ideally, senders would choose the richest medium necessary to communicate the message to the recipient with as little ambiguity as possible. Because a rich medium (such as a face-to-face conversation) is not always available, communicators must often use leaner media (for example, e-mail) that may not be as effective in reducing ambiguity and decreasing the risk of miscommunication. Just think how hard it is to know whether a text or an e-mail is sarcastic.

**FIGURE 1.9** Communication Channels from Richest to Leanest



**Social Presence.** The degree to which people are engaged online and ready to connect with others is called **social presence**. As proposed by Short, Williams, and Christie, however, social presence is the degree of salience (being there) between a sender and receiver using a communication medium.<sup>84</sup> Media with high social presence convey warmth and are personal. Social presence is greatest face-to-face and less so in mediated and written communication, such as phone conversations and text messages. Likewise, social presence is greater in synchronous communication (live chat, IM) than in asynchronous communication (e-mail, forum post), which is rather impersonal.

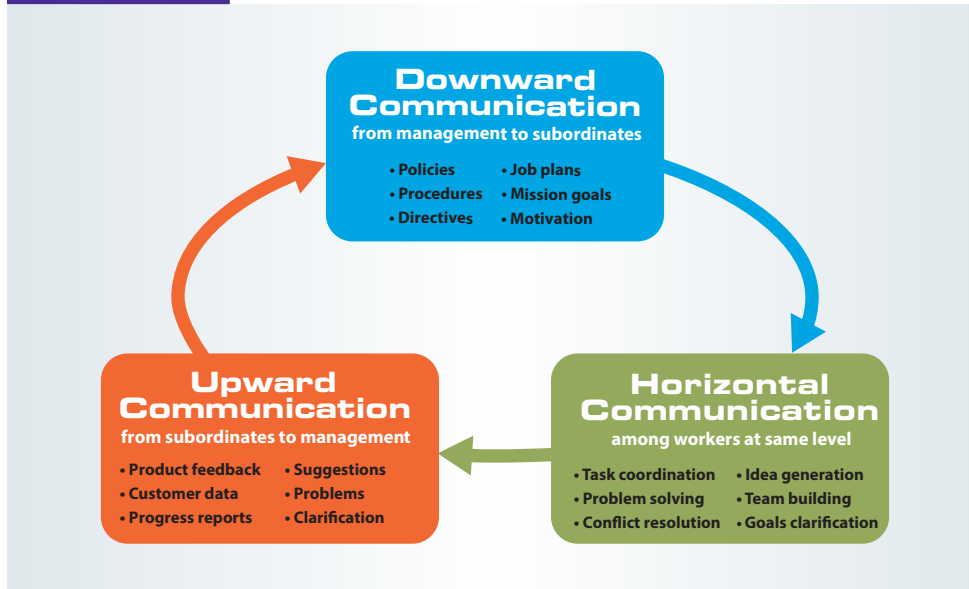
Face-to-face we receive many more signals than just speech. For example, nonverbal cues, emotional disposition, and voice inflection help us interpret a message. In real time, we can ask the author of a message to clarify—something we cannot do as easily when the message arrives with a delay and is enabled by technology. You could say that social presence means how much awareness of the sender is conveyed along with the message. Communication can succeed as long as the chosen communication medium offers enough social presence to complete the task.<sup>85</sup>

## 1-4d Formal Communication Channels

Information within organizations flows through formal and informal communication channels. A free exchange of information helps organizations respond rapidly to changing markets, boost efficiency and productivity, build employee morale, serve the public, and take full advantage of the ideas of today's knowledge workers. Official information within an organization typically flows through formal channels in three directions: downward, upward, and horizontally, as shown in Figure 1.10.

Formal channels of communication generally follow an organization's chain of command. That is, a message originates with executives and flows down through managers to supervisors and finally to lower-level employees. Many organizations have formulated communication policies that encourage regular open communication through newsletters, the corporate intranet,

