# CHAPTER 1

**Achieving Success through Effective Business Communication**

**CHAPTER OUTLINE**

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* What Employers Expect From You
* Characteristics of Effective Communication
* Communication in Organizational Settings

Understanding the Unique Challenges of Business Communication [pp. 11-15]

* I. The Globalization of Business and the Increase in Workforce Diversity
* II. The Evolution of Organizational Structures
* III. The Growing Reliance on Teamwork
* IV. The Increasing Value of Business Information
* V. The Pervasiveness of Technology
* VI. The Need for Increased Cybersecurity and Protection of Privacy
* Barriers to Effective Communication

Communicating More Effectively on the Job [pp. 16-21]

* Strategy 1: Improve Your Business Communications Skills
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* Distinguishing an Ethical Dilemma from an Ethical Lapse
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* Ensuring Legal Communication

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# LECTURE NOTES

**OBJECTIVE 1**

*Explain why effective communication is important to your success in today’s business environment.*

**Communication** is the process of transferring information from a sender to a receiver.

Communication is considered *effective* only when others

* Understand your message correctly
* Respond to your message in the way you want

Effective communication

* Helps you manage your workflow
* Improves business relationships
* Enhances your professional image

Effective communication also provides the following important benefits:

* Closer ties with important communities in the marketplace
* Opportunities to influence conversations, perceptions, and trends
* Increased productivity and faster problem solving
* Better financial results and higher return for investors
* Earlier warning of potential problems, from rising business costs to critical safety issues
* Stronger decision making based on timely, reliable information
* Clearer and more persuasive marketing messages
* Greater employee engagement with their work, leading to higher employee satisfaction and lower employee turnover

Effective communication connects an organization with all of its stakeholders.

**The Communication Process**

Senders and receivers connect through an eight-stage process:

* Sender has an idea
* Sender encodes the idea in a message
* Sender produces message in a medium
* Sender transmits message through channel
* Audience receives message
* Audience decodes message
* Audience responds to message
* Audience provides feedback to sender

# OBJECTIVE 2

*Identify eight communication skills that successful employers expect from their employees.*

1. Organize ideas and information logically and completely
2. Express and present information coherently and persuasively
3. Listen to others effectively
4. Communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences
5. Use communication technologies effectively and efficiently
6. Follow accepted standards of grammar, spelling, and other aspects of high- quality writing and speaking
7. Communicate in a civilized manner that reflects contemporary expectations of business etiquette
8. Communicate ethically, even when choices aren’t crystal clear

# OBJECTIVE 3

*Describe the five characteristics of effective business communication.*

Five characteristics of effective business communication:

1. Practical – provide practical information
2. Factual – give facts rather than impressions
3. Concise – present information in a concise, efficient manner
4. Clear – clarify expectations and responsibilities
5. Persuasive – offer compelling, cogent arguments and recommendations

# Communication in Organizational Settings

When you join an organization, you become a link in its information chain: you have information that others need, and they have information that you need.

**Internal communication** is the exchange of information and ideas within an organization. **External communication** is the exchange of information and ideas with those outside an organization. Such information travels over both formal and informal channels.

**Internal communication** is essential to the function of effective businesses.

Formal internal communication channels are defined by the official chain of command:

* Information flows up, down, and across the formal organization:
* Information flowing downward lets managers direct activities of employees
* Information flowing upward helps managers obtain information; solve problems; make intelligent decisions; and monitor emerging trends, opportunities for improvement, and performance.
* Information flowing horizontally from department to department or from peer to peer helps employees do their jobs more efficiently.

Informal internal communication (sometimes known as the grapevine):

* Encompasses all communication that occurs outside the formal network
* Can occur naturally from employee interactions or can result from employees not getting information they want or need
* Is used by intelligent managers to transmit and receive messages
* Helps employers to determine whether formal communications means are effective

While **External Communication** often occurs in a formal way,informal communication often helps organizations learn about customer needs and

* Often enters the organization through the employee, making the employee responsible for communicating it to their colleagues
* Often exits the firm through the employee, making the employee responsible for creating the right impression
* Often is enabled by business-oriented technical media, like LinkedIn, XING, and Ryze

# OBJECTIVE 4

*Discuss six factors that make business communication unique.*

**Globalization** affects the way businesses communicate, both at home and abroad:

* Encouraging businesses to cross national boundaries
* Diversifying the work force
* Requiring business people to understand the laws, customs, and business practices of many countries

**Organizational structures** are evolving, with flatter structures often allowing for more efficient communication. Moreover, independent of structure, successful organizations reflect a **corporate culture** that encourages open climates of freely flowing communication.

