KELLY M. **QUINTANILLA** • SHAWN T. **WAHL**

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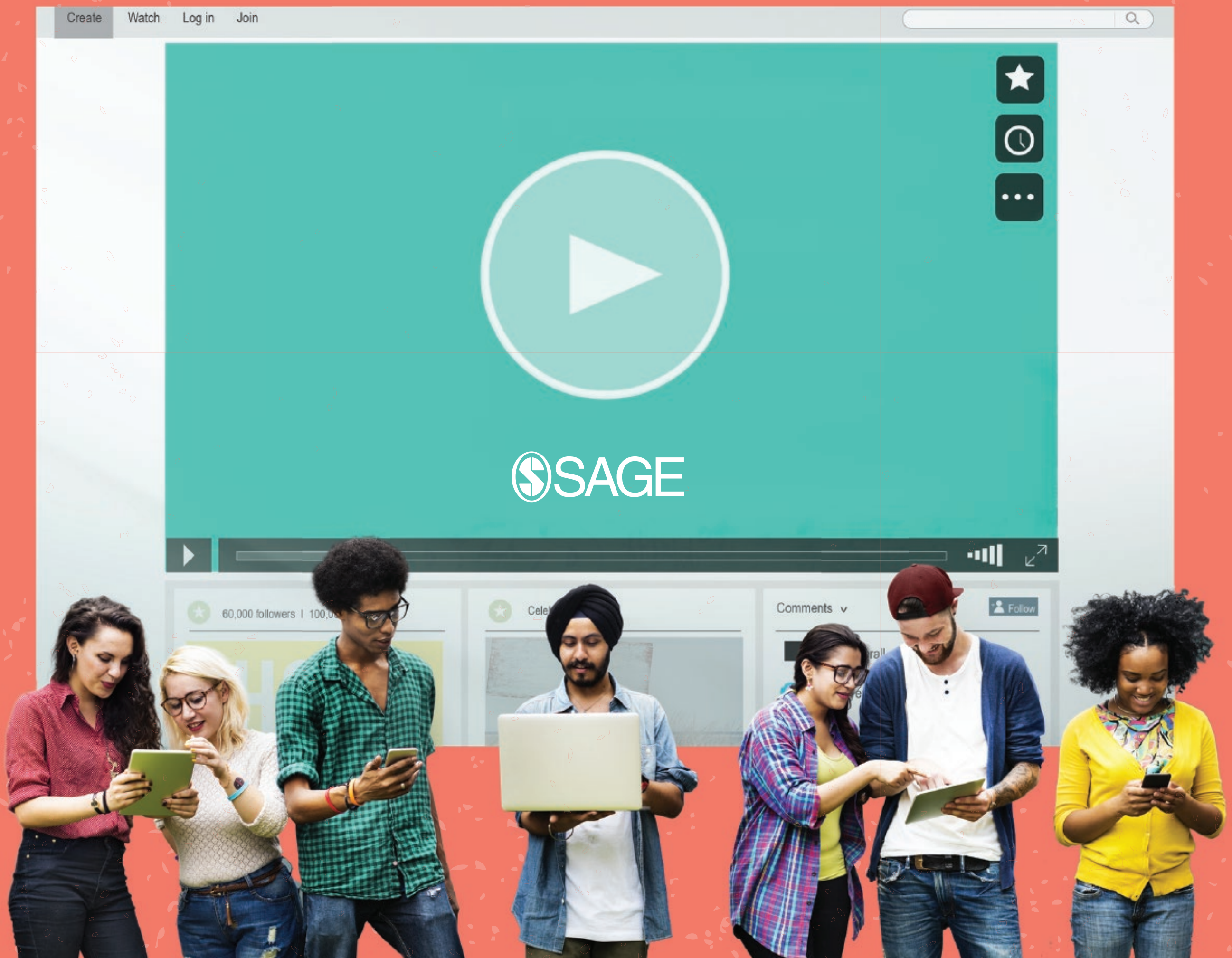
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BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Fourth Edition

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

KEYS for Workplace Excellence

Fourth Edition

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PREFACE

New look, new edition, a new journey for this book. We are thrilled to share the fourth edition with you!

As instructors, we must answer many questions when planning a business and professional communication course. First, we must address the broader conceptual questions, such as "What do we want our students to learn?" "How can this information be applied to their current and future professional lives?" "How can we make this material meaningful, useful, and interesting to students with a variety of professional goals and interests?" "How can all important information, skills, and competencies relevant to business and professional communication be covered in one term?"

Next, we must address the nuts-and-bolts questions that emerge about how to organize so much information and how to translate it into accessible language for students. Instructors often grapple with questions such as "Should I require both an individual and team presentation?" "How much time should I put in the schedule for mock interviews?" "How much attention should be given to résumé development?" "How can this course be delivered online?"

