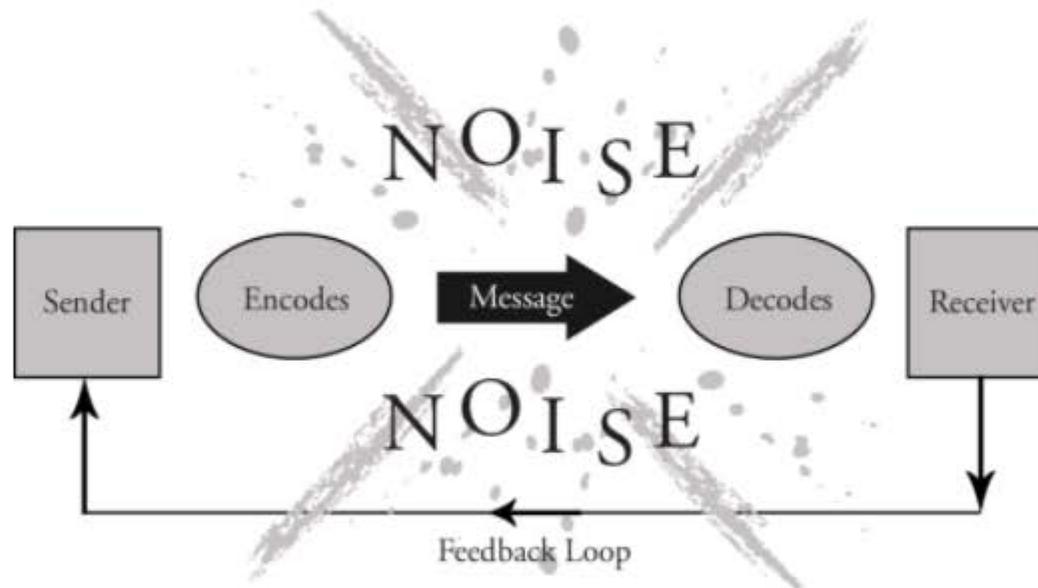


INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Communication is a process that is vital to transmitting and understanding information.¹ It is the means by which information, in the form of verbal or non-verbal cues, is transmitted via an encoded message by a sender to a receiver who fully understands. "Interpersonal communication is defined as person-to-person conversation; it's an exchange that occurs through dialogue between two people or through discussion among several, with participation by everyone involved."² In order for interpersonal communication to exist, the essential elements of communication must be present.



Communication Process—Sender, Receiver, Meaning, Encoding, Message Transmittal, Channel, Decoding, Interpreting, Feedback

The first component of the communication process is the sender. The sender has to be aware of the desired meaning of a message and to whom the message is being sent, prior to encoding the message and transmitting the message through the chosen channel. The sender may choose to speak, write, utilize gestures, visual images or multimedia as a means of transmitting or sending a message.³

After determining what needs to be communicated and what channel will be used to communicate the message, a sender encodes information into meaningful verbal or written language and/or nonverbal symbols that will be understood by the receiver. The message is then sent through the communication channel to the receiver who interprets the meaning of the message, which may or may not match the sender's intended message. The sender should get feedback from the receiver, to ensure that the message was properly decoded.

Oral communication is the primary method of conveying messages because of the ability for quick delivery and feedback. In an informal setting, oral communication is usually chosen for one-on-one encounters and gatherings of people. In contrast, formal settings, such as performance appraisals or employee handbooks, require oral communication to be accompanied by written communication to ensure that each person receives the same message and is able to confirm the message's receipt. Formal written communication is tangible and those who receive a written message can review it to ensure they understand.

All messages should be well thought out, logical, and clear. Nonverbal communication, hand gestures, facial expressions, and body language may reflect emotions and are not as clear as written or oral communication. Non-verbal cues may include body movements (kinesics), physical distance (proxemics), facial expressions, and voice intonations.

Using previous experiences and knowledge of the receiver, the sender determines the best way to encode the message and chooses a channel considered most receptive to the receiver. The clarity of the message, based on feedback from the receiver, determines the effectiveness of the chosen channel.

Once the message is acquired, the receiver decodes the message, which is the interpretation of the message. Feedback is the final step in the communication process and determines how successful the sender was in transferring the message as originally intended. A misunderstanding may occur for many reasons and are often referred to as noise or barriers to effective interpersonal communication.

Barriers to Communication

Because of barriers in the communication process, achieving clarity in interpersonal communication is a challenge to both the sender and the receiver of a message. To do so, the sender must be clear in his or her mind regarding the idea to be communicated, deliver the message, and ensure that the message has been correctly understood.⁴ The sender must also be aware of the receiver's background. The sender can think that a message was clear and concise, but the receiver may think otherwise. As a sender considers ways of communicating effectively, he or she must examine issues that prevent clarity.

