

Second Edition

Business Communication

A Problem-Solving Approach

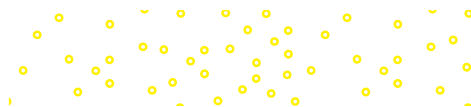
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BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: A PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH, SECOND EDITION

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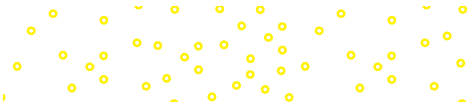
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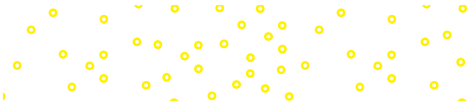
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Dedication

Kathy dedicates this book to her friend and colleague, Mary Beth Debs. Along with Kitty O. Locker, Mary Beth introduced Kathy to the rewarding and endlessly interesting world of professional writing. Mary Beth shaped the lives of many others as well, including hundreds of students. She was funny and incredibly smart, and she will be sorely missed.

Paula dedicates this book to business communication instructors everywhere who work tirelessly to equip their students for the workplace and inspire these students to become their best professional selves. She is grateful for the instructors' work and for their advocacy of business communication as an essential part of a 21st-century education.



About the Authors



Courtesy of Kathryn Rentz

Dr. Kathryn Rentz

Dr. Kathryn Rentz is a Professor of English at the University of Cincinnati. She taught her first business writing class as a doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the early 1980s and has been teaching workplace writing ever since. She helped establish the University of Cincinnati's professional writing program and has served as its coordinator. She has also won the English Department's teaching award, directed the department's graduate program, and helped direct the composition program.

Dr. Rentz's affiliation with the Association for Business Communication (ABC) goes back to her beginnings as a business writing teacher. She has performed many roles in the ABC, including serving on the Board of Directors and chairing the Publications Board. She served two terms as an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Business Communication* and was Interim Editor from 2000–2001, for which she won the Francis W. Weeks Award of Merit. In 2008 she won the ABC's Meada Gibbs Outstanding Teacher Award. In 2011 she began a four-year term on the association's Executive Committee, serving first as Second Vice President and then First Vice President, President, and Past President. She has also been named a Fellow of the Association and received the Distinguished Member Award.

Dr. Rentz has published articles on business communication pedagogy and research in such journals as *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, the *International Journal of Business Communication*, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. She has participated in many professional meetings and seminars over the years and is always learning from her colleagues and her students.



Courtesy of Paula Lentz

Dr. Paula Lentz

Dr. Paula Lentz is a Professor and Academic Program Director in the Department of Business Communication at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. She teaches Business Writing, Advanced Business Writing, and MBA courses. In addition, she directs the College of Business's Business Writing and Presentations Studio and is the Academic Director for the UW MBA Consortium program.

Dr. Lentz is particularly interested in qualitative research that explores narratives and organizational cultures, genre theory, and writing pedagogy. She has published in such journals as *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *Wisconsin Business Education Association Journal*, *Equal Opportunities International*, *Journal of Health Administration Communication*, and *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*. Her book, *Rhetorical Theory and Practice in the Business Communication Classroom*, co-authored with Dr. Kristen Getchell of Babson College, received the Association for Business Communication's 2019 Distinguished Book on Business Communication award. She also serves on the Association for Business Communication's Board of Directors and leads its Academic Environment Committee.

She continues to do freelance editing and provides consulting and writing services. She received a BA from Coe College, an MA from UW–Eau Claire, and a PhD in Rhetoric and Scientific and Technical Communication from the University of Minnesota.

In the Authors' Words:

The Problem-Solving Approach to Business Communication

More than ever, today's employers look for employees who have not only subject-matter expertise but also strong communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. Yet these employers also tell us that we are not preparing our students sufficiently in these areas.

In a way, we have a perfect storm: Today's students—while industrious, smart, and eager to do well—tend to avoid risks, become impatient with prolonged analysis, and focus on completing the immediate task, whereas the workplace has become a rapidly changing scene requiring comprehensive analysis, interpretation, and adaptation.

Our goal is to coax students out of their comfort zones into a problem-solving mindset while giving them the tools they need to make good communication decisions.

The following features of this second edition are critical to this effort.

A Realistic Depiction of BCom Challenges in the Professional Workplace

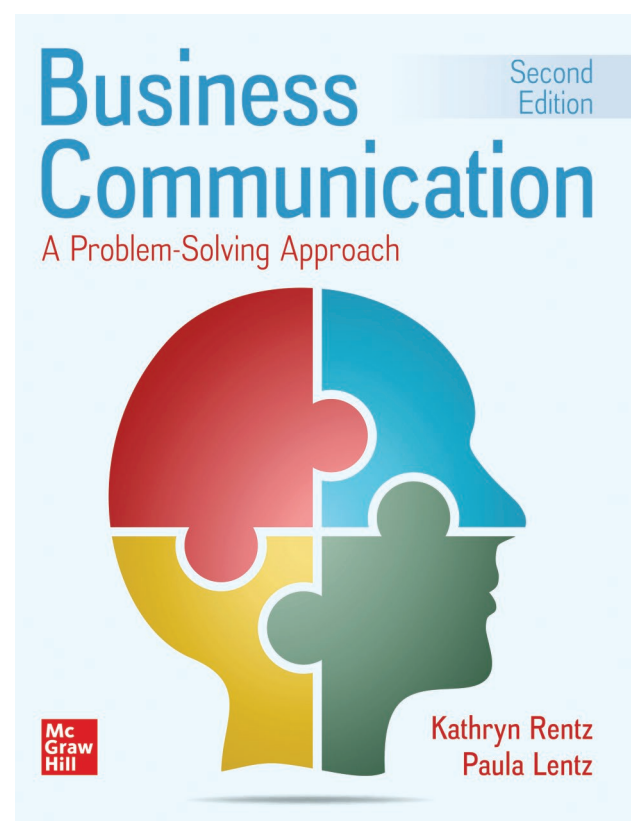
Students and instructors live in a world where a global pandemic and social justice issues have led business people to examine their values, their communication within their organizations and to the public, and their mindsets regarding where and how people do their work. From communicating in diverse cultures to participating in virtual teams and virtual job interviews, this book contextualizes business communication in the current global and social landscape, while at the same time equipping students with the problem-solving and communication skills to adapt in a continuously changing workforce.

From the very first page, the book makes clear that succeeding in the professional workplace requires analysis, information-gathering, creativity, and judgment. Even the clearest sentences, most appealing visuals, and most attractive document design cannot save a written or oral communication product if it has been built on inappropriate information and poor choices.

The upside of this tough reality is that solving communication problems is much more fun and rewarding than following a model or filling in a form. If given sufficient tools, students enjoy rising to the challenge of achieving results with creatively, carefully prepared communications. Plus, they quickly realize that the positions they aspire to will require the ability to solve ill-defined problems.

These special features support the book's problem-solving theme:

- Each chapter opens with a **Problem-Solving Challenge**, a scenario that introduces students to the kinds of communication problems that will be covered in the chapter.
- At various points in every chapter, students will see a **You Make the Call** box beside the main text. This feature invites students to think further about a point being made in the text.
- A new exercise, **Problem Solver to the Rescue**, has been added to the end of each chapter. Each exercise features a flawed solution to a communication scenario and invites students to use the problem-solving approach and the advice in the chapter to critique and rewrite the communication.
- **Critical-Thinking Questions** and **Skills-Building Exercises** at the end of every chapter give students further opportunity to think about and apply the book's advice, and over 75 **Problem-Solving Cases** situate students in workplace situations—from relatively simple ones that require brief but well-handled solutions to complex ones that require elaborate preparation—and give them practice meeting similar challenges that lie ahead.



Extensive Support for BCom Problem Solving

While it's ultimately up to the students to figure out what to write or say, why, and how in response to a communication problem, they do not have to start from scratch. As Chapter One points out, good problem solvers use heuristics—solutions to similar problems, general guidelines, and various analytical processes—to jumpstart their thinking. This book offers many such aids.

- The **Problem-Solving Process** described in Chapter One gives students a structured way to think their way to effective solutions. This process is integrated with the communication model in this same chapter and also with the writing process described in Chapter Four.
- The **coverage of common genres of business communication**—from good- and bad-news and persuasive messages to proposals, reports, presentations, and job-search documents—not only introduces students to common business communication situations but also helps them see the kind of communication products they are aiming for.
- The book offers numerous **Annotated Examples**, derived from actual workplace documents, that show the problem-solving approach in action in a variety of organizations. It also gives examples of **words and phrases to use or avoid**, compares **weak and strong handlings of communication solutions** in various genres, and features **exhibits** that include more examples of current communication practices.
- The **principles, concepts, and facts** presented in the chapters enable students to prepare well-informed solutions without straying into weak strategies. Multiple **Communication Matters** boxes in every chapter supplement the book's information with recent research findings in different areas of workplace communication, and a **Key Terms** section at the end of every chapter reinforces each chapter's conceptual takeaways.
- **From the Tech Desk** boxes in every chapter encourage students to take advantage of the many forms of technology that can help them research, plan, and build their communication solutions. A special section in Chapter Four, **"Computer Tools in Business Communication,"** explains how to use such tools throughout the writing process, from planning projects all the way to checking grammar and spelling.

Strong Coverage of Writing Guidelines, Visual Design, and Oral Communication

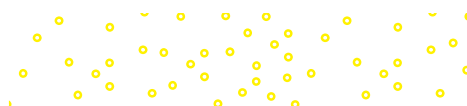
Once students have planned their problem-solving strategies, they must use the building blocks of effective communication to craft effective solutions.

To help them with their writing,

- Chapter Six walks them through **the dos and don'ts of word choice, style, and paragraphing**, paying particular attention to common trouble spots in student writing.
- Chapters Two and Four also offer stylistic advice, with the former helping students achieve **a reader-centered, positive tone** and the latter discussing **the appropriate level of formality for different media**.
- Every chapter ends with a **Power Charge Your Professionalism** feature that targets particular usage issues relevant to the content of the chapter.
- **Reference Chapter A** provides a clear, comprehensive guide to grammar and mechanics, and it now opens with **a guide to sentence-building** that enables students to make the link between sentence structure and correctness.

To help them manage the visual dimension of communication,

- Chapter Five discusses the **four core principles of document design**, moving from there to **advice about using different formatting elements**. Easy-to-understand examples facilitate students' comprehension.



- The chapter then demonstrates **how to communicate with visuals**. After introducing the basic vocabulary for talking about visuals, the chapter provides guidelines for constructing **tables, data-based graphics, and such additional visual elements as photographs and diagrams**. Here, too, well-chosen examples make the point.
- The book's **many examples of well-designed documents**—from messages to reports to résumés—additionally support students' learning in this area and give them the motivation and confidence to enhance their work with visual elements.

To support skillful oral communication,

- Chapter Twelve introduces students to **the kinds of speeches and presentations they're likely to encounter** as professionals. It then walks them through **the stages of planning a talk**, from determining its content to choosing the delivery method to designing slides and any handouts that will be needed. The section on **delivering the talk** helps students see how to control nervousness while projecting confidence and interacting smoothly with the audience. The final sections offer advice on giving **Web-based and collaborative presentations**.
- Chapter Thirteen is a comprehensive guide to interpersonal communication. After emphasizing the importance of understanding one's workplace culture, the chapter covers **nonverbal communication, listening, conversation and small talk, meetings and teamwork, and telephone skills**. In the process, it offers advice about **participating in difficult conversations** and **giving and receiving feedback**.
- The book's final chapter coaches students on **preparing for effective job interviews**. It also stresses **the importance of networking** and **preparing an appealing "elevator speech."**

A Focus on Today's Students

In a 2019 study of the kind of managers that bcom students hope to have, the most preferred type was "mentor"—"an empathetic advocate, professional, and personal guide." They appreciated the direct communication and guidance offered by the traditional "teacher" and "manager," but they wanted the guidance to be offered in the form of encouraging communication that indicated an understanding of who they were and what they needed.*

Using our ongoing experience as teachers, we have tried to accommodate this preference on the part of today's students. We use a conversational style, explain the "why" behind our advice, include contemporary examples, and keep the verbiage to a minimum. We've also included colorful and instructive visual content.