We considered many of the same questions and challenges as we made decisions about what content to cover in this text. **Our mission** in writing this book was to focus the research and competencies related to business and professional communication so that it can easily be covered in one term across delivery formats (e.g., traditional, online, hybrid). Further, we wanted to provide a book that speaks directly to the student as a developing professional by focusing on the actual experiences—from the job search to developing workplace relations to managing the challenges of coworker bullies, difficult clients, burnout, and the like. We also wanted to provide a text that is adaptable to a variety of instructional needs—for our colleagues who may need the flexibility to emphasize individual presentations and for others who may focus more on team presentations, not include oral communication at all, or deliver the course online. We recognize the diversity from one college or university to the next.

In response to our goal of focusing directly on the individual student experience related to the development of business and professional excellence, we developed an **organizing feature** (the KEYS process described below), which we believe will help instructors guide students and developing professionals in a variety of professional contexts. The KEYS process fosters the primary theme of this text—one that encourages students, regardless of industry or career, to strive for **professional excellence**. In this text, we provide 14 tightly focused chapters in which the best material—drawn from the research bases of communication, business, leadership, psychology, education, and other disciplines—is explored with relevance to the KEYS process. This book doesn't attempt to cover the entire business and professional world—we've made difficult choices regarding the content, based on our years of communication consulting in the business world, teaching communication in higher education, and experimenting with texts written by our friends and colleagues across the nation. What we ended up with represents the cutting-edge work in the field, including research from a variety of methods as well as popular literature, human resources, corporate consulting, and leadership coaching. **Our goal is to connect students across industries and academic disciplines to both theory and practice by applying information regarding business and professional communication directly to professional life *inside* and *outside* the workplace—without overwhelming them.**

We believe that one of the strengths of this text is that it addresses the challenges we face in today's workplace. In addition to our experience as teacher-scholars in communication, we have worked as consultants designing training and development programs for organizations in a variety of industries. While all these organizations face similar communication challenges, other textbooks merely mention the problems and rarely address solutions. *Business and Professional Communication: KEYS for Workplace Excellence* not only examines workplace problems (e.g., difficult people, negative impacts of technology, work–life balance, corporate health); it also provides students with a communication process that helps them solve problems and continue their professional journeys.

ORGANIZING FEATURE: KEYS FOR WORKPLACE EXCELLENCE

We believe that developing an organizing feature lends clarity to a textbook. Further, such a feature helps students apply material directly to their lives. The **organizing feature** running throughout the text is KEYS, a process designed to develop students' critical thinking skills and make them more reflexive communicators with the ability to adapt and continually improve.

The KEYS process includes the following four phases: **K**now yourself, **E**valuate the professional context, **Y**our communication interaction, and **S**tep back and reflect.

Know yourself: Challenging students to actively assess their skills as communicators and then develop strategies to utilize their strengths and develop their weaknesses

Evaluate the professional context: Teaching students to proactively address the needs of their audience and understand the constraints of the professional communication context, as well as developing their skills for communicating with a variety of audiences and contexts

Your communication interaction: Asking students to monitor their own verbal and nonverbal communication in addition to the audience within each interaction

Step back and reflect: Examining the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal messages students convey to others and the overall success of various communication interactions and then taking what they've learned and starting the KEYS process again; developing the ability to continually adapt and improve using a personalized communication inventory

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK: STRATEGIES FOR EXCELLING IN THE WORKPLACE AT EVERY STAGE

The book is organized into five distinct parts. Part I provides an overview of the foundations and key concepts important to the study of business and professional communication and introduces students to central principles related to verbal and nonverbal communication and listening. The next four parts correspond with the stages of experience that come with entering the workplace for the first time, receiving a promotion, or changing careers. **Each chapter includes cutting-edge research, skills, and tips that will help students to advance in the workplace at every stage of their career by honing their communication skills.** Throughout the text, we connect important issues such as cultural diversity, cultural competence, mutual respect, gender, ethnicity and race, religion, people with disabilities, and more to the business and professional context. With each phase of development, students will gain interpersonal competency, enhance their organizational ability, and refine their presentational skills. The final stage of experience, Part V, *Surviving in the Workplace*, encourages students to develop strategies for balancing work and life through communication, a topic not covered in most business and professional communication textbooks.

Features of the Textbook

We provide several unique pedagogical features to help students understand and apply the concepts and theories introduced in the text. The features help reinforce the book's themes and promote critical thinking in readers.

