

Part II: Chapter-by-Chapter Lecture Notes & Exercises

Chapter 1: Communicating in the Workplace

Teaching Suggestions

Much of the information you will cover in the first meeting is routine—introduction of yourself, office hours, course requirements, operating policies, and other business. In addition, you will probably want to introduce the subject matter of the course. Chapter 1 contains such an introduction, so you may want to start by summarizing its contents and adding illustrations from your knowledge and experience. Your overall goals should be to convince the students that business communication is important in business and to their personal advancement in business; to alert them to current challenges facing business communicators; to convey basic facts about the business-communication environment; and to bring out that business communication, as a problem-solving activity, requires analysis, creativity, and judgment (there are no magic formulas).

If you want to add some interest to this first meeting, try assigning a message to be written in class (but not for a grade). Make the problem a difficult one—a refusal or other bad-news situation requiring tactful handling. Without instructions on such problems, most of the students will write messages that are flawed. Save these messages until you cover this problem in the course and then give the messages back. When the students see their early writing specimens and compare them with their current work, they'll see the progress they have made. Also, the exercise is good for a few laughs, especially if you have some students read their original messages aloud to the class.

Another idea is to present a sample message (perhaps one from a real business) and, going over each part in detail, discuss the many decisions that went into the writing of the message. For example, the writer had to decide first even whether or not to write; then he/she needed to decide what genre (or form) of message this would be, how formal to make it, how to address the reader, what to say, how to organize the contents, where to put the paragraph breaks, which wording would be best in each place . . . and so on. This exercise reinforces the key point that good business communication is good decision making—as well as the point that preparing any message of importance will require time, care, and revision.

Still another possibility is the “message makeover” exercise. Present a poorly written message from a real organization, with identifying details removed. A negative message is often the most relatable and entertaining to students. (A popular choice is a memo announcing layoffs.) This also gives you the opportunity to discuss the importance of choosing the correct medium for the message. Ask students what problems they find with the tone, writing style, and information included and how they would improve these. Then present a well-written revision, explaining that this is the kind of writing they'll learn how to do in this course. This exercise helps students become aware of how much they already know about identifying good versus bad writing, and also how much they stand to learn from the course.

Connect provides instructors with a variety of ways to customize courses, create assignments, determine grading policies, and receive student work. One of the tools Connect offers is the ability to select and add interactive assignments to your course. Explanations of these assignments and how they support the learning objectives are integrated into the instructor's manual with the relevant subject areas.

Note that Presentation Capture is a good tool available in Connect for oral presentation delivery (either online or face-to-face). McGraw-Hill's Presentation Capture software gives instructors the ability to evaluate presentations and allows students the freedom to practice their presentations anytime, anywhere.

Instructors can use the software's fully customizable rubric to measure students' uploaded presentations against course outcomes and give students specific feedback. Peer-review functions are also available. For more information, go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=qWtyFIYtRWc.

Another useful tool in Connect is "Writing Assignment," which students can use to submit their homework assignments online. For more information on setting up this service, go to <http://createwp.customer.mheducation.com/wordpress-mu/success-academy/create-writing-assignments/>.

Follow-up via the *Connect* exercises is then encouraged to provide a holistic understanding of the chapter.

Learning Objectives

- LO 1-1** Explain the importance of communication to you and to business.
- LO 1-2** Explain the ways in which business communication is a form of problem solving.
- LO 1-3** Describe the skills that are needed by today's business communicators.
- LO 1-4** Define professionalism and its importance to business communicators.
- LO 1-5** Describe the three main categories of business communication.
- LO 1-6** Describe the two types of communication networks in an organization.
- LO 1-7** Describe the main factors that affect the types and amount of communicating that an organization does.
- LO 1-8** Describe the contexts for each act of business communication.
- LO 1-9** Describe the business communication process.

Key Terms

problem solving
 heuristics
 verbal literacy
 visual literacy
 computational thinking
 interpretive skills
 new media
 social intelligence
 cross-cultural competency
 corporate social responsibility
 professionalism
 business etiquette
 internal-operational communication
 external-operational communication
 personal communication
 formal network
 genres
 informal network
 grapevine
 organizational culture
 organizational contexts
 professional contexts

personal contexts
 recursive process
 filters
 bypassing

Text Summary, Lecture Outline

Communicating in the Workplace

Slides 1-1, 1-2, 1-3

This chapter puts business communication in context. It explains the importance of business communication skills, describes large and small factors that affect business communication, identifies the main types of communication, and describes the problem-solving approach that is essential to effective business communication.

Problem-Solving Challenge

Students should consider the problem presented—being asked as a new hire to join a task force to find the best internal communication solution for a software development company. Let students brainstorm a list of potential answers to the question: What will you need to know about communicating in business to do a good job on this team? Have them compare these answers with a list they create after they have worked through this chapter. What did they learn?

Slides 1-4, 1-5

Importance of Communication

Communication is important to you and to the business you will work for. For you, good communication skills can lead to advancement.

Your performance will be judged largely by your ability to communicate. The higher you advance, the greater your need for communication skills will be.

For the business for which you will work, communicating is important because it is a major part of the work of the business. Communication is essential for organized activity. Much of the work done involves the processing of information.

Unfortunately, many businesspeople do not communicate well. You might share highly publicized communication blunders that companies have made, or ask students to share stories they may have about how good or poor communication in a company had a significant result, either for a particular communicator or for a company in general.