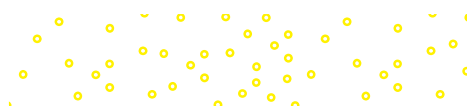
Not every topic, example, or activity in this book will be interesting to every student—just as there will be expectations and required tasks in the workplace that they will not like. But the goal isn't just to engage; it's also to instruct. While meeting the students where they are, we also strive to stretch them by providing a realistic picture of what professional success will entail and by challenging them to embrace the inevitable risk involved in communication problem solving. When they apply the book's advice and their own good judgment, they'll be surprised by what they can achieve.

We believe that a problem-solving approach *gets students to think about workplace communication in the right way*. With this foundational understanding, they will be ready to ask the right questions, gather the right information, use appropriate tools, and produce viable communication solutions. This readiness will serve them and their future employers well.

Kathryn Rentz, University of Cincinnati

Paula Lentz, University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

*Leah M. Omilion-Hodges and Christine E. Sugg, "Millennials' Views and Expectations Regarding the Communicative and Relational Behaviors of Leaders: Exploring Young Adults' Talk About Work," *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly* 81.1 (2019): 74-100, accessed November 2, 2019, doi: 10.1177/2329490618808043.



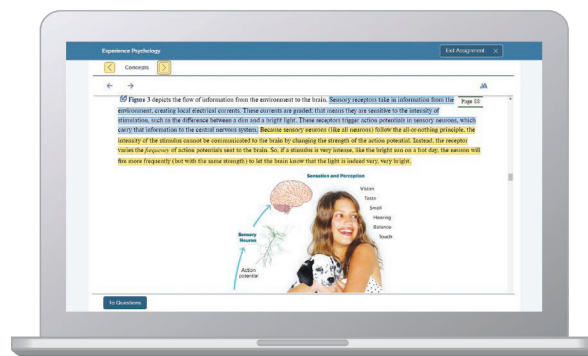


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- Jordan Cunningham,
Eastern Washington University



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What's New in the Second Edition

Here are the main changes you'll see from the first edition of *Business Communication: A Problem-Solving Approach*:

- The focus on problem-solving has been more thoroughly integrated throughout the book. Also, each chapter now ends with a new exercise, **Problem Solver to the Rescue**, that will enable your students to apply the chapter's advice. The Critical-Thinking Questions, Skills-Building Exercises, and Problem-Solving Cases have also been updated.
- This edition now groups the “big picture” chapters together at the beginning, with Chapter One discussing the workplace environment and the nature of communication problems, Chapter Two stressing the importance of reader-centered, ethical communication, and Chapter Three situating this content in the context of communicating across different countries' cultures and across cultures within the US.
- The coverage of document design and visual rhetoric are still a distinctive strength of this book, but the two chapters on these topics have been streamlined and combined into one chapter, and the section on report formatting has been moved to the chapter on creating the right type of report.
- The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and social-justice issues on business communication have been incorporated into the chapters and the end-of-chapter activities.
- Reference Chapter A has been expanded to include instruction on sentence-building before discussing correctness. Students will be better able to see the logic behind the rules for punctuation and grammar presented in this chapter, understand the stylistic advice given in Chapter Six (“Crafting Effective Sentences and Paragraphs”), and tackle the “Power Charge Your Professionalism” activities.

As you will see when reviewing the following list of chapter-by-chapter changes, the contents of every chapter—including the Annotated Examples and other boxed features—have been updated for usefulness, interest, and currency.

Chapter 1: “Solving Communication Problems in the Workplace” (formerly titled “Communicating in the Workplace”)

- Updates statistics on the importance of communication and problem-solving skills in the workplace.
- Includes a discussion and example of corporate activism when discussing corporate social responsibility.
- Replaces “Communication Networks of the Organization” with “The Influence of Organizational Structure and Culture on Communication,” which contains new material on common types of organizational structures and updated material on analyzing organizational culture.
- Has a clearer, more efficient explanation of the business-communication process.

Chapter 2: “Getting Positive Responses to Your Communication” (formerly Chapter 6, “Building Positive Relationships through Communication”)

- Has a new title that better conveys the goal of the advice in the chapter.
- Updates the examples of language to use and not to use.
- Includes more advice about avoiding gender-based discrimination.
- Removes outdated boxed features and updates the others.

Chapter 3: “Communicating with Culturally Diverse Audiences” (formerly Chapter 7, “Communicating across Cultures”)

- Broadens the discussion of cross-cultural communication to include communicating across different US cultures.
- Includes new boxed features on the benefits of workplace diversity and the importance of acknowledging other US cultures besides the historically dominant US culture.
- Incorporates advice and examples from Erin Meyer’s *The Culture Map*.
- Acknowledges that the coronavirus has changed attitudes toward the use of space, handshaking, and other touching.
- Updates the list of resources on cross-cultural communication and the featured Web-based tools.

Chapter 4: “Designing the Right Type of Message: From Letters to Social Media” (formerly Chapter 2, “Writing Effectively for Your Purpose, Audience, and Medium”)

- Updates sources and content regarding the importance of writing skills and the appropriate use of text messaging in the workplace.
- Includes content on the use of gendered and gender-neutral pronouns and courtesy titles in business communication.
- Emphasizes the interconnectedness of the problem-solving approach from Chapter 1 and the writing process discussed in this chapter.
- Relocates content from the first edition chapters to combine the discussion of genres of business communication with their formatting guidelines. (In the previous edition, the genres and their formats were in separate chapters.)
- Provides updated examples of document formats.
- Includes Communication Matters boxes on out-of-office messages and the use of emojis.
- Updates screenshots for all Microsoft Office technology tools to reflect the Office 365 interface.

Chapter 5: “Communicating Your Messages Visually” (formerly Chapter 3, “Designing Documents with Visual Appeal,” and Chapter 4, “Communicating with Visuals”)

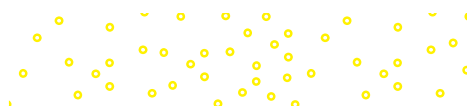
- Relocates content on the principles of document design and on writing and designing online material to this chapter for a more logical grouping of content.
- Provides new examples of well-constructed visuals.
- Updates information in Communication Matters boxes on font personalities, logo colors, and infographics.
- Adds a Communication Matters box on communicating big data.

Chapter 6: “Crafting Effective Sentences and Paragraphs” (formerly Chapter 5)

- Includes advice from Laura Phillips, president and partner of Vehr Communications.
- Updates the examples of language to use and not to use.
- Relabels the three types of wordiness to make them more distinct.
- Updates the boxed features on business clichés and Microsoft Word’s readability statistics.

Chapter 7: “Writing Good-News and Neutral Messages” (formerly Chapter 8)

- Updates and extends the Annotated Examples in the first edition with six new ones: routine inquiries (2), favorable responses (2), order acknowledgements (1), and internal-operational messages (1).



- Adds a section on writing external-informational messages, which includes one new Annotated Example.
- Adds five external-informational message prompts to the Problem-Solving Cases at the end of the chapter. Critical-Thinking Questions and Skills-Building Exercises for external-informational messages have also been added.
- Relocates the section on claims to Chapter 8.
- Adds a Communication Matters box on email privacy in the workplace.
- Updates the cited references.
- Updates screenshots for all Microsoft Office technology tools to reflect the Office 365 interface.
- Updates Critical-Thinking Questions, Skills-Building Exercises, and Problem-Solving Cases to include more references to virtual communication contexts.

Chapter 8: “Writing Bad-News Messages” (formerly Chapter 9)

- Updates and extends the Annotated Examples in the first edition with four new ones: refused requests (1), adjustment refusals (1), and negative announcements (2).
- Provides a Communication Matters box on handling crisis communication.
- Updates the cited references.
- Updates screenshots for all Microsoft Office technology tools to reflect the Office 365 interface.
- Updates Critical-Thinking Questions, Skills-Building Exercises, and Problem-Solving Cases to include more references to virtual communication contexts.

Chapter 9: “Writing Persuasive Messages and Proposals” (formerly Chapter 10)

- Updates all the cited references and social-media statistics in the chapter.
- Updates the statistics in the boxed feature on direct mail and adds new boxed features on Cialdini’s seven principles of persuasion and the use of QR codes in persuasive messages.
- Provides updated and more examples of unethical sales practices.
- Uses a new scenario for the Problem-Solving Challenge in the “Multimedia Selling” section and a new sample sales message.
- Discusses the popularity of live streaming and social-media stories.
- Includes a new subsection on YouTube and using video for promotional purposes.
- Includes new bad and good examples of a content-marketing blog post.

Chapter 10: “Researching and Writing Reports” (formerly Chapter 11)

- Opens with a revised Problem-Solving Challenge.
- Includes comments about the importance of research-based reporting from Caroline Molina-Ray (PhD, MBA), senior marketing manager for AgileAssets Inc.
- Makes a clearer distinction (with better examples) between a problem statement and a purpose statement.
- Trims “Determining the Factors to Research,” “Organizing the Information,” and “Writing the Report” and updates the examples.
- Updates the information on library, Web-based, and social-media-based research.
- Updates all screenshots of research-related websites and report-writing tools.
- Updates the exhibit listing appropriate resources for different research questions.



Chapter 11: “Creating the Right Type of Report” (formerly Chapter 12)

- Opens with a revised Problem-Solving Challenge.
- Adds a new Communication Matters feature, “Balancing Brevity and Clarity in Report Titles.”
- Replaces the sample executive summaries in the direct and indirect order with summaries that use contemporary material.
- Includes a new section, “Formatting Devices for Reports,” and a new feature on “Using and Modifying Styles in Word 2019” (both based on material from Chapter 3 of the first edition).
- Includes a feature on creating page numbers for reports (moved from Chapter 3 of the first edition).
- Includes a new example of a Microsoft Word report template.
- Updates the sample letter report.
- Includes a new boxed feature, with a recent example, on research-based reports used as content marketing.
- Replaces the military problem-solving template with a report template used by medical teams.
- Updates the boxed feature “Using a Table of Contents Generator for Speed and Accuracy.”
- Extends the discussion of writing minutes to include preparing the minutes for an online meeting.

Chapter 12: “Delivering Business Presentations and Speeches” (formerly Chapter 13)

- Includes a new boxed feature, “Organizing Your Presentation for a Cross-Cultural Audience.”
- Updates all references to and examples of presentation-related tools.
- Provides a more detailed discussion of Web-based presentations.

Chapter 13: “Using Interpersonal Communication Skills in Conversations and Meetings” (formerly Chapter 14)

- Adds a feature story from Zaimah Khan, founder of addie, LLC, a management consulting firm specializing in change management, emotional intelligence, and human capital development.
- Updates several Communication Matters boxes for more timely information on topics such as the use of profanity in the workplace and thinking before speaking.
- Adds a Communication Matters box containing best practices for participating in virtual meetings.
- Includes a Critical-Thinking Exercise that requires students to discuss ways they can participate effectively in a virtual meeting and a Skills-Building Exercise that requires students to participate in, record, and reflect on their performance in a virtual meeting.