- **Chapter Outlines** detail the organization of each chapter, while **Chapter Objectives** help students prioritize information so that they can learn more efficiently.
- An **opening chapter narrative** connects students to the primary chapter content—a brief example of real-world stories to gain attention from readers as they move into a new topic. In all chapters, opening chapter narratives are ripped-from-the-headlines news stories representing actual events and real experiences across business and professional contexts.
- Themes from the narratives appear throughout each chapter and are applied to and evaluated with the KEYS feature in a summary section, called **KEYS for Excellence in the Workplace**, that appears at the end of each chapter.
- The KEYS organizing theme is also highlighted in four distinct instructional features: **Know Yourself** features self-assessments and inventories for readers to hone their communication skills; **Evaluate the Professional Context** encourages application of knowledge to a variety of professional contexts and situations; **Your Communication Interaction** focuses on making competent communication choices and selecting the appropriate communication channel from calling a face-to-face meeting to using social media and technology; and **Step Back and Reflect** presents challenges and dilemmas in business and professional contexts, promoting analysis of what went wrong in specific

business and professional situations. All boxed features contain discussion questions to promote critical thinking and classroom discussion.

- Communication ethics is emphasized in all chapters with a feature called **Ethical Connection**, which connects the topic to an ethical perspective—because it's the foundation of business and professional excellence.
- All chapters also include a feature called **Executive Summary**, designed to promote reading comprehension and serve as a guide to help connect chapter concepts to the chapter objectives.
- We include **Discussion Questions** that instructors may use as a means of generating class discussions about chapter content, as actual assignments, or as thought-provokers for students to consider on their own time.
- Complete **References** to the research base cited within the text appear at the end of the book. Students may find these references useful as they prepare assignments and/or conduct their own research projects. Instructors may use the references to gather additional material for their own research or to supplement instruction.
- **New Tools for Professional Excellence** feature focuses on communication skills development, career tips, and practical strategies for contexts related to business and professional communication, social media, and technology.
- **New Action Items** feature encourages students to apply chapter content to business and professional communication skills and contexts.

New to This Edition

- **New chapter-opening narratives** introduce each chapter with a contemporary example drawn from the real world.
- **Revised Executive Summary** concisely reviews key concepts and skills at the end of every chapter.
- **New Explore questions** encourage students to research and evaluate real-world industries, career opportunities, workplace challenges, and more.
- **New Review questions** are included in every chapter as a learning tool to support mastery of chapter content.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

SAGE edge™

Additional ancillary materials further support and enhance the learning goals of *Business and Professional Communication: KEYS for Workplace Excellence*, Fourth Edition; please log on to **http://edge.sagepub.com/quintanilla4e**.

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SAGE edge for Students provides a personalized approach to help students accomplish their coursework goals in an easy-to-use learning environment.

- **Multimedia content** includes original SAGE videos that appeal to students with different learning styles.
- Mobile-friendly **eFlashcards** strengthen understanding of key terms and concepts.
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- Chapter-specific **learning objectives** reinforce the most important material.
- Access is provided to full-text **SAGE journal articles** that have been carefully selected to support and expand on the concepts presented in each chapter.

SAGE edge for Instructors supports teaching by making it easy to integrate quality content and create a rich learning environment for students.

- **Test banks** provide a diverse range of prewritten options as well as the opportunity to edit any question and/or insert personalized questions to effectively assess students' progress and understanding.
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- Editable, chapter-specific **PowerPoint® slides** offer complete flexibility for creating a multimedia presentation for the course.
- **Lecture notes** summarize key concepts by chapter to ease preparation for lectures and class discussions.
- **Tables and figures** from the book are available in an easily downloadable format for use in papers, handouts, and presentations.
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- **Chapter exercises** for individual or group projects provide lively and stimulating ideas for use in and out of class to reinforce active learning.
- **Video and multimedia links** include original SAGE videos that appeal to students with different learning styles.
- A **course cartridge** provides easy LMS integration.

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INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS

Let us introduce ourselves as your coauthors. We approach this project with years of experience teaching basic communication courses such as public speaking, business and professional communication, interviewing, teamwork and leadership, organizational communication, and public relations. Balanced with our teaching experience and expert knowledge in the communication field are years of professional consulting and real-world experience in a variety of industries, including retail, manufacturing, shipping, health care, government, education, and more. We know firsthand the communication challenges you will face and the communication skills you will need to succeed. Based on our teaching and professional experience, we wrote this book for you, the student as a developing professional.

When designing this text, we talked to professors and students alike, trying to get a sense of their needs. Two themes emerged from those conversations. First, instructors and professors are frustrated because students do not read their books. As a result, class discussions, exam scores, and student learning suffer. On the flip side, students are frustrated because they find most books extremely expensive and full of information they deem unimportant. Repeatedly, students asked, “Why can’t professors just put the stuff I need to know on a PowerPoint slide?” Our goal when writing this text is to address both problems/needs. We have tried to develop a text that speaks directly to you as a student who desires success after graduation. We realize that those of you taking this class and reading this text are interested in different professions and are in different stages of your professional lives. Given the array of professional journeys taking place in the lives of you, the readers, we have included topics that will be valuable to everyone. The topic areas of the text will focus on *beginning communication principles, entering the workplace, developing in the workplace, excelling in the workplace, presenting in the workplace,* and *surviving in the workplace*. We explore the experiences you will face as you transition from student to professional and, eventually, to leader. You will come to understand the role of communication in successfully handling situations such as interviewing for jobs, providing feedback to supervisors, and working in teams. As an additional feature, this text not only discusses the greatest challenges we all face in the modern workplace but also provides communication strategies for overcoming those challenges. Issues such as excelling under the pressure of increasingly competitive customer service demands, managing emotions when dealing with irate customers, overcoming stress and burnout, and managing difficult people are just a few of the topics covered. We hope that this approach will engage you as both a student and a reader.

