Part I

Understanding the Foundations of Business Communication

CHAPTER 1
Achieving Success Through Effective Business Communication

CHAPTER 2
Communicating in Teams and Mastering Listening and Nonverbal Communication Skills

CHAPTER 3
Communicating in a World of Diversity
Chapter 1

Achieving Success Through Effective Business Communication

Learning Objectives

AFTER STUDYING THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO

1. Explain why effective communication is important to your success in today’s business environment
2. Describe the five characteristics of effective business communication
3. Identify eight communication skills that successful employers expect from their employees
4. List five ways in which business communication differs from social communication
5. Describe six strategies for communicating more effectively on the job
6. Explain what must occur for an audience to successfully receive, decode, and respond to messages
7. Explain four strategies for using communication technology successfully
8. Discuss the importance of ethics in business communication, and differentiate between ethical dilemmas and ethical lapses
Many people transform personal interests into successful business enterprises. Mena Trott used her hobby to help start a revolution. She was among the first wave of web users to keep a web log, or blog, an online journal that can cover any topic from politics to pets. As the popularity of her blog grew, the rudimentary blogging tools available at the time couldn’t keep up. Trott and her husband, Ben, decided to create their own software that would handle high-volume blogging—and make it easy for anyone to blog.

The Trotts’ first product, Movable Type, caught on quickly as web users around the world welcomed the opportunity to become instant online publishers. Before long, Ben and Mena had become first-name celebrities in the “blogosphere,” and an effort that had started as an extension of a hobby soon grew into a multinational company. (The Trotts named their new company Six Apart in honor of the fact that the two of them were born just six days apart.)

With help from companies such as Six Apart, bloggers began to influence virtually every aspect of contemporary life, from politics to journalism to business. The best of the business blogs tear down the barriers that can make companies seem impersonal or unresponsive to customers. Companies ranging from Boeing to General Motors to Microsoft now use blogs to put a human face on commercial organizations, and millions of people read these blogs to keep up on the latest news about the products and companies that interest them.

Blogging is changing so rapidly that it’s hard to predict what the future holds for Six Apart, but Trott summed up the impact of blogging when she said, “I can’t imagine where we’ll be in a year, let alone five years, but I’m certain web logging is here to stay.”

www.sixapart.com
ACHIEVING SUCCESS IN TODAY’S COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Successful professionals such as Mena Trott (profiled in the chapter opener) will tell you that to succeed in business today, you need the ability to communicate with people both inside and outside your organization. Whether you are competing to get the job you want or to win the customers your company needs, your success or failure depends to a large degree on your ability to communicate. In fact, if you’re looking for a surefire way to stand out from your competition in the job market, improving your communication skills may be the single most important step you can take. Employers often express frustration at the poor communication skills of many employees—particularly recent college graduates who haven’t yet learned how to adapt their casual communication style to the professional business environment. If you learn to write well, speak well, listen well, and recognize the appropriate way to communicate in various business situations, you’ll gain a major advantage that will serve you throughout your career.2

Whether you are posting entries on a blog, giving a formal presentation, or chatting with co-workers at lunch, you are engaging in communication, the process of transferring information from a sender to a receiver. The essence of communication is sharing—providing data, information, and insights in an exchange that benefits both you and the people with whom you are communicating.3 Effective communication helps businesses in many ways. These benefits include:4

- Stronger decision making and faster problem solving
- Earlier warning of potential problems
- Increased productivity and steadier workflow
- Stronger business relationships
- Clearer and more persuasive marketing messages
- Enhanced professional images for both employers and companies
- Lower employee turnover and higher employee satisfaction
- Better financial results and higher return for investors

Effective communication strengthens the connection between a company and all of its stakeholders, those groups affected in some way by the company’s actions: customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, neighbors, the community, and the nation.5 Conversely, when communication breaks down, the results can be anything from time wasting to tragic. At every stage of your career, communication will help you succeed, and the higher you rise in your organization, the more important it becomes. In fact, top managers spend as much as 85 percent of their time communicating with others.6

Communicating in Organizational Settings

Messages flow into, through, and out of business organizations in a variety of ways. Internal communication takes place between people inside a company, whereas external communication takes place between a company and outside parties. In addition, messages travel over both formal and informal channels (see Figure 1.1).

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 1.2). Throughout the internal formal network, information travels in three directions. Downward communication flows from executives to employees, conveying executive decisions and providing information...
that helps employees do their jobs. **Upward communication** flows from employees to executives, providing insight into problems, trends, opportunities, grievances, and performance—thus allowing executives to solve problems and make intelligent decisions. **Horizontal communication** flows between departments to help employees share information, coordinate tasks, and solve complex problems.\(^7\)

Every organization also has an **informal communication network**—a **grapevine**—that operates anywhere two or more employees are in contact, from the lunchroom to the golf course to the company’s e-mail and instant messaging (IM) systems. Some executives are wary of the informal network, but savvy managers tap into it to spread and receive informal messages.\(^8\) Smart managers also know that a particularly active grapevine is a sign that the formal communication network is not providing the information employees believe they need. Grapevines flourish when employees don’t receive information they want or need.

**FIGURE 1.1**
Forms of Communication
Business communication can be both formal or informal and internal or external. As you can see from this chart, many of the same tools can be used in any of these four situations.
External communication flows into and out of the organization by both formal means (carefully prepared letters, announcements, and so on) and informal means (meeting potential sales contacts at industry gatherings or networking at social events). In fact, informal exchanges are now considered so important that a new class of technology has sprung up to enable them. Just as Facebook, MySpace, and similar social networking technologies help students and other individuals connect, software and websites such as Spoke Connect, LinkedIn.com, and Ryze.com help businesspeople connect. These business-oriented solutions typically work by indexing e-mail and IM address books, calendars, and message archives, then looking for connections between names.9

The concept of social networking is also evolving in some companies into the form of virtual communities or communities of practice that link employees with similar professional interests throughout the company and, occasionally, with customers and suppliers as well. For example, the heavy-equipment manufacturer Caterpillar has more than 2,700 such communities that discuss problems and share insights into improving quality and productivity.10

Recognizing Effective Communication

You can have the greatest ideas in the world, but they’re no good to your company or your career if you can’t express them clearly and persuasively. To make your messages effective, make them practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive:

- **Provide practical information.** Give recipients useful information, whether it’s to help them perform a desired action or understand a new company policy. For instance, if you review the various product blogs on Six Apart’s website (www.sixapart.com/about/ourblogs), you’ll see that every posting helps advance the cause of blogging in some way—and as blogging continues to grow, so do the business opportunities for Six Apart.

- **Give facts rather than vague impressions.** Use concrete language, specific detail, and information that is clear, convincing, accurate, and ethical. Even when an opinion is called for, present compelling evidence to support your conclusion.

- **Present information in a concise, efficient manner.** Rather than dump everything on the reader, highlight the most important information. Audiences respond better to messages that clarify and summarize effectively.

- **Clarify expectations and responsibilities.** Write messages to generate a specific response from a specific audience. Clearly state what you expect from audience members or what you can do for them.

- **Offer compelling, persuasive arguments and recommendations.** Show your readers precisely how they will benefit from responding to your message the way you want them to.

Keep these five important characteristics in mind as you review Figures 1.3 and 1.4 (see pages 8–9). At first glance, both e-mails appear to be well constructed, but Figure 1.3 is far less effective, as the comments (in blue) explain. In contrast, Figure 1.4 shows how an effective message can help everyone work more efficiently.

Understanding What Employers Expect from You

No matter how good you are at accounting, engineering, law, or whatever professional specialty you pursue, employers expect you to be competent at a wide range of communication tasks. In fact, employers start judging your ability to communicate
before you even show up for your first interview, and the process of evaluation never really stops. Fortunately, the skills that employers expect from you are the same skills that will help you advance in your career:

- Organizing ideas and information logically and completely
- Expressing ideas and information coherently and persuasively
- Listening to others effectively
- Communicating effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences
- Using communication technologies effectively and efficiently
- Following accepted standards of grammar, spelling, and other aspects of high-quality writing and speaking
- Communicating in a civilized manner that reflects contemporary expectations of business etiquette
- Communicating ethically, even when choices aren’t crystal clear

You’ll have the opportunity to practice all these skills throughout this course—but don’t stop there. Successful professionals continue to hone communication skills throughout their careers.

Understanding Why Business Communication Is Unique

If you have some experience in the business world, you already know that business communication is often more complicated and demanding than your typical social communication with family, friends, and school associates. Expectations are higher on the job, and the business environment is so complex that your messages can fail for reasons that never even occurred to you before. Business communication is affected by such factors as the increasing value of information, the globalization of business and increase in workforce diversity, the pervasiveness of technology, the evolution of organizational structures, and the growing reliance on teamwork.

The Increasing Value of Business Information

As competition for jobs, customers, and resources continues to grow, the importance of information continues to escalate as well. Even companies not usually associated with the so-called Information Age often rely on knowledge workers: employees at all levels of an organization who specialize in acquiring, processing, and communicating information. Three examples will give you an idea of the value of information in today’s economy:

- **Competitive insights.** The more a company knows about its competitors and their plans, the better its ability to adjust its own business plans.

- **Customer needs.** Most companies invest significant time and money in the effort to understand the needs of their customers, and this information needs to be analyzed and summarized in order to develop goods and services that better satisfy customer needs.

- **Regulations and guidelines.** Today’s businesses must understand and follow a wide range of government regulations and guidelines covering such areas as employment, environment, taxes, and accounting. In the field of accounting and finance, for instance, executives say that communication skills are more important than ever before, not only for the increasing requirements of government reporting but also for the increase in interdepartmental collaboration.
Part I Understanding the Foundations of Business Communication

No matter what the specific type of information, the better you understand it, use it, and communicate it to others, the more competitive you and your company will be.