Chapter 14: “Communicating in the Job Search” (formerly Chapter 15)

- Includes all new Annotated Examples of résumés (6) and cover letters (4).
- Replaces the current bad and good examples of résumés and cover letters with updated ones.
- Updates all cited references.
- Includes a Communication Matters Box on résumé FAQs, written by a certified résumé writer.
- Updates information on using scannable résumés and formatting résumés for applicant tracking systems.



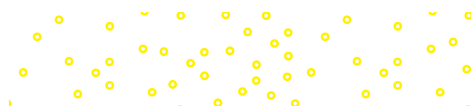
- Updates the Communication Matters box regarding answers to difficult interview questions.
- Adds a From the Tech Desk Box with information on preparing for and participating in a virtual job interview.
- Updates the Communication Matters box about sending a thank-you note to reflect the now-standard practice of emailing thank-you notes.
- Adds a Critical-Thinking Question asking students to describe ways to effectively participate in a virtual job interview and a Skills-Building Exercise in which students practice virtual interviews.

Reference Chapter A: “A Guide to Sentence-Building, Grammar, and Mechanics”

- Now opens with a sentence-pattern approach to applying the guidelines for correctness.
- Focuses on punctuation as a decision-making rather than rule-following endeavor.
- Updates the discussion of pronoun cases to include a table of cases as well as clearer guidelines for choosing the correct case.
- Removes language about the use of the singular “they” as “not having evolved” in business.
- Incorporates an updated discussion on the use of gendered pronouns.
- Adds a Communication Matters box offers the Oakhurst Dairy case as an example of legal issues that arose from unclear punctuation.

Reference Chapter B: “A Guide for Documenting Your Sources”

- Updates the sample citations with more current examples.
- Includes guidelines for citing Instagram posts, as well as other social-media material, in all three citation styles.
- Updates the screenshots in the boxed features.





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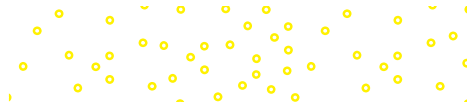
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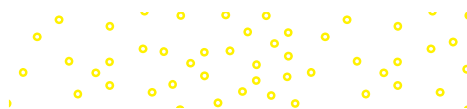
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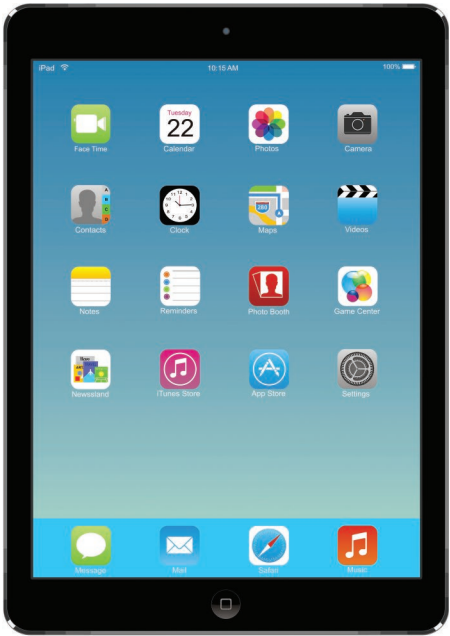
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Business Communication

A Problem-Solving Approach

Solving Communication Problems in the Workplace

Mark Dierker/McGraw Hill

Chapter

One

As head of his own talent-consulting company and former Director of Learning for Facebook, Stuart Crabb knows what it takes to be an attractive job candidate and a successful employee. He has over 25 years' experience helping companies hire the right people and develop their talent for peak performance. What does it take to flourish in today's workplace? According to Crabb, the answers are "critical thinking," "problem solving," "creativity," and "performance." It also takes being "motivated," "individually accountable," and on board with the company culture.

These happen to be key traits of successful business communicators, too. They understand that communicating well takes analysis, judgment, and even ingenuity. It takes being attuned to people and to each communication situation.



Courtesy of Stuart Crabb

And it takes not only verbal skill but many other skills as well.

Like the workplace itself, workplace communication can be challenging. But the challenge can be fun, and solving communication problems can bring enormous rewards. This book will help prepare you for an exciting future as both a professional and a communicator.

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- L01-1** Explain the importance of skillful communication to you and to your employer.
- L01-2** Explain the ways in which communication in the workplace is a form of problem solving.
- L01-3** Describe the communication skills that are needed in today's workplace.
- L01-4** Define professionalism and its importance to communication in the workplace.
- L01-5** Describe the three main categories of business communication.
- L01-6** Define organizational structure and describe its influence on the organization's communication.
- L01-7** Define organizational culture and describe the main factors that influence an organization's culture.
- L01-8** Describe the contexts for each act of communication in the workplace.
- L01-9** Describe the steps of a problem-solving approach to business communication.



Problem-Solving Challenge

Demonstrating Your Value on a High-Profile Team

You were thrilled to be hired a few months ago as a customer service representative for OrgWare, a software developer that sells management platforms to professional associations to help them run their operations and support their members' activities. This is your first "real," professional job, and you intend to make a great impression.

The company is doing well. In 12 years, it has grown from a five-person business into one that employs 120 people and has six regional US sales teams, and there's even a tech-development team in Malaysia. But this growth has created a problem: The extensive face-to-face communication that helped make OrgWare a thriving business has, in

many cases, become difficult or impossible. As a result, the sense of teamwork in the organization is weakening. And it is clear that phone calls, emails, and instant messaging are not sufficient to keep employees engaged and well informed.

The CEO has formed a task force to find an internal communication solution. Will it be an intranet? An electronic newsletter? A secure social networking site? Virtual meetings? A combination? Which would the employees be most likely to read and use? How should the solution be implemented, and what will it cost?

To your surprise, you were asked to help find the answers. The CEO felt that your familiarity

with new media could be an asset to the team. You'll also be expected to represent the customer service area and the viewpoints of young employees like yourself.

Everyone on the team will need to research the pros and cons of different media, acquire employees' opinions, write progress reports, share ideas, and ultimately help present the team's recommendation to the top executives.

What will you need to know about communicating in business to meet this challenge? Chapter 1 will give you a good grounding for answering this question thoroughly and well.

The Role of Communication in the Workplace

L01-1 Explain the importance of skillful communication to you and to your employer.

Your work as a professional, whether for a business, a nonprofit organization, or some other kind of employer, will involve communication—a lot of it—because communication is critical to every area of an organization's operations. The overview that follows will help you prepare for the countless communication challenges ahead of you.

The Importance of Communication Skills

What assets will you need to bring with you into the job market? The first answer that might pop into your head is "everything I learned in my major." Not a bad answer. You're working hard to master an area of study, and that knowledge will certainly assist your entry into a profession. But check out the **Communication Matters** feature **Take It from Today's Executives**. The knowledge needed for many jobs is changing so fast that employers are looking for skills that transcend particular jobs, industries, times, and places. Communication ranks at or near the top of these skills.

Why is the ability to communicate effectively so highly valued? As one professional trainer explains, "You will need to request information, discuss problems, give instructions, work in teams, and interact with colleagues and clients" to achieve cooperation and team efficiency. To advance, you'll also need to be able to think for yourself, "take initiative," and "solve problems."¹ On the managerial level, you'll find that communication skills are even more essential. In the words of an international business consultant, "nothing puts you in the 'poor leader' category more swiftly than inadequate communication skills."² Strong managerial-communication skills are especially important during times of crisis and major change. During the coronavirus pandemic, for example, employees have needed more open and honest, frequent, informative, and compassionate communication than usual from their organizations' leaders.³



Communication Matters

Take It from Today's Executives: What You Can Do Is Even More Important Than What You Know

In its latest three surveys of executives and hiring managers, the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that “cross-cutting capacities” like communication skills are more valued than a particular choice of major. The respondents continue to agree that “a candidate’s demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major” (from the 2015 report).

The chart below shows the eight skills that executives and hiring managers rated the most highly in the 2018 survey.

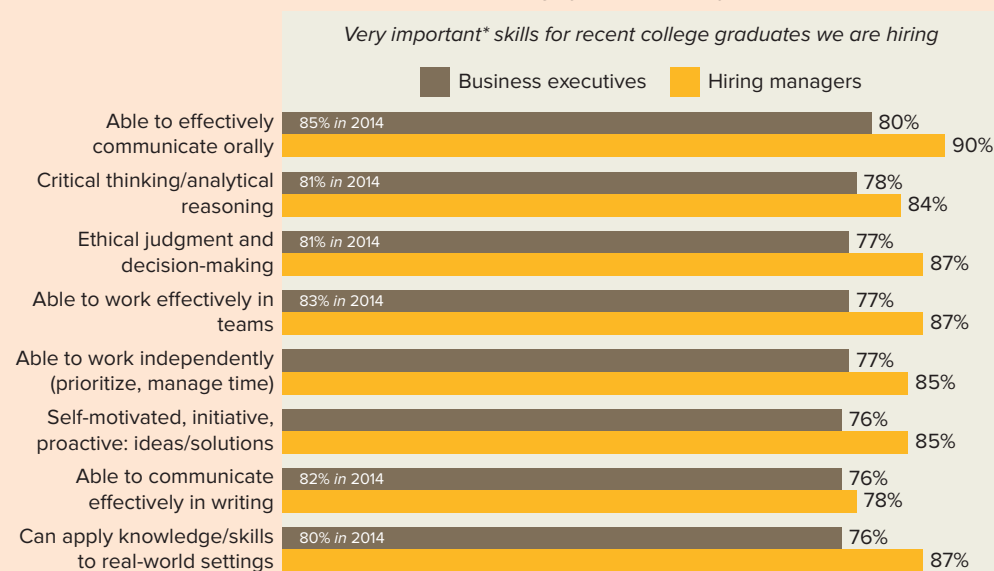
All these skills contribute to communication success in addition to professional success overall.

The coronavirus pandemic has elevated the need for some of these capacities by causing a massive spike in remote work and a flood of laid-off employees seeking such work. In

addition to the ability to learn and use new technologies, people who work from home need especially strong self-motivation as well as collaboration, communication, and time-management skills.

Sources: “Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work,” AACU, July 2018, accessed August 6, 2019, <https://www.aacu.org/research/2018-future-of-work>; Stephanie Voza, “5 Skills You Need to Demonstrate to Land a Remote Job,” *FastCompany*, April 17, 2020, accessed July 2, 2020, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90490491/5-skills-you-need-to-demonstrate-to-land-a-remote-job>.

The learning priorities that executives and hiring managers value most highly cut across majors.



*8–10 rating on a 0-to-10 scale; 15 outcomes tested

“Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work,” AACU, July 2018, accessed August 6, 2019, <https://www.aacu.org/research/2018-future-of-work>.

Unfortunately, the need for employees with strong communication skills often goes unfulfilled. A 2011 study of US and UK companies with 100,000 or more employees found that poor communication incurred a cost of \$37 billion, with each company losing an average of \$62.4 million per year.⁴ SIS International Research found that poor communication is a problem for small businesses as well. In 2009 a business with 100 employees spent an average downtime of 17 hours a week on clarifying its communications, which translated into an annual cost of \$524,569.⁵ According to Solari Communications, such costs take the form of wasted time, wasted

effort, misunderstandings, eroded customer loyalty, and lost business.⁶ Poor communication also causes stress, low morale, obstacles to innovation, and slower career progression.⁷ A recent study by the Project Management Institute revealed that one in five projects is unsuccessful due to ineffective communication, costing companies millions of dollars.⁸

The communication shortcomings of employees and the importance of communication in the workplace explain why you should develop your communication skills. Whatever position you hold, your performance will be judged largely on the basis of your ability to communicate. If you perform and communicate well, you are likely to be rewarded with advancement. And the higher you advance, the more you will need your communication ability. The evidence is clear: Improving your communication skills makes you a better contributor and a more successful professional.