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When you hear the word *professional*, who or what comes to mind? Do a suit and a tie equate to professional excellence, or is it something more?

WHAT IS BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION?

Although many of these subjects will be expanded upon in later chapters, these are some of the core principles that will set the foundation for your study of business and professional communication.

Interviewing

Obviously, your first step into the business world will involve landing a job. *Interviewing* is the process of making yourself available to employers in a formal setting and in the best possible light. Although the main goal of interviewing is to get a job, it also gives you the opportunity to determine whether the particular job is right for you. Interviewing is a two-way street; you should also use this time to make sure that an organization meets your needs as a professional and that the organizational culture will allow you to thrive. Knowing how to prepare for an interview, anticipating questions, dressing appropriately, providing credible and effective answers, and following up after an interview are all critical aspects of being a competent interview participant.

Relational Communication

Although you may be an effective communicator in interpersonal settings, you need to know how to apply relational communication to the business and professional world. Communication initiation, maintenance, and even disengagement are all necessary skills to possess for workplace relationships. You will be tasked with forming effective relationships with your coworkers, supervisors, customers, vendors, and subordinates. Much of your communication will challenge you to balance small talk, self-disclosure, task delegation, and many other functions that are essential in the workplace. Also, when business relationships turn sour or costly, you must know how to end the relationship with minimal tension and negative consequences.

Mediated Communication

The new media have opened numerous new channels for communication professionals. Computer-mediated communication offers convenience and timely access to pertinent information, and it connects communicators across the globe via screen taps and mouse clicks. However, as a communication professional, you must be aware of the inherent drawbacks of mediated communication. Be aware that traditional public speaking skills don't always translate as effectively (e.g., video or telephone conferences) and must be altered to fit the situation at hand.

Presentational Speaking

Public speaking is one of the most feared—but also most important—functions of business and professional communication. This textbook will introduce you to various types of business presentations, including informative, persuasive, and public presentations. You will learn how to research and prepare your presentation, how to analyze your audience (as well as who your *target* audience should be), and how to create memorable and effective introductions and conclusions that will stick in the mind of your audience. You will learn about the balance of having excellent content while also delivering it to the audience in an engaging way. Also, you will learn about many of the multimedia presentation aids available to you, as well as when (and if) visual aids are appropriate for your presentation.

Written Documents

Effective professional communication asks you to be not only a great communicator and speaker, but also an effective writer. Although the type of written communication you engage in can vary greatly depending on your profession, there are certain universal skills you should always have. You must know how to structure the information, select the right style/tone/language, and determine what length is appropriate to cover all the important information while also being short enough to keep the readers' attention. You must learn how to cultivate and maintain credibility, and use appropriate grammar and punctuation to emphasize professionalism. This may seem like a daunting to-do list, but through study and practice you will be able to create professional, engaging, and effective written communication for your business or organization.

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE IN CONTEXT

The text's driving theme is **professional excellence**. To demonstrate excellence as a professional, you must demonstrate excellence as a communicator. Excellence does not equate to merely communicating a message effectively or simply demonstrating communication competencies. Professional excellence means being recognized for your skills as a communicator and serving as a role model to others. Before you begin your journey with this important topic, it is important to understand some fundamental areas of communication, such as verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and listening. Additionally, it's important to understand the business and professional contexts that will receive specific attention in this book. The business and professional contexts you will explore are beginning communication principles (i.e., verbal and nonverbal communication, listening), the job-seeking process, workplace culture and diversity, interpersonal communication, team communication, communication and technology, written communication, leadership, presenting as a professional, and work–life balance. These are the contexts that will no doubt shape your experience as a professional. Keep in mind that communication is at the core of the business and professional contexts you will study in this course. Let's take a look at each one in more detail.

KNOPE WINS!
Phase 27
Phase 35
Phase 34
LESLIE KNOPE

Colleen Hayes/NBCUniversal/Getty Images

Professional excellence in the workplace is depicted in a variety of movies and popular television sitcoms. Do you think shows like *Parks and Recreation* that feature characters like Amy Poehler as Leslie Knope (pictured here) truly reflect what is experienced in business and professional contexts?

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The handshake is an important example of nonverbal communication experienced in many business and professional situations.