The Globalization of Business and the Increase in Workforce Diversity Today’s businesses increasingly reach across international borders to market their products, partner with other businesses, and employ workers and executives—an effort known as globalization. Many U.S. companies rely on exports for a significant portion of their sales, sometimes up to 50 percent or more, so managers and employees in these firms need to communicate with many other cultures. Moreover, thousands of companies from all around the world vie for a share of the massive U.S. market, so chances are you’ll do business with or even work for a company based in another country at some point in your career.

As people and products cross borders, businesses of all shapes and sizes are paying more attention to workforce

Successful companies know that diverse workforces can create powerful competitive advantages, but such workforces require closer attention to communication in order to eliminate barriers between groups with different communication styles.
diversity—all the differences among the people who work together, including differences in age, gender, sexual orientation, education, cultural background, religion, life experience, and so on. As Chapter 3 discusses, successful companies realize two important facts: (1) The more diverse their workforce, the more attention they need to pay to communication; and (2) a diverse workforce can yield a significant competitive advantage by fostering new ideas and new communication skills.

The Pervasiveness of Technology The blogging innovations provided by Mena Trott and her colleagues at Six Apart represent another important theme in contemporary business communication: the influence of technology in virtually every aspect of the field (see “Using the Power of Technology: Is Web 2.0 the Future or the Past Revisited?”). However, taking advantage of technology requires time, energy, and frequent improvement of skills. If your level of technical expertise doesn’t keep up with that of your colleagues and co-workers, the imbalance can put you at a disadvantage and complicate the communication process. Throughout this course, you’ll learn how to use numerous technological tools and systems more effectively.

The Evolution of Organizational Structures Every business has a particular structure that defines the relationships between the various people and departments within the organization. These relationships in turn affect the nature and quality of

FIGURE 1.4
Effective Business Communication
This improved version of the e-mail message from Figure 1.3 does a much better job of communicating the information people need in order to effectively prepare for the meeting.
USING THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY

Is Web 2.0 the Future or the Past Revisited?

Take your pick: (a) It unleashes the power of the individual while harnessing the collective wisdom of crowds; it shifts the web from consumption to contribution; and far into the future it “will be recognized as the largest, most complex, and most surprising event on the planet.” (b) It is a load of baloney that at best is meaningless marketing nonsense and at worst is an attempt to repackage failed business models from the dot-com boom of the late 1990s.

“It” is Web 2.0. Defining Web 2.0 is difficult, and estimating its eventual impact on business is even harder. Web 2.0 could be described as a shift in the philosophy and technology of the World Wide Web, from static, isolated, and tightly controlled websites to connected, interactive, user-driven services. However, the term is used so widely and so loosely that no accepted definition has yet emerged.

Communication technologies often included under the Web 2.0 umbrella include blogging, podcasting, wikis, and newsfeeds; you’ll learn more about them in Chapter 7. Among the companies frequently cited as examples of the Web 2.0 approach are the news website Digg.com (www.digg.com), which allows users to select the most important news stories from around the world; the social bookmarking site del.icio.us (http://del.icio.us), which helps web surfers find interesting and useful websites; and YouTube (www.youtube.com), the wildly popular video sharing service. YouTube in particular is a good example of user-generated content, in which individual consumers create a website’s content. Conversational media (in which individuals communicate back and forth then passively accepting content from a corporation) and citizen journalism (in which everyday people can contribute video clips, blog postings, and other news items) are other Web 2.0 concepts.

Web 2.0 detractors generally don’t dispute the value of these sites and tools; rather, they question whether Web 2.0 is really the profound philosophical shift in human behavior that some of its proponents seem to claim—and whether a whole class of profitable businesses can be built around the concept. While that debate rages on, here’s some pragmatic advice: Take advantage of these powerful new communication tools without getting too caught up in what exactly Web 2.0 means or where it might be going.

CAREER APPLICATIONS

1. Read several online opinions that promote or downplay the importance of Web 2.0 (you can find a number of links in the “Web 2.0” article on Wikipedia, www.wikipedia.org).
2. After reading those opinions, write your own one- or two-sentence description of Web 2.0. (Good luck! This could prove to be a challenging assignment.)

Communications throughout the organization. Tall structures have many layers of management between the lowest and highest positions, so they can suffer communication breakdowns and delays as messages are passed up and down through multiple layers.  \(^{13}\)

To overcome such problems, many businesses are adopting flat structures that reduce the number of layers. With fewer layers, communication generally flows faster and with fewer disruptions and distortions. On the other hand, with fewer formal lines of control and communication in these organizations, individual employees are expected to assume more responsibility for communication—particularly in the horizontal direction, from department to department across the company.

In the pursuit of speed and agility, some businesses have adopted flexible organizations that pool the talents of employees and external partners. For instance, when launching a new product, a company may supplement the efforts of internal departments with help from a public relations firm, an advertising agency, a marketing consultant, a web developer, and a product distributor. With so many individuals and organizations involved in the project, everyone must share the responsibility for giving and getting necessary information, or communication will break down.

Regardless of the particular structure a company uses, communication efforts will also be influenced by the organization’s corporate culture, the mixture of values, traditions, and habits that give a company its atmosphere and personality. Successful companies encourage employee contributions by ensuring that communication flows freely...
down, up, and across the organization chart. Open climates encourage candor and honesty, helping employees feel free enough to admit their mistakes, disagree with the boss, and share negative or unwelcome information. For example, at Great Circle, a travel company based in Boston, employees are expected to practice “open and courageous communication” with each other and company management—even when that means asking executives to explain mistakes and bad decisions.14

The Growing Reliance on Teamwork You’ll probably find yourself on a number of teams throughout your career, as a full-time assignment or as part of a temporary project. Teams are commonly used in business today, but they’re not always successful—and a key reason that teams fail to meet their objectives is poor communication. Chapter 2 offers insights into the complex dynamics of team communication and identifies skills you need to be an effective communicator in group settings.

COMMUNICATING MORE EFFECTIVELY ON THE JOB

Communication in today’s business environment is clearly a challenge, but a careful combination of strategies can improve your ability to communicate effectively. The most important of these strategies are connecting with your audience, minimizing distractions, adopting an audience-centered approach, improving your basic communication skills, using constructive feedback, and being sensitive to business etiquette.

Connecting with Your Audience

No matter what the circumstances, successful communication is all about making connections with your audience. You have no doubt had experiences in which a single word or even just a glance successfully communicated what you wanted to say—as well as experiences in which you talked for hours or sent what seemed like a million text messages but just couldn’t get your audience to understand your message. Why do some efforts succeed while others fail?

Human communication is a complex process with many opportunities for messages to get lost, ignored, or misinterpreted. Fortunately, by understanding this process, you can improve the odds that your messages will reach their intended audiences and produce their intended effects.

Overview of the Communication Process By viewing communication as a process (see Figure 1.5), you can identify and improve the skills you need in order to be more successful—and you can recognize the many places and ways in which communication can fail. (Note that the original version of this process model was created to describe electronic communication,15 but it provides helpful insights into any form of communication.) Many variations on this process model exist, but these eight steps provide a practical overview:

1. The sender has an idea. You conceive an idea and want to share it. Whether a communication effort will ultimately be effective starts right here, depending on the nature of the idea, the composition of the audience and your relationship to
these people, and your motivation for wanting to share the idea. For example, if an idea will benefit your department or company and your motivation is to make a contribution, the communication process is off to a strong start. In comparison, if the idea is poorly conceived (perhaps you haven’t considered the financial impact of a proposal) or your motivation is suspect (perhaps you’re more interested in “scoring points” with the boss than really contributing), the communication will be more difficult and possibly unsuccessful.

2. **The sender encodes the idea as a message.** When you put your idea into a message (words, images, or a combination of both) that your receiver will understand, you are encoding it. Much of the focus of this course is on developing the skills needed to successfully encode your ideas into effective messages. Encoding can fail for a number of reasons, including poor word choices that confuse or anger the audience, imagery that evokes unintended emotional responses, and cultural differences that result in the same words and images meaning different things to different people.

3. **The sender produces the message in a transmittable medium.** With the appropriate message to express your idea, you now need some way to present that message to your intended audience. As you’ll read in Chapter 4, media for transmitting messages can be divided into oral, written, visual, and various electronic forms of the other three. As an experienced user of communication media, you already know that this step requires careful decision making and at least some level of technical skills. Misguided media choices or insufficient technical skills can undermine the best intentions. For instance, a desire to keep everyone informed of every important detail in a project can lead to e-mail overload—and a breakdown in communication as people struggle to keep track of all the messages and the inevitable response threads. In contrast, many companies now find that a blog is a much better way to keep teams informed because this medium can dramatically reduce the number of messages required.

4. **The sender transmits the message through a channel.** Just as technology continues to multiply the number of media options at your disposal, it also continues to provide new communication channels you can use to transmit your messages. The distinction between medium and channel can get a bit murky, but think of medium as the form a message takes and channel as the system used to
deliver the message. The channel can be a face-to-face conversation, the Internet, another company—any system capable of delivering messages.

5. **The audience receives the message.** If all goes well, your message survives the trip through the channel and arrives at your intended audience. However, mere arrival at the destination is not a guarantee that the message will be noticed or understood correctly. As “How Audiences Receive Messages” explains, many messages are either ignored or misinterpreted as noise.

6. **The audience decodes the message.** If the message is actually received, the audience then needs to extract your idea from the message, a step known as decoding. “How Audiences Decode Messages” takes a closer look at this complex and subtle step in the process.

7. **The audience responds to the message.** By crafting your messages in ways that show the benefits of responding, you can increase the chances that your audiences will respond as you’d like them to. However, as “How Audiences Respond to Messages” points out, audiences need to remember your message long enough to act on it, they need to be able to act on it as you want them to, and they need to be motivated to respond.

8. **The audience provides feedback.** Aside from responding (or not responding) to the message, audience members may also give feedback that helps you evaluate the effectiveness of your communication effort. Sometimes feedback can be subtle and hard to interpret; a listener looking away while you’re talking might be confused and embarrassed to let it show, might be angry and trying to control his or her emotions, might be deeply interested in what you’re saying and considering the implications, or might simply be bored. Other times, feedback is direct and easy to interpret, as when someone says he or she doesn’t understand you, thinks your idea is brilliant, or can’t hear you.