Noise

Both the sender and receiver must utilize skill and effort in the two-way communication process. Noise is anything that causes interference in the true intent of the message and interferes with effective communication.⁵ Noise can include physical distractions, not paying attention to the message, having a hearing impairment, or visual inhibitors. For example, two people in a restaurant engaging in a dialogue, may encounter the distraction of a crying baby at the next table, and the manager making an announcement over the public address system. These noises are likely to distract the two people conversing, which may cause them to misinterpret the original intent of the messages being transmitted.

Another example of noise is interruptions. Interruptions stop the flow of conversation and may cause the communication to lose focus, as they often shift the focus of a conversation. For instance, parents who try to engage in conversation with another adult may find themselves interrupted by a toddler desiring attention.

Noise can also occur in the medium chosen for message transmittal. Communication sent via email may be difficult to decipher because such communication is usually written and sent without much thought. The sentence structure, words chosen, or absence of punctuation or capitalization may cause the receiver to misinterpret the sender's intended meaning.

- Be open and honest about your feelings and accept the feelings of others.
- Ask questions to clarify on an issue
- Learn to listen.⁶

Listening

An important aspect of communication is listening, but studies show that most people are poor listeners. Part of this is because one can listen to someone speaking 400 words per minute, but most people speak about 150 words per minute.⁷ There are five key points to active listening that should be implemented by effective communicators:

1. *Pay attention.* It is easy to allow our minds to wander, but active listening requires that we do not become distracted by others or trying to formulate a response when another is speaking.
2. *Show that you are listening.* Look at the speaker and encourage him or her with gestures, such as nodding or abbreviated verbal comments, such as “I see.”
3. *Provide feedback.* Personal experiences and noise in a conversation can distort what we hear. If you are in a small group, feedback may be asking for clarification, “What I’m hearing is . . .” or a short summary of the speaker’s comments.
4. *Defer judgment.* Make mental summaries, but wait until the speaker is finished before formulating a rebuttal.
5. *Respond appropriately.* Your response should be open and honest, but respectful.⁸

Perception

Perception affects the transference and understanding of a message’s meaning. In a conversation, each person has a set of wants, needs, and attitudes that can distort the original intent of a message. The sender may have wants, needs, and attitudes that favor offering a job to a certain applicant; however, the receiver, who has different wants, needs, and attitudes may oppose the job offer. How does the advocate convey a message that persuades the adversary to change positions on the issue?

Beliefs, personalities, emotions, values, and other personal characteristics also affect the sender’s encoding or the receiver’s decoding of a message. Beliefs have a profound affect on perception as each person in a conversation makes inferences based upon his or her belief system. Personality can also affect the sender’s or receiver’s perception of a message. For example, an optimist is likely to view a message from a positive aspect, while a pessimist will likely interpret a message with skepticism. Perception can be observed in a person’s emotional state as emotional responses indicate the receptiveness of the sender’s message. How the receiver feels at the time of communication will influence how he or she interprets the message.

In a typical conversation, the difference in individual values may lead the sender to place a higher level of importance on a decision than the receiver. For example, a decision concerning employee pay raises may cause the sender to attempt to convey the message that raises need to reflect a cost of living raise as well as a length of service raise. The receiver may have a difficult time understanding the importance of including both types of raises in the budget proposal. Thus, it becomes evident that the sender and receiver prioritize their values differently.

Filtering

Filtering is “a sender’s purposely manipulating information so that the receiver will see the information more favorably.”⁹ By controlling the message sent, the sender can dictate what is received. Filtering is a major issue in the business community. Important information can be purposefully left out of a conversation so that the receiver can view the message favorably. For instance, manager requests a written report from a work group; the group selects a writer who can write the report in a believable and favorable way, while unfavorable news may be hidden in the details.

Nonverbal Communication

“Verbal communication consists of sharing thoughts through the meanings of words, while nonverbal communication shares thoughts through all other means.”¹⁰ Nonverbal communication includes any form of expression that does not utilize written or spoken words. Body language is the most common form of nonverbal communication, but all senses can be utilized for nonverbal communication.

Attentiveness of the receiver or the sender when communicating in person is determined by the distance between the two and may also be indicated by direct eye contact. Communication norms, such as the desirability of eye contact or the acceptable distance between sender and receiver, are determined by cultural norms. A person from the southern part of the U.S. will smile at a stranger with the tacit understanding that the smile be interpreted as being friendly. Northerners, in contrast, will smile more in private social settings but may become suspicious of a cordial smile in public.