Multiple surveys find communication skills as highly prized in job applicants (see the Communication Matters box, “Take It from Today’s Executives” for more information), along with such related traits as a strong work ethic, an ability to work in a team, and initiative. In the most recent annual survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), employers rated leadership, ability to work on a team, written communication skills, and problem-solving skills as the top attributes they look for in applicants’ resumes. Oral communication skills and a strong work ethic were rated just under the top four choices.

Ask students: Can you think of a time when you were part of an unsuccessful project at school or work because of ineffective communication?

(Note: For online courses, you can create assignments via Connect in which students can respond to questions posed during class.)

Slides 1-6, 1-7

Communication as Problem Solving

Almost no business problem can be solved without communication. But communication itself—figuring out what to say or write, and how—is a form of problem solving. This means that, for most situations, the business communicator will need to take a unique set of circumstances into account and generate a unique solution that will achieve the desired business goals.

Most significant business communication problems are ill-defined—because they involve dealing with people, who are complex and unique. To solve these problems requires **research, analysis, creativity, and judgment**.

- **Research:** interview the players and understand the history of the communications situation
- **Careful analysis:** to gather and interpret the relevant information
- **Creativity:** to think of possible solutions
- **Judgment:** to pick the solution that will fit this situation best

You might ask your class how it's possible that, when there's no single "correct" answer to any business communication problem, it's still possible to say that some solutions are better than others. If you're not lucky enough to have a savvy student who "gets" this, you can make the point by showing them different handlings of a simple business situation and discussing what makes some better than others.

You might also share examples of how **analysis, creativity, and judgment** work during the business communication process.

For instance, in addition to gathering and interpreting the relevant information, **analysis** often involves analyzing the culture's expectations for communication (formal vs. informal), considering the current climate (are there sensitive/hot button issues, such as limited resources, that shouldn't be brought up?), and looking at the individual audience's needs and fears. For example, if you're asking your boss for a vacation day via email, and you know that he or she is already afraid a project isn't going to be completed on time, at some point in the email you need to mention this, reassuring your boss that you'll still meet the project deadline. Many factors go into analysis.

Creativity often means looking at a communications issue from multiple angles. At its most basic level, the following questions need to be asked: What is the correct medium for this communication? What is the correct venue? For instance, if you're in internal communications for a major company and rolling out a new company brand internally, a memo is probably not the most creative execution. But having the IT department turn every employee's desktop background into the company's new logo and look, so they're greeted with it in the morning when they come to work, is a surprising and fresh way to make the announcement.

Judgment is making sure you always pick the solution that will fit the situation and the long-term goals and values of the culture. It also means always sending a message at the right time, in the right tone. You may let students know that, believe it or not, this can be tricky in a business environment. It's common to inadvertently slip up or step on someone's toes, but they'll learn strategies for exercising excellent judgment in this course.

This book aims to equip students with several **heuristics**, tools to think with, to help them meet any communication challenge. Good problem solvers rely on guidelines, models, known scenarios, and other aids to help them apply tested strategies to new problems.

Slide 1-8

Test Your Judgment

Let the students consider the scenario presented on the slide: two employees have reported sexual harassment, but no formal policy is in place. As Director of HR, you need to announce the new sexual harassment policy. What is the best medium for this in this context?

Slide 1-9

Communication Skills

The scenario presented on this slide will help students consider how to use communication skills to work successfully together with partners of very different backgrounds.

Communication has always been central to business, but in the 21st century, people in business are encountering new challenges. Living in the Information Age means that information is now the hottest commodity. Whoever capitalizes on the changes in information technology stands the best chance of creating the most profitable innovations, and so keeping up with the constant developments of new technologies becomes increasingly important. To be an effective knowledge worker today, one needs several kinds of literacy.

Ask students to explain and give examples of how each of the following skill areas is involved in communication.

Verbal literacy: The greater your vocabulary and familiarity with language, and the stronger your knowledge of grammar and mechanics is, the better you will be able to communicate with a variety of people.

Visual literacy: Thanks to the Internet, readers are now used to graphics-rich content that is inviting and easy to read. Studies have shown that visually enhanced text produces more effective learning than text alone.

Interpersonal skills: Of particular interest to employers these days is employees' ability to work on a team. The respondents to the latest NACE survey ranked this trait second in terms of the skills they like to see indicated in a resume.

Analytical ability: Ask students what kind of thinking is especially valued by employers for processing data. Besides interpreting data, what other interpretive skills are useful in figuring out business solutions?

Media literacy: All the forms of communication that comprise what is known as new media require employees with social intelligence. Ask students to talk about the analogy of the organization as a brain with employees as sensors. What kinds of things do employees have to be aware of?

Cultural awareness: Different kinds of diversity impact the workplace and business communication in different ways. The next slide focuses more on the issue of diversity.

Ethics and social responsibility: Ethical scandals have hurt many businesses, and social responsibility has become a buzzword and marketing strategy for many companies. Let students discuss the reasons companies need to provide new transparency regarding their business practices. What are the pros and cons of this situation? How does this play out in the individual worker's performance? What impact does that have on the workplace as a whole?

You can have good conversations with your class about technological innovations that your students have seen in their own lifetimes, about the international nature of business these days, about diversity in places where students have worked, and about the growing presence of ethics and corporate-responsibility-related issues in the news. During the discussion of each trend, ask how it might influence business communication practices.

More questions for discussion:

Expanded media literacy—How are apps, Skype, tweets, social networking, and virtual meetings changing business? How are telecommuting situations, where your first meeting takes place over email, and you never meet in person, changing business interaction? How does this change “the stakes” of your first email and subsequent emails? Is it really possible to form a professional relationship over email? Have you ever experienced a business relationship like this? Was it successful? How would you prepare for an online interview vs. an in-person one?