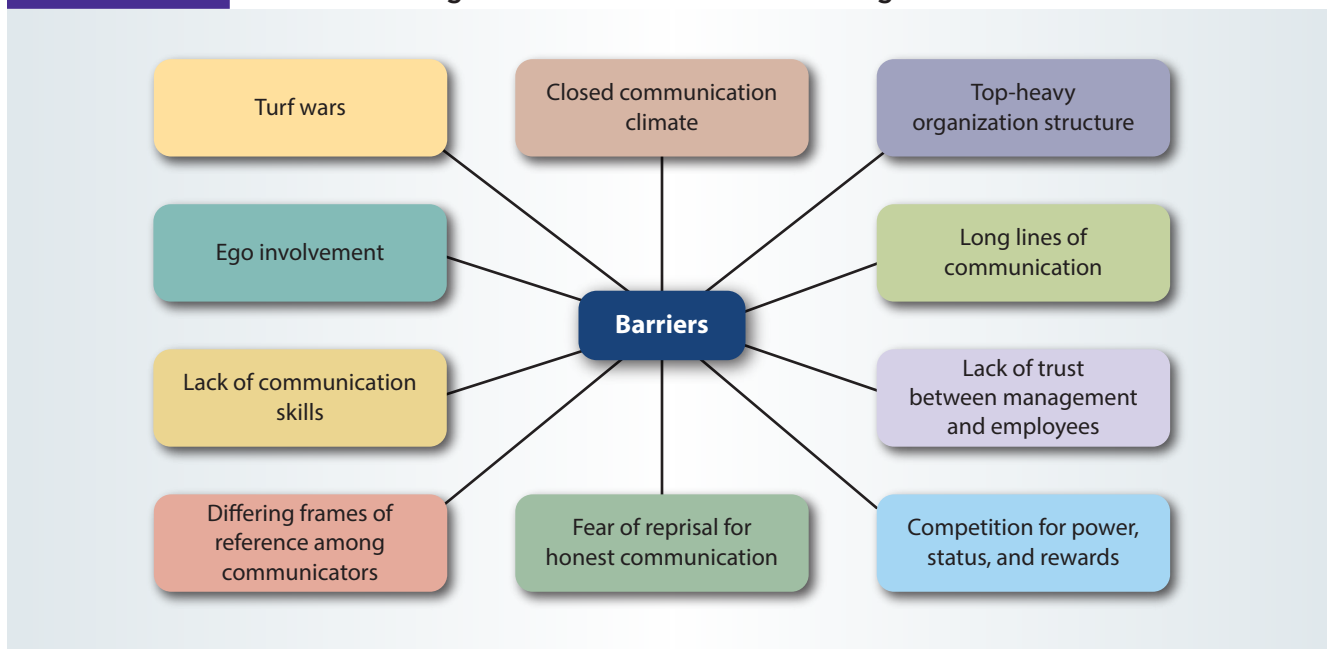
**FIGURE 1.10** Information Flow in Organizations



official messages, company-provided social networks, and blogs. Free-flowing, open communication invigorates organizations and makes them successful. Barriers, however, can obstruct the flow of communication, as summarized in Figure 1.11, and must be overcome if the organization is to thrive.

**Improving Downward Information Flow.** To improve communication and to compete more effectively, many of today's companies have restructured and reengineered themselves into smaller operating units and work teams. Rather than being bogged down with long communication chains, management speaks directly to employees. In addition to shorter chains of communication, management can improve the downward flow of information through

**FIGURE 1.11** Barriers Blocking the Flow of Communication in Organizations



## Ethics Check

### Office Grapevine

Like a game of telephone, the grapevine can distort the original message because the news travels through many mouths and ears at the office. Knowing this, can you safely share with even a trusted colleague something you would not comfortably discuss with everyone?

company publications, announcements, meetings, videos, podcasts, and other channels. Instead of hoarding information at the top, today's managers recognize the importance of letting workers know how well the company is doing and what new projects are planned.

**Improving Upward Information Flow.** To improve the upward flow of communication, some companies are (a) hiring communication coaches to train employees, (b) asking employees to report customer complaints, (c) encouraging regular meetings with staff, (d) providing a trusting, nonthreatening environment in which employees can comfortably share their observations and ideas with management, and (e) offering incentive programs that encourage employees to collect and share valuable feedback. Companies are also building trust by setting up hotlines for anonymous feedback to management and by installing ombudsman programs. An *ombudsman* is a mediator who hears employee complaints, investigates, and seeks to resolve problems fairly.

**Improving Horizontal Information Flow.** To improve horizontal communication, companies are (a) training employees in teamwork and communication techniques, (b) establishing reward systems based on team achievement rather than individual achievement, and (c) encouraging full participation in team functions. However, employees must also realize that they are personally responsible for making themselves heard, for really understanding what other people say, and for getting the information they need. Developing those business communication skills is exactly what this book and this course will do for you.



Feared by management, the office grapevine can be an accurate and speedy source of information in organizations with poor formal communication and lack of transparency.

## 1-4e Informal Communication Channels

Most organizations today share company news through consistent, formal channels such as e-mail, intranet posts, blogs, and staff meetings. Regardless, even within organizations with consistent formal channels, people still spread rumors about the company and gossip about each other.

