

Foundations of Management Communication

In business, as in most other areas of life, the best idea in the world can fail if it's not communicated effectively. How clearly and persuasively you present your information and recommendation matters as much as how well you've analyzed your data or how sensibly you've outlined a course of action. This book offers exercises to strengthen yourself as a business communicator.

Two schools of thought have dominated the teaching of business communication. One, derived from behavioral science, emphasizes that an organization, like an organism, has very complex communication pathways. This school has developed important concepts, such as an emphasis on the need to shape your communication to the situation of your audience. At the same time, it tends to downplay the importance—and opportunity—of the individual.

The other dominant school argues that effective business communication entails mastering proven techniques of writing and speaking. Many fine books explain how to avoid convoluted language, grammatical errors, passive expression, or technical jargon. This approach draws on a rhetorical tradition going back at least to the ancient Greeks, and it emphasizes the connection between clear thinking and clear communication. It also encourages the writer or speaker to take advantage of the vast resources of logic, evidence, persuasion, and imagery inherent in our language. At the same time, it tends to give too much attention to the communicator and too little attention to the context in which he or she is communicating.

Both the behavioral and rhetorical schools are right, and neither, alone, meets the full needs of the manager. Every communication is both situational (organizational) and personal (stylistic). Successful business communication depends on answering a few crucial questions: Have you mastered and organized all the relevant information? Have you taken into account the personal and organizational context? Have you defined a clear, achievable goal? Have you considered the needs of your audiences? Have you expressed yourself as clearly, vividly, and forcefully as possible? Have you chosen the right communication channels?

Managers send messages through writing, speaking, actions, gestures, electronic media, graphics, the grapevine, and force of personality. Good business people devote tremendous attention to shaping their message and deciding how to deliver it. Experienced managers insist that success depends largely on effective communication.

MANAGERS AND COMMUNICATION

As early as 1916, Henri Fayol defined the central functions of management as *planning* (developing an outline of things that need to be done), *organizing* (establishing a formal structure within which tasks are arranged and defined), *coordinating* (relating one aspect of the organization's work to other aspects), *commanding* (indicating what needs to be done, including rewards and penalties), and *controlling* (establishing a system capable of measuring how well the organization is doing). Researchers who have studied management empirically have found these categories to be useful but too rigid. In the 1970s, Henry Mintzberg identified 10 "working roles" that, in varying proportions, make up the manager's job: figure-head, leader, liaison, monitor, disseminator, spokesperson, entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator. Today, some of these terms might be translated as image-maker, motivator, or facilitator. Every one of these tasks requires effective communication to succeed.

As Mintzberg notes, "Verbal and written contacts *are* the manager's work." He goes on:

Managers must be able to communicate easily and efficiently, and they must share a vision of the direction in which they wish to take their organization. If they cannot agree with reasonable precision on these "plans," then they will pull in different directions and the team (or organization) will break down.¹

Mintzberg hits on a key point here: Effective communication, whether in response to a crisis or in service of a long-term plan, flows from a vision of success that includes, and motivates, your audience. This means that by the time you call the meeting, write the memo, initiate the conversation, send the E-mail, or give the speech, 90 percent of your communication work should already be done.

ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION

A communicator, or source, sends a message to a receiver, or audience, through chosen media, provoking a response. This feedback, in turn, often creates an ongoing dialogue. Building on this model, which originates early in the history of communication research, we suggest seven categories that will help you define and analyze any business communication situation:

SOURCE. This theme pervades the book. Who is initiating action, and why should she or he be believed? How can you become a credible and effective source?

¹Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 180.

GOAL. What result do you seek? This will seem obvious at first, when you've received an assignment or gotten a good idea. Write it down as a reality check. Then weigh it against the costs of achieving it. Can it stand on its own merits? Does it conflict with other goals of equal or greater importance? How are you or others going to gauge the risks and reap the benefits? How, in short, will you measure success?

AUDIENCE. Define your audience. What will move them to support you? Is their attitude toward your proposal positive, neutral, or negative? How are they likely to perceive you? Do you face one key audience or several? Are there secondary audiences who will be affected by the success or failure of your plan? Are there hidden audiences you haven't considered?