Body posture is one form of nonverbal communication that can indicate the state of a sender or receiver. When observing body posture, sitting erect is translated as showing interest in the topic being discussed, while slouching can be interpreted as having no interest and may be perceived as rudeness.

Hand movements are a form of nonverbal communication that can have multiple meanings. When a sender makes the “V” sign with the fingers, the receiver may think that the “V” stands for peace or victory. The correct interpretation depends upon the traditions of the host country where the “V” is used. For an American, the “V” stands for peace, while the European knows the “V” stands for victory.

Nonverbal language is not limited to eye contact, standing position, facial expressions, body posture, hand movements, or mannerisms. Nonverbal language includes squirms, gestures, tone of voice, puffs, whistles, and such vocalized non-words called *segregates*, as the “mm” response to somebody’s troubles or “mm-mm!” over a bowl of steaming gumbo.¹¹ In the example of the vocalized response to somebody’s troubles, the receiver’s tone will be quite different from the tone vocalized in response to a good meal. The same response was used in both examples, but the message was different.

Research purports that up to 70 percent of communication may be based upon gestures alone.¹² Since gestures are not part of the electronic communication process, care must be taken to write electronic messages in a clear, concise manner— so as to decrease the chance of errors in decoding the message.

Nonverbal communication is another way to communicate that greatly varies from culture to culture—and its use may be conscious or unconscious. The main classes of non-verbal communication are chronemics, kinesics, paralinguistics, proxemics, and haptics, which often occur together, with or without verbal expression.

Chronemics. Chronemics is the use of time to convey a message, including punctuality, the amount of time spent with another person, and the amount of time a person is kept waiting. Two classifications of chronemic culture include monochronic and polychronic. In a monochronic culture, individuals promptly keep appointments, meetings start on time, people do not tolerate interruptions easily, and business relationships focus strictly on the task at hand. In polychronic cultures, it is acceptable to keep someone waiting past an appointed meeting time as a normal part of doing business, and business relationships are closer and more personal.

Kinesics. Kinesics describes the physical messages communicated by gestures, such as facial expressions, body movement, posture, and gait. While some of these messages are universal in nature, such as sad or angry facial expressions, culturally significant kinesics can be an important way of communicating respect for another person and his or her culture. For example, bowing in Japanese culture conveys respect—even for enemies—when greeting, thanking, or saying goodbye to others. Knowledge of appropriate times and situations to bow to a Japanese person can convey the expatriate's willingness to learn and appreciate Japanese culture. In Arab countries, the gesture of placing one's hand over one's heart when conveying a greeting is a gesture of respect for people of that culture. When a foreigner offers such a gesture in addition to a verbal greeting, the Arabs appreciate the gesture even more.

Paralinguistics. Paralinguistics, or the vocal cues other than words, include the volume, rate of speech, pitch, pauses and silences used in speaking. These vocal cues require some knowledge of the local language. Though English is a second language in many countries of the world, knowledge of the local language carries advantages that cannot be gained through the use of English alone, especially in countries where English is not widely spoken. Knowledge of paralinguistics that are unique to the local culture can be useful in everyday business transactions, especially negotiations in which some or all of the talking may be done in the local language.

Proxemics. Proxemics consists of spatial cues, such as interpersonal distance, territoriality, and other spatial relationships. It is the use of distance—the arrangement of the physical space that surrounds the people who occupy the space. The proximity of people to one another when interacting in a business environment and the configuration of a work area sends a message to workers and visitors alike.

To effectively communicate spatially, people must first become aware of the effects of proxemics, understanding the messages they and others send not only through the way they enter or use space but also through their preferred meeting environment and office.¹³

Consciously and unconsciously, humans have a desire to defend territory. Even when two friends go to lunch, they instinctively draw an imaginary line down the middle of the table to establish their own space. This line represents a boundary line, and neither person will cross the line nor invade the other's territory. Personal territory can be broken down into four separate areas:

- *Public space*—ranges from 12 to 25 feet.
- *Social space*—ranges from 4 to 10 feet and is used to separate strangers using public areas, such as park benches or beaches.
- *Personal space*—ranges from 2 to 4 feet and is used among friends and family, but also used by people in queues such as at grocery stores.
- *Intimate space*—ranges out to about 12 inches and includes a high probability of touching. This territory is normally reserved for whispering and embracing.¹⁴

While these distances are accurate for those living in the United States, they are very culturally dependent. To someone from Latin America or the Middle East, personal space shrinks down to approximately eight to ten inches;¹⁵ however, in the Netherlands, personal space is closer to 4 to 10 feet.¹⁶