The **grapevine** is an informal channel of communication that carries organizationally relevant gossip. This powerful but informal channel functions through social relationships; people talk about work when they are lunching, working out, golfing, and carpooling, as well as in e-mails, texts, and social media posts. At one time gossip took place mostly around the water cooler. Today, however, gossip travels much more rapidly online.

**Respecting the Power of the Grapevine.** Researchers studying communication flow within organizations know that the grapevine can be a powerful, pervasive source of information. In some organizations it can account for as much as two thirds of an employee's information. Is this bad? Well, yes

and no. The grapevine can be an accurate and speedy source of organization information. Studies have demonstrated accuracy ratings of 75 to 80 percent for many grapevine transmissions.<sup>86</sup> The grapevine is often the fastest channel to disseminate information throughout an organization.<sup>87</sup> However, like a game of telephone, such messages can introduce falsehoods the longer the path the news travels. Sensitive rumors publicized online have cost many workers their jobs.

**Understanding the Potential Benefits of the Grapevine.** In deft hands, the grapevine can serve as an opportunity to praise coworkers and subtly build one's positive workplace reputation.<sup>88</sup> Sometimes office gossip can be downright positive. A Dutch university study found that up to 90 percent of office conversation consists of gossip. The authors believe that such chatter may foster group cohesion, strengthen the bonds among workers, and even improve productivity by making poor performers work harder.<sup>89</sup> To many of us, gossip is fun and even entertaining. It encourages social bonding and makes us feel close to others who share our trust. We feel a part of the group and believe that we can influence others when we share a significant tidbit.



As opposed to the offline grapevine, consumer-generated information online in social media, forums, Internet discussion boards, blogs, Facebook posts, and tweets provides an unsparing, revealing glimpse of what employees and the public are thinking. Social networking sites such as Glassdoor offer anonymous reviews that expose the inner workings of companies. Glassdoor also enables users to share typical interview questions with other job seekers and provides invaluable insider information. High-profile leaks spread fast online, and their accuracy can be verified more easily than rumors in an offline grapevine.

**Using the Grapevine Productively.** Managers can use the grapevine productively by doing the following: (a) respecting employees' desire to know, (b) increasing the amount of information delivered through formal channels, (c) sharing bad as well as good news, (d) monitoring the grapevine, and (e) acting promptly to correct misinformation.<sup>90</sup> In addition, managers should model desirable behavior and not gossip themselves.<sup>91</sup>

As we have seen, office gossip online or off is complex and sometimes harmful. Productivity and morale may suffer as mistrust spreads. As a result, worker engagement plummets and turnover increases. If pervasive gossip qualifies as "malicious harassment," it may expose a company to legal liability.<sup>92</sup> Malicious gossip spread in e-mails, via text messages, or on social media sites can be used in defamation cases. It can become evidence against employers in supporting charges of harassment or maintaining a hostile work environment. In addition, employers look upon gossip as a productivity drain. The time spent gossiping reduces the time spent working.

Responsive organizations are better able to correct inaccuracies and misperceptions regardless of the channel used. Through formal and informal channels of communication, smart companies keep employees and the public informed.

## 1-5 Ethics in the Workplace Needed More Than Ever

Business ethics continue to grab headlines and dominate public debate. The Great Recession of 2007–2009 was triggered by the collapse of the housing bubble and ensuing banking crisis. Many economists blame greed and ethical lapses for the worst economic tailspin in more than 70 years. Subsequent corporate scandals, allegations of executive misconduct, and fraud investigations have ensured that business ethics remain in the spotlight.