**The growing reliance on teamwork** affects the way businesses communicate: Successful teams can improve productivity, creativity, employee involvement, and job security.

**The value of business information** continues to grow. Valuable information includes

* Competitive insights
* Customer needs
* Regulations and guidelines

**Technology** has an influence over almost all aspects of business communication; it can help or hinder communication depending on how it’s designed and used.

**Cybersecurity and privacy protection** needs have increased as the cyber environment has evolved. While most Canadian businesses have been victims of cyber attacks, only a third of Canadian businesses are aware of measures to prevent them. Cybersecurity is not only a Canadian but also a global concern.

**The barriers to effective communication** include any interference in the communication process that distorts or obscures the sender’s meaning.

**Noise and distractions** interfere with communication. Distractions include physical distractions (bad connections, poor acoustics, illegible copy, uncomfortable chairs, poor lighting, health problems, etc.)

* Poor listening
* Emotions
* Multitasking

**Competing messages** can divide your audience’s attention causing information overload.

**Filters**, either intentional, such as auto file rules based on sender’s name, or unintentional, such as spam filters, can inhibit the flow of vital messages

**Perceptual differences** interfere with communication because of differences in personal, professional, and cultural differences

**Language differences** interfere with communication when two people define a given word or phrase differently

**Restrictive environments** interfere with communication. These environments result when

* Formal communication networks limit the flow of information in any direction
* Managers use a directive and authoritarian leadership style

**Deceptive tactics** interfere with communication and include illegal or unethical messages that

* + - * + Exaggerate
        + Present information inaccurately
        + Hide negative information
        + State opinions as fact
        + Leave out crucial information
        + Portray graphic data unfairly
        + Allow personal preferences to influence perception

# OBJECTIVE 5

*Describe five strategies for communicating more effectively on the job.*

Five ways to improve communication:

* Improve your business communication skills
* Minimize distractions
* Reduce noise
* Reduce visual clutter
* Reduce electronic and other interruptions
* Adopt an **audience-centred** approach
* Understand how audiences receive messages
* Consider audience expectations
* Ensure ease of use
* Emphasize familiarity
* Practise empathy
* Design for compatibility
* Understand how audiences decode messages
* Understand how audiences respond to messages
* Know as much as you can about your audience
* Make your feedback constructive
* Evaluate effectiveness
* Carefully think through changes
* Discuss improvements
* Focus on controllable behaviour
* Be specific
* Keep feedback impersonal
* Verify understanding
* Carefully time feedback
* Highlight feedback limitations
* Be sensitive to business etiquette

# OBJECTIVE 6

*Explain five strategies for using communication technology successfully.*

1. Understand the social communication model.
2. Keep technology in perspective.
3. Guard against information overload.
4. Use technological tools productively.
5. Reconnect with people frequently.

# OBJECTIVE 7

*Discuss the importance of ethics in business communication and differentiate between an ethical dilemma and an ethical lapse.*

**Ethics** are the accepted principles of conduct that govern behaviour within a society

# Ethical communication

* Includes all relevant information
* Is true in every sense
* Is not deceptive in any way

**Unethical communication** can include

* Plagiarism
* Information omission
* Selective misquoting
* Misrepresentation of numbers
* Distortion of visuals
* Lack of respect for personal privacy or information security needs.

An **ethical dilemma** involves choosing among alternatives that are not clear-cut:

* Two conflicting alternatives that are both ethical and valid
* Two alternatives that lie somewhere in the vast gray area between right and wrong

An **ethical lapse** involves making a clearly unethical (and possibly illegal) choice.