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The location and size of furniture in a work area are potential indicators of a person's status. The way that a person has his or her office organized implies an individual leadership style. For example, chairs placed in front of the desk, forcing visitors across from the occupant, imply an autocratic style. In such instances, communication tends to be formal. A manager who prefers informal management techniques may place chairs on either side of his or her desk. Managers who have a collaborative leadership style remove their desks all together and prefer to conduct business with visitors in a circle or arrangement of chairs and tables. The following are suggestions for dealing with proxemics:

1. Observe and be aware of others' personal space. Determine the best way to use distance and space to communicate more effectively.
2. No space arrangement alone will make a leader more or less powerful or a better communicator. Study others' workspace to see if it implies the message that they would like.
3. Include nonverbal and spatial elements into persuasion plans.¹⁷

Mixed Messages

Mixed messages occur when the sender says one thing, but actions, body language, or personal appearances communicate another. In a meeting, a person who does not agree with the discussion may cross her arms over her chest. One who is fighting with a coworker may sit next to him or her but lean in the opposite direction. Nonverbal messages alert others that the verbal message has not been received warmly or positively, transmitting a strong message in itself.

Professional Presentations

Over a million business presentations are given every day.¹⁸ Business leaders use presentations to communicate to colleagues, customers, and stakeholders in an effort to clearly convey relevant information. The clarity and delivery of a presentation is instrumental in determining whether the audience is able to connect with the speaker and understand the information presented. For the sales and marketing professional, the presentation is an extension of the product's package and can make or break a sale.

For millions of American managers, the thought of giving a presentation can invoke fear and anxiety. Surveys consistently show that the fear of public speaking is one of the top phobias in the US.¹⁹

A recent online poll of 382 executives found that over half of the respondents gave one or more presentations per month. Of those respondents, 36 percent found presenting data to the board or senior management tedious, with a further 24 percent stating that they dread it each time it comes around.²⁰ To ease fears of public speaking, managers benefit from practicing a presentation.

The words of Pericles 2,500 years ago are relevant to successful presentation: "A person who can think but cannot express what he thinks, places himself at the level of the person who cannot think."²¹ Are the qualities that make an individual a dynamic speaker in-born traits? While it is true that some personality types are more comfortable with public speaking, almost all speakers experience a certain degree of apprehension prior to addressing a group. Any manager can improve his or her presentation skills and ability to captivate an audience with the proper knowledge and preparation.

While many models provide detailed guidance for developing and giving a successful presentation, each model adheres to some common tenets. The common tenets include strategy, substance, structure, style, support, and supplement—each of which is important in conveying the message. Proper use of each principle will ensure that the speaker effectively communicates the intended message. Understanding the six basic tenets is vital to developing a successful presentation.²²

Strategy

A specific communication strategy should be devised for each audience to whom a topic is presented. One should know the makeup of the individuals in the audience and prepare the presentation to match their level of knowledge on the subject matter. The use of technical jargon or complex data will only confuse an audience not familiar with the lingo.

Detailed planning and preparation is crucial. Individuals must identify the theme or main point, and spend a considerable amount of effort preparing the presentation. The intent of the presentation could be to provide information, offer various alternatives, or provide a solution to a problem. A successful strategy engages the audience, persuading them to accept the main point.

Substance

Substance consists of the speaker's knowledge of the subject matter being presented. A speaker can ensure that he understands all facets of a subject and is ready to respond to the audience's questions by utilizing what some speakers refer to as a "murder board."²³ The purpose of the murder board is to ensure the presenter can answer probing questions regarding the subject matter. The presenter lists all potential questions about the topic and composes then practices a response to each. The rehearsal allows the presenter to gain confidence by proactively anticipating tough questions.

Structure

A presentation must be structured so that the topic is presented in such a manner that allows the audience to logically follow the speaker's message. A presenter should always adhere to the cliché, yet proverbial, presentation truth: begin by introducing what you are going to tell them, tell them; and conclude by telling them what you told them. The format should be sequential, logical, and allow the audience to stay focused on the main topic at hand.

Style

"Style, the passion and [energy] of the speaker, includes the use of [symbolic] devices . . . voice inflection . . . eye contact . . . and positive body language."²⁴ Style is the art of public speaking. Video recording a rehearsal presentation can help a speaker practice and develop the fundamentals involved in style. Since audiences tend to listen to a speaker with whom they are comfortable and connect, one must recognize that style can be as important as substance.

Support

A speaker must support his presentation with accurate data. One should never play with the facts, because a presenter's credibility will be at risk. Once credibility is lost, the audience will no longer be interested in what the presenter has to say. Visual aids, such as a well-constructed PowerPoint slideshow or an old-fashioned butcher board, can be instrumental in allowing the presenter to disseminate relevant, accurate data.