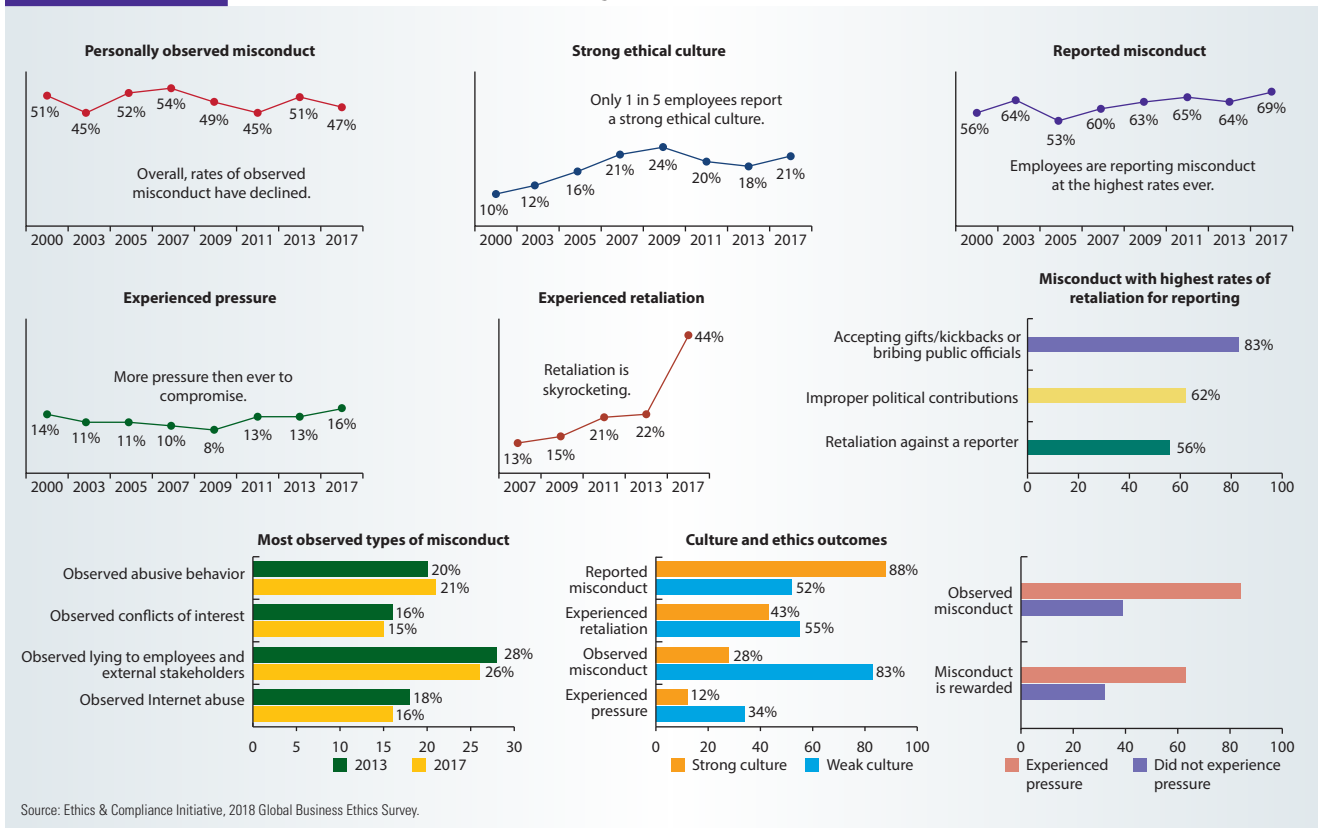
Consider one egregious example—Wells Fargo's systemic consumer abuses at a time when U.S. banks' reputations were still tarnished by the financial crisis. The bank admitted that thousands of its employees had created 3.5 million fake accounts to earn bonuses. Wells Fargo also charged unfair mortgage fees and ripped off service members. Nearly \$1.2 billion in fines followed—a huge sum historically, but one that is dwarfed by Wells Fargo's annual revenue of \$22 billion.<sup>93</sup> Of similar magnitude, Volkswagen AG's massive diesel emissions fraud led to lawsuits in 55 countries and a fine of \$1.2 billion. In all, "Dieselgate" has cost VW \$35 billion in buybacks and litigation. The German carmaker had rigged 11 million vehicles to bypass diesel-emissions regulations.<sup>94</sup> Each new tale of impropriety erodes consumer confidence and feeds into the perception that all business is dishonest.

Most individuals understand that lying is "corrosive," undermining trust in the workplace and destroying personal integrity.<sup>95</sup> Warren Buffett's much-quoted maxim applies here: "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it."<sup>96</sup> More tangibly, lying in the form of fraud can cost a typical business about 5 percent of its annual revenue, leading, according to an association of investigators, to a projected global loss of nearly \$4 trillion a year.<sup>97</sup> Harvey Weinstein's sexual indiscretions destroyed his production company; the scandal triggered the **#MeToo movement** and led to the firing of prominent public figures.

Americans want change. An important study reveals that millennials prefer brands with sustainable manufacturing and ethical business practices.<sup>98</sup> A PwC study suggests that corporate boards will not be able to overlook executives' ethical lapses. Activist shareholders and technology make discovering malfeasance easier and amplify public outrage via social media. A Stanford poll found that almost half of Americans want dishonest CEOs to be fired or sent to prison. Only 15 percent oppose punishment.<sup>99</sup> Figure 1.12 reveals the results of a global ethics study. The survey

### LEARNING OUTCOME

**5** Recognize the tools for doing the right thing as an ethical business communicator.

**FIGURE 1.12** Global Business Ethics Survey

concludes that strong workplace cultures prioritizing ethics suffer fewer lapses, but the number of such workplaces remains stagnant.