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Chapter 2 explores the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication as the foundation of beginning principles needed to guide your study of business and professional communication across contexts. Verbal communication is both our words and our verbal fillers (e.g., *um*, *like*). Verbal messages are created through language. Effective communication involves accurate interpretations of others' verbal messages as meaning is cocreated. Further, nonverbal communication (sometimes referred to as body language) includes all those ways we communicate without words.

Listening

Chapter 3 connects listening to your study of business and professional communication. Effective listening is central to fostering interpersonal relationships with coworkers, leaders, and clients. Effective listening can impact one's relationship satisfaction and can be a determining factor in whether someone is an effective communicator. Listening, in addition to other communication abilities, is a likely predictor of who gets promoted or who receives other relevant rewards such as status and power. In all, listening is a beginning communication skill or basic principle important to your study of business and professional communication. You will learn the importance of listening across business and professional contexts using the KEYS process.

Résumés, Interviews, and Negotiation

The context you will study in Chapter 4 is job seeking. Our approach is to provide the information you'll need to conduct a comprehensive job search and know yourself in terms of professional goals and the type of work environment you desire. Job seeking is one context in which business and professional excellence is critical to your success.

Getting to Know Your Diverse Workplace

Once you've landed the job, you'll enter a diverse workplace context. You will no doubt have coworkers whose views of the world and ways of living are different from yours. Further, it can take time to learn the organizational culture in terms of your role and how you fit in. As Chapter 5 explores, getting to know your diverse workplace goes beyond new employee orientation. The diverse workplace context requires professional excellence fostered by cultural competence, perception checking, and mutual respect.

Interpersonal Communication at Work

Central to your personal and professional growth in any career are the relationships and overall rapport you'll have with your boss, coworkers, and clients. Chapter 6 reviews the importance of **interpersonal communication** in common business and professional encounters. Interpersonal communication (also referred to as people skills) helps you build relationships in your personal and professional life, but these skills also can help you to survive many challenges (e.g., conflict, difficult coworkers and clients).

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Where would you begin to search for jobs in the industry or profession in which you're interested?

Strengthening Teams and Conducting Meetings

Another common experience for professionals across industries is working in a team context. You've probably heard other people use terms such as *team player*, *team skills*, and *team building* in reference to job performance. Working in a team context can be both a rewarding and an exhausting experience for any professional. Chapter 7 pays specific attention to the team context you'll likely encounter in your professional life, as well as strategies that foster professional excellence in team communication. This chapter also focuses on the skills needed to run effective meetings, a primary tool for team communication.

Technology in the Workplace

Technology in business and professional contexts is central to communication, planning, marketing, networking, organization, research, and the like. Technology allows you to communicate faster than in years past with the use of email, personal digital assistants, and a host of other devices designed to make the exchange of information in business instant rather than delayed. Chapter 8 examines the impact of communication and technology on business and professional contexts, including the role of social media as a professional tool and a professional barrier. As technology enables you to excel at work with faster information exchange and interaction, it's important to be aware of the problems and misunderstandings that can occur as the result of various technology-based communication channels.

Business and Professional Writing

Chapter 9 examines written communication as it connects to professional excellence. As you enter business and professional contexts that require you to use written communication, it is important for you to make decisions that will ensure professional excellence. Written communication can challenge professionals in a variety of contexts. How do I select the correct format to get the message out? Is it appropriate for me to send this document via email? What tone should I strive for in this message? These are only a few of the questions about written communication that you may encounter in your career.

Leadership and Conflict Management

Chapter 10 reviews the role of leadership in business and professional contexts. In order to excel as a leader, you must understand what leadership is and get to know what style of leader you are and if your style works best in the business and professional context in which you're working. Further, this chapter explores the challenges leaders experience, as well as strategies for leading difficult people and managing workplace conflict.

Presentations

As a professional, you will enter situations that require you to give presentations. The presentation context arises in many forms (e.g., informative, persuasive, motivational, team). Chapters 11, 12, and 13 explore the presentation skills essential to your professional success. When you're faced with an opportunity to give a formal presentation, pitch a product, present research findings, run a meeting, conduct a morning huddle, acknowledge outstanding employees, or motivate your team in difficult times, view that speaking situation as a chance to communicate professional excellence.

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As much as anyone wants to be successful professionally, it's important to think about personal and family life, too. Unfortunately, maintaining balance can be difficult.

Work–Life Balance

Chapter 14 looks at how the various experiences in your professional and personal life can be in conflict with one another. This tension can present quite a challenge, which can lead to stress and burnout. We emphasize the importance of work–life balance, explore the triggers that cause imbalance, and present communication strategies that enable you to sustain professional excellence and foster meaningful and successful relationships in your personal life.

Present in each of these contexts is the KEYS process.