Significant evidence suggests that people retain more data visually than audibly. According to the Department of Labor's OSHA website, "Three days after an event, people retain 10% of what they heard from an oral presentation, 35% from a visual presentation, and 65% from a visual and oral presentation."²⁵ However, care must be taken that the visual aids are appropriate to the audience; faulty visual aids which are too flashy, illegible, or inappropriate will distract from the presenter's message.

Supplement

Finally, the speaker should supplement the message by providing informed responses that support the ideas presented. Former Apple CEO Steve Jobs added to the drama of his presentations by stating at the end of his presentations, :

"And one more thing." He then adds a new product, new feature, or sometimes introduces a band. He approaches each presentation as an event, a production with a strong opening, product demonstration in the middle, a strong conclusion, and an encore—that "one more thing!"²⁶

Presentation Taboos

Managers are often evaluated based upon their skill at giving effective presentations. Most managers learn through experience the skills required to stand in front of a group of people and communicate a message. A good starting point is an understanding of what should be avoided. Ten things must be avoided when giving a presentation:

1. Reading from notes.
2. Not making eye contact.
3. Dressing down—dress like a leader, and a little bit better than everyone else.
4. Swaying back and forth, jiggling coins, and fidgeting with your hands.
5. Failure to rehearse.
6. Standing at attention.
7. Reciting bullet points.
8. Speaking too long.
9. Failing to grab the audience's attention.
10. Ending on a flat note. Presentations should not end with an inspiration deficit; the attendees should be prepared to act on the points given in the presentation.²⁷

The Perfect Presentation

Several things should be included in a great presentation; the following is a step by step guide for putting together an effective presentation:²⁸

1. *Incite, don't inform.* Effective presentations end with the audience taking action. It is the presenter's responsibility to convince them to act.
2. *Don't talk to strangers.* "You should know as much as you can about those to whom you're speaking. . . .What are their expectations? Where are they positioned on the issue? What is their knowledge level? What are their demographics and cultures?"²⁹
3. *First and last impressions are everything.* The audience is going to remember the first thirty and last fifteen seconds of a presentation and determine within that first 30 seconds if they are going to pay attention to the speaker. A presenter can also create positive feelings by finishing the presentation early.
4. *Simpler is better.* "Too many presentations are too long, too slick, and too convoluted. . . .[Consensus says] to make . . . presentations shorter and more candid."³⁰
5. *Perform, don't present.* In a typical presentation, the audience will be influenced by how you look (55 percent), how you talk (38 percent), and what you say (7 percent). If you look and speak with authority and knowledge, the audience will listen to what you have to say.
6. *The show must go on.* Because so much technology is involved in presentations, ensure that a back-up plan exists. If the projector bulb burns out and cannot be replaced, alternative plans should be in place, allowing the presentation to proceed.
7. *One exists in every crowd:* how should a hostile audience member be handled? One suggestion is to answer the question, "but don't address the questioner directly— speak to the entire audience instead."³¹
8. *Practice.* As with most other things, the only way to improve presentation skills is to practice. Practice can take place in front of coworkers or recording for later review and assessment. One should practice new presentations a minimum of six times—even previous presentations should be practiced twice prior to the event.

People in most organizations view meetings from a negative viewpoint. This reaction is partly the result of personal experiences with poorly planned, misdirected, or poorly executed meetings. In today's workforce, no one has time to waste, but according to recent studies, "the average number of meetings at work more than doubled in the second half of the 20th century, and time spent in meetings keeps growing."³²

However, those who hold a large number of meetings each a week acknowledge that maintaining a structure for meetings is vital for success.³³ There are six keys to running a successful meeting:

1. *Set an agenda* that outlines what will be discussed and makes the optimal use of the allotted time. An agenda serves to focus the participants on what they wish to achieve in a meeting.
2. *Appoint a note taker*. Transcribed notes are sent to those who missed the meeting, allowing attendees to review notes to determine what actions were assigned or what decisions were made.
3. *Carve out micro-meetings*. Reserve large blocks in your schedule and carve out time for short meetings. A ten-minute "micro-meeting" can be scheduled almost immediately, instead of having to wait weeks for the next thirty-minute opening.
4. *Hold open office hours*. Some executives have found that keeping a free schedule every day, beginning at 4:00 p.m. and lasting for ninety minutes, can provide open communication with staff. Employees can schedule an appointment by adding their names to a board that sits outside the office—on a first-come, first-serve basis. One executive notes that she spends approximately seven minutes per employee, but pitches first made during these office hours often lead to successful outcomes for the organization.
5. *Discourage politics and use data*. Ideas, designs, or projects chosen should be assessed using a metrics. The option chosen should be based upon how well it performs on those metrics. Decisions should be made based upon evidence, not relationships.
6. *Stick to the clock*. Keeping a schedule proves very important, but the schedule must be utilized with great care.