**Ensuring ethical business communications** requires three elements: ethical individuals, ethical company leadership, and appropriate policies and structures to support ethical choices (**code of ethics**)

Organizations often perform **ethics audits** to monitor ethical progress and to highlight ethical weaknesses needing to be addressed.

Questions to ask to test whether a message is ethical:

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

**Ensuring legal communication**: business communication is governed by a wide variety of laws and regulations, including the following areas:

* Promotional communication
* Contracts
* Employment communication
* Intellectual property (IP)
* Financial reporting
* Defamation
* Transparency requirements

# ON THE JOB SCENARIOS

Performing Communication Tasks at Wave Accounting

1. To build Wave Accounting’s positive relationships with its customers, the information should be distributed to customers by (a)
   1. Wave’s blog, which contains those customers and others that have opted in to hear more about Wave.
   2. Twitter may have greater numbers of viewers but these may not be actual customers.
   3. Facebook may allow more information to be posted but this added media richness may not be directed to actual Wave customers.
   4. The blog could also be supported with a notice send to all customers

via postal letter to reach those customers that do not yet follow the company’s blog. The Webinar could be used as a promotion to join for future updates.

1. The most ethical and effective approach would be (c)
   1. As a summer intern you will not likely be able to so easily discount the wishes of your supervisor.
   2. It is important to be honest and forthright in your communications with the intern, but a two-week deadline—especially with no course of action beyond that—may seem unusually harsh.
   3. While individuals often do have their own style of personal

communication, it is important to recognize that once they are at work they also represent the company, which may have a very different style. Where these styles differ, it is important to be clear about the expectations for each employee and then to allow each to redefine their own style *within* the company’s norm.

* 1. Similarly, with (a) above, as an intern it is likely unwise to ignore the request of your supervisor.

1. The first action to respond to the Twitter complaint should be (d)
   1. A notice on Twitter may encourage a continued dialogue on this very public forum. Complaints should be handled quickly and discreetly.
   2. Complaining to Twitter about your disgruntled customer will not solve the problem and may actually make it worse if the person finds out.
   3. Complaining online to others that are unconnected to the case is an

invitation for future retaliation.

* 1. The unhappy customer wants satisfaction first and foremost. You need to effectively deal with the complaint and do it in a less public forum to minimize collateral damage to your company’s reputation.

# END-OF-CHAPTER EXERCISES

Test Your Knowledge

1. Stakeholders: the groups that your company affects in some way and who themselves have some influence on your company (p. 2); stakeholders play a pivotal role in the success or failure of a company.
2. Increased globalization requires employers and their employees to understand the laws, customs, and business practices of the countries with which they do business. The companies that understand and celebrate the increasing diversity of stakeholders are likely to have a competitive advantage in the marketplace. (p. 11-12)
3. Technology is of little use to a business if it is not understood; in fact, technology has as much potential to impede communication as it does to enhance it. Remembering that, regardless of the technological tool, effective communication is practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive will help employees to interact with customers and colleagues. (pp. 5,13)
4. Internal communication is any communication that happens within the business organization. External communication is the exchange of information or ideas outside of the organization. (p. 8)
5. Downward, Upward, and Horizontal (pp. 9-10)
6. Grapevine: an informal internal communication network, casual conversations amongst employees (p. 10)
7. Encoding = step 2; Decoding = step 6
8. An audience wants to know “what’s in it for me”; therefore, keeping the audience’s needs in mind helps the communicator to structure the message so that it will be understood and complied with. (p. 17)
9. A corporate culture that values respect, courtesy, and common sense will facilitate internal and external communication that reflects these norms. (p. 12)
10. Ethics are the accepted principles of conduct that govern behaviour in society and in business. Business communicators have a responsibility to think through not only what they say or write, but also what the consequences of that communication might be. (p. 24)