The following sections take a closer look at two important aspects of the process: environmental barriers that can block or distort messages and the steps audiences take to receive, decode, and respond to messages.

**Barriers in the Communication Environment**

Within any communication environment, messages can be disrupted by a variety of communication barriers:

- **Noise and distractions.** External distractions range from poor acoustics to uncomfortable meeting rooms to crowded computer screens with instant messages and reminders popping up all over the place. The common habit of multitasking, attempting more than one task at a time, is a recipe for distractions. Internal distractions are thoughts and emotions that prevent audiences from focusing on incoming messages. For instance, a person worried about losing his job might ignore any message that doesn’t apply to his immediate concerns.

- **Competing messages.** Having your audience’s undivided attention is a rare luxury. In many cases, you must compete with other messages that are trying to reach your audience at the same time. Too many messages can result in information overload, which not only makes it difficult to discriminate between useful and useless information but also amplifies workplace stress.

- **Filters.** Messages can be blocked or distorted by filters, which are any human or technology intervention between the sender and the receiver. Filtering can be both intentional (such as automatically filing e-mail messages based on sender or content) or unintentional (such as an overly aggressive spam filter that deletes legitimate e-mail). As you read earlier, 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, either accidentally or to meet their own needs.

- **Channel breakdowns.** Sometimes the channel simply breaks down and fails to deliver your message at all. A colleague you were counting on to deliver a message to your boss might have forgotten to do so, a brochure you sent to a customer might have gotten lost in the mail, or a computer server might have crashed and prevented your blog from displaying.

As a communicator, try to be aware of any barriers that could prevent your messages from reaching their intended audiences. And make sure you haven’t unintentionally built barriers around yourself. If people don’t feel that you are approachable for any reason, they’ll avoid communicating with you—even regarding messages that you need to hear.

### Inside the Mind of Your Audience

After a message survives the journey through the communication channel and reaches its intended audience, it encounters a whole new set of challenges. Understanding how audiences receive, decode, and respond to messages will help you create more effective messages.

#### How Audiences Receive Messages

Messages often reach the intended audience but have no effect whatsoever. For an audience member to actually receive a message, three events need to occur: the receiver has to **sense** the presence of a message, **select** it from all the other messages clamoring for attention, and **perceive** it as an actual message (as opposed to random, pointless noise). You can appreciate the magnitude of this challenge by driving down any busy street in a commercial section of town. You’ll encounter literally hundreds of messages—billboards, posters, store window displays, thumping car stereos, pedestrians waving or talking on mobile phones, horns honking, street signs, traffic lights, and so on. However, you sense, select, and perceive only a small fraction of these messages. In fact, if you **didn’t** ignore most of them, you would be one very dangerous driver!

Today’s business audiences are much like drivers on busy streets. They are inundated with so many messages and so much noise that they miss or ignore many of the messages intended for them. The good news is that through this course, you will learn a variety of techniques to craft messages that get noticed. In general, follow these five principles to increase your chances of success:

- **Consider audience expectations.** Deliver messages using the media and channels that the audience expects. Of course, sometimes going **against** expectations can stimulate audience attention, which is why advertisers sometimes do wacky and creative things to get your attention. However, for most business communication efforts, following the expectations of your audience is the most efficient way to get your message across.

- **Ensure ease of use.** Even if audiences are actively looking for your messages, they probably won’t see your messages if you make them hard to find. Poorly designed websites with confusing navigation are common culprits in this respect.

- **Emphasize familiarity.** Use words, images, and designs that are familiar to your audience. For example, most visitors to business websites now expect to see information about the company on a page called “About Us.”
• **Practice empathy.** Make sure your messages “speak to the audience” by clearly addressing their wants and needs—not yours. People are much more inclined to notice messages that relate to their individual concerns.  

• **Design for compatibility.** With so many messages delivered electronically these days, be sure to verify technical compatibility with your audience. For instance, if your website requires visitors to have the Adobe Flash capability on their computers, you won’t reach audience members who don’t have that software.

**How Audiences Decode Messages**  
Even though a message may have been received by the audience, it still doesn’t “mean” anything until the recipient decodes it and assigns meaning to it. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that your audience will assign the same meaning that you intended. Even well-crafted, well-intentioned communication efforts can fail at this stage because assigning meaning is a highly personal process affected by culture, individual experience, learning and thinking styles, hopes, fears, and even temporary moods. Moreover, audiences tend to extract the meaning they expect to get from a message, even if it’s the opposite of what the sender intended. In fact, rather than extracting your meaning, it’s more accurate to state that audience members re-create their own meaning—or meanings—from the message.

As you’ll discover in Chapter 3, culture shapes people’s views of the world in profound ways, from determinations of right and wrong to details such as the symbolic meanings attached to specific colors. For instance, because U.S. culture celebrates youth and individual accomplishment, it is “natural” for people raised in the United States to admire young, independent-minded leaders who rebel against older, established ways of doing business. Compare this approach to that in places such as Japan, where people generally place a higher value on respect for older colleagues, consensus decision making, and group accomplishment. Given these differences, a younger colleague’s bold proposal to radically reshape business strategy could be interpreted more positively in one culture than in the other—quite independent of the proposal’s merits alone.

At an individual level, beliefs and biases also influence the meaning that audiences extract from messages. For instance, our minds organize incoming sensations into a mental map that represents our individual perception of reality. If a detail does not quite fit for any reason, people are inclined to distort the information rather than rearrange their pattern—a process known as selective perception. For example, a manager who believes wholeheartedly in a particular business strategy might distort or ignore evidence that suggests the strategy is failing.

Language differences also influence received meaning. If you ask an employee to send you a report on sales figures “as soon as possible,” does that mean within 10 seconds, 10 minutes, or 10 days? By clarifying expectations and resolving any potential ambiguities in your messages, you can reduce the odds of such interpretation uncertainties. The more experiences you share with another person, the more likely you are to share perception and thus share meaning (see Figure 1.6).

Individual thinking styles are another important factor in decoding messages. For example, even though business decisions are supposedly made on the basis of objective analysis and clear logic, emotion and intuition (reaching conclusions without using rational processes) can influence the interpretation of messages. Let’s say you return from a sales trip with a hunch that several major customers may start buying more products from your firm, and you share that optimistic assessment with your colleagues. Someone who tends to respond to the emotional element in messages and to put a lot of faith in “gut feel” may conclude that sales are about to increase. Someone else with a more cautious, analytical approach may view your input as an interesting bit of data but hardly proof of an imminent increase.
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FIGURE 1.6  How Shared Experience Affects Understanding
The more your audience members share your experiences—personal, professional, and cultural—the more likely they will be to extract the same meanings that you encode in your messages.

**How Audiences Respond to Messages**
You are almost there. Your message has been delivered, received, and correctly decoded. Now what? Will audience members respond in the way you’d like them to? Probably—if three events occur.

First, the recipient has to **remember** the message long enough to act on it. Simplifying greatly, memory works in several stages: **Sensory memory** momentarily captures incoming data from the senses; then, whatever the recipient pays attention to is transferred to **short-term memory**. Information in short-term memory will quickly disappear if it isn’t transferred to **long-term memory**, which can be done either actively (such as by memorizing a list of items) or passively (such as when a new piece of information connects with something else the recipient already has stored in long-term memory). Finally, the information needs to be **retrieved** when the recipient needs to act on it. In general, people find it easier to remember and retrieve information that is important to them personally or professionally. Consequently, by communicating in ways that are sensitive to your audience’s wants and needs, you greatly increase the chance that your messages will be remembered and retrieved.

Second, the recipient has to be **able** to respond as you wish. Obviously, if recipients simply cannot do what you want them to do, such as paying for a product you are promoting, they will not respond according to your plan. By understanding your audience (see Chapter 4), you can work to minimize these scenarios.

Third, the recipient has to be **motivated** to respond. You’ll encounter many situations in which your audience has the option of responding but isn’t required to—the record company may or may not offer your band a contract, the boss may or may not respond to your request for a raise, and so on. The good news is that you often have a fair amount of influence over whether the recipient will respond as you’d like. Throughout this course, you’ll learn the techniques for crafting messages that motivate readers to respond.

**Minimizing Distractions**
Although distractions are a major problem in business communication, everyone in the organization can help overcome them. A small dose of common sense and courtesy goes a long way. Turn off that mobile phone before you step into a meeting. Don’t talk across the tops of cubicles when people inside them are trying to work. Be sensitive to personal differences, too; for instance, some people enjoy working with music on, but music is an enormous distraction for others.

Take steps to insulate yourself from distractions, too. Don’t let e-mail, IM, or telephones interrupt you every minute of the day. Set aside time to attend to a number of messages at once so that you can think and focus the rest of the time.

Make sure the messages you send are necessary. E-mail in particular has made it too easy to send too many messages or send messages to the people who don’t need them.
them. In fact, one of the reasons that blogging is taking off so quickly in business is that it can significantly reduce internal e-mail traffic.24

In addition, if you must send a message that isn’t urgent or crucial, let people know so that they can prioritize. If a long report requires no action from recipients, tell them up-front so that they don’t have to search through it, looking for action items. Also, most systems let you mark messages as urgent; however, use this feature only when it’s truly needed. Too many so-called urgent messages that aren’t particularly urgent will lead to annoyance and anxiety, not action.

Finally, try to overcome emotional distractions by recognizing your own feelings and by anticipating emotional reactions from others.25 When a situation may cause tempers to flare, choose your words carefully. As a receiver, avoid placing blame and reacting subjectively.