The topic of ethics could fill entire books. However, we will examine aspects that specifically concern you as a business communicator in today's workplace.

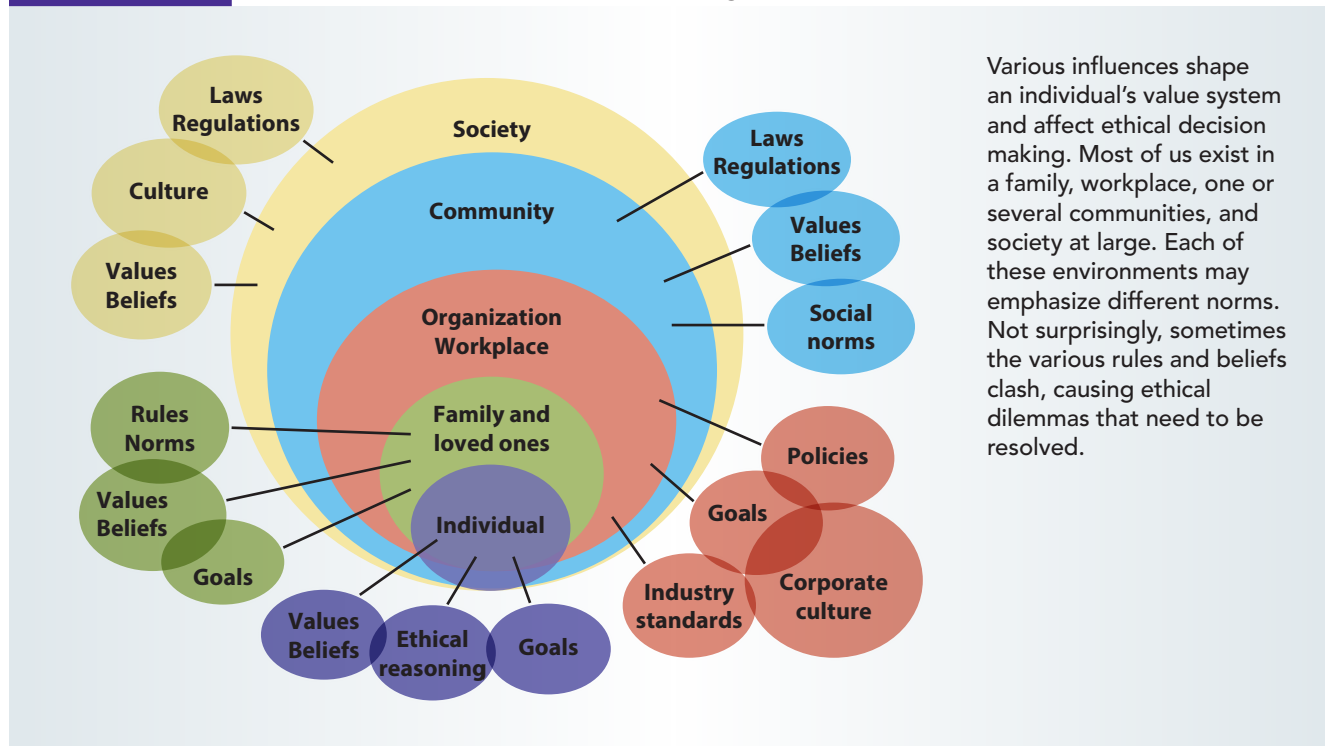
## 1-5a Defining Ethics

**Ethics** refers to conventional standards of right and wrong that prescribe what people should do. These standards usually consist of rights, obligations, and benefits to society. They also include virtues such as fairness, honesty, loyalty, and concern for others. Ethics is about having values and taking responsibility. Ethical individuals follow the law and refrain from theft, murder, assault, slander, and fraud. Figure 1.13 depicts some of the influences that form our awareness of ethics and help us develop a value system that guides our decisions. In the following discussion, we examine ethics in the workplace, study goals of ethical business communicators, and learn tools for doing the right thing.

As a business communicator, you should understand basic ethical principles so that you can make logical decisions when faced with dilemmas in the workplace. Professionals in any field deal with moral dilemmas on the job. However, just being a moral person and having sound personal or professional ethics may not be sufficient to handle the ethical issues you may face in the workplace. Consider the following ethical dilemmas:

- **E-mail message** You accidentally receive a message outlining your company's restructuring plan. You see that your coworker's job will be eliminated. He and his wife are about to purchase a new home. Should you tell him that his job is in danger?
- **Customer e-mail** You are replying to an e-mail from a customer who is irate over a mistake you made. Should you blame it on a computer glitch, point the finger at another department, or take the blame and risk losing this customer's trust and possibly your job?