Increased globalism and diversity—Diversity can happen on many levels. Consider the differences between a Baby Boomer who has been in a business for decades and a Millennial who was recently hired into a similar position as the older employee. Does growing up with technology give the Millennial an advantage in the workplace? Why or why not? How might being a digital native affect that person's view of doing business in the world? What might these two employees be able to gain from one another?

Increased need for strong analytical skills—Your book mentions that many work tasks now require “the ability to determine the deeper meaning or significance of what is being expressed” and that “high-value work . . . has an *imaginative* component.” Do you agree? Can you recall a project at work where you were required to add value through deep thinking and imagination, even if it was analyzing and presenting a simple report?

Increased focus on ethics and social responsibility—Do you agree, as your book states, that “The more an organization builds trust among its employees, its shareholders, its business partners, and its community, the better for the business and for economic prosperity overall”? Can you think of companies that have failed because they've failed to do this? What about those companies that are still successful despite breaches in ethics and poor products? Why do you think they've survived?

Slides 1-10, 1-11

Workplace Diversity

Diversity programs are becoming more and more widespread. A web article by American Express outlined these diversity benefits: It builds your employer brand, it increases creativity, it encourages personal growth, and it makes employees think more independently. (See the Communication Matters box, “Why Companies Promote Workplace Diversity”).

Possible questions for discussion:

1. Do you agree that diversity increases creativity in the workplace? If so, how?
2. Does diversity make an organization stronger or weaker as a whole? Explain your answer.
3. Diversity isn’t just cross-cultural. It’s also cross-generational. Have you noticed any differences between the younger generation (generally classified as Millennials, and now the upcoming Generation Z) and Baby Boomers in the workplace? What about you and Gen X? Different attitudes toward work, technology, etc.? Do you feel a mutual professional respect? What do you feel you have learned/can learn from one another?

Workplace Diversity Analysis

Encourage students to share examples from their own work experience or from those of companies they know well.

Connect Assignment 1-1: Preparing for Success in the Workplace

Summary: Today’s workplace requires employees to have many different skills. In this activity, students will evaluate advice from various sources to determine whether the statements are useful for achieving success in future employment. Students’ understanding of employer expectations will be tested.

Learning Objectives: 1-01, 1-02, 1-03, 1-04

Difficulty: Easy

AACSB: Reflective Thinking

Blooms: Understand

Follow-Up Activity: Students could be asked to correct any “bad advice” with helpful suggestions for achieving success in the workplace, and offer their reasoning for those suggestions.

*Slide 1-12***A Recipe for Better Companies?**

Students can take one of these quotes from the text and discuss its merits and ramifications. How true is the statement? What’s the evidence? What’s your experience tell you? If the statement is true, what does that mean for businesses? What does it mean for workers? If you think the statement is true, consider anomalies in the marketplace that seem to give a contrary result—for instance, some companies have seemingly dishonest practices and yet still are thriving. How is that possible? Can you give an example?

*Slides 1-13, 1-14, 1-15***Professionalism**

Professionalism comes into play in every business interaction. It’s the set of behaviors that’s expected of you as an employee when you’re in social situations, whether with your colleagues, your superiors, or such outsiders as partners and customers.

Students can look at the Communication Matters box titled “How to Spot a Professional” and see how many other behaviors they can add to that list.

Let the students discuss the three scenarios presented in the “You Make the Call” slide. Which scenario is the easiest for them to make a judgment about? Why? What are the complexities involved in these workplace-related conversations?

Too much or too little personal communication, or the wrong type, can adversely affect productivity. Ask students to discuss the types of personal communication that went/go on in a workplace they are familiar with. Bring out the benefits and drawbacks, and see if you can draw some conclusions about how much and what kind of personal communication is appropriate in a workplace or develop rules of thumb for personal communication in business.

Have students check out “How Professional Is This Email?” and share what they think about the level of professionalism presented in that message. Remind them not to judge the actions of the person being addressed, but to judge the text and tone of the email itself.

Let students discuss the possible factors that influence their assessment of this email. What about this email is professional? What qualities, if any, seem less professional? Just from reading this email, what conclusions would you draw about the nature of the working relationship between these two people?

Let students rework the email in two different ways (you could divide the class into two groups for this exercise): 1) rewrite the email in a much more professional tone; 2) rewrite the email in a less professional, friend-to-friend tone.

Slide 1-16

Categories of Communication

Despite all the changes we’ve seen in the last 25 years or so, most communications in business still fall into one of three basic categories.

Internal-operational communication is all the communication that occurs in conducting work within the business. It is the work done to carry out the operating plan (the business’s plan for doing whatever it was formed to do).

It takes many forms—orders and instructions from superiors; oral exchanges between workers; written reports, emails, memorandums, proposals . . . and the list goes on.

Much of it is conducted through the business’s computer network. (Here you can call attention to the Intranet example provided and discuss other contemporary communication media that businesses are using internally.)

External-operational communication is all the communicating businesses do with people and groups outside the business. Because businesses are dependent on outside people and groups, external-operational communication is necessary for success.

This category includes direct selling (sales presentations, advertising, public relations activities, mailings), correspondence with other businesses, and communication with external parties such as community representatives, nonprofit and/or government organizations, and more.

Nowadays, much of this communicating is technology assisted. Ask students what types of computer-assisted messages businesses are sending out these days in addition to email and faxes.

Personal communication is the exchange of information and feelings among the workers.

People will talk when they come together. Much of this talk is personal. But this communicating can affect the workers' attitudes—and thus their job performance.