Business Communication as Problem Solving

L01-2 Explain the ways in which communication in the workplace is a form of problem solving.

Communication is involved in everything organizations do. Even in businesses based largely on manual work rather than knowledge work, somebody has to inform the employees how to run the machinery or perform their jobs, and the employees need to be able to explain their needs and describe problems. Communication is thus a huge problem solver in the workplace; indeed, almost no workplace problem could be solved without it.

But there’s another way in which communication is problem solving. Every communication challenge you will face will involve factors that require at least a somewhat unique solution. For this reason, workplace communication itself—that is, figuring out what to say or write, and how—is a form of **problem solving**.

Researchers in many fields—management, medicine, writing, psychology, and others—have studied problem solving. In general, they define a *problem* as a gap between where you are now and where you want to be.⁹ As Exhibit 1-1 indicates, there are two kinds of problems. One kind can be solved by following set procedures. These are well-defined problems. When you find out how much money is left in your budget or fill in a report with routine data, you are solving a well-defined problem. But most significant workplace communication problems are ill-defined problems. They involve too many unmeasurable factors and allow for too many possible options to be routinely solved. With ill-defined problems, you cannot *find* the answer; you have to *develop* one by gathering information, analyzing it, and making decisions. In fact, you often have to construct a definition of the problem before you can construct the solution.

One reason so many communication tasks are ill defined is that communication is a transaction between people—and people are both complex and unique. But the workplace context itself is

complex, often presenting you with multiple ways to handle a situation. For example, if a customer has complained, what will you do about it? Nothing? Apologize? Imply that the customer was at fault? Give a conciliatory discount? Refuse to adjust the bill? Even a “simple” ill-defined problem like this one requires thinking through not only how to solve the business problem (what to do with an unhappy customer) but also how to solve the communication problem (what to say and how to say it).

Fortunately, once you’ve studied this book, you’ll have several **heuristics** in your toolbox that’ll help you meet any communication challenge. Heuristics are tools to think with. They’re basic guidelines, rough models, previous scenarios, and other aids that keep you from having to treat each problem as a brand new problem. Good problem solvers rely

Exhibit 1-1 Well-Defined vs. Ill-Defined Problems	
Well-Defined Problems	Ill-Defined Problems
Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Follow a formula or flowchartHave a correct answer	Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Have unknown and/or unmeasurable factorsHave unpredictable outcomes
Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Putting a message into correct full-block letter formatFilling in a form to report how much money you have left in your budget	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Keeping a customer’s goodwill while rejecting his/her request for a refundPersuading your boss to pay for you to attend a professional meeting
Your goal: Find the answer	Your goal: Develop a good solution

Courtesy of Kathryn Rentz.

on heuristics. When facing a problem, the first thing they ask is, “Have I seen this kind of problem before?” And then, depending on the answer, they consider strategies they’ve already learned from other situations to see if some of those might apply. This is the kind of problem solving we encourage you to use. The concepts, structures, and strategies offered here are meant to save you time when planning communication solutions, but you must use your own good judgment to figure out how and when to apply them.

Of course, people will handle communication tasks differently depending on who they are, how they interpret the situation, and who they imagine their recipients to be. Does this mean that all communication solutions are equally good? Absolutely not. While there is no perfect solution, there can be many bad ones that have been developed without enough effort. While analysis, research, thinking, and planning will not guarantee success, they will make your chances of success as high as possible. Following the advice in this book, you can generate effective solutions for many common communication problems.

Communication Skills—A Breakdown

When you approach communication as problem solving, you draw on skills that you may not have realized are necessary for effective workplace communication.

Certainly **verbal literacy** is a core component of communication skill. The greater the range of words and sentence patterns you’re familiar with, and the stronger your knowledge of grammar and mechanics, the better you can communicate appropriately with a given audience. Chapter 2, Chapter 6, and Reference Chapter A will help you craft a correct, reader-focused style.

But these days, **visual literacy** is almost as important. Extensive exposure to the Internet, with its graphics-rich content, has led readers to expect all types of written communication to look inviting and easy to read. Anything that doesn’t look this way is likely to be ignored. Visuals are also critical to conveying information. Research indicates that 80 to 85% of all our perception is mediated through vision, and visually enhanced text has been proven to generate more effective learning than text alone.¹⁰ Chapters 4 and 5 will explain how to boost your communication’s effectiveness through purposeful visual design.

While verbal and visual literacy will be your core communication skills, many other skills will come into play as you solve workplace communication problems. Listed in Exhibit 1-2 are the ones most frequently mentioned by employers and by analysts of the contemporary workplace. Incidentally, they will also help you keep your job as artificial intelligence revolutionizes the workplace (see **From the Tech Desk: Will Artificial Intelligence Take Your Job?**).

Interpersonal Skill Every organization, even a one-person business, is a social enterprise. Someone has to make, acquire, or design the product or service that is being offered, someone has to promote it, and someone has to manage the whole operation. Whatever the size and type of organization, considerable interaction will be needed for it to do its work. **Interpersonal skills** are thus highly prized in the workplace. Such skills involve not only written and oral expression but also listening, analysis of the situation and audience, and use of body language.

Of particular value to employers these days is employees’ ability to work on a team. The respondents to the latest survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers ranked this trait third out of 20 (behind written-communication skills and problem-solving skills) in terms of the skills they’d like to see indicated on a résumé, and it is similarly prized by many other employers.¹¹ There is good reason for this: As the hierarchical structure that characterized 20th-century businesses has given way to flatter, more shifting organizational shapes, the work-group approach to business has become widespread.

L01-3 Describe the communication skills that are needed in today’s workplace.

Exhibit 1-2

Communication-Related Skills for the 21st-Century Workplace

- Verbal and visual literacy
- Interpersonal/collaboration skills
- Analytical ability (computational thinking, interpretive skill)

- Media literacy/social intelligence
- Cultural awareness/cross-cultural competency
- Ethical awareness

Many workplace groups manage a functional area of the company, such as sales or tech support. But others are cross-functional teams set up on a temporary basis to solve particular problems or pursue particular initiatives. And you'll notice that even large companies sometimes refer to their employees as the "team." Enabling people with different kinds of expertise to work together has become essential to most organizations' success. Chapter 13, which discusses interpersonal communication, will help you become a valued contributor in this environment.

Analytical Ability When you communicate on the job, you will often be presenting your analysis of a situation or a set of information. Adapting to a quickly changing business landscape requires being able to scan the available facts, focus on the relevant ones, and interpret them reliably and usefully. As "smart machines"—devices with data-gathering ability—have become widespread, they have created more numerical data for us to process. Thus, the need for **computational thinking**—the ability "to interact with data, see patterns in data, make data-based decisions, and use data to design for desired outcomes"¹²—has grown, and, with it, the need for the ability to create and read data-based graphics.¹³

But your **interpretive skills** need to go beyond interpreting numbers. Being able to "determine the deeper meaning or significance" of situations, people's behavior, and even numerical data is critical.¹⁴ As one expert put it, "high-value work" has "an *imaginative* component."¹⁵ This quality is required to discern and evaluate the key facts, to explore "what ifs," and to choose the best solution—all central components of successful business communication. Every communication task in this book draws on such analytical skills.

Media Literacy When email arrived on the scene in the late 1980s, it created something of a revolution. Instead of being restricted to letters, memos, and printed reports and proposals, business writers could now correspond electronically. As a result, many tasks formerly conducted via print documents—memos in particular—were performed through email instead, and email replaced many phone and face-to-face conversations as well.

As you know, we now have many additional media options for our communication. In addition to instant messaging and text messaging, businesses are now using blogs, tweets, podcasts, virtual meetings, videos, animation, simulations, e-books, and even online games. Collectively referred to as **new media**, these forms of communication and the mobile devices with which people access them have caused another revolution.

The impacts of this change are many and far reaching. It is easy now to network with others, even on the other side of the world, and to tap the intelligence of those outside the boundaries of the organization. Obviously, these "new ways for groups to come together and collaborate" require that employees be "highly conversant with digital networking and virtual collaboration."¹⁶ But new media also increase the need for employees with **social intelligence**—the ability "to quickly assess the emotions of those around them and adapt their words, tone, and gestures accordingly."¹⁷

With information coming in so fast and from so many sources, organizations are becoming more brainlike, with each employee acting as a kind of sensor. As a result, front-line employees now have a higher level of decision-making power than ever before.¹⁸ Performing well in such an environment takes "novel and adaptive thinking,"¹⁹ a willingness to "embrace change," and "fierce problem-solving skills."²⁰ Chapter 4 and many of the later chapters will help you choose your media wisely and strengthen your ability to use them well.

Cultural Awareness Countries and cultures continue to grow more interconnected as businesses expand around the world. The US itself is a conglomeration of regional and social cultures, and each generation of US workers has grown more ethnically diverse, with the youngest generation having the most ethnic diversity.²¹



From the Tech Desk

Will Artificial Intelligence Take Your Job?

Tom Davenport, the President's Distinguished Professor of Information Technology and Management at Babson College, poses just such a question in his book *Only Humans Need Apply: Winners and Losers in the Age of Smart Machines*. The answer is no—as long as you work in a job where your uniquely human skills are needed.

As Davenport explains, every job has features that can be automated, and your job may be at risk if it consists mostly of these features.

But most jobs, especially on the professional level, require many of the following kinds of intelligence, which machines will never have:

- The “ability to imagine new ways of solving problems.”
- Communication that requires more than data transfer.
- Comprehension of the bigger picture.
- The ability to use good judgment in cases where sufficient data can't be collected.

- The ability to “tap into the human condition” to use humor and empathy, creativity, courage, conviction, ethical reasoning, emotions, and integrity, as well as “taste, vision, and the ability to inspire.”

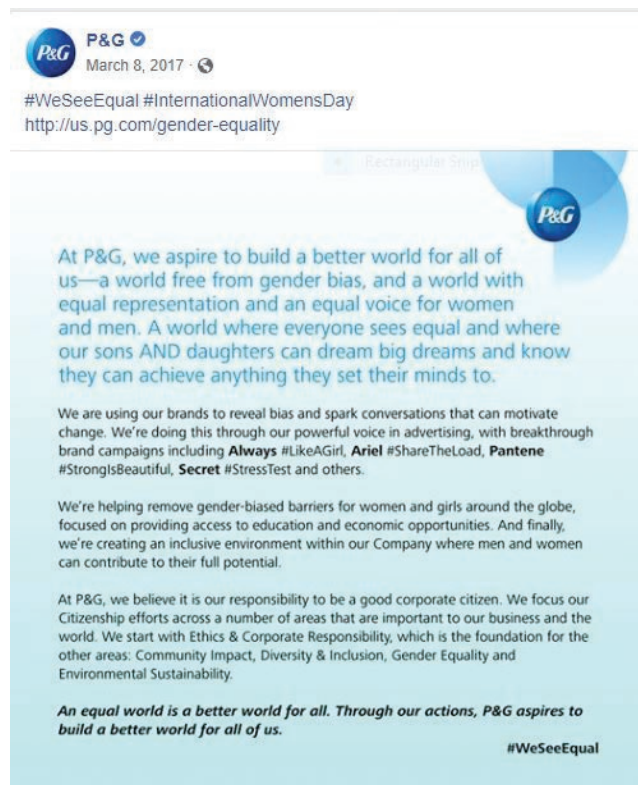
Source: Thomas H. Davenport and Julia Kirby, *Only Humans Need Apply: Winners and Losers in the Age of Smart Machines* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016).