Apply Your Knowledge

1. Employees who feel respected and who likewise respect others in the company are more likely to have an attitude that promotes performance. Good communication helps employees feel that they are a part of the business process. They feel supported in their efforts and rewarded for their accomplishments. They believe their comments, suggestions, and problems will receive fair consideration, so any problems among co-workers are quickly and easily resolved. Knowing the company’s objectives and having clear instructions on how to accomplish their tasks makes employees confident in their work.
2. Limiting feedback makes sense when time is short, when the audience is large and diverse, and when maintaining control is important. Say that you’re a professor trying to cover 500 years of history in one semester. As you plan your lectures, you have to make a trade-off between covering basic information and responding to students’ comments and questions. The more time that you allow for student participation and feedback, the less time you have to cover the major points. If you have a small class—say 20 students—you can probably permit a discussion-oriented atmosphere that opens up opportunities for feedback. But if you have 150 students, all of whom want to participate, feedback becomes more of a problem, especially since some students are sure to raise points that are of no interest to the rest of the class.
3. Written messages are more susceptible to noise than spoken messages because the sender has little control over the environment in which the receiver gets the message. The writer is rarely present when the reader picks up the document and begins to read. A speaker, on the other hand, is present when communication occurs; he or she has a chance to notice the interference and remove the source of the noise.
4. Of course, you can always tell employees that it’s important to include all information in messages, even when it’s negative. But your actions actually speak louder than your words. Employees will pick up on the way you yourself receive and handle the negative information they convey—whether or not it’s “safe” to relate negative information, whether their jobs might be in jeopardy, or whether they might be subjected to an angry tirade. In addition, they will learn from the way you handle your own need to communicate negative information. Do you beat around the bush, use vague insinuations, cloak bad news in false positivism—or do you communicate negative information clearly, constructively, and unemotionally?
5. Remember that writing documents for superiors is usually a part of your job. Business documents often bear the signature of someone who did not actually write them. Yet one person repeatedly taking credit for another’s work may also come to be seen as unethical behaviour. So the question becomes, when should action be taken? Of course, once the decision to take action has been made, you don’t want to embarrass your boss or risk your relationship with a direct confrontation. The best tactic may be to keep quiet for now and find ways to clarify your role through informal lines of communication whenever you’re working on a report for your boss. Word-of-mouth generally spreads far and fast up the organizational ladder in situations like this.
6. The resources section of the website includes newsletters, articles, speeches, book reviews and related links. But in attempting to answer this question, the FAQ’s and Related Links sections will probably be the best places to start. In the FAQ’s visitors to the website will find questions such as “What is a code of ethics?”, “Why should my organization have a code?” and “How do you develop and maintain an ethical corporate culture?” Answers to these questions provide the What, Why and How’s of corporate ethical practices. In the related links section visitors can find additional resources available to organizations attempting to foster and support ethical practices including socially responsible and philanthropic practices. Being informed about the best practices of other businesses, and understanding the implications of adopting ethical practices, helps individuals or groups get involved and “start the conversation” on how to foster their own culture that is trustworthy, transparent, responsible and accountable to all its stakeholders.

# RUNNING CASES

*Student responses will vary. The following are examples of possible acceptable answers.*

Case 1

1. Any method of communication can be accepted here, provided that a sufficient explanation accompanies the response.
2. This is an example of horizontal information flow. This is an example of formal communication because it was a direct request from management.
3. The expectations of her employer must be considered before she begins her task. These include: the logical organization of ideas and information, coherent and persuasive expression of ideas and information, effective listening, effective communication with people of diverse backgrounds and experiences, effective and efficient use of communication technology, the use of accepted standards of spelling and grammar along with other standards of professional communication, adhering to contemporary expectations of business etiquette, and maintaining ethical standards when choices are not crystal clear.
4. In order to ensure efficient and clear communication, the characteristics of effective communication must be considered. These include: providing only practical information, the use of facts as opposed to impressions, clarifying and condensing information, stating precise responsibilities, being persuasive and making recommendations.
5. Possible barriers to effective communication include: noise and distractions, competing messages, filters, perceptual differences, language differences, restrictive environments and deceptive tactics. Strategies to overcome these barriers include: minimizing distractions, adopting an audience-centred

approach, self-improvement of your own communication skills, making feedback constructive and being sensitive to business etiquette.