While these guidelines may not be appropriate in all situations, they may be a starting point for transforming meetings normally considered a waste of time, to productive, effective meetings that benefit the organization.

An effective meeting requires strong leadership to ensure that the agenda is addressed and attendees focus on making productive plans, which will result in action and advancement of the organization's goals. The following reveal some guidelines for strong meeting leadership:

- **Begin meetings on time.** When attendees know that a meeting will not start promptly, they will begin showing up late. Such tardiness leads to the start time of each meeting being pushed back, while everyone waits for the late arrivals. All attendees should be extremely prompt for meetings.
- **The entire agenda should be covered prior to discussing any new business.** However, the leader should insure that issues raised will be addressed at the next meeting.
- **A meeting should never be dominated by one attendee; therefore, inputs from all participants must be encouraged.** The leader must watch for discussions that are off-topic and redirect conversations back to the subject at hand.³⁴

In addition to meeting leaders, meeting participants also have responsibilities. Before speaking, a participant should ask himself or herself if the comment contributes to the understanding of an issue and if the comment is relevant. If one answers “no” to those questions, then the attendee should continue to listen to the discussion without interjection.

Successful meetings are structured events. A meeting should be called for a defined objective and allow for resolution of routine matters and a quick address of the agenda. The roles of all meeting participants should be clearly spelled out prior to the meeting and should, at a minimum, include a leader, recorder, and timekeeper. A meeting outline should assign the amount of time that will be spent on each agenda item. “During the course of the meeting the leader should insure that everyone precedes through the agenda items, summarizing agreed on action items and decisions as they are made.”³⁵ At the end of the meeting, the leader should summarize the agenda, make plans for follow up meetings, and thank all attendees for their participation.

ETIQUETTE

Business protocol is a major aspect of today’s corporate world. Business leaders are expected to fully understand office etiquette, email etiquette, etiquette utilized in dining, and etiquette utilized in meeting business contacts outside of an office setting. Business etiquette ranges from how early to arrive for a business appointment to the appropriate ways to utilize email.

Email Etiquette

Electronic communication has become an excellent way to correspond with those both inside and outside of one’s organization; however, caution must be used in how email is utilized. “People who are not familiar with email etiquette risk alienating potential clients and customers.”³⁶ For example, a breach of etiquette occurs when one hits the “reply all” function when they should have hit the “reply” function. This sends the email to everyone—even those who should not have received it or did not need to receive it. Another breach of email etiquette is attaching non-work-related documents to an email; such attachments can carry computer viruses that infect the recipient’s computer. Therefore, make sure others are willing to accept attachments prior to actually sending them.

One should keep the following general guidelines in mind when using email:³⁷

1. Include a subject line with your messages. This allows the recipient to know that the email is not junk mail. Sending out an email without a subject line shows lack of respect for your recipient’s time.
2. Check and double check the intended recipient’s address before you click on send. You do not want to risk sending an email to the wrong person.
3. NEVER WRITE IN ALL CAPS. This not only makes your message difficult to read, but in cyber world, this is tantamount to screaming at the recipient.
4. Never forward a “chain-letter” email, which is never appropriate in an office environment.
5. Do not expect immediate replies to an email. Do not send an announcement at noon for a meeting to be held at 3:00 pm the same day. Someone may be out of the office for the afternoon or in a meeting.
6. Never send email when you are angry. Once you send the message you can never get it back. While writing down your thoughts may be therapeutic, sending these thoughts can be a disaster.
7. Be cautious when using sarcasm and humor. Without facial expressions and tone of voice, they do not translate easily through email.
8. Write using proper grammar and punctuation.

Rumor Mill

The rumor mill, an informal channel of communication, is inevitable in an office environment of three or more people. “Rumors are totally natural. . . . It is the group trying to make sense of something that is important to them.”³⁸ When employees produce a lot of rumors, it is an indication that leaders need to regularly explain company actions— and not just when major changes occur. There are advantages to the rumor mill grapevine in that this type of communication creates strong connections between peer groups. The information is passed quickly and can provide informal feedback on upcoming changes planned by an organization’s leadership. Page 145
A disadvantage of the rumor mill is if it is not being watched, it could spread unnecessary gossip and distort the message. Rumors cannot be eliminated, but they can and should be monitored. If a rumor is circulating that is correct (many of them are), then leaders need to present the facts.