Adopting an Audience-Centered Approach

Using an audience-centered approach means focusing on and caring about the members of your audience, making every effort to get your message across in a way that is meaningful to them (see Figure 1.7). This approach is also known as adopting the “you” attitude, in contrast to messages that are about “me.” Learn as much as possible about the biases, education, age, status, style, and personal and professional concerns of your receivers. If you’re addressing strangers and unable to find out more about them, try to project yourself into their position by using your common sense and imagination. This ability to relate to the needs of others is a key part of emotional intelligence, widely considered to be a vital characteristic of successful managers and leaders.26 The more you know about the people you’re communicating with, the easier it will be to concentrate on their needs—which, in turn, will make it easier for them to hear your message, understand it, and respond positively.

If you haven’t had the opportunity to communicate with a diverse range of people in your academic career so far, you might be surprised by the different communication styles you will encounter on the job. Recognizing and adapting to your audience’s style will improve not only the effectiveness of your communication but also the quality of your working relationship.27 The audience-centered approach is emphasized throughout this book, so you’ll have plenty of opportunity to practice this approach to communicating more effectively.

Fine-Tuning Your Business Communication Skills

Your skills as a communicator will be as much a factor in your business success as anything else you’ll do. No matter what your skill level, opportunities to improve are easy to find. Many employers provide communication training in both general skills and specific scenarios, but don’t wait. Use this course to begin mastering your skills now.

Lack of experience may be the only obstacle between you and effective communication. Perhaps you’re worried about having a limited vocabulary or uncertain about questions of grammar, punctuation, and style. If you’re intimidated by the idea of writing an important document or appearing before a group, you’re not alone. Everyone gets nervous about communicating from time to time, even people you may think of as “naturals.” People aren’t born writing and speaking well; they master these skills through study and practice. Even simple techniques, such as keeping a reading log and writing practice essays, will improve not only your writing skills but also your overall performance in school.28

This course lets you practice in an environment that provides honest and constructive feedback. You’ll have ample opportunity to plan and produce documents, collaborate in teams, listen effectively, improve nonverbal communication, and communicate across cultures—all skills that will serve your career well.
Audience-Centered Communication

After an upgrade to its TypePad blog-hosting system resulted in a period of poor performance for customers, Six Apart’s Mena Trott and her staff communicated openly and honestly with customers. They explained what happened, acknowledged customer frustrations, apologized for the inconvenience, offered compensation, and kept their audience up to date. Trott and her colleagues even shared what the experience had taught them as managers and communicators—insights that can help customers handle their own business communication challenges.

Giving—and Responding to—Constructive Feedback

You will encounter many situations in which you are expected to give and receive feedback regarding communication efforts. Whether giving or receiving criticism, be sure you do so in a constructive way. Constructive feedback, sometimes called constructive criticism, focuses on the process and outcomes of communication, not on the people involved (see Table 1.1). In contrast, destructive feedback delivers criti-
GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How to Be Constructive</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think through your suggested changes carefully.</td>
<td>Because many business documents must illustrate complex relationships between ideas and other information, isolated and superficial edits can do more harm than good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss improvements rather than flaws.</td>
<td>Instead of saying “this is confusing,” explain how the writing can be improved to make it clearer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on controllable behavior.</td>
<td>Because the writer may not have control over every variable that affected the quality of the message, focus on those aspects the writer can control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be specific.</td>
<td>Comments such as “I don’t get this” or “Make this clearer” don’t identify what the writer needs to fix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep feedback impersonal.</td>
<td>Focus comments on the message, not the person who created it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verify understanding.</td>
<td>Ask for confirmation from the recipient to make sure that the person understood your feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time your feedback carefully.</td>
<td>Make sure the writer will have sufficient time to implement the changes you suggest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlight any limitations your feedback may have.</td>
<td>If you didn’t have time to give the document a thorough edit, or if you’re not an expert in some aspect of the content, let the writer know so that he or she can handle your comments appropriately.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Being Sensitive to Business Etiquette

In today’s hectic, competitive world, the notion of etiquette (the expected norms of behavior in a particular situation) can seem outdated and unimportant. However, the way you conduct yourself can have a profound influence on your company’s success and your career. When executives hire and promote you, they need to see you as someone who can communicate effectively and professionally. Understanding communication etiquette can help you avoid needless blunders.

cism with no effort to stimulate improvement. For example, “This proposal is a confusing mess, and you failed to convince me of anything” is destructive feedback. Your goal is to be more constructive: “Your proposal could be more effective with a clearer description of the construction process and a well-organized explanation of why the positives outweigh the negatives.” When giving feedback, avoid personal attacks and give the person clear guidelines for improvement.

When you receive constructive feedback, resist the immediate urge to defend your work or deny the validity of the feedback. Remaining open to criticism isn’t easy when you’ve poured your heart and soul into a project, but feedback is a valuable opportunity to learn and improve. Try to disconnect your emotions from the work and view it simply as something you can make better. Many writers also find it helpful to step back, think about the feedback for a while, and let their emotions settle down before diving in to make corrections. Of course, don’t automatically assume that even well-intentioned feedback is necessarily correct. You have the responsibility for the final quality of the message, so make sure that any suggested changes are valid ones.

Try to react unemotionally when you receive constructive feedback.
expect your behavior to protect the company’s reputation. The more you understand such expectations, the better chance you have of avoiding career-damaging mistakes.

Throughout this book, you’ll encounter advice for a variety of business situations, but even if you don’t know the specific expectations in a given situation, some general guidelines will get you through any rough spots. Start by being sensitive to the fact that people can have different expectations about the same situation. Something you find appalling or embarrassing might be business as usual for a colleague, and vice versa. Moreover, etiquette expectations don’t always make sense, nor are they always fair in the eyes of everyone concerned. For example, some high-ranking women executives say some male colleagues who aren’t bothered when men use coarse language (particularly words and phrases with sexual undertones) often view such language as unacceptable from women. These women acknowledge that the situation isn’t fair, but they’ve learned to work within the prevailing behavior norms in order to avoid hindering their careers.

Long lists of etiquette “rules” can be overwhelming, and you’ll never be able to memorize all of them. Fortunately, you can count on three principles to get you through just about any situation: respect, courtesy, and common sense. Moreover, these principles will encourage forgiveness if you do happen to make a mistake. As you encounter new situations, take a few minutes to learn the expectations of the other people involved. Travel guidebooks are a great source of information about norms and customs in other countries. Check to see if your library has online access to the CultureGram database, or review the country profiles at www.kwintessential.co.uk. Don’t be afraid to ask questions, either. People will respect your concern and curiosity. You’ll gradually accumulate considerable knowledge, which will help you feel comfortable and be effective in a wide range of business situations.

Applying What You’ve Learned to the Communication Process

With these additional insights into what makes communication succeed, take another look at the communication process model. Figure 1.8 identifies the key challenges in the process and summarizes the steps you can take along the way to become a more effective communicator.

Using Technology to Improve Business Communication

Today’s businesses rely heavily on technology to improve the communication process. Companies and employees who use technology wisely can communicate more effectively and therefore compete more successfully.

You will find technology discussed extensively throughout this book, with specific advice on using both common and emerging tools to meet communication challenges. The four-page photo essay “Powerful Tools for Communicating Effectively” (on pages 22–25) offers an overview of the technologies that connect people in offices, factories, and other business settings.

Anyone who has used a computer knows that the benefits of technology are not automatic. Poorly designed or inappropriately used technology can hinder communication more than it helps. To communicate effectively, learn to keep technology in perspective, use technological tools productively, spend time and money on technology wisely, and disengage from the computer frequently to communicate in person.
FIGURE 1.8
Becoming an Effective Business Communicator
The communication process presents many opportunities for messages to get lost, distorted, or misinterpreted as they travel from sender to receiver. Fortunately, you can take action at every step in the process to increase your chances of success.

Keeping Technology in Perspective

Technology is an aid to interpersonal communication, not a replacement for it. Technology can’t think for you or communicate for you, and if you lack some essential skills, technology probably can’t fill in the gaps. Your spell checker is happy to run all your words through the dictionary, but it doesn’t know whether you’re using the correct words or crafting powerful sentences.

The sheer number of possibilities in many technological tools can get in the way of successful communication. For instance, the content of a message may be obscured if an electronic presentation is overloaded with visual effects. Moreover, if technological systems aren’t adapted to user or organizational needs, people won’t adapt to the technology—they won’t use it effectively or, worse, they won’t use it at all. Perhaps even more ominously, some workers are beginning to show signs of information technology addiction—possibly to the point of craving the stimulation of being connected practically around the clock, even while on vacation.31

Don’t rely too much on technology or let it overwhelm the communication process.
Powerful Tools for Communicating Effectively

The tools of business communication evolve with every new generation of digital technology. Selecting the right tool for each situation can enhance your business communication in many ways. In today’s flexible office settings, communication technology helps people keep in touch and stay productive. When co-workers in different cities need to collaborate, they can meet and share ideas without costly travel. Manufacturers use communication technology to keep track of parts, orders, and shipments—and to keep customers well-informed. Those same customers can also communicate with companies in many ways at any time of day or night.

Intranets

Businesses use Internet technologies to create an intranet, a private computer network that simplifies information sharing within the company. Intranets can handle company e-mail, instant messaging (IM), websites, and even Internet phone connections. To ensure the security of company communication and information, intranets are shielded from the public Internet.

Wireless Networks

Laptop PCs with wireless access let workers stay connected to the network from practically anywhere within the office—any desk, any conference room. This technology offers high-speed Internet access within range of a wireless access point.

Electronic Presentations

Combining a color projector with a laptop or personal digital assistant (PDA) running the right software lets people give informative business presentations that are enhanced with sound, animation, and even web site hyperlinks. Having everything in electronic form also makes it easy to customize a presentation or to make last-minute changes.

Follow-Me Phone Service

To be reachable without juggling multiple forwarding numbers, some people have follow-me phone service. Callers use one number to reach the person anywhere—at the office, a remote site, a home office. The system automatically forwards calls to a list of preprogrammed numbers and transfers unanswered calls to voice mail.