CONTEXT. Communication occurs in a specific environment. It can involve an effort to reach one person or to reach millions. It can mean working within the norms of a particular corporate culture, its history, and its competitive situation or challenging those norms. It can involve external communications: clients, potential customers, local or national media. When designing your communication strategy, keep in mind the big picture: in an increasingly polarized political culture, people increasingly get their opinions from Rush Limbaugh, John Stewart, Howard Stern, their favorite cable news channel, or the blogosphere. If your organization is involved in an effort to reach the general public, be aware of the opportunities and perils posed by our increasingly polarized and diversified media culture. Before you plan your communication strategy, be sure you know the territory.

MESSAGE. What message will achieve your goal with these particular audiences? Consider how much information they need, what doubts they're likely to have, how your proposal will benefit them, how to make your message convincing and memorable, and how your points can be organized most persuasively.

MEDIA. Which medium will convey your message most effectively to each significant audience? Should you speak, write, call, send E-mail, meet, fax, produce a videotape, or hold a press conference? We all know that "the medium is the message." What message will your choice of medium convey? Sending a memo to an office mate, for example, may express an unwillingness to talk face to face.

FEEDBACK. Communication is not an act but a process. A message provokes a response, which requires another message. The business communicator doesn't shoot an arrow at a target but sets in motion a process designed to achieve a considered result. This means polling your audience at every stage of the communication and, more importantly, giving them an opportunity to respond. That way, you know what they think and can tailor your message accordingly. They are more likely to feel involved in the process and committed to your goal.

(See *Exhibit 1.1*, Sample Communication Analysis.)

Even a brief consideration of these seven analytical tools will reveal that any business communication task is really a management task. Many communication situations *happen to* a manager rather than occur as planned events. Some of your key topics and goals may not be listed on any overt agenda. How can these realities be turned to advantage? Considering the source, goal, audience, context, message,

EXHIBIT 1.1 Sample Communication Analysis

	You're going to ask your boss if you can take a vacation during a busy period.	
<i>Source</i>	You're a star/good/mediocre subordinate asking a favor. You're a senior/junior.	
<i>Goal</i>	Get the time off when you want it.	
<i>Audiences</i>	<i>Primary</i>	Your boss, who is close or remote, friendly or unfriendly, flexible or rigid.
	<i>Secondary</i>	Your colleagues, subordinates, customers; and others who may be affected by the outcome.
<i>Context</i>	Workload is heavy. You're marginal/critical to the department's operation. You have/haven't asked for special consideration before. There are/aren't fixed precedents and procedures. Others are/aren't asking for the same consideration.	
<i>Messages</i>	Personal considerations make it crucial that I go at this time. I've arranged for my work to be covered by colleagues. Others have been given similar consideration. I can keep on top of the job by putting in longer hours before and after the vacation. Schedules and deadlines can be rearranged to make this possible. I'll repay the favor. Because the vacation will be good for me, it will be good for the company.	
<i>Media</i>	One-on-one conversation Phone call Memo Meeting Electronic communication Some of or all the above	
<i>Feedback</i>	Various audiences are supportive, receptive, indifferent, or hostile. Perhaps they remind you of possible consequences you haven't considered.	

Analyzing even this apparently simple situation demonstrates how many factors we consider—often half-consciously—before communicating. Variables in source, context, and likely audience attitude will shape our choice of message and media. We may decide to send different messages to different audiences (as long as they're not in direct conflict). Having weighed the costs and benefits carefully, we may decide not to make the request.

media, and feedback provides you with an economical framework for introspection in any business situation, whether you're planning a broad strategy or devising a particular communication effort. Using this checklist will ensure that by the time you actually engage in the communication process, you are executing a particular task in service of a larger vision and are therefore more likely to succeed.

Each of the chapters in Part One will focus on one of these key communication tools. The remainder of this chapter will concentrate on exploring the characteristics unique to business communication and the importance of "knowing yourself," that is, analyzing your strengths and weaknesses as a *source*.

Communication is something we're doing most of our waking life, and it's hard work. Human beings have been communicating in some form or another since they cried at being forced out of the womb, and most human communication is instinctive, experiential, or personality-based. The job of a successful manager is to become more analytical about planning communication and more objective about how it likely will be received. This section covers the basic tools that should be a conscious part of every manager's communications planning and execution.