Slides 1-17, 1-18

Networks

If we decide to analyze the information flow and human interactions of a business, an extremely complex system is exposed. These exchanges and the relationships they represent form communication networks, which can be either formal or informal.

Formal networks are generally well-established and function along operational lines. They depend on established policies and practices within the company; they include memos, reports, and emails. They are often planned and managed, such as weekly progress reports.

The informal network is by contrast complex and ever-changing. It is not one single network but a complex web of many smaller networks that are constantly shifting and changing. Internally, it is what we often refer to as the grapevine.

This outline emphasizes the points in your review of networks. Have students generate and share examples of these from their own work experience.

The **formal network** consists of communication along established channels in the business.

Every business has a formal network. It may be completely hierarchical, meaning little information can be communicated to the company unless it goes through the CEO and internal communications team first. Or it may be less hierarchical and flat, meaning that every employee can call a team meeting or has access to company-wide email and can send any notice out as required. In larger companies, the former is generally true, while in smaller companies the latter is often true.

In general, communication flow can be downward, upward, or lateral (with this latter type growing in importance as hierarchies in organizations become flatter).

Each business develops its own forms (or genres) of communication to get its work done. Whether it's formal work requests and progress reports, weekly/monthly staff meetings, or an internal project management/communications system, such as Basecamp, every organization has its own formal, traceable way of disseminating work information internally.

The informal network consists of all the personal communicating that goes on in the business.

The informal network includes those employees you have professional and personal relationships with within your company.

It follows no set pattern and may link any of the workers in the business. Its structure is ever-changing and may be extremely complex.

Known as the grapevine, it carries rumors and gossip but can also spread information and insights that enhance an organization's culture, cohesion, and performance.

It cannot be outlawed or controlled—so wise executives work with it rather than against it.

The informal network also includes the social media networks you interact with outside of work, through Facebook and other venues. Many companies, such as Procter & Gamble, have extremely detailed social media policies and lengthy internal courses on how to use social media effectively. For instance, as of 2010, P&G employees could not promote a P&G product on their own Facebook pages without disclosing first that they were employees of the company. Many companies will also fire employees for sharing proprietary information or speaking negatively about their companies and other employees on their Facebook pages.

Possible discussions: Here, you can invite students to share their experiences with formal and informal networks in places where they or those they know have worked. Ask them who the “talk leaders” were in their examples of grapevines, and point out that even those without a great deal of formal power can have considerable informal power.

You can also invite students to share the difficulties they've encountered with Facebook and work situations. Have they seen a coworker write something negative on a page or share proprietary information? Did they feel the need to react? How did they deal with the situation ethically?

Or you can discuss a news article on a well-known social media case covering a workplace issue.

If you have time for a brief, in-class writing assignment you may want to invite students to remember a time when they found out confidential company information from an informal communication. How did they deal with it? Did they share it? You may also ask them to write about the most powerful professional relationship they've experienced, and how the relationship contributed positively or negatively to their careers. Helping them understand the influence relationships have on their careers is critical to helping them understand the influence of communication.

The network diagram on slide 1-18 shows the communication networks in a division of a small manufacturing company. The black lines show the formal network. The red lines show the informal network at a given moment in time. They change often, and may look completely different over time.

Slide 1-19

What's the Culture?

How much and what kind of communicating a business does depends on the type of business, its environment, and the nature of the people involved.

Nature of the business: Some industries have more communication needs than others.

Size and complexity: Relatively simple businesses, such as auto repair services, require far less communication than complex businesses, such as automobile manufacturers.

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Company structure: Companies may range from the highly structured (executives at the top, entry-level employees at the bottom) to more flat and team-based structures. Structure strongly determines the topics you may communicate about and with whom.

Geographic dispersion: Obviously, internal communication in a business with multiple locations differs from that of a one-location business.

Diversity: A business whose employees come from similar backgrounds will have different communication norms from those of a multicultural organization.

Organizational culture: People coming together in an organization and spending many hours a day there form a social world with its own goals, values, behaviors, and idiosyncrasies. Learning a workplace's culture is essential to successful communication in that environment.

For discussion, you can draw on students' own experiences as employees and consumers to help them understand the significance of these factors. Compare students' experiences working for large and small companies and companies in different industries. Get them to volunteer stories about the organizational culture of places where they've worked or shopped and to discuss how the culture probably influenced, and was influenced by, the company's communication practices.

Look at the list of traits or observations on slide 1-19. Have students discuss what some of these might tell them about a company's culture, structure, or other factors. What would they expect or what conclusions might they make about communication within that company based on each of these factors?

You can relay that if the company culture is formal—for example, you need to set up an appointment to see the CEO, rather than dropping by his or her office—you can probably assume that the communication will be formal as well (perhaps having strict communication channels you must follow and not as much access to information).

If the CEO is wearing jeans when you meet him or her—now common in many industries, especially if the company is a start-up—you'll probably find an informal and conversational writing style, particularly internally and possibly externally.

Companies with the strongest cultures—shared values/mission, company-sponsored team-building events/retreats, etc.—are often the most successful. You may ask students why they think this is true.

However, the “unofficial culture”—what the employees really believe and what they're really doing/saying behind closed doors—is often considered the true culture. When the company-sanctioned culture and the unofficial culture are aligned, you often have success. When they aren't, the company struggles more. You may ask students if they've ever worked for an organization where the official culture was different from the unofficial culture.

You may also want to ask students what they feel are “tip-offs” to a company's culture. You can also share these signs of an organization's culture recognized by researchers and ask them to contribute others:

- What kind of stories does the company tell about its past—the living history? What a culture chooses to share says a lot about its values.
- Do they have certain “heroes” that they elevate (or even make fun of in a friendly way) because they've had such an impact on the success of the company? This says a lot about the professional contributions the company values.