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PART I

Beginning Communication Principles

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TWTR
LISTED
NYSE

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1

Business and Professional Excellence in the Workplace

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

1. Define professional excellence and communication
2. Identify business and professional communication contexts
3. Identify the four KEYS to communication in the workplace
4. Discuss the importance of human communication in business and professional contexts
5. Explain the components of the communication model
6. Describe the communication challenges posed by social media and technology
7. Identify the types and causes of communication apprehension
8. Discuss communication and professional excellence from an ethical perspective

Chapter Outline

Understanding the Importance of Human Communication in Business and Professional Contexts **4**

Communication: A Complex Process **6**

Communication Apprehension **10**

Communication Ethics **13**

KEYS for Excellence in the Workplace **14**

Communication has increasingly become a cornerstone of professional excellence in the workplace. The popular social networking website Twitter embodies both communication and **professional excellence**; its entire platform relies on the drive for communication while requiring a level of professionalism to make the company profitable. Below we take a look at how Twitter incorporates these two ideals.

- *What it does:* Twitter is a global online information network that allows users to share content and conversations in real time. The company has more than 330 million monthly active users who create approximately 500 million tweets every day (Aslam, 2018). This amount of traffic requires an effective and motivated team of employees to manage.
- *Challenges:* An anonymous survey conducted by Great Rated! indicated that 87% of employees reported that the company often or almost always provided training, fair promotions, and personally challenging work; and 88% of employees felt that Twitter offered more than just a job, but also the opportunity to develop a worldwide forum of communication that creates special meaning.
- *Atmosphere:* The majority of Twitter employees report enjoying their colleagues and find the workplace to be cooperative and fun. Professional excellence requires employees to work fluidly with one another, thus minimizing miscommunication and conflict.
- *Rewards:* 85% of employees reported that Twitter supports their work–life balance and compensates them fairly. Feeling essential to company success is a great motivator to encourage employees to strive for professional excellence.

Reading about employee feedback concerning Twitter may have you motivated to find a career devoted to such positive professional excellence. However, successfully applying to and being accepted at such an organization is no easy feat. You may ask yourself, "Will I be able to get an interview? Will I be considered for a promotion at work? Will I fit in at my new job? What's the best way to run a meeting? What are the qualities of a professional presentation? How should I respond to negative coworkers?" The preceding questions are commonly asked by people entering the workplace for the first time, as well as by people changing job titles, duties, or careers. It seems that regardless of the position or the industry in which you desire to work, there is one thing that will make or break the experience: communication. So welcome to the world of business and professional communication. As you study business and professional communication over the course of this semester, we encourage you, regardless of your major, to take these principles and objectives to heart. After all, communication is the key to professional excellence, and professional excellence is the key to success.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS

As you begin your study, it's important to define what communication means. Communication has been defined in many ways, but here's the definition we prefer: **Human communication** is the process of understanding our experiences and the experiences of others through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages (Edwards, Edwards, Wahl, & Myers, 2016; Ivy & Wahl, 2014; Regenbogen et al., 2012). People come to understand that communication in everyday experiences is the essential process and skill that helps them make sense of things in both personal and professional contexts.

Even if you have some reservations about your communication skills, you probably consider yourself to be a good communicator and good listener. Most people do. After all, it's difficult to admit being bad at something you do all day, every day, for your entire life. Because communication is so much a part of our everyday lives, we think of communication as a simple process. Communicating comes so naturally to us that we rarely feel the need to give communication a second thought. When was the last time you really stopped and examined your communication skills? Do you stop and examine your communication regularly? Most people don't.

In some cases, people who fail to reflect on their communication skills trudge through life thinking they are great communicators when they are, in actuality, dreadful communicators. They exemplify a behavior called **communication bravado**—perceiving their communication as effective, while those around them perceive it as ineffective (Quintanilla & Mallard, 2008). Ineffective communicators view communication as simply talking—but truly effective communicators know it is far more complicated than that.

Do you take your communication skills for granted? Are you suffering from communication bravado? Let us assure you that you do indeed have some weaknesses in your communication and listening, simply because everyone does. However, understanding why communication is important and how the communication process works is the first step in overcoming those weaknesses and starting on the road to professional excellence.

In addition, there are several important ways in which the key areas of human communication as a whole influence and are essential for effective communication in the workplace.

Role-Taking

The critical functions of human communication (sending and receiving messages, offering feedback, identifying the "role" of different communicators) must also be applied to the context of business communication. For example, car salespeople must basically give sales "presentations" to any potential buyers who visit their car lot. Much of their success is determined by how well they can tailor their message depending on the individual needs of many different customers. If customers give verbal or nonverbal cues expressing concern about the fuel efficiency of their prospective vehicle, the salesperson must modify the message to emphasize each car's gas mileage as a major selling point. This dynamic aspect of role-taking and feedback keeps the transaction flowing.