Case 2

1. Along with researching the company he is applying to work for and the responsibilities of the position, Kwong should research which communication skills the company values most.
2. Any of the following skills can be accepted provided an explanation accompanies the response: the ability to logically organize ideas and information, the ability to coherently and persuasively express ideas and information, effective listening skills, the ability to effectively communicate with people of diverse backgrounds and experiences, effective and efficient use of communication technology, understanding and being able to implement accepted standards of spelling and grammar along with other standards of professional communication, being able to follow contemporary expectations of business etiquette, and the ability to maintain high ethical standards when choices or instructions are not crystal clear.
3. Kwong’s best strategy for emphasizing his strengths and de-emphasizing his weaknesses is to be honest about what his skills are. If he twists the truth and his employer realizes this after he has been hired, he could lose his job. If he is honest during the interview, he is showcasing his strong ethical foundation, and demonstrating that he can be trusted by his new employer.
4. Kwong may have to choose if he should be honest about his long-term goals of opening his own firm. A company may not want to invest time and money in training an individual who is intending on using that knowledge to start his own competing firm.
5. Any of the following can be accepted provided a sufficient explanation accompanies the response: noise and distractions, competing messages, filters, perceptual differences, language differences, restrictive environments

and deceptive tactics.

Practise Your Knowledge

Among the barriers to communication contained in the memo are the following:

1. An opening that immediately arouses negative emotions (accusing employees of lying)
2. A hasty conclusion based on hearsay about people’s time card habits
3. Another hasty conclusion
4. A hostile attitude
5. Defensiveness (the author had “no choice” but to institute the time clock)
6. A dogmatic and authoritarian tone
7. An assumption of bad intentions
8. Vague, confusing language (More than three times during what period? Will have to answer to the author for what specific penalties?)
9. Prejudice or bias (slurs against female employees)
10. Defamatory language (even though not directed to any one person)
11. Polarization (incites punctual employees to be angry with those employees that they think may be “cheating”)

Student responses will vary. Here is a sample:

To ensure the accuracy of your time cards and improve site security, on Monday, April 9, *company name* will begin using a time clock system. For your convenience, the time-clock has been installed at the entrance to the building. All employees are required to punch out whenever they leave the work area and to punch in on their return. If you have any questions about the process, please talk to your manager or visit our intranet site where a special section called Time Clock Questions & Answers has been posted.

Exercises

1.1 The tasks described have the following communication directions:

* 1. Downward, upward, and horizontal—since the entire company is involved. A memo is the best choice (either printed or electronic).
  2. Upward. Probably a formal proposal or memo.
  3. Horizontal. Memo (either printed or electronic).
  4. Downward. One memo might help, but a newsletter would offer a continuing opportunity to keep employees informed. A workshop would also be a good idea.

1.2 As students weigh the ethical options, they may realize that the college friend ignored ethical practices when relating the information in the first place. Now the employee has to decide whether to protect that friend by keeping silent (d), decide whether to protect the company by communicating the information to someone in authority (c), and determine to whom the information should be related (b). There may be no “right” answer here, but it should help students recognize that business communication often carries serious consequences.

1.3 The ethics of each situation may be decided as follows:

1. Keeping quiet about the possible environmental hazard would be an ethical lapse that could affect wildlife, if not people’s lives.
2. Stretching the truth, even “a bit,” is never ethical.
3. Helping a friend would be ethical, unless “privileged” information were being conveyed without permission.
4. Using allocated funding for bogus purchases is unethical. It would be better to justify the need for next year’s budget than to preserve it by cheating.

1.4 Regarding the issue of employee blogs and information that is critical of an employer, a much stronger case can be made for placing such restrictions than for not doing so. Publicly aired criticism of internal company matters is likely to cause harm to the company (by scaring away potential customers, employees, or investors, for instance) while probably doing little or nothing to resolve whatever situations a blogger might be upset about. In fact, an argument can be made that criticizing one’s own employer in public is unethical, since employees are paid to further the company’s interests—not their own interests. If they are unhappy in their jobs, they have a responsibility to either work to improve the situation through appropriate channels or to find other employment.