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- Do they have rituals? Burgers or happy hours on Friday? Battle of the bands every year? Community clean-up day? When the company gives employees tickets to events are they tickets to NASCAR or tickets to the ATP? This says a lot about the type of culture it is.
- Does the team seem like a cohesive group with shared values or are they “doing their own thing” and confused about where the company is going?
- Ask students how important an organization’s culture is to them. Should they ask questions about it during an interview? For instance, if a company has “battle of the bands” every year and employees are supposed to participate and expected to perform, would this be an issue for them? Or would they enjoy this type of culture?

Invite students to share their experiences of the organizational metaphors provided in the Communication Matters feature titled “What’s the Dominant Metaphor in *Your Workplace*?” Or they can offer new metaphors to describe places in which they have worked or are working.

Connect Assignment 1-2 (a-e): Learning to Communicate in a New Job

Summary: To be an effective communicator, students need to be aware of the “big picture” in which communication takes place. This activity (which includes five questions based on the provided case) tests students’ understanding of communication environments and networks.

1-2-a

Learning Objective: 1-05

Difficulty: Easy

AACSB: Communication

Blooms: Apply

1-2-b

Learning Objective: 1-07

Difficulty: Easy

AACSB: Communication

Blooms: Apply

1-2-c

Learning Objective: 1-06

Difficulty: Medium

AACSB: Communication

Blooms: Analyze

1-2-d

Learning Objective: 1-06

Difficulty: Medium

AACSB: Knowledge Application

Blooms: Understand

1-2-e

Learning Objective: 1-06

Difficulty: Hard

AACSB: Analytical Thinking

Blooms: Evaluate

Follow-Up Activity: Based on the information provided in the activity, students could be asked to create two versions of Sean's email message to all employees about how to request computer help—an ineffective version and an effective version.

The Business Communication Process

Slide 1-20

Because the communicating that goes on in business is done by people, it is helpful for us to know how communication between businesspeople occurs. This model shows both process and contexts. Refer to Exhibit 1-4 in Chapter 1 for a complete illustration and explanation of the process.

The business communication process involves two communicators trying to solve a particular problem. For the purpose of solving the particular problem, the communicators occupy the same sphere, which can be defined as their relationship. The sphere of their mutual relationship occurs within the larger socioeconomic historical context.

This model guides your discussion of the contexts for and steps in the business communication process.

You can point out that the communication process here is viewed as part of a larger problem-solving process, in which the two communicators work together to achieve business-related goals and that communication is often ongoing—not a one-shot type of action.

A fun exercise for illustrating this process in action is to divide the class up into two opposing teams. Team 1 must recommend a surprising change to the syllabus to Team 2. Team 2 then has to follow the process of responding to this recommendation as laid out in this model. Do they agree? Will they propose a different recommendation and argue their case? Will they respond at all? If the class is large, you may break it up into smaller competing groups. (You can also write this as an assignment where a student must recommend and argue for a change to the syllabus and present that argument to you, the instructor.)

Slide 1-21

Communication Contexts

In the previous slide we saw that the two communicators in a communication exchange occupy similar concentric spaces for their communication.

Now we'll take a closer look at the contexts in which business communication takes place.

The *larger context* includes the general business-economic climate; language, values, and customs of the surrounding culture; and the historical location of the communication exchange.

The *relationship of the communicators* also forms an important context for communication. Although communication may be about moving information from point A to point B, it is also about interactions between human beings. Perhaps the strongest influencing factors are the particular contexts that comprise the relationship of the two communicators.

The *context of the communicators* involved must also be considered in order to create successful communication. The organizational context of the type and culture of the organization will shape

communication choices. Professional contexts are determined by the various levels of expertise of the communicators. Finally, personal contexts as defined by all the factors that contribute to make you who you are will influence your communication.

As the text says, communication is not simply about moving information from point A to point B. Anyone who neglects the specific contexts in which communication takes place is likely doomed to be an unsuccessful communicator. Factoring these multiple contexts into communication decisions is a large part of treating business communication as a problem-solving process.

Let students role-play the situation as described in the slide. Then discuss the different kinds of communications that occurred and what contexts were influencing those different interactions. (Encourage online students to role-play this situation with a friend and then report on the results.)

Slide 1-22

Here are the steps that usually occur when people are solving business problems and communicating about them.

1. Sensing a communication need. You can emphasize that a “need” can be either a problem to solve or an opportunity to take advantage of.
2. Defining the situation. Here, the writer/speaker gathers information about the situation—about what has happened or what might be achieved, about possible audiences, about prior similar situations, about organizational goals and possible means for achieving them.
3. Considering possible communication strategies. Given the situation, in what different ways might the communication challenge be tackled? What strategies could best further the interests of the parties involved?
4. Selecting a course of action. Here the writer/speaker decides not only what to say but also how to say it. He or she makes basic decisions about the type of message that will be sent—which also involves choosing the communication channel (phone? email? texting?) that will best support the goals of the message.
5. Composing the message. You can preview the advice in Chapter 2 about the writing process. Help students realize that whatever writing style works best for them is the one they should use, but emphasize the importance of all three main composing stages (planning, drafting, and revising).
6. Sending the message. Students often do not realize how important message timing is, or how important it is to imagine the hectic work context in which the recipient will receive the message. This step deserves some careful thought.
7. Receiving the message. Now we’re over on the recipient’s side of the process. If the sender has made wise decisions (about timing, channel, format, and framing of the message), the odds of the recipient’s actually reading and/or hearing the message are promising. (Otherwise, as you can remind your students, the message might get thrown away, buried under other messages, or deleted.)
8. Interpreting the message. As the recipient processes the message, he or she will be forming all sorts of impressions—about the writer/speaker, about the writer/speaker’s company, about the goal of the message, about the message’s specific contents, about why the message is significant (or not).