Norms

While almost every large company has a written code of ethics, often the real ethical fabric of a company can be measured by the unwritten rules in the form of norms. Norms define the limitations of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and are the standards by which the appropriateness of behaviors, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings are measured. Relevance of a norm is determined independently within each organization.”³⁹ Groups tend to enforce norms for four different reasons:⁴⁰

- The first reason norms are enforced is to facilitate group survival. It may be the norm not to discuss internal problems of the group with outsiders because that information could be utilized against the group at a later date.
- Groups use norms to clarify member behavior. In a meeting where a proposal is given, do group members really want feedback or is the presenter merely going through the motions?
- Norms are used so that group members avoid embarrassing situations. The norms in such a case would include not discussing romantic involvements or dominating a discussion.
- Norms expand on what is unique about a group and are enforced to show the strength of a group.

Just because a group behavior is the norm does not mean that the behavior is in the best interest of the organization. One of the toughest challenges for a leader is to determine which norms within the organization are positive and which ones are negative. Positive norms should be reinforced, yet negative norms must be identified and changed. A manager must understand group dynamics to determine why certain norms exist. A norm on a factory floor may be to only produce goods at a certain rate—even though the technology is available and the skill of the worker would allow production at a much faster rate. A leader must identify informal leaders and communicate effectively the objectives of the company or the work unit. In many instances, a policy or procedure may be misunderstood, requiring the manager to provide insight into the policy’s intended purpose.

Groupthink

First identified by Irvin Janis, groupthink takes place when a group's "strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action."⁴¹ Symptoms of groupthink manifest in three different ways: overestimation of the group's power, closed-mindedness, and pressure toward uniformity. The more the symptoms are manifested, the worse the quality of the decision that is made.

One of the worst cases of groupthink was the decision to launch the Challenger from Kennedy Space Center in January 1986.⁴² Even though engineers had warned that the flight was risky, the decision-makers ignored the warnings and allowed the mission to continue.

Groupthink can occur in eight specific ways:⁴³

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1. **An illusion of invulnerability.** If it has always worked in the past, it will surely work this time—a strong, optimistic belief that “we never fail.”
2. **An unquestioned belief in the group's inherent morality—even if that morality has shifted.** Group members believe in the “rightness” of their cause and may ignore the moral or ethical consequences of their decisions.
3. **Collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings.** No one will introduce information that may go against the group's rationalizing efforts because they may be ostracized as a result.
4. **Stereotyped views of the opposition.** Group members may look down upon those outside of the group as unintelligent because they are providing information contrary to the beliefs held by group members.
5. **Self-censorship.** Group members may offer opinions rather than make strong recommendations that are against the group consensus.
6. **A shared illusion of unanimity.** Silence may be interpreted to mean agreement.
7. **Direct pressure on any member who expresses strong disagreement.** Pressure may be put on those who dissent directly through threats of job loss or indirectly through group pressure. It is believed that dissent would never come from a loyal group member.
8. **Emergence of self-appointed mindguards.** These are members who work to prevent anyone within the group from hearing information that may disrupt the group's complacency regarding their decision-making process.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

Since the first modern social media site, SixDegrees, was established in 1997, there has been a transformation in the interaction of, and communication to and between individuals throughout the world.⁴⁴ Simply providing one-way communication of information to the public is no longer sufficient, as not only do people want to be in control of what they read and view, but they also want to make known their opinions. Social media has taken what had been monologues, one-to-many, and has transformed the communication into many-to-many dialogues. The increase in the use of social media has been associated with the growth of internet-savvy individuals who wish to communicate with each other.⁴⁵ It has become so indispensable that the world spends over 110 billion minutes a day using various social media platforms.⁴⁶ These platforms have provided organizations an entirely new way to look at the marketplace, customers and communication.⁴⁷

Communicating through social media uses online services that allow individuals and organizations to construct a public page or profile within a controlled system.⁴⁸ The popularity of social media is growing and 72 percent of organizations engage in some form of social media.⁴⁹ Consumers are beginning to interact with organizational content, which could be as easy as “Liking” an organization’s Facebook page or using an app on a smart phone to announce what locations have been visited. Successful communication through social media allows users to interact and connect with the brand.⁵⁰

Social networking sites utilize already established social relationships and allow organizations to communicate directly with other businesses, consumers and the friends of those consumers. This easy access allows organizations to become embedded in the lives of those on the social networking site. Organizations most frequently use communication through social networks to promote their business, perform market research and acquire new customers.⁵¹ Some benefits of social media to customers are that they can return to an organization’s social media site to review information or obtain updates. On the other hand, one benefit to companies is that the information can be pushed to the consumer through the connections made on social media sites. Social media is an excellent tool for organizations to communicate with stakeholders, but it should be utilized with caution, as many companies have difficulty conveying the same message over the various social media channels. A social media presence, whether via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, blogs, etc., must communicate with the same voice and convey a consistent meaning so that the organization provides meaningful communication.⁵²