Previous Communication Experiences

The way people respond initially to new business transactions depends greatly on their previous communication experiences in similar situations. Using the previous example, have you experienced buying a new vehicle or making another major purchase (house, major appliance, business)? Depending on whether that experience was positive or negative, it helps form the basis for how you communicate in similar transactions in the future. Therefore, from a business standpoint, your initial communication impression is of critical importance.

Communication Channels

Depending on your physical location, your communication approach can alter significantly (Ivy & Wahl, 2014). For example, your communication with a classmate will likely be much more informal than your communication with a professor. Similarly,

ACTION ITEMS

Communication Excellence in the Workplace

Skill	Strategy	Application
Sales	Allow online shopping for customers.	Retail outlet Target allows customers to order in-store items from home for added convenience.
Customer service	Use social media to reach out directly to consumers.	Electronics retailer Best Buy responds directly to customer concerns and complaints via its Facebook and Twitter pages.
Public relations	Use nontraditional media platforms to reach the target audience.	Fast-food corporation McDonald's uses a YouTube channel to show customers exactly how its products are made.

the channel of communication can also affect communication. Many people feel comfortable taking a more aggressive or assertive tone when using email than when engaging in face-to-face communication.

Cultural Influences

The way we communicate, with whom we communicate, and what we communicate are almost always influenced by culture (Wahl & Scholl, 2014). Culture is an ongoing social institution that has its own set of behavioral rules. For our discussion, *organizational culture* influences how we (as members of a business or professional organization) frame our communication with others both within and outside that organization. For example, the communication that takes place in a board meeting of lawyers will feature a different set of decorum, rules, and *norms* when compared with a brainstorming session among creative writers for a small company. To be a competent communicator in your organization, you must be dynamic in adhering to the rules and norms of different communication situations.

Communication Relationships

The perceived social hierarchy between communicators, whether they be strangers or intimates, significantly influences the nature of the communication interaction. The way you communicate with a customer would differ from the way you communicate with a coworker, which would also differ from how you communicate with your supervisor. Organizational structures require that you be fluid in switching your communication strategies depending on your relationship with the other communicator(s). This includes not only your initial communication, but also the type of feedback you give and the amount of appropriate self-disclosure the sender and receiver provide one another.

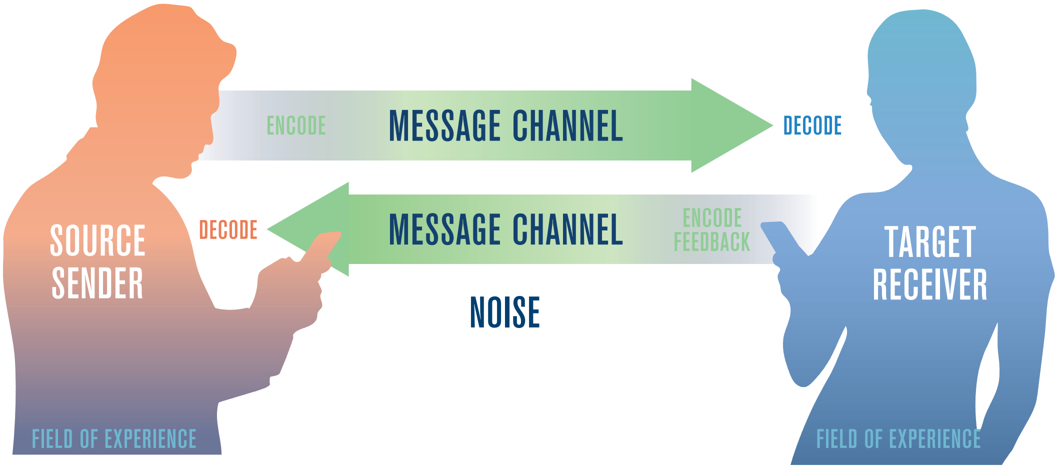
Regardless of your major or the career path you eventually follow, effective communication will be essential to your success in the workplace (Gray, 2010). For instance, effective communication has been shown to affect employee engagement and workplace relationships (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015). Your fellow students understand the value and importance of communication in their careers. Of 116 students surveyed at a southwestern university, 97% agreed that communication is a valuable skill, and 88% saw themselves using oral presentation skills in their careers (Mallard & Quintanilla, 2007). Further support for the importance of communication in your professional careers comes from business and industry focus groups. You'll notice that all the competencies listed in the "Tools for Professional Excellence" box are connected to your study of business and professional communication in this course.

COMMUNICATION: A COMPLEX PROCESS

Communication is a complex process that consists of a number of elements, all of which are in play every time you communicate (see Figure 1.1). Those who demonstrate professional excellence consider these elements every time they communicate. By the end of this semester, so will you. Let's examine each of these elements in more detail.