Redefining the Office

Technology makes it easier for people to stay connected with co-workers and retrieve needed information. Some maintain that connection without having a permanent office, a desktop PC, or even a big filing cabinet. For example, Sun Microsystems lets staff members choose to work either at the main office or at remote offices called “drop-in centers.” Many Sun facilities have specially equipped “iWork” areas that can quickly reconfigure phone and computer connections to meet individual requirements.

Electronic Whiteboards

Electronic whiteboards can capture, store, and e-mail the results of brainstorming sessions and other meetings. The newest versions work with electronic presentations too, letting users write and draw directly on displayed slides.

Communicating in the Office

Wikis promote collaboration by simplifying the process of creating and editing online content. Anyone with access (some wikis are private, while some are public) can add and modify pages as new information becomes available.

Web-Based Meetings
Workers can actively participate in web-based meetings by logging on from a desktop PC, laptop, or mobile phone. Websites such as WebEx help users integrate voice, text, and video, and let them share applications such as Microsoft PowerPoint and Microsoft Word in a single browser window.

Collaborating
Working in teams is essential in almost every business. Teamwork can become complicated, however, when team members work in different parts of the company, in different time zones, or even for different companies. Technology helps bridge the distance by making it possible to brainstorm, attend virtual meetings, and share files from widely separated locations. Communication technology also helps companies save money on costly business travel without losing most of the benefits of face-to-face collaboration.

Internet Videophone
Person-to-person video calling has long been possible through popular instant messaging programs. Internet videophone services do even more, letting multiple users participate in a videoconference without the expense and complexity of a full-fledged videoconferencing system. Some services are flexible enough to include telecommuters who have broadband Internet connections.

Shared Workspace
Online workspaces such as eRoom and Groove make it easy for far-flung team members to access shared files anywhere, any time. Accessible through a browser, the workspace contains a collection of folders and has built-in intelligence to control which team members can read, edit, and save specific files.

Communicating Remotely

Videoconferencing and Telepresence
Less costly than travel, videoconferencing provides many of the same benefits as an in-person meeting. Advanced systems include telepresence and robot surrogates, which use computers to “place” participants in the room virtually, letting them see and hear everyone while being seen and heard themselves. Such realistic interaction makes meetings more productive.
RFID
Throughout the distribution chain, from factories to ships to warehouses to retail shelves, companies can replace manual tracking and reporting with automated systems that monitor small radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags attached to goods and containers.

Extranets
Extranets are secure, private computer networks that use Internet technology to share business information with suppliers, vendors, partners, and customers. Think of an extranet as an extension of the company intranet that is available to people outside the organization by invitation only.

WirelessWarehouses
Communication technology is a key source of competitive advantage for shipping companies such as FedEx and UPS. Hand-worn scanners use wireless links to help warehouse personnel access instant information that lets them process more packages in less time at transit hubs.

Package Tracking
Senders and receivers often want frequent updates when packages are in transit. Handheld devices such as the FedEx PowerPad enhance customer service by letting delivery personnel instantly upload package data to the FedEx network. The wireless PowerPad also aids drivers by automatically receiving weather advisories.

Supply Chain Management
Advanced software applications let suppliers, manufacturers, and retailers share information—even when they have incompatible computer systems. Improved information flow increases report accuracy and helps each company in the supply chain manage stock levels.

Sharing the Latest Information
Companies use a variety of communication technologies to create products and services and deliver them to customers. The ability to easily access and share the latest information improves the flow and timing of supplies, lowers operating costs, and boosts financial performance. Easy information access also helps companies respond to customer needs by providing them timely, accurate information and service and by delivering the right products to them at the right time.

Communicating About Products and Services
Over-the-Shoulder Support
For online shoppers who need instant help, many retail websites make it easy to connect with a live sales rep via phone or instant messaging. The rep can provide quick answers to questions and, with permission, can even control a shopper’s browser to help locate particular items.

Help Lines
Some people prefer the personal touch of contact by phone. Moreover, some companies assign preferred customers special ID numbers that let them jump to the front of the calling queue. Many companies are addressing the needs of foreign-language speakers by connecting them with external service providers who offer multilingual support.

Corporate Blogs
Web-based journals let companies offer advice, answer questions, and promote the benefits of their products and services. Elements of a successful blog include frequent updates and the participation of knowledgeable contributors. Adding a subtle mix of useful commentary and marketing messages helps get customers to read or listen to them.

Interacting
Maintaining an open dialog with customers is a great way to gain a better understanding of their likes and dislikes. Today’s communication technologies make it easier for customers to interact with a company whenever, wherever, and however they wish. A well-coordinated approach to phone, web, and in-store communication helps a company build stronger relationships with its existing customers, which increases the chances of doing more business with each one.

Podcasting
With the portability and convenience of downloadable audio and video recordings, podcasts have quickly become a popular means of delivering everything from college lectures to marketing messages. Podcasts are also used for internal communication, replacing conference calls, newsletters, and other traditional communication vehicles.

Communicating with Customers
In-Store Kiosks
Staples is among the retailers that let shoppers buy from the web while they’re still in the store. Web-connected kiosks were originally used to let shoppers custom-configure their PCs, but the kiosks also give customers access to roughly 8,000 in-store items as well as to the 50,000 products available online.
Employees who are comfortable using communication technologies have a competitive advantage in today’s marketplace.

Using Technological Tools Productively

Communication technologies can save time and money, but they can also waste time and money if not used efficiently. You don’t have to become an expert to use most communication technologies efficiently, but you will need to be familiar with the basic features and functions of the tools you are expected to use on the job.

Another major productivity consideration is personal use of IM, blogging, music players, and other technological tools (and toys) on the job. Few companies go to the extreme of banning all personal use of such technologies while at work or of trying to restrict employees’ personal blogs, but every company needs to address this issue. For instance, inappropriate web surfing not only distracts employees from work responsibilities but also can leave employers open to lawsuits for sexual harassment if inappropriate images are displayed in or transmitted around the company. In addition, e-mail and instant messages are considered legal documents and can be used as evidence in lawsuits or criminal trials. Blogging has created another set of managerial challenges, given the risk that employee blogs can expose confidential information or damage a firm’s reputation in the marketplace. With all of these technologies, the best solution lies in clear policies that are enforced evenly for all employees. Finally, remember that every communication tool, from e-mail to IM to micro-blogging tools such as Twitter, can be used productively or wastefully. Make sure that technology enhances the communication effort rather than overwhelsms or disrupts it.

Reconnecting with People Frequently

In spite of their efficiency and speed, technological tools may not be the best choice for every communication situation. Even in the best circumstances, technology can’t match the rich experience of person-to-person contact. Let’s say you IM a colleague, asking how she did with her sales presentation to an important client, and her answer comes back simply as “Fine.” What does fine mean? Is an order expected soon? Did she lose the sale and doesn’t want to talk about it? Was the client rude, and she does not want to talk about it? If you reconnect with her, perhaps visit her in person, she might provide additional information, or you might be able to offer advice or support during a difficult time.

Moreover, most human beings need to connect with other people. You can create amazing documents and presentations without ever leaving your desk or meeting anyone in person. But if you stay hidden behind technology, people won’t get to know you nearly as well. You may be funny, bright, and helpful, but you’re just a voice on the phone or a name on a document until people can interact with you in person. As technological options increase, people seem to need the human touch even more.

MAKING ETHICAL COMMUNICATION CHOICES

Ethics are the accepted principles of conduct that govern behavior within a society. Put another way, ethical principles define the boundary between right and wrong. Former Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart defined ethics as “knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is the right thing to do.” To make the right choices as a business communicator, you have a responsibility to think through not only what you say but also the consequences of saying it.

Of course, people in a society don’t always agree on what constitutes ethical behavior. For instance, the emergence of stealth marketing, in which customers don’t know they’re being marketed to, has raised a new set of concerns about ethics. One common stealth-marketing technique is sending people into public places to use particular products in a conspicuous manner and then discuss them with strangers—as
though they were just regular people on the street, when in fact they are employed by a marketing firm. Another is paying consumers or rewarding them with insider information and other benefits to promote products to their friends without telling the friends it’s a form of advertising. Critics complain that such techniques are deceptive because they don’t give their targets the opportunity to raise their instinctive defenses against the persuasive powers of marketing messages.

Ethical behavior is a companywide concern, of course; but because communication efforts are the public face of a company, they are subjected to particularly rigorous scrutiny from regulators, legislators, investors, consumer groups, environmental groups, labor organizations, and anyone else affected by business activities. Ethical communication includes all relevant information, is true in every sense, and is not deceptive in any way. In contrast, unethical communication can include falsehoods and misleading information (or can withhold important information). Here are some examples of unethical communication:

- **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s words or other creative product as your own. Note that plagiarism can also be illegal if it violates a copyright, which is a form of legal protection for the expression of creative ideas.

- **Selective misquoting.** Deliberately omitting damaging or unflattering comments to paint a better picture of you or your company is unethical if the picture you create is untruthful.

- **Misrepresenting numbers.** Statistics and other data can be unethically manipulated by increasing or decreasing numbers, exaggerating, altering statistics, or omitting numeric data.

- **Distorting visuals.** Images can also be manipulated in unethical ways, such as making a product seem bigger than it really is or changing the scale of graphs and charts to exaggerate or conceal differences.

In contrast, an ethical message is accurate and sincere. It avoids language and images that manipulate, discriminate, or exaggerate. On the surface, such ethical practices appear fairly easy to recognize, but deciding what is ethical can be a considerable challenge in complex business situations.

### Distinguishing Ethical Dilemmas from Ethical Lapses

Every company has responsibilities to its stakeholders, and those various groups often have competing interests. An ethical dilemma involves choosing between alternatives that aren’t clear-cut. Perhaps two conflicting alternatives are both ethical and valid, or perhaps the alternatives lie somewhere in the gray area between clearly right and clearly wrong. Suppose you are the chief executive of a company whose sales are declining, and you might be forced to reduce costs by laying off 100 employees. You’ve decided to wait two months before making this tough decision. Here’s your dilemma: Do you tell the workforce now that 100 jobs could disappear in the near future? Telling them now would give people more time to look for new jobs and adjust their finances—clearly a good thing. However, if you tell them now, vital employees nervous about their future could jump ship, which could drive sales down even more—clearly not a good thing. And what if you tell them now and many people leave but then sales improve enough in the next two months that you can avoid the layoffs? You will have unnecessarily disrupted many careers and families. Situations such as these often have no clear answer.