Cross-cultural competency should thus be a part of your skillset.²² You will need to be aware that your assumptions about business and communication are not shared by everyone everywhere. As Chapter 3 explains, businesspeople from other countries as well as from US subcultures that are different from yours may have different attitudes about schedules and deadlines. They can also differ from you in their preference, or lack thereof, for directness and the show of emotion. And the core features of their culture—such as their preference for individualism or collectivism, their religious beliefs, their political environment, their ideas about social hierarchy, and their attitudes toward work itself—can make their view of how to do business quite different from yours.

Now more than ever, professionals in the workplace have an opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to develop their cultural awareness and learn from people with diverse backgrounds.

Ethical Awareness One more widespread trend in business today will likely affect your work and the goals of the organization you work for: an increased focus on ethical, socially responsible behavior.

Ethical scandals have plagued businesses throughout modern history, but several have fueled particular concern. In the 1990s, a series of articles about Nike's outsourcing its manufacturing operations to Asian countries focused the public's attention on the widespread problem of exploitation of foreign labor. In 2001, Enron and WorldCom were found to have falsified their accounting statements, which cost their shareholders and employees millions of dollars and ultimately led to these companies' bankruptcy (as well as to the downfall of one of the former “big five” US accounting firms, Arthur Andersen). In 2008 came unprecedented discoveries of mismanagement, predatory lending, and fraud on the part of many of the US's largest financial institutions—discoveries that caused the Great Recession, global economic panic, and the loss of countless homes and jobs. The explosion of a BP oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 caused the worst oil spill in US history. Recent scandals include Facebook's providing a data analytics firm with subscribers' personal information without their permission, Google's and Uber's sexual-harassment cases, Wells Fargo's creation of fraudulent accounts, and Volkswagen's use of software to generate incorrect emission test results for its vehicles. Companies have been sued for wage theft and



The practice of speaking out on social issues is becoming more common for businesses that once would have carefully avoided controversy. Here you see a post in Procter & Gamble's "We See Equal" campaign, an effort to combat gender bias through social messaging, TV ads, and programs and partnerships that support educational and economic opportunities for women (<https://us.pg.com/gender-equality/>). Note in the next-to-last paragraph the other causes that P&G supports.

P&G

other types of mistreatment of employees. And businesses are routinely taken to court for defective products and/or deceptive advertising.

On a moral level, doing business in a way that harms others is wrong. On a practical level, doing so undermines trust, which is critical to the success of business. The more an organization builds trust among its employees, its shareholders, its business partners, and its community, the better for the organization and for economic prosperity overall. This helps explain why businesses place a high premium on the ethical integrity of their members and on honest, trustworthy communications.

But there's another reason. The Internet and social media have brought transparency to companies' business practices, with negative information traveling quickly and widely. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as CorpWatch, Consumer Federation of America, and Greenpeace can exert a powerful influence on public opinion and even on governments. Businesses now operate in an age of social accountability, and one of their responses has been the widespread development of **corporate social responsibility (CSR)** departments and initiatives. Accountability to the various groups affected by your organization, including society as a whole, will—and should—influence how you work and communicate.

Many companies, in fact, are moving beyond CSR to **brand activism** (also called cause marketing or social marketing), using their communications and actions to take a stand on widespread social issues. Procter & Gamble's "We See Equal" campaign, begun in March 2017, is an example. By explicitly targeting gender bias and working to reduce it around the globe, the company demonstrates a commitment to equality without making any explicit connection to its products. Of course, as a manufacturer of numerous consumer goods for women, P&G is not likely to incur serious financial repercussions for its ethical

bravery. But just by entering a values-based conversation, they run some risk of turning off investors and potential customers who think businesses should stay away from any social campaigning.

Other businesses have exposed themselves to more risk by entering into a divisive public conversation (see **Communication Matters: CSR and Brand Activism**). Nike's featuring of Colin Kaepernick in its advertisements, for example, explicitly aligned the company with one side of a controversial social cause. By supporting this football player who knelt during the National Anthem and has vocally opposed police brutality toward African Americans, Nike drew both high praise and heavy criticism from its customers. Ultimately, though, its decision paid off: Despite a boycott against the company, the value of its stock soared, increasing the company's overall value by \$6 billion in just three weeks.²³

Today's consumers want to know what values a given company stands for, and many of them will make buying decisions based on this knowledge. The same goes for job applicants, who, these days, consider whether companies' social values will align with their own. Whether you are searching for a job or working as an employee, you will need to be attuned to this dimension of the contemporary workplace.



Communication Matters

CSR and Brand Activism: Not Just Empty Talk

There's more pressure on businesses than ever to be—not just appear to be—socially responsible, and companies are responding. As the chart below shows, members of the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship spent more money on CSR initiatives in 2016 than they did in 2014. Of those surveyed, 40% represented Fortune 500 companies, but over half the companies had under 5,000 employees, and the majority were private companies.

Many companies are also taking social responsibility to a new level by actively working against injustice and harmful environmental practices. Even before the killing of George Floyd in May 2020, which sparked an unprecedented number of anti-racism statements and initiatives, the phenomenon of brand activism had been gaining ground. For example,

- P&G moved its tournament from a golf course owned by President Trump to protest his comments on Mexicans.

- Apple protested against legislation that would allow businesses to refuse service to same-sex couples.
- McDonald's supported legislation to raise the minimum wage.
- Duke Energy has lobbied for legislation to retard climate change.

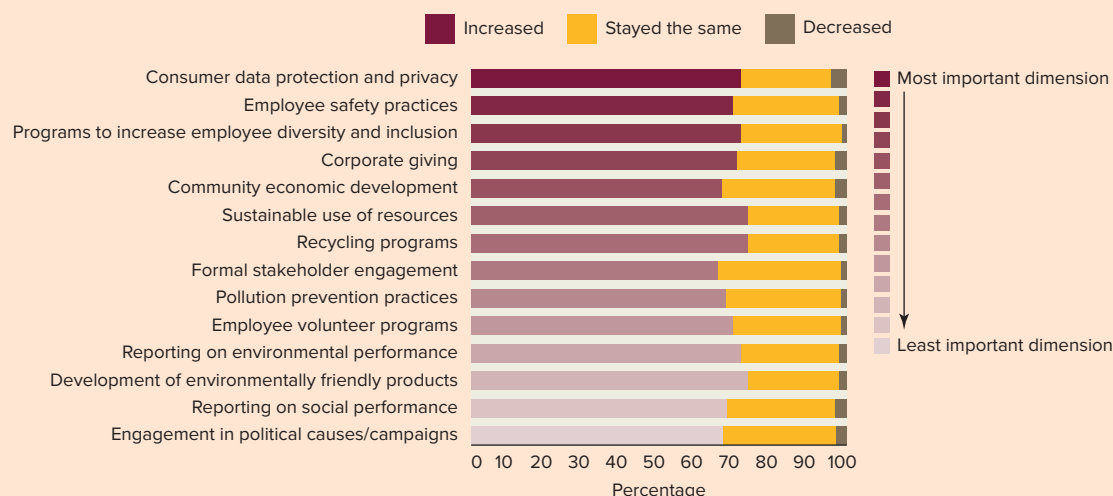
As Salesforce's CEO Marc Benioff has commented, "Today's CEOs need to stand up not just for their shareholders, but their employees, their customers, their partners, the community, the environment, schools, everybody" (Chatterji and Toffel). It should be noted, though, that companies have different interpretations of this responsibility. Chick-fil-A publicly sided with those opposed to same-sex marriage and donated to anti-LGBTQ organizations, and Hobby Lobby brought a suit against the US government to challenge the inclusion of mandated birth-control coverage in the Affordable Care Act. Brand

activism can fall anywhere on the political/social spectrum.

Taking a controversial stand is risky, but it can also be good, and even necessary, for the business. According to a 2017 study conducted by Weber Shandwick and KRC Research, almost half the Millennials who were surveyed (47%) supported CEO activism, and over half (51%) said they were more likely to buy from activist companies. Of the people surveyed, 47% said that CEOs who do not speak out risk criticism, and 21% risk declining sales.

Source: Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship, *State of Corporate Citizenship 2017* (2017), accessed August 6, 2019, <https://ccc.bc.edu/content/ccc/research/reports/state-of-corporate-citizenship.html>; Aaron K. Chatterji and Michael W. Toffel, "The New CEO Activists," *Harvard Business Review*, January–February 2018, accessed August 7, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-new-ceo-activists>; "CEO Activism in 2017: High Noon in the C-Suite," Weber Shandwick, July 24, 2017, accessed August 7, 2019, <https://www.webershandwick.com/news/ceo-activism-in-2017-high-noon-in-the-c-suite/>.

Executives who found corporate citizenship important increased resource investment over the past three years



Virgin Atlantic. Reprinted with permission.



Communication Matters

How to Spot a Professional

You've seen them, and probably worked with them—they're the ones who are responsible, easy to work with, and under control without being stuffy or unfriendly. They're professionals. Here are some of their most noticeable behaviors:

- When responding to others, especially in sensitive situations, they do not blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. Instead, they listen and think and then give a considered response.
- They realize that they represent their organization. They don't say anything to an external

party that they wouldn't want their boss to overhear.

- They do not needlessly make work for other people. They answer messages appropriately and efficiently, come through with their part of a project, pay attention to instructions and feedback, and try to find the information they need before asking others for it.
- They're willing to go beyond their own job description to contribute something that will help the team. When they pick up the slack for a co-worker, they don't make a big deal out of it;

they realize that everyone is expected to give extra occasionally and that, at some point, a co-worker will return the favor.

- When in important meetings or at important presentations, they put their phones on silent and do not look at them unless they've been invited to tweet their feedback to the speaker, they're researching something for the group, or it's clear that using one's phone in such situations is okay.

What else do they do? See how many other professional behaviors you can add to this list.

L01-4 Define professionalism and its importance to communication in the workplace.

Professionalism 101

There's one more highly valued trait to mention, and it should come into play during every interaction you have. It's **professionalism**.

Like communication, professionalism seems a simple concept until you start to unpack it. What exactly is professionalism?

Surely a part of it is **business etiquette**. This is the set of behaviors that's expected from you as an employee when you're in social situations, whether with your colleagues, your superiors, or such outsiders as partners and customers. Good table manners, polite conversation, and appropriate attire are part of business etiquette, but it goes deeper than this. As one source puts it, the ultimate goal of good manners "is to build positive relationships that enable a working environment to function in the most favorable way to all concerned."²⁴

Courtesy is a part of business etiquette. In terms of communication, this means that you allow others to speak, you listen carefully, you don't interrupt, and you keep your tone of voice under control. Respect also plays a role. You demonstrate awareness of and appreciation for others' expertise and accomplishments, as well as their cultural norms.

But professionalism goes beyond etiquette because it extends beyond behavior in social situations. It means being responsible, conscientious, and cooperative in every area of your work. It means being loyal to the organization that pays you, having a strong work ethic, and adapting gracefully to change as needed. It also means having high standards for your communications. As one blogger put it, "professionalism results in carefully prepared reports, accurate presentation of information, and constantly bearing in mind that the company exists for its customers."²⁵

Research shows that employees are now changing jobs at a faster rate than ever before. According to Integral Talent Systems, recent graduates are staying at one organization only 1.8 years, and 60% of them are "résumé building" while working for their current employer.²⁶ As you plot your upward path, be a professional in whatever job you hold. It will lead to better learning on your part, more impressive accomplishments, and stronger letters of reference, as well as rewarding relationships and a personal sense of pride. Remember that people will know you largely through your communications. Make sure your content, your wording, and the look of your written work all convey your professionalism.



You Make the Call

Think of a time when you observed unprofessional behavior. What was unprofessional about it? What kind of damage might this behavior have caused?