**FIGURE 1.13** The Context of Ethical Decision Making



- **Progress report** Should you write a report that ignores problems in a project, as your boss asks? Your boss controls your performance evaluation.
- **Sales report** Should you inflate sales figures so that your team can meet its quarterly goal? Your team leader strongly urges you to do so, and you receive a healthy bonus if your team meets its goal.
- **Presentation** You are rushing to prepare a presentation. On the Internet you find perfect wording and great graphics. Should you lift the graphics and wording but change a few words? You figure that if it is online, it must be in the public domain.
- **Proposal** Your company urgently needs a revenue-producing project. Should you submit a proposal that unrealistically suggests a short completion schedule to ensure that you get the job?
- **Résumé** Should you inflate your grade point average or give yourself more experience or a higher job title than your experience warrants to make your résumé more attractive? The job market in your field is very competitive.

On the job you will face many dilemmas, and you will want to react ethically. Determining the right thing to do, however, is not always an easy task. No solid rules guide us. For some people, following the law seems to be enough. They think that anything legal must also be ethical or moral. Most people, however, believe that ethical standards rise to a higher level. What are those standards? Although many ethical dilemmas have no right answer, one solution is often better than another. In deciding on that solution, keep in mind the goals of ethical business communicators.

## 1-5b Doing What Ethical Communicators Do

Taking ethics into consideration can be painful in the short term. In the long term, however, ethical behavior makes sense and pays off. Dealing honestly with colleagues and customers develops trust and builds strong relationships. The following guidelines can help you set specific ethical

goals. Although these goals hardly constitute a formal code of conduct, they will help you maintain a high ethical standard.

**Abiding by the Law.** Know the laws in your field and follow them. Particularly important for business communicators are issues of copyright law. Under the concept of fair use, individuals have limited rights to use copyrighted material without seeking permission. To be safe, you should assume that anything produced privately after 1989—including words, charts, graphs, photos, and music—is copyrighted. More information about copyright law and fair use appears in Chapter 11.

By the way, don't assume that Internet items are in the public domain and free to be used or shared. Files and media posted on the Internet are covered by copyright laws. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) have sued individuals, website operators, and Internet service providers for allowing illicit downloading or sharing of music and movies. Tough penalties can include a felony conviction, up to five years in jail, and fines up to \$250,000. If you are in accounting, financial management, investing, or corporate management, you should be aware of the restrictions set forth by the Sarbanes–Oxley Act or the provisions of the Dodd–Frank Act. Whatever your field, become familiar with its regulations.



3D generator/Shutterstock.com

## Ethics Check

### How Bad Is “Prosocial Deception” a.k.a. White Lies?

We all tell lies intended to benefit others daily, for example: “Your presentation was terrific” or “I can’t believe you were passed over for promotion.” Meant to spare others’ feelings, such fibs are thought to be harmless, perhaps socially necessary. However, even compassionate lies can harm people, claim researchers studying prosocial deception, for instance, if the white lie gives the incompetent presenter false confidence. Compassionate people, say researchers, lie more than others. How can you determine when a small lie may be appropriate?

**Telling the Truth.** Ethical business communicators do not intentionally make statements that are untrue or deceptive. Samsonite CEO Ramesh Tainwala was called out by an activist investor for claiming a doctoral degree he had not earned and was forced to resign a week later. Hewlett-Packard CEO Mark Hurd was ousted in scandal after a probe into his relationship with a female contractor revealed that he had submitted inaccurate expense reports. Former Volkswagen CEO Martin Winterkorn faces years in prison and stiff fines for allegedly helping to conceal cheating software in the company’s massive diesel emissions scandal. According to a Stanford study, lying and cheating CEOs had a lingering effect on their companies’ reputations—on average for five years after their departure.<sup>100</sup> The big-time lies made headlines, and you may see no correlation to your life. On a personal level, however, we all may lie and deceive in various ways. We say things that are not so. We may exaggerate to swell the importance of our assertions.

**Labeling Opinions.** Sensitive communicators know the difference between facts and opinions. Facts are verifiable and often are quantifiable; opinions are beliefs held with confidence but without substantiation. It is a fact, for example, that women are starting businesses at five times the rate of men.<sup>101</sup> It is an opinion, though, that the so-called glass ceiling has held women back, forcing them to start their own businesses. Such a cause-and-effect claim would be difficult to prove. It is a fact that many corporations are spending billions of dollars to be socially responsible, including using ethically made products and developing eco-friendly technology. It is an opinion that corporate social responsibility is an obligation for all businesses. Assertions that cannot be proved are opinions, and stating opinions as if they were facts is unethical and, well, foolish.