9. Deciding on a response. If the recipient attends to the message, he/she will have a response, whether it's the one the sender intends or not. If the message has been tailored carefully to the recipient's interests, the recipient's response—whether a return message, an action, or simply a change in attitude—will have a good chance of being the desired one.

10. Replying to the message. Here the recipient becomes the sender, and the communication cycle begins again. And it may lead to another cycle—and another. The cycles may continue as long as the participants wish to communicate. In oral communication, you can point out, the cycles tend to happen quickly as the communicators work to create a mutual understanding, whereas the communication cycles in written communication tend to occur more slowly.

There are no guarantees that any message will be successful—but the analytical process presented in the communication model will make the odds of success as high as possible.

Connect Assignment 1-3: The Business Communication Process

Summary: Business communication is a problem-solving activity, and in this click-and-drag exercise, students will review their understanding of the stages of the business communication process by considering brief scenarios and deciding which parts of the communication process these scenarios best illustrate.

Learning Objectives: 1-08, 1-09

Difficulty: Medium

AACSB: Communication

Blooms: Understand

Follow-Up Activity: Instruct students to choose three of the given scenarios and decide what would be the next steps in the communication process for the people in those scenarios.

Slide 1-23

The last slide suggests the three key features of business communication: it's about sharing information, it's about building relationships, and it's about solving workplace problems.

Power Charge Your Professionalism: Use the Right Word

1. The performance of our stock will (**affect/effect**) our shareholders' willingness to continue investing in our company.
2. Roy, Sydney, and Ming have all applied for the promotion. We will have a difficult time choosing (~~among~~/**between**) the three of them.
3. Jeanette knew she had to raise more (**capital/capitol**) before starting her new business.
4. We will be conducting interviews on (~~eite/sight~~/**site**) next Thursday.
5. Jorge and Mira work well together because their skills are (~~complimentary~~/**complementary**).
6. The CEO asked for everyone's (**cooperation/corporation**) as we moved through the software conversion.
7. Guests always receive (~~deferential~~/**differential**) treatment when they visit our company.
8. Good team members do not (**desert/dessert**) their teams just because the work isn't going well.

For further instruction on using the right word, see "Using the Homophones Correctly" in the "Grammar" section of LearnSmart Achieve.

Critical-Thinking Questions

1. **Why do you think employers value transferable skills more highly now than in the past? What changes in business over the last 20 years or so might account for this change? (LO1)**

Changing technology and an increasingly connected global marketplace means that employees need to be more adaptable and able to interact with a broader range of people and tools. Employees can be trained fairly easily on new equipment or software—it's much harder to train people to be good communicators, to have good judgment, and to solve problems with critical and creative thinking.

2. **"If there's no definitive solution, then all ways of handling a business communication problem are equally good." Using the discussion of business communication problem solving in this chapter, explain why this statement is false. (LO2)**

True, there are no guarantees that even the best-planned, most carefully designed message will succeed. But one that is not well thought out and well executed will almost certainly fail.

3. **In what ways is imagination important in business? In business communication? (LO2, LO3)**

Students may want to consider the creativity aspect of the business communication process in their response. Each student's answer should be evaluated on its merits.

4. **Think of a time when insufficient verbal skills on the part of someone in the workplace or in the public sphere led to a negative result. What kind of wording mistake did this person make, and what kind of damage did it cause? (LO3)**

Each student's answer should be evaluated on its merits.

5. **Think of or find an example of a time when someone used a visual effectively to make a point. Why does the visual work so much better than words, or words alone? (LO3)**

Each student's answer should be evaluated on its merits, but should include reference to the fact that visuals are critical to conveying information, that research shows 80 to 85 percent of perception is mediated through vision, and that visually enhanced text has been proven to generate more effective learning than text alone.

6. **Think back through your work history and any team projects you've been on, and identify someone who, in your opinion, was a great team player. What qualities and skills made this person skillful at working with others? (LO3)**

Each student's answer should be evaluated on its merits, but should include some of the skills mentioned in this chapter.

7. **To get a feel for the importance of media literacy on the part of business communicators, make a list of all the information technologies (devices, media platforms, and applications) that you've used over the last two years. What kind of knowledge is required to be able to use these technologies well? (LO2)**

Each answer should be evaluated on its own merits, but could include such concepts as problem solving and social intelligence.

8. **"People need to leave their cultures and values at the door when they come to work and just do business." Discuss the possible merits and flaws of this attitude. (LO3)**

The main flaw of this attitude is that business communication is still human communication, and humans cannot divorce themselves entirely from their cultures and values when they walk through the company door. Another flaw is that many employers value an employee's ability to evaluate problems in light of their cross-cultural competency—they want employees who are able to understand and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. However, it's important and worthwhile for employees to remember that their words and actions will be perceived as a reflection of their company. So, though they cannot "leave their cultures and values at the door," they will need to be able to assess in what ways their personal values do or do not line up with those of their employer, and remember that the business environment is not the place for them to broadcast their own opinions with no limits.