The Business Communication Environment

Seeing the big picture is an important part of communication success. The Project Management Institute reports that one of the main reasons projects fail is that the team members don't understand how the project fits into the company's larger business strategy.²⁷ Trying to grasp a situation in its entirety before figuring out how to act is also what effective problem solvers do.²⁸

Efficiency is highly prized in the workplace, but not taking the time to gather and think through all the important facts will lead to inefficiency, as well as to decisions that backfire. The discussions that follow will help you identify communication factors that may be lurking behind the more obvious ones.

Main Categories of Business Communication

All the communicating going on in your workplace can seem so overwhelming that you can be tempted to ignore all messages that do not concern you directly. But as mentioned, ignoring the big picture can lead to poor communication choices.

A way to make sense of the big communication picture is to view all communications as being one of three types: internal operational, external operational, or personal. This categorizing scheme is an oversimplification, of course. For example, a blog post or tweet can fall into all three categories if it is read by people both inside and outside the company and has a distinctive personal voice. Many business messages and work-related conversations also include brief personal comments to help build goodwill.

Still, an understanding of these three primary categories can help you see where your communications fit in and decide what to say, how, why, and to whom.

Internal-Operational Communication All work-related communication that occurs within an organization is internal operational. This is the communication among the employees that is conducted to achieve the goals of the organization and track its success.

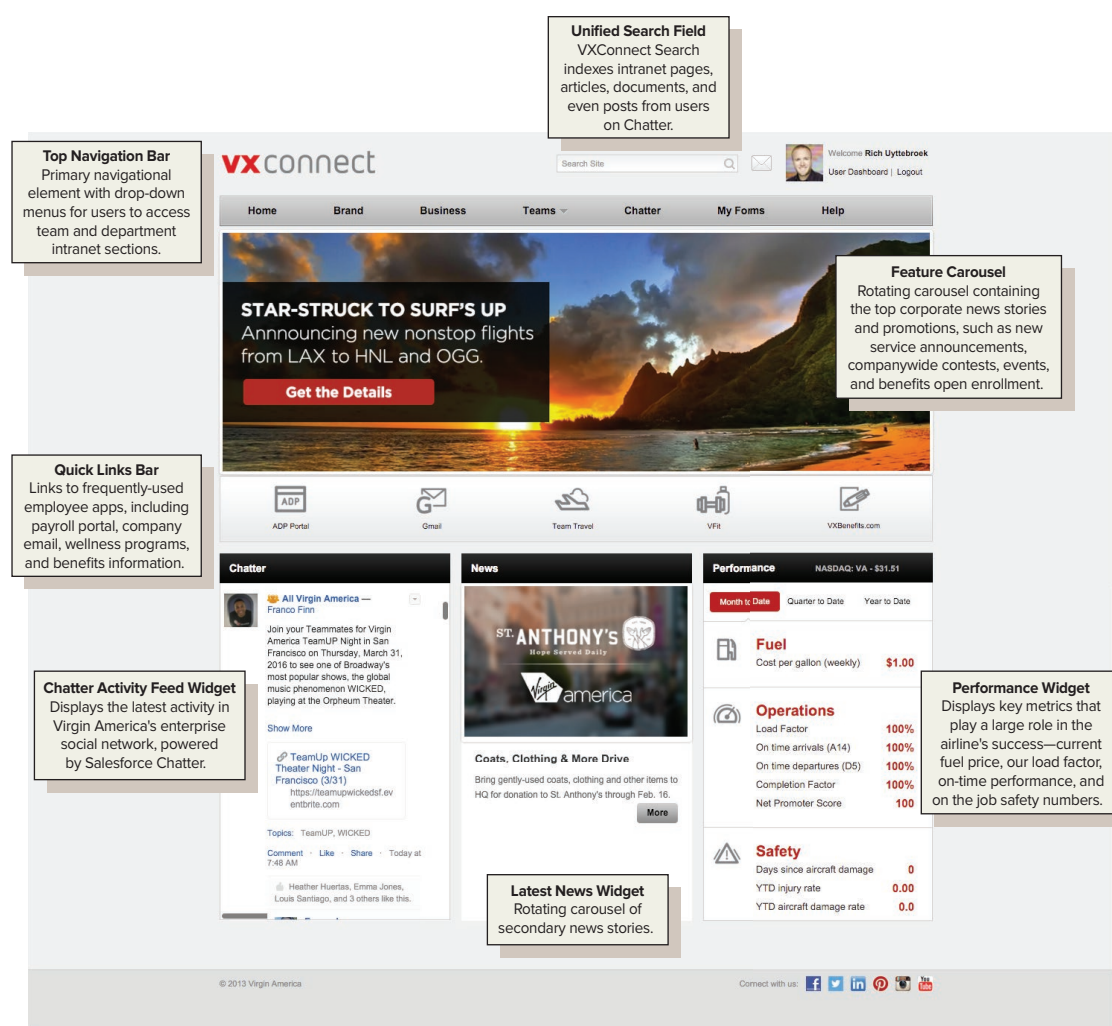
Internal-operational communication takes many forms. It includes the ongoing discussions that senior management undertakes to determine the goals and processes of the organization. It includes the orders and instructions that supervisors give employees, as well as written and oral exchanges among employees about work matters. It includes reports that employees prepare concerning sales, production, finance, maintenance, and other parts of the organization's operations. It includes the messages that they write and speak in carrying out their assignments and contributing their ideas.

Most internal-operational messages should use the conversational style discussed in Chapter 2. This style is pleasant without being too chummy and professional without being stiff. Another style can be appropriate depending on what kind of communication you're engaging in—for example, a chat with a co-worker can be more casual, while a report to your boss can be more formal. But none of your internal messages should lapse into profanity, goofiness, or poor grammar.

External-Operational Communication The work-related communicating that the organization does with people and groups outside its internal operations is **external-operational communication**.

External-operational communication includes all of the organization's promotional efforts—from sales or fundraising letters, emails, social media posts, and phone calls to Web and television ads, trade-show displays, the company website, and customer visits. Also in this category is everything the organization does to gain positive publicity, such as promoting its community-service activities, preparing appealing materials for current and prospective investors, writing press releases for the media, and contributing expert insights at professional meetings and on webinars. In fact, every act

L01-5 Describe the three main categories of business communication.



Companies often use carefully designed intranets, such as this award-winning one from Virgin America, to communicate with employees and enable them to communicate with each other.

Virgin Atlantic. Reprinted with permission.

of communication with an external audience can be regarded as a public-relations message. For this reason, all such acts should be undertaken with careful attention to both content and tone.

Organizations also rely on external-operational communication to coordinate with contractors, consultants, suppliers, and industry or nonprofit partners. In addition, every organization must communicate to some extent with such external parties as government agencies, community leaders, and public-interest groups.

Some likely external audiences for today's businesses are illustrated in Exhibit 1-3. A nonprofit organization's external audiences would look somewhat different in that they would likely include sponsors, donors and potential donors, and volunteers.

Communication with such parties can be friendly, but it is typically more formal than internal communication unless you know your co-communicator well. When conversing with outsiders, you'll want to be especially aware that you are representing your organization. Be sure to do so with discretion and professionalism.

Personal Communication Much of the communication that occurs in the workplace is interpersonal dialog that has no clear connection to the organization's operations. But do not

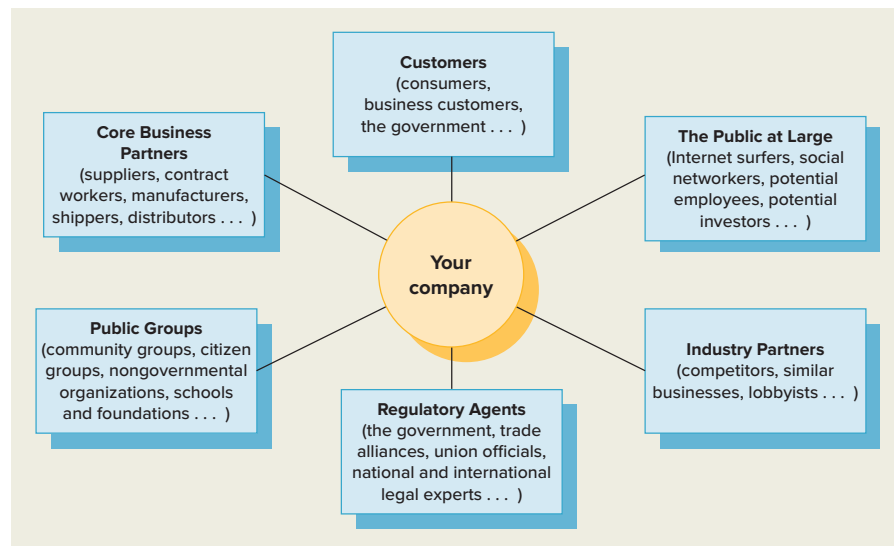
underestimate its importance. **Personal communication** helps make and sustain the relationships upon which organizations depend.

The employees' attitudes toward the organization, one another, and their assignments directly affect their productivity, and the nature and amount of personal talk at work affect those attitudes. Wise managers understand the importance of chitchat at doorways, around the water cooler, in the break room, and in online meetings; it encourages a team attitude and can often help spark more effective business solutions. In fact, to encourage random connections and spontaneous collaboration, many businesses have switched to an open-space office design (though, as many critics point out, providing quiet spaces to concentrate is necessary, too).²⁹

Using both online and face-to-face networking, you will also cultivate relationships with other professionals. Your relationships with these contacts will not only help you do your current job but also be an important resource as you change jobs or even careers.

As with operational communication, the personal communication you engage in as an employee should have boundaries. Undue familiarity with colleagues can be distracting, offensive, or even in violation of company policies, and too much complaining can lead others to regard you as a negative influence. Be careful about what you say about yourself and about other employees, since stories have a way of getting around and getting distorted via the **grapevine**, the company's informal communication network. Do not say anything that would undermine the inclusiveness of your work environment, and blow off steam only with your most trusted work friends (as Chapter 4 points out, never do this via email, chat, or social media!).

Exhibit 1-3 Likely External Audiences for Today's Businesses



Source: Rentz: *Business Communication*, 1e (1259565874), Exhibit 1-2.



You Make the Call

What are some examples of personal communication that would probably be inappropriate in the workplace?



Personal communication can help employees work better together and contribute to a cohesive company culture.

Rawpixel.com/Shutterstock

The Influence of Organizational Structure and Culture on Communication

An important part of seeing the big picture in your communication environment is understanding your organization’s structure and culture. These will heavily influence whom you communicate with, what you say, and how you say it.

L01-6 Define organizational structure and describe its influence on the organization’s communication.

Organizational Structure Except for the smallest and most informal organizations, every organization has an **organizational structure**, whether it has developed by accident or been carefully designed.

The structure is how the organization’s various components fit together.³⁰ More specifically, it is a work pattern determined by the employees’ different levels of authority, assumed or assigned responsibilities, and typical lines of communication.