**Being Objective.** Ethical business communicators recognize their own biases and strive to keep them from distorting a message. Suppose you are asked to investigate laptop computers and write a report recommending a brand for your office. As you visit stores, you discover that an old high school friend is selling Brand X. Because you always liked this individual and have faith in his judgment, you may be inclined to tilt your recommendation in his direction. However, it is unethical to misrepresent the facts in your report or to put a spin on your arguments based on friendship. To be ethical, you could note in your report that you have known the person for ten years and that you respect his opinion. In this way, you have disclosed your relationship as well as the reasons for your decision. Honest reporting means presenting the whole picture and relating all facts fairly.

**Communicating Clearly.** Ethical business communicators feel an obligation to write clearly so that receivers understand easily and quickly. Some states have even passed plain English



(also called plain language) laws requiring businesses to write policies, warranties, and contracts in language comprehensible to average readers. Under former chairman Arthur Levitt, the Securities and Exchange Commission issued *A Plain English Handbook* explaining how to create clear SEC disclosure documents. Persistent lobbying efforts by plain-language advocacy groups at the federal level culminated in the Plain Writing Act. The law mandates that government agencies use unadorned prose in documents addressing the public. Plain English means short sentences, simple words, and clear organization. Communicators who intentionally obscure the meaning with long sentences and difficult words are being unethical.

**Using Inclusive Language.** Ethical business communicators use language that includes rather than excludes. They avoid expressions that discriminate against individuals or groups on the basis of their sex, ethnicity, disability, race, sexual orientation, or age. Language is discriminatory when it stereotypes, insults, or excludes people. You will learn more about how to use inclusive, bias-free language in Chapter 4.

**Giving Credit.** Ethical communicators give credit for ideas by (a) referring to originators' names within the text, (b) using quotation marks, and (c) documenting sources with endnotes, footnotes, or internal references. You will learn how to do this in Chapter 11 and Appendix B. Don't suggest that you did all the work on a project if you had help. In school or on the job, stealing ideas, words, graphics, or any other original material is unethical.

In addition to legal and regulatory restrictions in their fields, many professionals uphold their own rigorous rules of conduct; for example, physicians, psychologists, and accountants follow standards of professional ethics much higher than the restrictions imposed by law. Similarly, members of the International Association of Business Communicators have developed a code of ethics with 12 guidelines that spell out criteria for determining what is right and wrong for members of its organization. Search for *IABC Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators* on the Web.

## Reality Check

### Corporate Ethics Is Front and Center Again

"While some Fortune 100 executives have gone to jail trying to deliver financial results at all costs, others have pushed their businesses forward with decisions rooted in integrity and a commitment to employees, customers, and shareholders. ... If leaders do not operate from a place of integrity, it sets the tone for everything and everyone else and directly and negatively impacts the bottom line."<sup>102</sup>

—Nicole Alvino, co-founder and CSO of SocialChorus

## 1-5c Choosing Tools for Doing the Right Thing

It's easy to commit ethical lapses because of natural self-interest and the desire to succeed. In composing messages or engaging in other activities on the job, business communicators can't help being torn by conflicting loyalties. Do we tell the truth and risk our jobs? Do we show loyalty to friends even if it means bending the rules? Should we be tactful or totally honest? Is it our duty to make a profit or to be socially responsible?

Acting ethically means doing the right thing given the circumstances. Each set of circumstances requires analyzing issues, evaluating choices, and acting responsibly. Resolving ethical issues is never easy, but the task can be made less difficult if you know how to identify key issues. The five questions in Figure 1.14 may help you resolve most ethical dilemmas. The checklist begins by asking whether an action is legal. You should go forward only if the action complies with the law. If it does, then test the ethical soundness of your plan by asking the remaining questions: Would you proceed if you were on the receiving end of the action, and can you rule out better options? Even if the answer is yes, consider then how a trusted mentor or your family, friends, and coworkers would view your decision.

Traditionally, it has been argued that the best advice in ethical matters is contained in the **Golden Rule**: Treat others the way you wish to be treated. The principle of reciprocity has a long tradition and exists in many religions and cultures. However, more recently, author Tony Alessandra proposed the **Platinum Rule**: "Treat others as *they* wish to be treated," acknowledging that people may have standards and wishes different from our own. The ultimate solution to all ethics problems is treating others fairly and doing what is right to achieve what is good. In succeeding chapters, you will find additional discussions of ethical questions as they relate to relevant topics.