FIGURE 1.1

Interaction Model of Commmunication



Sender and Receiver

We stated earlier that, speaking practically, communication involves sending and receiving messages. So it should be no surprise that you take on the roles of sender and receiver when you communicate. When you are acting as the sender, you **encode** your messages with verbal and nonverbal cues to help others understand what you mean. When the receivers of your messages respond or **decode** your message, you find out if your message was successfully transferred. In one sense, this exchange of message and response is a cocreation of meaning, in that both parties play a role in cocreating a meaningful exchange. Although the person initiating the exchange (the **sender**) can't control how the listener (or **receiver**) interprets the message, the goal is for the listener to understand the meaning of the message as the sender intended it.

The respective roles of sender and receiver in communication seem fairly clear-cut, but in truth, communication is experienced in a more holistic manner—not as senders and receivers but as communicators. Consider an example: You run into a friend, Pat, while walking to class. Pat says, "Hey, how's it going?" You return the greeting and begin to tell Pat about your plans for the weekend (you are attending a cousin's wedding). At some point during the story you are telling (how your cousin met her fiancé), you notice Pat checking his wristwatch. You cut off your story and say goodbye, and each of you walks to class. In one view of this example, you and Pat switch off as senders and receivers: Pat sends you a greeting, which you receive; you send Pat an explanation of your weekend plans and a story, which Pat receives; then Pat sends you a nonverbal cue that time is short, which you receive by ending the encounter. In another view of this example, you and Pat are both communicators, as you simultaneously send and receive messages.

TOOLS FOR PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE 1.1

Skills You Need for Your Career (based on a 2015 Bloomberg survey of job recruiters)

When thinking about your future career path, consider the skills and attributes that recruiters really desire:

Desirability	Skills and Competencies
More Common/Less Desired	• Initiative/risk-taking • Decision making • Global mindset • Entrepreneurship • Quantitative skills • Motivation/drive
Less Common/Less Desired	• Industry-related work experience • Adaptability
Less Common/More Desired	• Strategic thinking • Creative problem solving • Leadership skills • Communication skills
More Common/More Desired	• Analytical thinking • Ability to work collaboratively

Source: Levy, F., & Rodkin, J. (2015). The Bloomberg recruiter report: Job skills companies want but can't get. *Bloomberg*. Adapted from http://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2015-job-skills-report

Message and Feedback

Implicit in the preceding discussion of senders and receivers is that a **message** is communicated. One principle from the field of communication suggests that you cannot *not* communicate.

To say that you cannot *not* communicate is *not* to say that everything is communication. Rather, it means that messages have both a verbal and a nonverbal component. In the previous example, Pat did not say anything verbally, but he did send a message nonverbally when he checked his watch. What was his message? That is not clear. He may have been giving a nonverbal cue that your wedding story was too long. He may have had an appointment and needed to be on his way. Only Pat knows for sure. The point is, regardless of whether or not Pat intended to provide a message, he did, and you responded in accordance with the meaning you took from that message.

Also included in the communication model is **feedback**. In the model, you will see that feedback is sent from the receiver to the sender. However, since the distinction between sender and receiver is in many ways arbitrary, feedback is the same as the message. The notion of feedback reminds us, as communicators, to look for cues from the other person or persons with whom we are communicating.

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Professionals send and receive verbal and nonverbal messages in a variety of contexts.

Channel

The **channel** is simply the method by which you send your message. With all the technology available today, deciding which channel to use can be a daunting task. When you advance in your career and move into a leadership position, you'll have to evaluate the merits of various communication channels daily. Given the message, should you meet with members of your team one-on-one or call a meeting? Is it better to send a memo or an email? Should you call, or should you text? Each communication channel brings with it a variety of strengths and weaknesses that will be discussed in a later chapter.

Context

Always and everywhere, communication is contextual. **Context** refers to the location, time, and occasion where communication occurs. Developing professional excellence means beginning to assess your communication context and use that information when developing your message. For instance, consider the context of the business and professional communication course. Virtually everyone in the course is there because they have to be. As a result, if you give a speech in this course, your audience may not be interested in or knowledgeable about the topic you select; you might need to educate them and take conscious steps to capture their interest. However, if you are giving a speech to a group of employees about their cost-of-living and merit raises, they will be hanging on your every word.

Noise

Noise is part of the communication context. **Noise** can be either external or internal. **External noise** includes distractions such as audible talking during a meeting, ruffling of papers, or a cell phone going off in the next cubicle. For our purposes, the definition of external noise is extended to include any external factor that could interfere with a communicator's ability to focus on the message. In a meeting, external noise might also include a team member sending text messages with the sound on or whispering while your boss is talking.

Internal noise encompasses any internal condition or state that interferes with the communicator's ability to focus on the message. If your meeting starts at 11:00 a.m., your team members may be looking forward to lunch; if you hold an emergency meeting at 6:00 a.m., your team may be tired. Being hungry or tired creates internal noise. Developing professional excellence includes learning to consider things such as context and noise when making decisions about your communication