

CHAPTER-1

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION IN A DIGITAL, SOCIAL, MOBILE WORLD



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain the importance of effective communication to your career and to the companies where you will work.
- Explain what it means to communicate as a professional in a business context
- Contrast the conventional communication process model with the social communication model.
- Identify five major benefits of business communication technology and three major innovations that are reshaping the practice of communication.

UNDERSTANDING WHY COMMUNICATION MATTERS

Communication is complex, and KLM's ambitious social media program highlights its importance to every business (see the chapter-opening Communication close-up).

Communication is the process of transferring information and meaning between senders and receivers, using one or more forms of media. For communication to be considered successful, it also must transfer or negotiate understanding.

COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR CAREER

In every career path you can take— employee, independent freelancer, entrepreneur, manager— you will need strong communication skill.

COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR COMPANY

- **Operations.** Every company needs fast, effective communication between managers and staff, within departments, between departments, and between the company and its external business partners. Communication carries everything from high-level strategic plans down to minute technical details, and any bottlenecks or breakdowns can reduce operational efficiency and create problems with quality or safety.
- **Intelligence.** Companies need to keep a constant “ear to the ground” to be alerted to new opportunities, risks, and impending problems— both internally and externally.

COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR COMPANY

- **Relationships.** Just as in personal and social relationships, business relationships depend on communication. Effective communication strengthens the connections between a company and all its stakeholders, which are any persons or organizations significantly affected by the company's business decisions and operations. Stakeholder groups include employees, customers, investors, creditors, suppliers, and local communities. Individuals within companies also rely on communication to foster the emotional connections that create a healthy work environment.

COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR COMPANY

- Companies rely on communication for efficient operations, timely business intelligence, and positive relationships.
- Stakeholders are any persons or organizations significantly affected by a company's business decisions and operations.

WHAT MAKES BUSINESS COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVE?

To make your communication efforts as effective as possible, focus on making them practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive:

- **Provide practical information.** Give recipients useful information that helps them solve problems, pursue opportunities, or take other action.
- **Give facts rather than vague impressions.** Use concrete language, specific detail, and information that is clear, accurate, and ethical. When an opinion is called for, present compelling evidence to support your conclusion.
- **Communicate efficiently.** Concise messages show respect for people's time, and they increase the chances of a positive response.

WHAT MAKES BUSINESS COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVE?

To make your communication efforts as effective as possible, focus on making them practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive:

- **Clarify expectations and responsibilities.** Craft messages to generate a specific response from readers. When appropriate, clearly state what you expect from audience members or what you can do for them.
- **Offer compelling arguments and recommendations.** When a situation calls for persuasive communication, show your readers how they will benefit if they respond the way you would like them to respond.

**EFFECTIVE MESSAGES ARE PRACTICAL, FACTUAL, CONCISE,
CLEAR, AND PERSUASIVE**

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UNDERSTANDING WHAT EMPLOYERS EXPECT FROM YOU

- **Acquiring, processing and sharing information.** Employers expect you to be able to recognize information needs, locate and evaluate reliable sources of information, organize information into cohesive messages, and use information ethically. This collection of skills is often referred to as *digital information fluency*. Information fluency includes critical thinking, which is the ability to evaluate evidence completely and objectively in order to form logical conclusions and make sound recommendations.
- **Using communications to foster positive working relationships.** This task includes listening, practicing good etiquette, resolving conflicts respectfully, and communicating with people from diverse backgrounds.

EMPLOYERS EXPECT YOU TO POSSESS A WIDE RANGE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS.



Figure 1.3 Elements of Professionalism
To be respected as a true professional,
develop these six qualities.

● **Representing your employer in the public arena.** Employers expect you to act responsibly and professionally on social media and in other venues and to follow accepted standards of grammar, spelling, and other aspects of quality writing and speaking.

● **Efficiently using the tools that your employer provides.** Aside from in-person conversations and meetings, every instance of business communication involves some level of technological assistance, so employers expect a level of proficiency with the tools they provide you to use.

COMMUNICATION IN AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

Every organization has a formal communication network, in which ideas and information flow along the lines of command (the hierarchical levels) in the company's organization structure (see Figure 1.4).

Throughout the formal network, information flows in four directions.

- Downward Communication
 - Upward Communication
 - Horizontal or lateral Communication
 - Diagonal Communication
- (Every organization also has an informal communication network)

***THE FORMAL COMMUNICATION NETWORK MIRRORS THE COMPANY'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.**

***THE INFORMAL COMMUNICATION NETWORK ENCOMPASSES ALL COMMUNICATION THAT OCCURS OUTSIDE THE FORMAL NETWORK.**

EXPLORING THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Viewing communication as a process helps you identify steps you can take to improve your success as a communicator.