* 1. In answering this question, students should consider the fundamental issue of what a blogger hopes to accomplish by airing complaints in public. If the blogger truly wants to solve a problem, he or she can surely find more appropriate and more productive internal channels through which to pursue such a solution. Simply “protecting the employees’ freedom of speech” or some other general goal is insufficient justification for rejecting restrictions because it doesn’t consider the many possible ramifications of critical blog postings.
  2. Note that if a true whistle-blower situation exists, in which an employee believes than an employer is breaking the law, this situation should be handled through private channels to the proper authorities.
  3. Response depends on the site(s) selected by students.
  4. All three items are important, and here’s why:
     1. Knowing how many top managers will attend allows the speaker to gear the message toward the audience’s point of view.
     2. Knowing the audience’s preference for management style helps the speaker determine the sort of communication climate that exists: open or closed, formal or informal, and so on.
     3. If the rigidity of managers is possible to determine, such knowledge would help the speaker decide whether the audience would be receptive or resistant to the message.
  5. Students’ explanations might consider the “informal” communication the supervisor is trying to cultivate here. If they view this approach as the supervisor’s way of improving communication, they might not feel so uncomfortable about the arrangement. On the other hand, if they feel that the supervisor is relinquishing responsibility for carrying out that communication personally, they might question that supervisor’s ability to manage. From yet another perspective, students might view the situation as an opportunity for practicing their own communication skills, which could enhance their career.
  6. Responses will vary. Students should focus on how enhancing employee communication skills at every level in the company will enhance internal and external communication. In addition, employees who have an opportunity to learn and practise basic etiquette will be able to move into positions of increased authority and exposure to the public with less training.
  7. Before writing the report, the author will want to know
     1. The audience’s culture (so that cultural biases can be avoided)
     2. The audience’s level of knowledge about the subject (so that the report’s style, content, organization, and tone will address that level)
     3. The environment in which the report will be received (to compensate for any noise interference)
     4. Whether the report will be read directly by the intended audience or will first pass through several layers of gatekeepers (so that anticipated distortions can be minimized before the report is read and summarized by gatekeepers)
     5. The audience’s gender and family status (because child care may be viewed from a different perspective by men, women, parents, and nonparents)
  8. Responses will vary with student scenarios. This exercise challenges students to apply their understanding of the communication process. Ask them to be specific about how they chose the medium and how they encoded and transmitted the idea they wanted to share; also ask them to explain exactly how they knew whether the message had been accurately decoded. Students might identify such barriers as a difference in perception due to differences in age, background, culture, or language; a lack of credibility, precision, congeniality, or control; a lack of information about the audience; a misunderstanding caused by unfocused, incoherent, or sloppy communication; a miscommunication resulting from one party being sidetracked or constantly bringing up unnecessary information; an inability to relate new information to existing ideas; or the noise from environmental distractions, from the emotional states of the people involved, or from a person’s poor listening ability.
  9. This exercise asks students to weigh the ethical aspects of a decision, in addition to using what they’ve learned so far about communication principles. Students should recognize the potential for an ethical lapse, presenting inadequate, incomplete, or untruthful information for the sake of winning an issue.

Students might consider two more ethical choices: First, they might go ahead and make the presentation but cite a range of cost figures that would span plus or minus 10 percent and that would be refined within the next day or two. Second, they might request a postponement because new information has just come to light.

Students might note that whichever alternative is chosen, it must be phrased in positive terms to soften the bad news and to enhance credibility (explaining that the reason for the postponement is a desire to be thorough and complete). Regardless of the alternative that students choose, they might mention going back over the issue and thoroughly studying the budget dilemma in order to arrive at a wholehearted, above-board estimate of the project cost.

* 1. Students will learn more about group dynamics in Chapter 2, but common sense and thoughtful analysis should yield a number of insightful ideas. The only possible advantages of going along with the flow would be not making any enemies and not damaging one’s own career prospects—both of which could be compromising for the employee. The disadvantages include contributing to the perpetuation of a dysfunctional team environment, potentially limiting opportunities for you to make real contributions to the organization, risking the likelihood that your eventual contributions will sooner or later be co-opted by someone else who doesn’t deserve the credit, and compromising your own ethics and standards in an effort to fit in.