**FIGURE 1.14** Five Questions to Guide Ethical Decisions



## Zooming In

### Your Turn: Applying Your Skills at Nordstrom

Customers expect speed and convenience, says Jamie Nordstrom, president of stores, regardless of where they shop, online or in a physical store. The great-grandson of the company founder believes that “the retailers that deliver on those customers’ expectations are the ones that are going to get their business.”<sup>103</sup>

He grew up with the threat of new competitors unseating the family business, Jamie Nordstrom says, but he points to the company’s longevity and continued success. Its secret? Engaging customers and listening to their needs: “We have to remind ourselves on a daily basis that if we’re not listening to the customer, then we’re probably not going to make a good decision—so that’s our focus.”<sup>104</sup> And listen Nordstrom does.

#### Your Task

You are an intern in the User Experience and Optimization division overseen by Jamie Nordstrom, president of stores.

You are learning about the “Nordie” ethos of truly believing in helping others and genuinely loving customer service. As the former chairman Bruce A. Nordstrom put it: “We can hire nice people and teach them to sell, but we can’t hire salespeople and teach them to be nice.”<sup>105</sup> Naturally, this means being kind online.

The intern supervisor wants you to study Facebook interactions among customers and Nordstrom representatives to learn about the friendly, casual tone employed in such virtual encounters. How are the Nordstrom posters helping their Facebook followers? What are some of their most prominent strategies? Read several days’ worth of Facebook posts. Summarize your observations in an e-mail. Refer to Chapter 8 for information about how to draft an e-mail. Be sure to select two or three specific posts representing a pattern or strategy. For example, discuss particularly successful responses, whether they are prompted by an inquiry, complaint, or praise.

# SUMMARY OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

## 1 Explain how communication skills fuel career success in a technology-driven, social, and mobile workplace.

- In the age of automation, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence, also called the Fourth Industrial Revolution, communication and other interpersonal skills can future-proof well-trained workers.
- Superior communication skills—reading, writing, listening, nonverbal, speaking and writing skills—are always in demand; they rank high among the most desirable job competencies.
- Workers communicate more than ever; they must write their own messages and are glued to their screens for hours each day. Employers expect more of workers, not less.
- Writing skills can be learned; they are not innate.

## 2 Understand the impact of powerful interpersonal skills and a college education for your professional success in the hyperconnected digital age workplace.

- In the information age, which has allowed us to access and share vast amounts of resources via digital media, you will engage in mind work.
- Expect to be a knowledge worker who must think critically and develop opinions backed by evidence, particularly in an era of disinformation, manipulation, and fake news.
- You are learning to think, read, and ask questions in a networked world in which employers demand professionalism.
- Be prepared to take charge of your career as you are less likely to find predictable employment, pay increases, or even conventional workplaces.
- Because technologies are constantly evolving, you must engage in lifelong learning; expect to pursue several careers, not just jobs, but your education will most likely cause your income to grow.

## 3 Describe significant communication trends in today's dynamic, networked work environment.

- The trends affecting today's workers include new disruptive technologies and social media, expectations of around-the-clock availability, and global competition.
- Flattened management hierarchies, team projects, a diverse workforce, and the mobile or virtual office operating practically 24/7/365 are other significant trends.

- Workers need new skills and attitudes to collaborate successfully as team members in workplaces that are increasingly diverse and as potential telecommuters.
- Today's changing work environments include coworking spaces and flexible office design, requiring adaptability and mobility; some workers become digital nomads traveling the world.

## 4 Identify how information flows internally and externally in organizations through formal and informal channels.

- Business communicators are strategic; they always seek to achieve a particular objective, aided by rapidly changing communication technologies.
- The mobile digital workplace is unthinkable without smart mobile devices for accessing e-mail, messaging, company intranets, corporate websites, podcasts, videoconferences, and live chats.
- Internal communication involves superiors, coworkers, and subordinates, whereas external communication includes customers, suppliers, government agencies, and the public.
- Media richness and social presence describe the communication media most suitable to avoid ambiguity in any workplace interaction.
- Formal channels of communication follow an organization's rank order; informal channels, such as the grapevine, deliver unofficial news among coworkers. Gossip can be damaging.

## 5 Recognize the tools for doing the right thing as an ethical business communicator.

- Ethics describes standards of right and wrong prescribing what people should do and includes virtues such as fairness, honesty, and loyalty. Ethical standards are more rigorous than the law.
- The goals of ethical communicators include abiding by the law, telling the truth, labeling opinions, being objective, communicating clearly, using inclusive language, and giving credit.
- To do the right thing, ask these questions: (a) Is the action legal? (b) Would you do it if you were on the opposite side? (c) Can you rule out a better alternative? (d) Would a trusted advisor agree? and (e) Would your family, friends, employer, or coworkers approve?