9. **How might people's definition of "professional behavior" depend on which industry or type of company they're in? (LO4)**

The part of professional behavior that is concerned with business etiquette will change somewhat depending on the industry. What is considered good manners, suitable conversation topics, and appropriate attire can vary from one kind of workplace to another. But professional behavior also refers to the concept of being "responsible, conscientious, and cooperative in every area of your work"—these values will remain fairly consistent across industries.

10. **“Never mix business with personal matters—it just leads to damaged relationships, poor business decisions, or both.” In what ways might this be a fair statement? In what ways is it unwise advice? (LO5)**

The statement has merit in that getting too personally involved with a business associate can lead one either to neglect the business goals or to risk damaging the personal relationship in the interest of business. Furthermore, divulging personal information within such a relationship can sometimes be damaging professionally. It is also not ethical to develop a personal relationship just to exploit it for business reasons. On the other hand, even in business contexts, people are still people. They cannot leave their humanness at the door—and, arguably, business would not be rewarding and worthwhile if they could. The good business communicator always remembers that communication is a human activity and takes care to foster goodwill between the communicators.

11. **Describe the formal communication network in an organization, division, or department with which you are familiar (preferably a simple one). Discuss why you think the communication network has taken this form and how successfully it seems to meet the business’s needs. (LO6)**

Each example should be evaluated on its merits.

12. **As noted in this chapter, companies develop specific forms of communication, or genres, that enable them to get their work done. In a place where you have worked or in another organization you have been a member of, what were the main forms of communication with the employees or members? To what extent were these uniquely adapted to the needs of the organization? (LO6)**

Each answer should be evaluated on its merits.

13. **Read the Communication Matters box at the end of “The Business Communication Environment” to see what management scholar Gareth Morgan has to say about types of workplace cultures. Then think of an organization you know well and decide what its dominant cultural metaphor is. Is it one of Morgan’s? Or is it a family? A team? A community? A prison? A mixture of several kinds? Once you settle on your metaphor, be prepared to explain how this organization’s culture affects, and is affected by, its communication practices. (LO7)**

Each example should be evaluated by its merits.

14. **Think of a recent transaction you had with a businessperson or with a staff person at your school. Describe the contexts of your communication, from the larger context (business-economic, sociocultural, and historical) down to the personal (to the extent that you know them). How did these likely influence the outcome of your communication? (LO8)**

To get students thinking, you might invite those who have tried to argue a parking ticket or library fine or to resolve a registration or payment problem to reflect on contexts that helped determine the nature and outcome of the communication.

15. Using this chapter's discussion of communication, explain how people reading or hearing the same message can disagree on its meaning. (LO8, LO9)

The explanations should note that our specific contexts give us different mental filters (storehouses of experience, knowledge, biases, and priorities). Thus, when two people interpret a message through their unique filters, the meanings given the message are likely to differ. For example, assume that John has worked for companies in which the human resources department was poorly run, while Bill has seen firsthand that well-run HR departments can make important contributions to the morale and bottom line of a company. Their responses to a message announcing an additional hire in the HR department would differ sharply.

Each answer should be evaluated on its merits.

Skills-Building Exercises

- 1. Interview a successful professional in an area of business you're interested in to find out how he or she feels about the importance of communication skills. See how this person defines such skills and their importance. Ask for a positive and a negative example of a time when communication helped determine an important outcome. (LO1)**

Each answer should be evaluated on its merits. It would be good for students to ask about the communication environment/process that exists at the interviewee's company.

- 2. You purchased two pairs of expensive shoes (or substitute another product) about six months ago at a specialty store located 20 miles from where you live. One of the pairs needed to be ordered from the manufacturer because the store did not have the color you wanted. The manager told you that he would call you when that pair came in, but three months passed, and you heard nothing. So you called the store and left a message. The manager called you back to say that those shoes wouldn't be available for another three months and asked if you wanted to wait for them. You said yes—but then four more months passed, with no word from him. You called again and left a message, but, so far, no one has called you back. Use Exhibit 1-5 to help you decide how to use communication to solve this problem. Explain which communication solution you think would be best and why. (LO2, LO8, LO9)**

Each student should use critical thinking to consider what questions need to be asked to get at the heart of this problem. Are there cultural differences that make the store manager avoid talking on the phone? What are the lines of communication like at the store? Since the phone calls have not achieved the desired effect, one could surmise that a letter might also provide similar unsuccessful results. In this case, a personal visit might be necessary in order to make your desires clearly known and to impress upon the management what you expect to happen. You could also exchange further information, write down the manager's name, and get the name of the owner of the store. Often just collecting such information in an obvious way will communicate the seriousness of your position and result in more attentive service.

- 3. Choose a certain national or regional culture, ethnicity, or generation—one different from your own—and find out what values the people in this demographic are generally**

known for. How might working or doing business with a person from this group require you to adapt your own values and communication style? (LO3)

The main things to encourage in this exercise are use of details and honesty. Help students realize that there may be a downside to working with those unlike themselves—but that the gains are usually greater.

4. **Using the Internet, find a company that has a corporate social responsibility program and study what the company's website says about that program. What kind of image as a corporate citizen is the company trying to project, and how? How convincing is this effort, in your opinion, and why? (LO3)**

The public face of almost any major company will have some kind of corporate responsibility dimension. Look for evidence in the students' responses that they have tried to analyze and assess the bases on which the company claims (explicitly or implicitly) to be a good citizen. You might ask students to attach or share sample web pages from the company to support their observations.