In contrast, an ethical lapse is a clearly unethical (and frequently illegal) choice. In 2004, several insurance companies were accused of misleading military personnel at Fort Benning in Georgia, Camp Pendleton in California, and other bases around the country. Many of these young men and women thought they were signing up for
savings programs when in fact they were buying extremely expensive and frequently unnecessary life insurance policies. The policies were often sold during mandatory financial training sessions for the soldiers, who were given no time to read the documents they signed. After the situation was brought to national attention by the New York Times and other news media, at least two of the companies involved, Madison National Life Insurance Company and American Amicable Life Insurance, began issuing full refunds. 39

With both internal and external communication efforts, the pressure to produce results or justify decisions can make unethical communication a tempting choice. Compare the messages in Figures 1.9 and 1.10, in which the results of a marketing research project are presented to company executives.

Ensuring Ethical Communication

Ensuring ethical business communication requires three elements: ethical individuals, ethical company leadership, and the appropriate policies and structures to support employees’ efforts to make ethical choices. 40 Moreover, these three elements need to work in harmony. If employees see company executives making unethical decisions and flouting company guidelines, they might conclude that the guidelines are meaningless and emulate their bosses’ unethical behavior.

Employers have a responsibility to establish clear guidelines for ethical behavior, including business communication. In a recent global survey by the International

Responsible employers establish clear ethical guidelines for their employees to follow.

FIGURE 1.9
Unethical Communication
The writers of this memo clearly wanted the company to continue funding their pet project, even though the marketing research didn’t support such a decision. By comparing this memo with the version shown in Figure 1.10, you can see how the writers twisted the truth and omitted evidence in order to put a positive spin on the research.

SunStar Sports
Confidential Memorandum

DATE: October 23, 2008
TO: Executive Committee
FROM: Darcy O’Leary & Bob Caruthers, Product Management
SUBJECT: Pegasus market confirmation

We’re pleased to announce that the numbers are in, and as we predicted before the research began, consumers show strong support for the Pegasus product concept. The results validate the several months we’ve invested in product design and should give a green light to fund the completion of the project.

We’re particularly pleased with the results in this case, since the research was directed by Sadie McMahon at Bowerman Research. She has conducted hundreds of research projects and is known for her keen insights into the consumer market. Only a third of the consumers surveyed expressed little or no interest in Pegasus, and Ms. McMahon said that doesn’t worry her at all since few products ever appeal to the entire market. With a two-thirds majority in our favor, this looks to be a winner before we even bring it to market.

Given the momentum we’ve already built up, coupled with this powerful endorsement of the concept, we’re confident the executive committee will reach the same strategic conclusion that we have and continue funding the project.

Thank you for your support.
DATE: October 23, 2008
TO: Executive Committee
FROM: Darcy O’Leary & Bob Caruthers, Product Management
SUBJECT: Market research summary for Pegasus project

The market research for the Pegasus Project concluded last week with phone interviews of 236 sporting goods buyers in 18 states. As in the past, we used Bowerman Research to conduct the interviews, under the guidance of Bowerman’s survey supervisor, Sadie McMahon. Ms. McMahon has directed surveys on more than two hundred consumer products, and we’ve learned to place a great deal of confidence in her market insights.

A complete report, including all raw data and verbatim quotes, will be available for downloading on the Engineering Department intranet by the end of next week. However, in light of the project-funding discussions going on this week, we believe the conclusions from the research warrant your immediate attention.

Sadie McMahon’s research summary

Consumer interest in the new product code-named Pegasus is decidedly mixed, with 34% expressing little or no interest in the product but 37% expressing moderate to strong interest. The remaining 29% expressed confusion about the basic product concept and were therefore unable to specify their level of interest. The segment expressing little or no interest is not a cause for concern in most cases; few products appeal to the entire consumer market.

However, the portion of the market expressing confusion about the fundamental design of the product is definitely cause for concern. We rarely see more than 10 or 15% confusion at this stage of the design process. A 29% confusion figure suggests that the product design does not fit many consumers’ expectations and that it might be difficult to sell if SunStar goes ahead with production.

Our recommendations

At $7.6 million, the development costs for Pegasus are too high to proceed with this much uncertainty. The business case we prepared at the beginning of the project indicated that at least 50% consumer acceptance would be needed in order to generate enough sales to produce an acceptable return on the engineering investment. We would need to convince nearly half of the “confused” segment in order to reach that threshold. We recommend that further development be put on hold until the design can be clarified and validated with another round of consumer testing.

Please contact Darcy at ext. 2354 or Bob at ext. 2360 if you have any questions or concerns.

This version of the memo shown in Figure 1.9 presents the evidence in a more honest and ethical manner.
suspected fraud and other ethical concerns. The people who share their concerns through the program then receive a written response that explains how the situation was resolved. To ensure ongoing compliance with their codes of ethics, many companies also conduct ethics audits to monitor ethical progress and to point out any weaknesses that need to be addressed.

However, whether or not formal guidelines are in place, every employee has the responsibility to communicate in an ethical manner. In the absence of clear guidelines, ask yourself the following questions about your business communications:

- Have you defined the situation fairly and accurately?
- What is your intention in communicating this message?
- What impact will this message have on the people who receive it, or who may be affected by it?
- Will the message achieve the greatest possible good while doing the least possible harm?
- Will the assumptions you’ve made change over time? That is, will a decision that seems ethical now seem unethical in the future?
- Are you comfortable with your decision? Would you be embarrassed if it were printed in tomorrow’s newspaper or spread across the Internet?

If all else fails, think about a person whom you admire and ask yourself what he or she would think of your decision. If you wouldn’t be proud to describe your choice to someone you admire and respect, you may be making a poor ethical choice.

Ensuring Legal Communication

In addition to ethical guidelines, business communication is also bound by a wide variety of laws and regulations, including the following areas:

- **Promotional communication.** Marketing specialists need to be aware of the many laws that govern truth and accuracy in advertising. These laws address such issues as false and deceptive advertising, misleading or inaccurate labels on product packages, 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 10 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 are fundamental to virtually every aspect of business, from product sales to property rental to credit cards and loans to professional service agreements.

- **Employment communication.** A variety of local, state, and federal laws govern communication between employers and both potential and current employees. For example, job descriptions must be written in a way that doesn’t intentionally or unintentionally discriminate against women, minorities, or people with disabilities.

- **Intellectual property.** In an age when instant global connectivity makes it effortless to copy and retransmit electronic files, the protection of intellectual property has become a widespread concern. Intellectual property (IP)
includes patents, copyrighted materials, trade secrets, and even Internet domain names. Bloggers need to be particularly careful about IP protection, given the carefree way that some post the work of others without offering proper credit. For guidelines on this hot topic, get the free Legal Guide for Bloggers at www.eff.org/bloggers/lg.

Financial reporting. Finance and accounting professionals, particularly those who work for publicly traded companies (those that sell stock to the public), must adhere to stringent reporting laws. For instance, a number of corporations have recently been targets of government investigations and shareholder lawsuits for offering misleading descriptions of financial results and revenue forecasts.

Defamation. Negative comments about another party raise the possibility of defamation, the intentional communication of false statements that damage character or reputation. (Written defamation is called libel; spoken defamation is called slander.) Someone suing for defamation must prove (1) that the statement is false, (2) that the language is injurious to the person’s reputation, and (3) that the statement has been published.

If you have any doubts about the legality of any message you intend to distribute, ask for advice from your company’s legal department. A small dose of caution can prevent huge legal headaches and protect your company’s reputation in the marketplace.

APPLYING WHAT YOU’VE LEARNED

At the beginning of this chapter, you met Six Apart’s Mena Trott in “On the Job: Communicating at Six Apart.” Trott is just one of the many real business professionals you’ll meet throughout this book—people who successfully handle the same communication challenges you’ll face on the job. Each chapter opens with one of these slice-of-life vignettes, and as you read through each chapter, think about the person and the company highlighted in the vignette. Become familiar with the various concepts presented in the chapter, and imagine how they might apply to the featured scenario.

At the end of each chapter, you’ll take part in an innovative simulation called “On the Job: Solving Communication Dilemmas.” You’ll play the role of a person working in the highlighted organization, and you’ll face situations you’d encounter on the job. You will be presented with several communication scenarios, each with several possible courses of action. It’s up to you to recommend one course of action from each scenario as homework, as teamwork, as material for in-class discussion, or in a host of other ways. These scenarios let you explore various communication ideas and apply the concepts and techniques from the chapter.

Now you’re ready for the first simulation. As you tackle each problem, think about the material you covered in this chapter and consider your own experience as a communicator. You’ll probably be surprised to discover how much you already know about business communication.

On the Job

SOLVING COMMUNICATION DILEMMAS AT SIX APART

As president of Six Apart, Mena Trott plays a vital role in keeping communication flowing and making sure everyone receives necessary information by helping employees overcome potential barriers to effective communication. To assist her with a growing workload of internal and external communication tasks, she has recently hired you as assistant with special responsibilities for communication. Use your knowledge of communication to choose
the best response for each of the following situations. Be prepared to explain why your choice is best.

1. One of the reasons for Six Apart’s success is its friendly, open style of communication with its customers, even those occasional customers who make unrealistic demands or expect special treatment. Unfortunately, you’ve learned that some of the customer service representatives have been letting their emotions get in the way when dealing with these difficult customers. Several customers have complained about rude treatment. You’re sensitive to the situation because you know that customer service can be a difficult job. However, having a reputation for hostile customer service could spell doom for the company, so you need to communicate your concerns immediately. Which of the following sentences would be the best way to begin an e-mail message to the customer service staff?
   a. “We must all work harder at serving customers in an efficient, timely manner.”
   b. “The growing problem of abusive customer communications must stop immediately—after all, without customers, we have no revenue; without revenue, you have no jobs.”
   c. “Positive customer support is one of our most important competitive advantages, but it has come to management’s attention that some of you are ruining the company’s reputation by mistreating customers.”
   d. “Thank you for your continued efforts at supporting our customers; I know this can be a challenging task at times.”