THE CONVENTIONAL COMMUNICATION MODEL

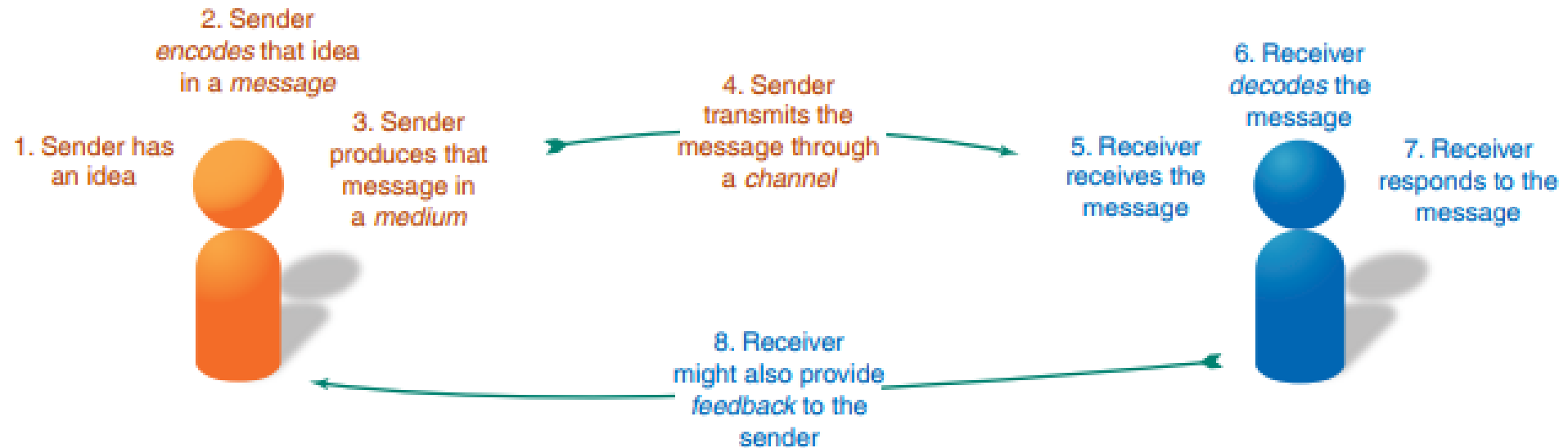


Figure 1.5 The Conventional Communication Process

This eight-step model is a simplified view of one cycle of communication. In reality, the process is complicated with noise, barriers, and interruptions, but understanding the basic concepts of encoding and decoding will help you as a sender and as a receiver.

BARRIERS IN THE COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT

Within any communication environment, messages can be disrupted by a variety of communication barriers. These barriers include noise and distractions, competing messages, filters, and channel breakdowns:

- **Noise and distractions.** External distractions range from uncomfortable meeting rooms to reminders popping up on your screen while you're trying to write or read.

Internal distractions are thoughts and emotions that prevent audiences from focusing on incoming messages. The common habit of multitasking—attempting more than one task at a time—is practically guaranteed to create barriers when communication is involved because the human brain simply isn't wired to work that way. You may think you are doing two or more tasks at once, but you are really shifting back and forth between individual tasks, and your productivity and focus can suffer every time you shift.

As more communication takes place on mobile devices in busy environments, the need to insulate yourself from noise and distractions will keep growing.

BARRIERS IN THE COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT

- **Competing messages.** Having your audience's undivided attention is a rare luxury. In most cases, you must compete with other messages that are trying to reach your audience at the same time.
- **Filters.** Messages can be blocked or distorted by filters, which are any human or technological interventions between the sender and the receiver. Filtering can be intentional (such as automatically filing incoming email messages based on sender or content) or unintentional (such as an overly aggressive spam filter that traps legitimate emails). The structure and culture of an organization can also inhibit the flow of vital messages. And, in some cases, the people or companies you rely on to deliver a message can distort it or filter it to meet their own needs.
- **Channel breakdowns.** Sometimes the channel simply fails to deliver your message at all. A colleague you were counting on to forward a message to your boss might have forgotten to do so, for instance.

(Communication barriers can block or distort messages before they reach the intended audience.)

USING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

The potential benefits of communication technology include

- Greater effectiveness
- Greater efficiency
- Better and easier research
- Improved decision-making
- Fewer barriers

THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

To use communication technology effectively, bear these five points in mind:

- **Keep technology in perspective.** Any technology is simply a tool, a means by which you can accomplish certain tasks. Technology is an aid to communication, not a replacement for it. Moreover, it can get in the way if not used thoughtfully. Throughout this book, you'll see advice on keeping the focus on your messages and your audiences and on using technology to enhance the communication process without overwhelming it.