5. **What do you think would be the most professional way to handle these situations? (LO4, LO5)**

a. You're the lead student employee of your school's technology help desk. Each day, you field questions from faculty, staff, and students about their email accounts, the Internet, and other tech topics. The volume of calls and emails is high, so you're worn pretty thin by the end of your shift each day. Today, late in the day, you get an email from a faculty member expressing interest in having her students design a tutorial to help faculty and students learn one of the school's tech tools better and asking which IT person would be best to contact about this idea. You have no idea. How do you answer?

Consider each student's answer on its merits. A good answer will include a polite explanation of the student employee's position and also some questions to clarify the skills the person is looking for. The person could point out that their current role does not allow much time to assess the skills of the other employees, but if the faculty member could reply with more specifics about what role they will want the IT person to take, what software/systems will need to be known, and what outcomes they expect, then that information would be helpful in talking with the team (and any supervisors) to select the best person for the task.

b. You're the chair of the employee volunteerism committee at your workplace. After three years in this role, you're ready to step down. At your latest meeting, one of the committee members eagerly volunteered to be the next chair. The thing is, this person actually hasn't done much of the work, and you suspect that he wants the job just to make himself look good to the company's leaders. You didn't say anything right then, but now the HR director, in whose area this committee falls, has come to your desk to ask if the person who wants the job should be appointed to it. What do you say?

Consider each student's answer on its merits. Some students might suggest a bold response—just being honest about their opinions of the person. However, the assessment of the potential chair's motives cannot necessarily be verified. A better response might be to stick to the facts: explain that the potential chair has not been present for much of the work of the committee, and therefore may not understand the time commitment and responsibilities involved. The HR director might

want to go over the chair job description with the person to be sure they agree to and will be present for all the required activities.

c. You recently served on a team that prepared an important proposal for your company. During the presentation of the proposal to management, one of your teammates indicated that she had done most of the work, when in fact she had done very little compared to you. Do you say or do anything in response or just let it slide?

Students may suggest a few possible approaches here. One could be to confront the person directly and suggest they apologize to the team for taking the credit. But that could result in strained relations and more bad feelings, especially if the person won't agree. One could be to simply ignore the behavior, but that could also result in strained relations—particularly if others on the team are irritated with their coworker. Another proactive response could be to send out an email memo to the team, thanking each member for the specific work they did, and copy management on that memo. That corrects the misinformation in a trackable yet understated way, and does not directly contradict the other teammate's words.

d. You've had a long, successful relationship with the supplier of some of the materials that your company uses in its products. The company is reliable, and the quality of their products is solid. But the sales rep you usually dealt with at this company was recently replaced by someone who isn't very pleasant. She seems to regard each phone call or email from you as an annoyance and is quick to become defensive when you call any little issue to her attention. What, if anything, would you do about this situation?

Students' answers should include acknowledgment of the skills needed to deal with this problem. First, the employee needs to understand the sales rep as a member of their team in these negotiations—the two of them need to work well together in order to complete their transactions in an effective manner. The employee will need to use his or her interpretive skills and social intelligence to consider the other person's point of view: the sales rep has been put into a new position—she may feel pressure to prove herself in this new role. Perhaps management is putting pressure on the sales reps to handle deals more quickly. The employee should not stop pointing out issues or asking questions—his or her first responsibility is to make sure the company gets the materials it needs. But the employee could call the sales rep to touch base, acknowledging the new business relationship, and ask what the employee could do to help with these transactions or whether the sales rep has a preferred way of being notified about issues or questions that may arise.

- 6. Find two websites of companies in the same industry—for example, two manufacturers of household products or two wireless service providers. Using the evidence presented on their websites, compare their company cultures. Look at their stated mission (if any), their history (if provided), the gender and qualifications of their personnel (if given), their employee benefits, their information for job applicants, their information for investors, the company image projected by the visual elements on the site—anything that suggests who they are or who they want you to think they are. Write up your comparison in a well-organized, well-supported message to your instructor. (LO7)**

This is a simple but educational research project. You might ask students to attach sample web pages from the company to support their observations.

7. After noticing that some workers were starting work late and finishing early, a department head wrote this message to subordinates:

It is apparent that many of you are not giving the company a full day's work. Thus, the following procedures are implemented immediately:

- a. After you clock in, you will proceed to your workstations and will be ready to begin work promptly at the start of the work period.
- b. You will not take a coffee break or consume coffee on the job at the beginning of the work period. You will wait until your designated break times.
- c. You will not participate in social gatherings at any time during the workday except during designated break periods.
- d. You will terminate work activities no earlier than 10 minutes prior to the end of the work period. You will use the 10 minutes to put up equipment, clean equipment, and police the work area.
- e. You will not queue up at the exit prior to the end of the work period.

The message was not well received by the workers. In fact, it led to considerable anger and confusion. Using the discussion of communication planning in this chapter, explain where the department head's problem-solving process went awry. What did he or she fail to take into account? (LO8, LO9)

It is easy to see why this message evoked negative reactions. In most minds, the negative language used here is associated with harsh, autocratic leadership—the kind most of us do not like. As will be explained in following chapters, such negative words create unpleasant mental images. In addition, the lecturing tone used throughout the document is insensitive or even insulting. Most people react negatively when people talk down to them. A much more diplomatic message would have resulted had the writer thought more carefully about what effects he/she really wanted to achieve (making people angry shouldn't be one of them), who would read the message, and how they would be likely to respond to various approaches and tones.

8. Find an article in the business press or general news about a recent incident involving a company—for example, a merger or acquisition, a scandal or crisis, or the launching of a new product. What kinds of communication challenges might this event have posed for the company, both internally and externally? What kinds of messages probably needed to be written, and to whom? (LO1-LO9)

This is a relatively easy research project that can get students thinking about the communication efforts—and challenges—involved in running a business.