Communicating effectively in business is at least as challenging as communicating well in a personal relationship. In his examination of how hard it is to communicate in a business situation, Peter Drucker,¹ an astute observer of management, any of whose books or articles is worth reading, has identified four fundamental communication principles:

1. *Communication is perception.* "In communicating, whatever the medium, the first question has to be 'Is this communication within the recipient's range of perception? Can he receive it?'"² Only what has actually been understood will have been communicated. Consider the situation of employees receiving bad performance evaluations. Are they likely to rationalize away the criticism? Do they have the capacity and resources to change?
2. *Communication is expectation.* Seventy years of research find agreement on one fundamental conclusion: People tend to hear what they want to hear, and they block out the unfamiliar or threatening. "A gradual change in which the mind is supposedly led by small, incremental steps to realize that what is perceived is not what it expects to perceive will not work."³ Only by understanding your audience members' interests and expectations can you jolt them into seeing something in a new light.
3. *Communication makes demands.* "[Communication] always demands that the recipient become somebody, do something, believe something."⁴ Communication, in other words, usually invites the recipient to give—attention, understanding, insight, support, information, and/or money. Perhaps most important, communication demands *time*, a business person's most valuable commodity. Before engaging in any business communication situation, you should ask yourself, Why should I spend time on this? What will motivate someone to give me their valuable time, and will they be convinced at the end that it has been well spent?
4. *Communication and information are different and indeed largely opposite, yet interdependent.* For most of human history, plenty of communication happened, but facts were at a premium. Now, due to an explosion of media in the last century, the sheer data overwhelm us and our audiences. High school

¹Peter Drucker lays out his basic principles in *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, and Practices* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

²Ibid., p. 484.

³Ibid., p. 486.

⁴Ibid., p. 487.

students can reach Bill Gates via E-mail and access vast databases. Plenty of pieces of information—that is, facts—are available, but how do we identify them and sort the important from the unimportant? This situation poses new questions: When do you want to communicate, when do you want to impart information, and under what circumstances are the two compatible? Why should your audience pick your communication out of the constant barrage and pay attention?

Given that people resist change and that their attention is a valuable commodity, how can you reach them with maximum effect? Start your planning by considering who you are as a *source*.

SOURCE: WHO ARE YOU AS A COMMUNICATOR?

While it's crucial to master the tools of communication analysis and the techniques of effective delivery, ultimately your success as a communicator will depend heavily on how you are perceived as a person. Aristotle spoke directly and often to this issue in the first, and still the best, general study of communication, his *Rhetoric*. He defined three essential qualities of successful communication: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.

Logos, essentially, means command of the language. Have you chosen the right words? Have you built them into clear, coherent sentences? Does each paragraph convey a succinct unit of thought? Have you identified all the relevant data and constructed a convincing argument? Do you, in short, have the fundamental skills to be an effective communicator? This Aristotelian category includes many crucial qualities, such as a command of structure and style, that will be addressed often in the following pages.

Pathos means command of your own, and the audience's, emotions. Emotion may seem out of place in a business setting, but in fact it plays a major role in every interaction. You're more likely to help out a colleague you like; you work harder for a boss who, you feel, respects and counts on you; you'll probably promote a competent friend instead of a talented competitor whom you vaguely distrust. *Pathos* also contains the idea of empathy—individuals and mass audiences alike will be more prone to support someone who understands their point of view, even if they disagree. Most important, the ability to appeal to an audience's sense of justice, fair play, and human dignity matters as much in a business situation as in other communications, and it can sometimes override a call to narrow personal advantage.

Ethos, essentially, means who you are as a person. Do your employees, your colleagues, your bosses have reason to trust you? Have you subordinated your needs to theirs when their goals were paramount? Have you kept your word and delivered what you said you would? Perhaps the best modern translation of *ethos*, at least in a business context, is *credibility*.

Pathos and *ethos*, especially, raise ethical considerations for the business communicator. Leaders, like other human beings, will have unpleasant qualities and make mistakes. The immensely successful bond trader, widely known to be driven and tyrannical, probably makes sure that her useful subordinates share in the profits. Constituents will forgive the congressman his extracurricular dalliances with

pages if they like and believe him, and if he has delivered extended fishing rights for his coastal district. But audiences are always making judgments about whether their leaders are, on balance, decent people, worthy of support and respect. All the analysis and technique in the world won't move them to support you if, at all times, that balance isn't working in your favor. Whether you are credible depends largely on whether you're perceived to be working for a larger purpose than your own short-term interest.

Aristotle's categories suggest another important point, widely validated by current experience in teaching and practicing business communication. Command of communication theory or public relations tricks will get the manager nowhere without an understanding of human nature, which can come only from a broad base of knowledge and experience. Communication is not a body of knowledge to be mastered, like biology or literature. Communication is always about something else.