2. Six Apart has developed a corporate culture that reflects both the engaging personalities of Ben and Mena Trott and the generally informal “vibe” of the blogosphere. However, as the company continues to grow, new employees bring a variety of communication styles and expectations. In particular, the new accounting manager tends to communicate in a formal, distant style that some company old-timers find off-putting and impersonal. Several of these people have expressed concerns that the new manager “doesn’t fit in,” even though she’s doing a great job otherwise. How should you respond?
   a. Tell these people to stop complaining; the accounting manager is doing her job well, and that’s what counts.
   b. In a private conversation with the accounting manager, explain the importance of fitting into the corporate culture and give her a four-week deadline to change her style.
   c. In a private conversation with the accounting manager, explain the reasoning behind the company’s informal culture and its contribution to the company’s success; suggest that she might find her work here more enjoyable if she modifies her approach somewhat.
   d. Allow the accounting manager to continue communicating in the same style; after all, that’s her personal style, and it’s not up to the company to change it.

3. A false rumor has begun circulating online that Six Apart plans to sell one of its product lines to a competitor and lay off most of the employees who currently work on those products. Trott asks your advice in handling the situation. Which of the following would you recommend?
   a. Try to plant a counter-rumor on the online grapevine so that the employees who are worried about their jobs will get the right message the same way they got the wrong one.
   b. Immediately schedule a companywide, in-person meeting to set the record straight, emphasizing to everyone in the firm that Six Apart has no plans to shed that product line.
   c. Post a message on Mena’s Corner (her blog on the Six Apart website), setting the record straight and assuring the workforce that all jobs are safe; employees and customers alike are accustomed to getting information from her blog, so it’s the right way to communicate this message.
   d. Ignore the rumor. Like all other false rumors, it will eventually die out.

4. As Microsoft, Google, and other major companies join the market for blogging software and services, Six Apart is forced to lower its prices to remain competitive. Unfortunately, lower prices mean the company will have to lower its operating costs if it is to remain profitable, and employee salaries are the single biggest cost. The management team has decided to enact a 10 percent salary reduction for the next six months and then re-evaluate the company’s financial health at that point. However, some of the executives are convinced that the salary reductions will have to continue for a year at least—and perhaps even be permanent. In light of this knowledge, which of the following communication strategies would best balance the needs of the company and the needs of the employees?
   a. Tell employees that the 10 percent pay cut will last six months, without implying that it could last longer or even be permanent. If employees worry that their income could be reduced permanently, they’ll start looking for other jobs now, which will be a big drain on worker productivity and make the financial situation even worse.
   b. Tell employees that the 10 percent pay cut is scheduled to last six months, leaving open the possibility that it could last longer without stating so.
   c. Explain that the pay reduction is likely to be permanent, even if you’re not sure that will be the case; it’s better to give employees the worst possible news and then offer a pleasant surprise if the situation works out more favorably than expected.
   d. Tell employees that the pay cut will last for six months, at which point the management team will evaluate the situation and decide if the cut needs to be extended beyond that. Explain that you’d like to be able to provide more solid information, but the uncertainties in the market make that unrealistic. The best that you can do is tell employees everything you know—and don’t know.
Assess your understanding of the principles in this chapter by reading each learning objective and studying the accompanying exercises. For fill-in-the-blank items, write the missing text in the blank provided; for multiple-choice items, circle the letter of the correct answer. You can check your responses against the answer key on page AK-1.

Objective 1.1: Explain why effective communication is important to your success in today’s business environment.
1. Your ability to communicate can help your company
   a. Become more efficient
   b. Increase quality
   c. Improve responsiveness
   d. Become more innovative
   e. Do all of the above
2. As your career advances and you achieve positions of greater responsibility with an organization, your communication skills will
   a. Become less important because you will delegate these tasks
   b. Become more important because you will communicate about increasingly important matters to larger and larger audiences
   c. Remain as important as they were during the early stages of your career

Objective 1.2: Describe the five characteristics of effective business communication.
3. Effective business messages are
   a. Entertaining, blunt, and persuasive
   b. Practical, objective, concise, clear, and persuasive
   c. Personal, clear, and challenging
4. Why is it important for a business message to clearly state expectations regarding who is responsible for doing what in response to the message?
   a. To make sure other employees don’t avoid their responsibilities
   b. To make sure that the person who sent the message isn’t criticized if important tasks don’t get completed
   c. To eliminate confusion by letting each affected person know what his or her specific responsibilities are

Objective 1.3: Identify eight communication skills that successful employers expect from their employees.
5. Which of the following skills does the chapter identify as those that employers are likely to expect?
   a. Organizing ideas and information
   b. Programming HTML webpages
   c. Designing graphics for reports and websites
   d. Expressing and presenting ideas coherently and persuasively
   e. Training other employees
   f. Using communication technologies
   g. Communicating in at least three languages
   h. Communicating in an ethical manner

Objective 1.4: List five ways in which business communication differs from social communication.
6. How has teamwork affected business communication in recent years?
   a. Businesses have decided that team-based communication is inefficient, and most companies have stopped using teams.
   b. Businesses increasingly rely on teams, but most companies have communication specialists who are responsible for communication within each team.
   c. Businesses increasingly rely on teams, and they expect every member of a team to be able to communicate effectively in a team setting.
   d. Innovative businesses use blogs as the primary means of communicating in teams.
7. The evolution toward flatter organizational structures is affecting communication by
   a. Reducing the workload of upper managers by reducing the number of messages they receive
   b. Reducing the number of layers of management
   c. Giving employees more responsibility for communication
   d. Slowing down business decisions and processes
8. Which of the following is a common barrier to successful communication?
   a. Distractions
   b. Information overload
   c. Perceptual differences
   d. All of the above
9. Successful companies tend to view workforce diversity as
   a. A legally mandated requirement
   b. An opportunity to learn more about markets and communicate more effectively with various market segments
   c. An unavoidable cost of doing business
   d. A reason to outsource more business functions in order to reduce the confusion created by diversity
10. Which of the following is the most accurate characterization of current business use of communication technology?
    a. Companies can’t afford to waste money on new technology, so few have adopted e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, and other tools that many consumers use.
    b. Only large companies use technologies such as e-mail and websites.
    c. Technology affects virtually every aspect of business communication today.
    d. The use of technology always improves the effectiveness of communication.

Objective 1.5: Describe six strategies for communicating more effectively on the job.
11. An audience-centered approach to communication
    a. Starts with the assumption that the audience is always right
    b. Improves the effectiveness of communication by focusing on the information needs of the audience
c. Is generally a waste of time because it doesn’t accommodate the needs of the sender
d. Always simplifies the tasks involved in planning and creating messages

12. Constructive feedback focuses on ____________ rather than criticism.

13. Sensitivity to business etiquette
a. Reduces the chance of interpersonal blunders that might negatively affect communication
b. Is considered by most companies to be a waste of time in today’s fast-paced markets
c. Is now legally required in all 50 states
d. Always increases the cost of business communication

Objective 1.6: Explain what must occur for an audience to successfully receive, decode, and respond to messages.
14. In order for audience members to successfully receive messages, they must first ____________ the presence of the message, then ____________ it from other sensory input, and then ____________ it as a message.

15. In order for the receiver of a message to respond in the manner desired by the sender, the receiver needs to
a. Remember the message
b. Be able to respond to the message
c. Have the motivation to respond to the message
d. Do all of the above

Objective 1.7: Explain four strategies for using communication technology successfully.
16. Successful users of business communication technology make sure that it ____________ the communication effort rather than overwhelms or disrupts it.

Apply Your Knowledge

1. Why do you think good communication in an organization improves employee attitudes and performance? Explain briefly.
2. Is it possible for companies to be too dependent on communication technology? Explain briefly.
3. How can a lack of shared experience between sender and receiver result in communication failures?
4. As a manager, how can you impress on your employees the importance of strong business ethics when dealing with colleagues, customers, and the general public?

5. Ethical Choices Because of your excellent communication skills, your boss always asks you to write his reports for him. When you overhear the CEO complimenting him on his logical organization and clear writing style, he responds as if he’d written all those reports himself. What kind of ethical choice does your boss’s response represent? What can you do in this situation? Briefly explain your solution and your reasoning.

Practice Your Knowledge

MESSAGE FOR ANALYSIS
Read the following blog posting and then (1) analyze whether the message is effective or ineffective (be sure to explain why) and (2) revise the message so that it follows this chapter’s guidelines.

It has come to my attention that many of you are lying on your time cards. If you come in late, you should not put 8:00 on your time card. If you take a long lunch, you should not put 1:00 on your time card. I will not stand for this type of cheating. I simply have no choice but to institute an employee monitoring system. Beginning next Monday, video cameras will be installed at all entrances to the building, and your entry and exit times will be logged each time you use electronic key cards to enter or leave.

Anyone who is late for work or late coming back from lunch more than three times will have to answer to me. I don’t care if you
Chapter 1 Achieving Success Through Effective Business Communication

had to take a nap or if you girls had to shop. This is a place of business, and we do not want to be taken advantage of by slackers who are cheaters to boot.

It is too bad that a few bad apples always have to spoil things for everyone.

EXERCISES

For active links to all websites discussed in this chapter, visit this text’s website at www.prenhall.com/thill. Locate your book and click on its “Companion Website” link. Then select Chapter 1 and click on “Featured Websites.” Locate the name of the page or the URL related to the material in the text. Please note that links to sites that become inactive after publication of the book will be removed from the “Featured Websites” section.