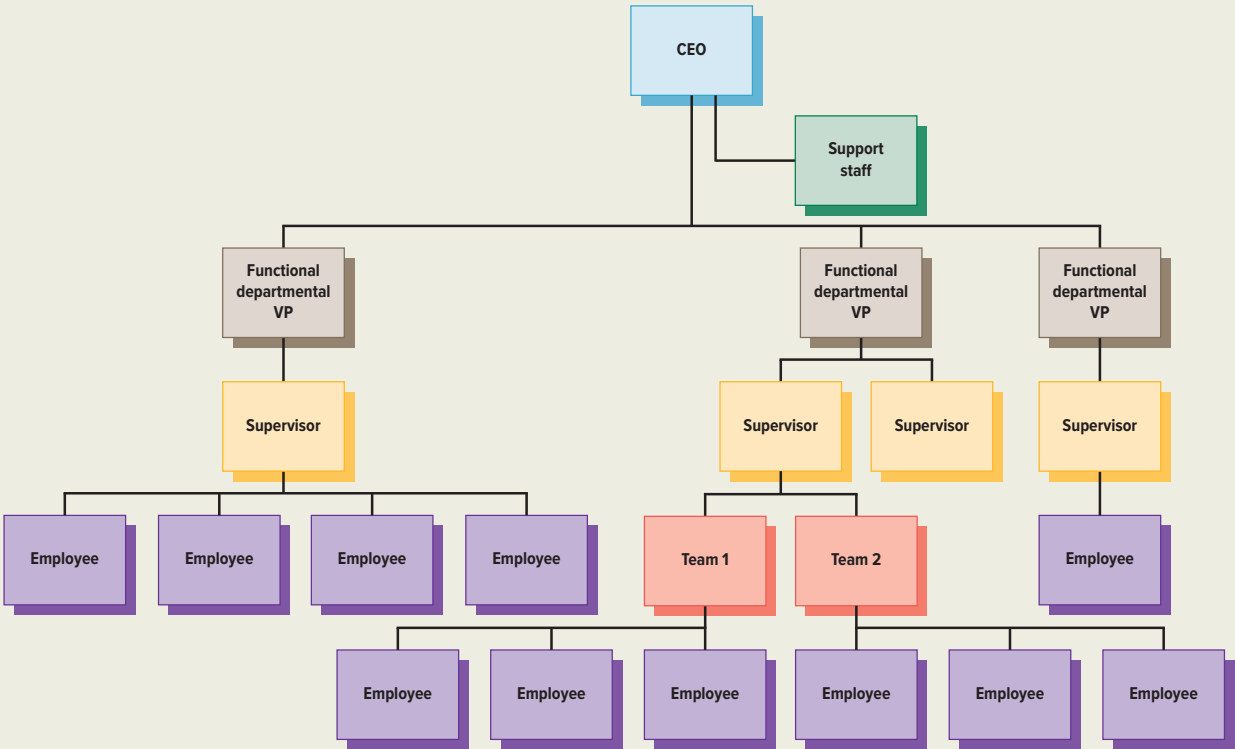
The most formal structure is that of the traditional hierarchical, or bureaucratic, organization. Represented by the top chart in Exhibit 1-4, it is based on a rigid chain of command, clear

Exhibit 1-4 Three Common Types of Organizational Charts

Organizational structures can take many forms, depending on the factors discussed in the text. Three of the most common types are variations of the hierarchy, the matrix, and the flat structures.

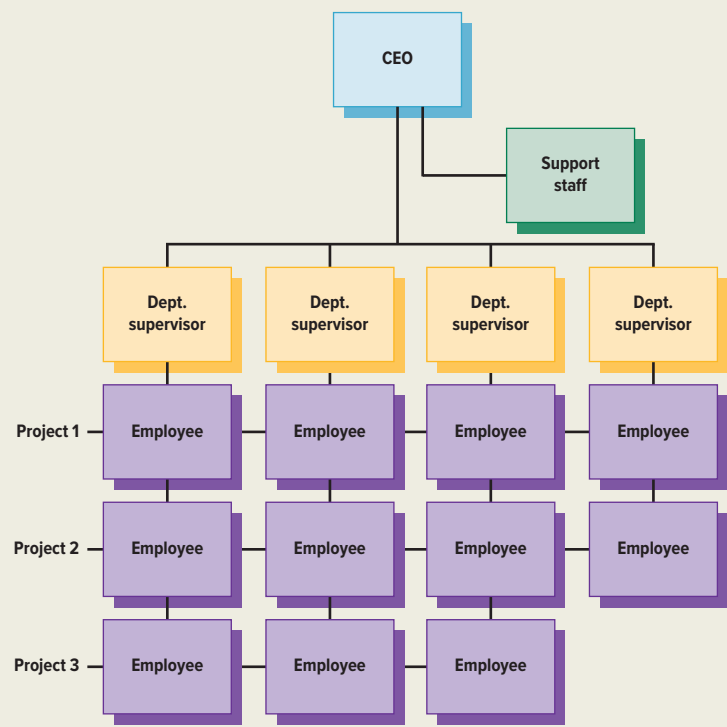
The Hierarchy

The hierarchical organization developed during the Industrial Revolution and was the most common form in the heyday of manufacturing. In a way, the hierarchical structure resembles a machine (hence one of its alternate names, the mechanistic structure) in that responsibilities are divided among all the parts that must work together in prescribed ways.



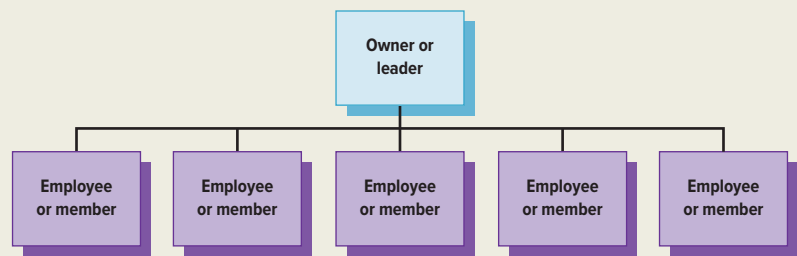
The Matrix

As organizations needed to change to be able to respond more quickly to changing markets, a more team-based approach developed. In this type of workplace, employees with the needed areas of expertise are assigned to different project groups. As the groups complete their work and the organization takes on new projects, the employees are assigned to new groups as appropriate. Note that, in this configuration, the employee answers to two bosses: the head of his/her functional area and the leader of the project. Also note that not every project will always require the same number and type of employees.



The Flat Organization

This type of organization is well suited to relatively small businesses in the knowledge economy (e.g., a PR firm) and organizations in the nonprofit sector (e.g., a charity). Here, a leader and a lean operations staff provide direction and support for the employees, who are essentially at the same level.



Source: Author.

boundaries for each person’s responsibilities, and highly restricted lines of communication. At the other end of the spectrum is the organic or flat structure, represented by the third chart in the exhibit. This kind of structure has few levels of authority and reporting, loose boundaries around the different employees’ responsibilities, and open channels of interaction among the employees. In between are many different configurations, the most common of which is the matrix structure, represented by the middle graph. In this kind of organization, employees report not only to their functional bosses (e.g., finance VP or IT director) but also to a project supervisor.

The available lines of communication in an organization cause certain stable forms of communication, or **genres**, to exist (you can read more about genres in Chapter 2). For example, in a hierarchical company, the executives may hold monthly staff meetings, and supervisors may require routine operational reports from those they manage. In a company that is more project based, the project leaders may require brief, relatively informal reports from their team members each week. The members of a flat organization will do a lot of random communicating in the form of emails, phone calls, and face-to-face conversation but will still be likely to use some stable forms, such as meetings and various kinds of reports to the rest of the team. Whatever the established form and medium, it will bring with it certain expectations about what can and cannot be said, who may and may not say it, and how the messages should be structured and worded. You will need to understand these expectations in order to communicate appropriately and well.

L01-7 Define organizational culture and describe the main factors that influence an organization's culture.

Organizational Culture When people come together in an organization and spend many hours a day there, they form a social world with its own goals, values, behaviors, and idiosyncrasies. This is its **organizational culture**.³¹

You can think of a given company's culture as its customary, but often unstated, ways of perceiving and doing things. Employees at a craft brewery, for example, are expected to behave differently from those at a large corporation like Google or any bank or insurance agency, but only some of the behavioral rules are spelled out. As you know from your own experience, the ins and outs of each workplace's culture can take quite a while to learn. Making this effort is essential to successful communication in that environment.

Organizational culture is strongly influenced by the leaders at the top, but they do not have full control. While they may promote a certain culture through such communications as mission statements and mottoes, the actual culture of a company is a living medium constructed daily through countless behaviors and communications at all levels of the organization.

Several factors strongly influence the kind of culture that an organization will have. What follows are the main ones; you may be able to think of others.

- **The purpose of the organization.** What the organization does and why has an enormous influence on its culture. If its purpose is to help others, it will have a more openly caring culture than if its primary goal is to increase shareholder wealth. If it is a business, its industry will help govern its purpose and therefore its culture.
- **The customers or clients whom they serve or with whom they do business.** Closely related to the organization's purpose is whom they serve or market their goods and services to. If something causes these to change, it can create the need for the organization's culture to change.
- **The organization's size and structure.** A small organization is likely to have a flat culture that encourages informality, whereas a large organization will need several layers of hierarchy that will make the culture more formal and the employees' power less evenly distributed.
- **The geographical and physical characteristics of the organization.** Obviously, internal communication in an organization with multiple locations will differ from that of an organization where everyone is in the same office or building. This difference can affect on how informal and cohesive the organization is. As researcher Deborah Andrews points out, the type of layout an office or building has can also affect an organization's culture. For example, an open floor plan will encourage more informal collaborations than a room filled with cubicles.³²
- **How diverse the organization is.** An organization whose employees are similar in background and who come from the same local area will have a culture that outsiders will have difficulty breaking into, whereas a multicultural organization or one with extensive diversity is likely to have a wider range of accepted values and more openness to different viewpoints.
- **The values and management style of the organization's leaders.** While an organization's leaders can't control the culture, they can strongly influence it through their behavior, their decisions and decision-making style, their internal communications, and the image they present to the public. Sometimes a change in leadership will effect major changes in an organization's culture.



Communication Matters

How to Scope Out an Organization's Culture

The Chartered Management Institute, a UK-based certification firm for managers, advises paying attention to the following 10 clues to an organization's culture:

1. The way the organization represents itself in its vision, mission, and value statements as well as its other documents and its digital media.
2. The sector (public/private and for-profit/not-for-profit) and the industry (e.g., financial advising) that the organization is in, and its organizational structure.
3. What the people who work for the organization say about it and what kind of information is and isn't shared with them.
4. What the observable physical features of the organization (e.g., its offices, its decor, how people dress) say about it.
5. The communication styles and channels in the organization.
6. How decisions are made, in terms of both participants and priorities.
7. How much employees are expected to work and how rigorously they must stick to a schedule.
8. What employee groups exist and the degree to which employees can work and communicate with other groups.
9. How meetings are conducted.
10. The strength and types of organizational boundaries (e.g., between majority and minority groups, around the organization's identity).

Source: Chartered Management Institute (CMI), *Understanding Organisational Culture*, accessed August 7, 2019, <https://www.managers.org.uk/~media/Files/PDF/Checklists/CHK-232-Understanding-organisational-culture.pdf>.

When you are researching organizations you might like to join or when you join a new organization, you'll need to pick up on all the available cultural cues. **Communication Matters: How to Scope Out an Organization's Culture** tells you the key places to look. The more attuned you are to the nature of your organization, the more effective your communication as an employee will be.

The Business Communication Process

So how do you solve communication problems? Just throw yourself in there and hope your intuition steers you in the right direction? Or is there a better way?

Even though such problems are often not clear-cut, you can take a systematic approach to solving them. The exhibits and discussion in this section will help you do so.

A Model of the Business Communication Process

Exhibit 1-5 shows the basic components of a communication event in the workplace. The communicators are represented here as individuals, but they could be writing or speaking as a team. Note also that in the case of oral communication, this process might be repeated several times as the communicators talk back and forth.