- **Guard against information overload.** The overuse or misuse of communication technology can lead to information overload, in which people receive more information than they can effectively process. Information overload can cause distractions, stress, mistakes, and communication breakdowns, and minimizing it is a shared responsibility. As a receiver, be your own gatekeeper and stay mindful of what information you allow in. Periodically “prune” your information channels to avoid material you no longer need, and use filtering features in your systems to isolate high-priority messages that deserve your attention. As a sender, make sure you don't send unnecessary messages or poorly crafted messages that require multiple rounds of clarification.

THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

To use communication technology effectively, bear these five points in mind:

- **Use your tools wisely.** Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other communication technologies are key parts of what has been called the information technology paradox, in which information tools can waste as much time as they save. In addition to distracting employees from work responsibilities, inappropriate use can also leave companies vulnerable to lawsuits and security breaches.

- **Use your tools efficiently.** Knowing how to use your tools efficiently can make a big difference in your productivity. You don't have to become an expert in most cases, but you do need to be familiar with the basic features and functions of the tools you are expected to use on the job. As a manager, make sure your employees are trained to use the systems you expect them to use.

THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

To use communication technology effectively, bear these five points in mind:

- **Reconnect with people.** Even when it is working well, communication technology can still present barriers to understanding and healthy emotional connections. Messaging, email, and other text-heavy modes are particularly prone to misunderstandings and bruised feelings because they can't convey nuances and emotions the same way that voice, video, and in-person conversation can. Whenever you sense that you're stuck in a loop of confusion or negativity, pick up the phone or visit the other party in person if you can. A few minutes of direct conversation can often work wonders.

COMMITTING TO ETHICAL AND LEGAL COMMUNICATION

- Ethics are the accepted principles of right and wrong that govern behavior and decision-making within a society.
- Ethical communication includes all the information an audience needs to make an informed decision or take an informed stance on an issue.
- Withholding information, distorting information, and plagiarizing are all forms of unethical communication.
- Transparency is a sense of openness that gives audience members access to all the information they need to process messages accurately.

FORMS OF UNETHICAL COMMUNICATION

- Withholding information
- Distorting information
- Plagiarizing

ENSURING LEGAL COMMUNICATION

Business communication is governed by a wide variety of laws designed to ensure accurate, complete messages.

- **Promotional communication.** Anyone who creates marketing messages needs to be aware of the many laws that govern truth and accuracy in advertising. These laws address such issues as false and deceptive advertising, claims expressed on product packaging, the use of celebrity testimonials, and bait-and-switch tactics in which a store advertises a lower-priced product to lure consumers into a store but then tries to sell them a more expensive item. Chapter 12 explores this area in more detail.

- **Contracts.** A contract is a legally binding promise between two parties in which one party makes a specified offer and the other party accepts. Contracts cover a wide range of business scenarios, including employment, purchasing and leasing, project services, and nondisclosure agreements.

ENSURING LEGAL COMMUNICATION

Business communication is governed by a wide variety of laws designed to ensure accurate, complete messages.

- **Employee communication.** A variety of local, state, and federal laws govern communication between employers and both potential and current employees. For example, employers are required to inform employees about workplace hazards, such as toxic chemicals.

- **Intellectual property.** In an age when instant global connectivity makes copying and retransmitting electronic files effortless, the protection of digital and creative assets has become a widespread concern. Intellectual property (IP) includes copyrighted materials as well as industrial property such as patents, product designs, and logos.

- **Financial reporting.** Finance and accounting professionals who work for publicly traded companies (those that sell stock to the public) must adhere to stringent reporting laws.

ENSURING LEGAL COMMUNICATION

Business communication is governed by a wide variety of laws designed to ensure accurate, complete messages.

- **Defamation.** Negative comments about another party raise the possibility of defamation, the intentional public communication of false statements that damage character or reputation. Written defamation is called libel; spoken defamation is called slander.

- **Transparency requirements.** Governments around the world are taking steps to help ensure that consumers and other parties know who is behind the information they receive, particularly when it appears online. In the United States, for example, the FTC requires influencers such as celebrities and professional athletes to disclose any relationships they have with companies when they promote or endorse products in social media.

DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR YOUR CAREER

- **Critical thinking.** In many of the assignments and activities, you will need to define and solve problems and make decisions or form judgments about a situation or set of circumstances.
- **Collaboration.** Depending on the configuration of your course, you will have various opportunities to work with classmates on reports, presentations, and other projects.
- **Knowledge application and analysis.** The ability to learn a concept and then apply that knowledge to other challenges is a skill that employers value highly.

DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR YOUR CAREER

- **Business ethics and social responsibility.** As you work on projects throughout this course, be mindful of the ethical implications that you could encounter in similar projects on the job.
- **Information technology skills.** Use projects and activities to build your skills with technology, including word-processing apps, spreadsheets, presentation software, messaging systems, and AI tools.
- **Data literacy.** You'll have multiple opportunities to fine-tune your data literacy skills, which include the ability to access, assess, interpret, manipulate, summarize, and communicate data.

THANK YOU