1.1 Effective Business Communication: Understanding the Difference Bring to class a sales message that you received in the mail or via e-mail. Comment on how well the communication

a. Provides practical information
b. Gives facts rather than impressions
c. Clarifies and condenses information
d. States precise responsibilities
e. Persuades others and offers recommendations

1.2 Internal Communication: Planning the Flow For the following tasks, identify the necessary direction of communication (downward, upward, horizontal), suggest an appropriate type or types of communication (casual conversation, formal interview; meeting, workshop, web conference, instant messaging, memo, blog, bulletin board notice, and so on), and briefly explain your suggestions.

a. As human resources manager, you want to announce details about this year’s company picnic:
b. As director of internal communication, you want to convince top management of the need for an internal executive blog:
c. As production manager, you want to make sure that both the sales manager and the finance manager receive your scheduling estimates:
d. As marketing manager, you want to help employees throughout the company understand the marketplace and customer needs.

1.3 Communication Networks: Formal or Informal? An old college friend phoned you out of the blue to say, “Truth is, I had to call you. You’d better keep this under your hat, but when I heard my company was buying you guys out, I was dumbfounded. I had no idea that a company as large as yours could sink so fast. Your group must be in pretty bad shape over there!” Your stomach suddenly turned queasy, and you felt a chill go up your spine. You’d heard nothing about any buyout, and before you could even get your college friend off the phone, you were wondering what you should do. Of the following, choose one course of action and briefly explain your choice.

a. Contact your CEO directly and relate what you’ve heard.
b. Ask co-workers whether they’ve heard anything about a buyout.
c. Discuss the phone call confidentially with your immediate supervisor.
d. Keep quiet about the whole thing. (There’s nothing you can do about the situation anyway)

1.4 Ethical Choices In less than a page, explain why you think each of the following is or is not ethical.

a. Keeping quiet about a possible environmental hazard you’ve just discovered in your company’s processing plant:
b. Overselling the benefits of instant messaging to your company’s management; they never seem to understand the benefits of technology, so you believe it’s the only way to convince them to make the right choice:
c. Telling an associate and close friend that she’d better pay more attention to her work responsibilities, or management will fire her:
d. Recommending the purchase of excess equipment to use up your allocated funds before the end of the fiscal year so that your budget won’t be cut next year

1.5 The Changing Workplace: Personal Expression at Work Blogging has become a popular way for employees to communicate with customers and other parties outside the company. In some cases, employee blogs have been quite beneficial for both companies and their customers by providing helpful information and “putting a human face” on otherwise formal and imposing corporations. However, in some other cases, employees have been fired for posting information that their employers said was inappropriate. One particular area of concern is criticism of the company or individual managers. Should employees be allowed to criticize their employers in a public forum such as a blog? In a brief e-mail message, argue for or against company policies that prohibit any critical information in employee blogs.

1.6 Internet Cisco is a leading manufacturer of equipment for the Internet and corporate networks and has developed a code of ethics that its employees to abide by. Visit the company’s website, at www.cisco.com, and find the Code of Conduct. In a brief paragraph, describe three specific examples of things you could do that would violate these provisions; then list at least three opportunities that Cisco provides its employees to report ethics violations or ask questions regarding ethical dilemmas.

1.7 Communication Etiquette Potential customers frequently visit your production facility before making purchase decisions. You and the people who report to you in the sales department have received extensive training in etiquette issues because you deal with high-profile clients so frequently. However, the rest of the workforce has not received such training, and you worry that someone might inadvertently say or do something that would offend one of these potential customers. In a
two-paragraph e-mail, explain to the general manager why you think anyone who might come in contact with customers should receive basic etiquette training.

1.8 Ethical Choices Knowing that you have many friends throughout the company, your boss relies on you for feedback concerning employee morale and other issues affecting the staff. She recently approached you and asked you to start reporting any behavior that might violate company policies, from taking office supplies home to making personal long-distance calls. List the issues you’d like to discuss with her before you respond to her request.

1.9 Formal Communication: Self-Introduction Write an e-mail message or prepare an oral presentation, introducing yourself to your instructor and your class. Include such things as your background, interests, achievements, and goals. If you write an e-mail message, keep it under one normal screen in length, and use Figure 1.4 as a model for the format. If you prepare an oral presentation, plan to speak for no more than two minutes.

1.10 Teamwork Your boss has asked your work group to research and report on corporate child-care facilities. Of course, you’ll want to know who (besides your boss) will be reading your report. Working with two team members, list four or five other things you’ll want to know about the situation and about your audience before starting your research. Briefly explain why each of the items on your list is important.

1.11 Communication Process: Analyzing Miscommunication Use the eight phases of the communication process to analyze a miscommunication you’ve recently had with a co-worker, supervisor, classmate, teacher, friend, or family member. What idea were you trying to share? How did you encode and transmit it? Did the receiver get the message? Did the receiver correctly decode the message? How do you know? Based on your analysis, identify and explain the barriers that prevented your successful communication in this instance.

1.12 Ethical Choices You’ve been given the critical assignment of selecting the site for your company’s new plant. After months of negotiations with landowners, numerous cost calculations, and investments in ecological, social, and community impact studies, you are about to recommend building the new plant on the Lansing River site. Now, just 15 minutes before your big presentation to top management, you discover a possible mistake in your calculations: Site-purchase costs appear to be $500,000 more than you calculated, nearly 10 percent over budget. You don’t have time to recheck all your figures, so you’re tempted to just go ahead with your recommendation and ignore any discrepancies. You’re worried that management won’t approve this purchase if you can’t present a clean, unqualified solution. You also know that many projects run over their original estimates, so you can probably work the extra cost into the budget later. On your way to the meeting room, you make your final decision. In a few paragraphs, explain the decision you made.

1.13 Communication Etiquette In group meetings, some of your colleagues have a habit of interrupting and arguing with the speaker, taking credit for ideas that aren’t theirs, and shooting down ideas they don’t agree with. You’re the newest person in the group and not sure if this is accepted behavior in this company, but it concerns you both personally and professionally. Should you go with the flow and adopt their behavior or stick with your own communication style, even though you might get lost in the noise? In two paragraphs, explain the pros and cons of both approaches.

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**Expand Your Knowledge**

**LEARNING MORE ON THE WEB**

**CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES AT THE BUSINESS WRITER’S FREE LIBRARY**

[www.mappnp.org/library/commskls/cmm_writ.htm](http://www.mappnp.org/library/commskls/cmm_writ.htm)

The Business Writer’s Free Library is a terrific resource for business communication material. Categories of information include basic composition skills, basic writing skills, correspondence, reference material, and general resources and advice. Log on and read about the most common errors in English; become a word detective, ask Miss Grammar, review samples of common forms of correspondence, fine-tune your interpersonal skills, join a newsgroup, and more. Follow the links and improve your effectiveness as a business communicator.

1. What are some strategies for communicating with an uncooperative audience?
2. What is the value of diversity in the workplace?
3. Why is bad etiquette bad for business?

**SURFING YOUR WAY TO CAREER SUCCESS**

Bovée and Thill’s Business Communication Headline News offers links to hundreds of online resources that can help you with this course, your other college courses, and your career. Visit [www.businesscommunicationblog.com](http://www.businesscommunicationblog.com) and click on “Web Directory.” The “Communication” section connects you to a variety of websites and articles on basic communication skills, communication challenges on the job, and intriguing topics such as communication ethics and disinformation. Identify three websites from this section that could be useful in your business career. For each site, write a two-sentence summary of what the site offers and how it could help you launch and build your career.
Learn Interactively

INTERACTIVE STUDY GUIDE
Visit www.prenhall.com/thill, then locate your book and click on its “Companion Website” link. Select Chapter 1 to take advantage of the interactive “Chapter Quiz” to test your knowledge of chapter concepts. Receive instant feedback on whether you need additional studying. Also, visit the “Study Hall,” where you’ll find an abundance of valuable resources that will help you succeed in this course.

PEAK PERFORMANCE GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS
“Peak Performance Grammar and Mechanics” is a special feature accompanying your text that helps you evaluate and improve your knowledge of the various parts of speech and of mechanics, basic style issues such as capitalization, abbreviation, spelling, numbers, and the use of italics. If your instructor has required the use of this feature, either in your online course or on CD, you can improve your skill with nouns by using the “Peak Performance Grammar and Mechanics” module. Click “Grammar Basics,” then “Nouns and Pronouns.” Take the Pretest to determine whether you have any weak areas. Then review those areas in the Refresher Course. Take the Follow-Up Test to check your grasp of nouns. For an extra challenge or advanced practice, take the Advanced Test. Finally, for additional reinforcement, go to the “Improve Your Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage” section that follows and complete those exercises.

Improve Your Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage

The following exercises help you improve your knowledge of and power over English grammar, mechanics, and usage. Turn to the Handbook of Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage at the end of this book and review all of Section 1.1 (Nouns). Then look at the following 10 items. Underline the preferred choice within each set of parentheses. (Answers to these exercises appear on page AK-3.)

1. She remembered placing that report on her (bosses, boss’s) desk.
2. We mustn’t follow their investment advice like a lot of (sheep, sheeps).
3. Jones founded the company back in the early (1990’s, 1990s).
4. Please send the (Joneses, Jones’) a dozen of the following (stopwatches, stopwatches), canteens, and headbands.
5. Our (attorneys, attornies) will talk to the group about incorporation.
6. Make sure that all (copys, copies) include the new addresses.
7. Ask Jennings to collect all (employee’s, employees’) donations for the Red Cross drive.
8. Charlie now has two (sons-in-law, son-in-laws) to help him with his two online (business’s, businesses).
9. Avoid using too many (parentheses, parenthesis) when writing your reports.
10. Follow President (Nesses, Ness’s) rules about what constitutes a (weeks, week’s) work.

For additional exercises focusing on nouns, go to www.prenhall.com/thill, then locate your text and click on its “Companion Website” link. Click on Chapter 1, click on “Additional Exercises to Improve Your Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage,” then click on “1. Possessive nouns” or “2. Antecedents.”