Social media has been used to communicate during times of social change, as it cannot be as easily controlled as formal methods of communication. In June 2009 during the Iranian election, “protesters used Twitter to circumvent government control over phones and the media. Twitter was so important that the US State Department asked Twitter to delay a network upgrade that would have taken the website offline at a busy time of day in Iran. Twitter complied and rescheduled the downtime to 1:30 am Tehran time. The ability to remain anonymous helped protect people who were spreading information in real time.⁵⁶

Another way that organizations are communicating with the public is through the use of blogs. Organizations use blogs to discuss their latest products, announce new releases and share ideas for improvement and new products. Disney uses blogs to connect by communicating park happenings and sharing “behind the scenes” information, such as providing sneak previews of holiday surprises at its parks.

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As a social media platform, Facebook, interacts with other platforms such as blogs and Twitter, which can enhance presence and “provide a simple interface to consistently and easily update a community of supporters with news of an organization’s activities.”⁵⁸ Facebook provides a platform in which a message can be transmitted quickly, without the danger of getting caught in a spam filter or getting blacklisted by an internet service provider.

Social media has created a new way to communicate and 93 percent of Americans believe that companies should have a presence in social media, while 85 percent believe that companies should also respond to social media networking audiences.⁵⁹ Social media provides ways for organizations to provide information to and connect with fans, customers, employees, and supporters. While location was previously an obstacle to communication, computer-mediated communication has bridged the gap in interpersonal communication and business-customer relations.

CONCLUSION

Communication is extremely important because each individual interacts with internal and external customers on a daily basis. To be productive and maintain a competitive edge in corporate America, those within an organization must correspond with customers in a manner that is beneficial to both the organization and customer.

People constantly communicate, but an astounding number of errors can occur in both transmitting and receiving messages. The childhood game of whispering a statement into one child's ear and having them individually share it with their friends clearly illustrates the potential for miscommunication. Rarely does the last child in the sequence relate a message that is remotely close to the original.

One cannot overstate the importance of effective communication for the aspiring manager or business leader. Effective communication skills, both written and verbal, are high on the list of managerial job skills. A survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) asked 259 employers to rank the importance of a list of skills employers seek in college graduates. Employers rated the skills in the following order: oral communication, interpersonal, teamwork, analytical, flexibility, leadership, written communication, proficiency in field of study, and computer skills.⁶⁰

For the business leader, first-rate communication skills are a prerequisite to success. Business presentations, employee counseling, coaching, and instructions to subordinates are only a few examples of the daily requirements for effective communication. Leaders in organizations stress that college graduates must be able to communicate effectively and succinctly.⁶¹ Knowledge or information that is not effectively communicated may be useless. As wisely stated by United States Marine Corp General Alfred Gray, "Communications without intelligence is noise; intelligence without communications is irrelevant."⁶²

In meetings, managers have the opportunity to convey messages through several methods of communication, such as handouts, speeches, and presentations. Managers must ensure that they choose the method that will be the most receptive and effective. Subconsciously, managers and employees display behaviors that can be interpreted differently by different observers. Behaviors and nonverbal communication, such as standing position, eye contact, hand movements, and facial expressions reveal a lot. In order to direct and lead employees effectively, managers have to be conscious of their non-verbal communication behaviors. Employees must also be aware of preconceived ideas that others reveal through non-verbal communication.

Employees practice corporate culture, whether consciously or subconsciously. Consciously, employees observe other employees—particularly the employees who have been with a company for a long time. Employees are conditioned to understand the expectations of office etiquette. Employees also learn about office politics through firsthand observation or secondhand information. Secondhand information, which can usually be accepted as fact, is a part of the rumor mill.

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Managers must understand the power of social media and how to use it to impact positive communication. Social media has provided a medium for creative expression and is available to anyone with access to a computer and the internet. People with common interests, regardless of their location, can become a virtual community to share ideas and thoughts. Many people count on the people in their social networks for advice on major life issues, such as caring for someone with an illness, buying a car, planning for college or career or finding a new place to live.⁶³

Successful managers understand the importance of interpersonal communication. Businesses are constantly trying creative methods to convey messages. From corporate culture to business etiquette, each business has standards concerning dress codes, office layout, informal norms, and office politics. To be effective in conveying messages, businesses have to go through the communication process and require feedback. Feedback allows for clarity and ultimately results in improved efficiency.