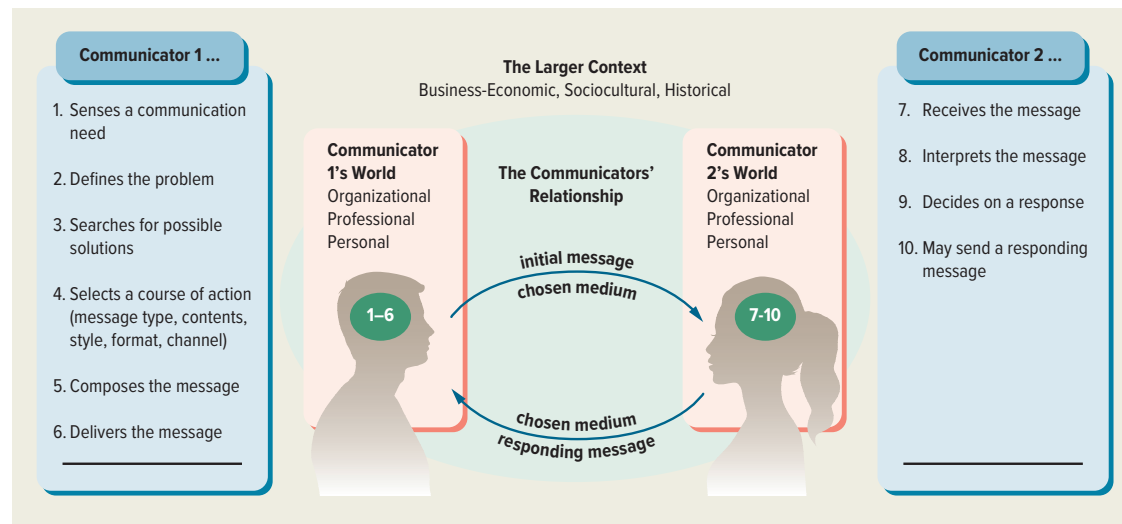
The Contexts for Business Communication As the model shows, certain features of the communication situation are already in place before Communicator 1 starts solving the communication problem. Thinking about these contexts will be a key part of creating a successful solution.

The **larger communication context** includes the general business-economic climate; the language, values, and customs in the surrounding culture; and the historical moment in which the communication is taking place.

When you think about how these contexts might influence communication, surely the first example that comes to mind is the coronavirus pandemic, which damaged economies around the world, disrupted the physical location where people work, and brought virtual-communication technology to the fore. All these developments have influenced the content and tone of workplace

L01-8 Describe the contexts for each act of communication in the workplace.

Exhibit 1-5 The Business Communication Process



communication. But even during more normal times, fluctuations in the economy or a particular industry can affect an organization's communication in both minor and major ways. The sociocultural context also affects how workplace professionals communicate. Whether they are communicating within US culture, within the culture of a particular region or another country, or across cultures, their communication choices will be affected. The particular historical context of their communication can also be a factor. Consider how financial scandals, an increased focus on the environment, and different social issues have influenced the language of business. The skillful communicator is sensitive to these larger contexts, which always exert an influence and, to some extent, are always changing.



You will often need to adapt your communication when speaking to those whose areas of expertise are different from your own.

Shutterstock/wavebreakmedia

The **communicators' relationship** also forms an important context for communication. Certainly, communication is about moving information from point A to point B, but it is also about interaction between human beings. Your first correspondence with someone begins a relationship between the two of you, whether as individuals, people in certain business roles, or both. All future messages between you will continue to build this relationship.

The communicators' *particular contexts* exert perhaps the strongest influence on their business communication.

- **Organizational contexts.** As we've discussed, the type and culture of the organization you represent will shape your communication choices in many ways, and the organizational contexts of your audiences will, in turn, shape theirs. In fact, in every act of workplace communication, at least one of the parties involved is likely to be representing an organization. What you communicate and how you do so will be strongly shaped by the organization for whom you speak. In turn, the organization to which your audience belongs—its priorities, its current circumstances, even how fast or slow its pace of work—can strongly influence the way your message is received.

- **Professional contexts.** You know from school and experience that different professionals—whether physicians, social workers, managers, accountants, or those involved in other fields—possess different kinds of expertise, speak differently, and have different perspectives. What gets communicated and how can be heavily influenced by the communicators' professional roles. Be aware that internal audiences as well as external ones can occupy different professional roles and therefore favor different kinds of content and language. Employees in management and engineering, for example, have been demonstrated to have quite different priorities, with the former focusing on financial benefit and the latter on technological achievement.³³ Part of successful communication is being alert to your audiences' different professional contexts.
- **Personal contexts.** Who you are as a person comes from many sources: the genes you inherited, your family and upbringing, your life experiences, your schooling, the many people with whom you've come in contact, and the culture in which you were reared. Who you are as a person also depends to some extent on your current circumstances. Successes and failures, personal relationships, financial ups and downs, the state of your health, your physical environment—all can affect a particular communicative act. Since much workplace communication is between individuals occupying organizational roles, personal matters are usually not disclosed. But you should be mindful of the effect that these can have on the communicators. If you're aware, for example, that the intended recipient of your message is under stress or having a bad day, you can adapt your communication accordingly.

One more important context for communication isn't represented in the model: the **intertextual context**. Most workplace communications are not isolated events; instead, they take place in the context of related communications. As Stephen Bremner explains,

Texts composed in professional settings draw on—and are shaped by—other texts in a variety of ways, whether referring specifically to other documents, taking shape within a chain of emails or other interactions, incorporating the work of colleagues as part of the collaborative process, or being informed by the templates, practices, and traditions that are specific to an organizational setting.³⁴

This fact is difficult to incorporate into classroom assignments, but it will play a huge role in your decision-making when you're communicating on the job.

The Steps in the Problem-Solving Process The process that is represented in Exhibit 1-5 is based on a problem-solving approach to communication. Exhibit 1-6 lists the main questions to consider when taking this approach.

While these steps tend to be linear, the communicator often needs to revisit earlier steps while moving through the different activities. In other words, the process of solving a communication problem is usually **recursive**. For example, you might begin with a certain view of the situation and then decide, with additional research and thinking, that this view needs to be revised. Or you might begin designing your message as an email and then decide that a phone call would probably work better (see the **Communication Matters** feature **Choice of Medium—It Matters in Business, Too**). Let yourself revisit earlier steps when a little alarm bell in your head is telling you that part of your strategy is off track.



Communication Matters

Choice of Medium—It Matters in Business, Too

It's considered so uncool to break up with someone by texting that this has become the classic example of a poor choice of medium. But choosing the wrong medium can also be decidedly uncool in business, too.

Check out the article listed in the source note, which tells the story of a dancer who was fired by text message. As you can see from the comments and from other such cases on the Internet, bosses who choose the wrong medium for such messages are judged insensitive and cowardly, and they run the risk of having their poor communication decision widely publicized, to their discredit.

It is naive to assume that the medium is simply a means for transmitting words. It carries a certain message itself, above and beyond the literal contents of your message.

When selecting the medium for your communication, consider such factors as the message content and length, the recipient's likely familiarity with the medium, and the assumptions associated with it. Choosing wisely will help you get the response you desire.

Source: Laruen Weber, "Text from the Boss: UR Fired," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 2013, accessed August 7, 2019, <http://blogs.wsj.com>.

L01-9 Describe the steps of a problem-solving approach to business communication.

Exhibit 1-6 Planning Your Communication Strategy: A Problem-Solving Approach

What is the situation/problem?

- What has happened to make you think you need to communicate?
- What prior knowledge can you apply to this situation? How is this situation like and unlike others you've encountered?
- What do you need to find out to understand every facet of this situation? Where can you get this information?
- How should you define the problem based on your full understanding of the situation?

Define the Problem

What are some possible communication goals and strategies?

- To whom should you communicate? Who might be your primary and secondary audiences? What are their different organizational, professional, and personal contexts? What would each person care about or want to know? What is your prior relationship, if any, with them?
- What purpose might you want to achieve with each recipient? What are your organizational, professional, and personal contexts?
- What different forms (in terms of genre and medium) might help you achieve your goals?
- How might the larger business-economic, sociocultural, and historical contexts affect the success of different strategies?

Generate Options

Which is the best course of action?

- Which strategies would be impractical, incomplete, or potentially dangerous? Why?
- Which of the remaining strategies looks like the optimum one? Why?
- What will be the best message type, contents, structure, style, and format for the message?
- What medium will you use to deliver it?

Evaluate the Options

What is the best way to design the chosen message?

- What will be your audience's expectations given the genre and medium you have chosen?
- Given your goals for each recipient, what information should your message include?
- What structure should you use for the content?
- What kind of style and tone should you use? What image of yourself and your audience should you project? What relationship with each recipient should your message promote?
- How can you use formatting and supporting visuals to make your message easy to read and comprehend?

Build the Solution

What is the best way to deliver the message?

- Are there any timing considerations related to delivering your message?
- Should you combine the main message with any other messages?
- How can you best ensure that each intended recipient will receive and read or hear your message?

Deliver the Solution



You Make the Call

Think about a recent communication situation you handled that didn't go well. Where did your problem-solving process go wrong?

Study the response from every message you deliver, and learn from it. If you have a chance to respond to your audience's response, your assessment can help you meet the current communication challenge more successfully. If the dialog has ended, the practice of assessing the results of your communication decisions will still help you develop stronger skills for meeting future challenges.

Source: Rentz, *Business Communication*, 1e (1259565874), Exhibit 1-5.

Business Communication: The Bottom Line

The theme of this chapter might be summed up this way: The goal of communication in the workplace is to create a shared understanding of situations that will enable people to work successfully together.

Organizations depend on timely and clear transfer of information to achieve their goals. Figuring out what kind of information to send, whom to send it to, how to send it, and what form to use requires good decision making. But effective management of workplace relationships is just as essential. Every act of communication conveys an image of you and of the way you regard those to whom you’re speaking or writing. Successful professionals pay careful attention to the human relations dimension of their messages.

Yes, business communication can be challenging. It can also be extremely rewarding because of the results you achieve and the relationships you build. The advice, examples, and exercises in this book will jump-start you toward success. But it will be your ability to analyze and solve specific communication problems that will take you the rest of the way there.



Power Charge Your Professionalism: Use the Right Word (Part I)

Select the word that completes each sentence below. The choices are pairs of words that are sometimes confused. You’ll find these and other misused words listed in Reference Chapter A. To be sure you use them accurately, consult a dictionary.

1. The performance of our stock will (affect/effect) our shareholders’ willingness to continue investing in our company.
2. The company features (its/it’s/its’) logo in the top-left corner of every webpage.
3. Jeanette knew she had to raise more (capital/capitol) before starting her new business.
4. We will be conducting interviews on (cite/sight/site) next Thursday.
5. Jorge and Mira work well together because their skills are (complimentary/complementary).
6. The CEO asked for everyone’s (cooperation/corporation) as we moved through the software conversion.
7. Guests always receive (deferential/differential) treatment when they visit our company.
8. Good team members do not (desert/dessert) their teams just because the work isn’t going well.

Choosing the right word is important because . . .

- Using the wrong word can confuse readers or even make them completely misunderstand your meaning.
- Using the wrong word can make you appear to be poorly educated and/or careless, neither of which is an impression you want to convey.

Key Terms

problem solving 6
heuristics 6
verbal literacy 7
visual literacy 7
interpersonal skills 7
computational thinking 8
interpretive skills 8
new media 8
social intelligence 8
cross-cultural competency 9
corporate social responsibility (CSR) 10

brand activism 10
professionalism 12
business etiquette 12
internal-operational communication 13
external-operational communication 13
personal communication 15
grapevine 15
organizational structure 16
genres 18
organizational culture 18

larger communication context 19
communicators’ relationship 20
organizational contexts 20
professional contexts 21
personal contexts 21
intertextual context 21
recursive process 21