The newly hired manager may be able to make a great success for a time out of her command of a narrow specialty or technical area. But as that manager's responsibilities increase, she will be dealing with other departments, external constituencies, and leaders in business, culture, and government.

While it's unarguable that some business people have made brilliant careers out of a narrow specialty or one great idea, in general, successful managers are also cultivated people. This means they write well, speak well, and maintain a broad range of interests both within and outside their fields. Good writers, for example, are also good readers: they regularly read good journalism, novels, and poetry as well as keep up with developments in their personal area of expertise. Good speakers listen to, and learn from, good speeches, whether given by politicians on television or visiting experts at the local university. A broad range of interests—in national and international affairs, history, science, and the arts—not only gives you something to talk about at the next office party, but also helps you grow as a whole person. The ability to engage in informed conversation about someone else's interests both establishes rapport and increases willingness to grant you credibility on your own turf.

Listening

It's very important to remember that *good communicators are good listeners*. By the time you've identified your goal and chosen a plan of action to achieve it, you'll likely be so convinced you're right (or under so much pressure from your boss to succeed) that you'll be tempted to become a good promoter but a bad listener. Remember that all business goals require teamwork to achieve.

Several techniques can ensure that you become a better listener.

1. **Practice empathy.** Whether you're interacting with an individual or a large audience, whether you agree or disagree with the point of view being expressed, *show you understand it*. If you're paying close attention to what's being said, you'll find opportunities to cite analogous examples from your own experience that demonstrate you share your audience's concerns. This can often create common ground, which is the necessary condition for reaching agreement.
2. **Bring areas of disagreement into the open.** Opposition to your point of view won't go away just because you ignore it. Often, only patient listening can bring the real causes of disagreement to the surface.

3. **Paraphrase.** Restate your audience's concerns succinctly before you respond to them. If you haven't understood them correctly, this is the time to find that out.
4. **Ask the right questions.** If an employee complains about being overworked and you think the issues he raises are legitimate, ask: "What are your most important tasks, and what aspects of your job are distracting you from them?" This prepares for a resolution of the problem.
5. **Listen actively.** Try to understand the emotions or interests that may lurk hidden beneath a given complaint or statement. Often the person you're talking with won't be fully aware of them themselves.
6. **Provide immediate feedback.** While it's often true that you can't offer an instant solution to a request or concern, you should at least tell the person how you intend to address it. Except in very special situations, leaving your interlocutor in suspense about how you intend to proceed will just create frustration and paralysis.

To summarize: Be very careful to understand the motives and interests of those whose cooperation you need to succeed. Try not to send overt or covert messages that you don't want to hear suggestions or opposing points of view. Even someone who disagrees with your goal, or your plan to achieve it, will be more likely to go along if she feels she's had a fair hearing and that her concerns have been understood.

Someone who shows informed interest in what others have to say will inevitably develop a reputation as a good conversationalist and communicator. In the following pages we will repeatedly stress the importance of understanding the needs and interests of your audience. Some of these points are addressed in more detail in "Handling Q&A: The Five Kinds of Listening" (*Harvard Communications Update*, February 1999).

Authority

Your credibility as a source will also be intangibly affected by what the ancient philosophers called *auctoritas*, best translated as "authority." Authority can derive from several different sources and can arise at any level within an organization. The person who runs the janitorial staff well can be a real authority within his sphere of operations and perhaps be more valued by a major corporation than a senior executive.

Factors that determine your authority include:

- How much you know about your field
- How well you perform your job
- How much others have learned to trust you
- Whether your ideas break new ground
- Your past accomplishments
- Raw intelligence
- Understanding of human nature
- How right your judgments have proven in previous situations
- How you come across in person

While authority certainly depends in part upon how much raw power you have to tell others what to do, in many business situations the decisions are really driven

by the person who has the most authority, not necessarily the one who has the highest position in the organizational hierarchy. Try to manage your communications so that you become an authoritative source.

QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Once you've examined your position as the source of a communication, you want to ensure that each conversation, memo, phone call, Internet message, presentation, proposal, or report carries the maximum impact possible. Here we want to address the fundamental qualities shared by any effective source of business communication. We also encourage you to refer throughout the course to the technical manuals on writing and speaking in Part Three of this book.

It's important to understand that these chapters are not addenda but are crucial to success in the course. The authors recommend that you consult them regularly in conjunction with writing or speaking assignments and bring up the points they address in class discussions. Qualities to aim for, whenever you write or speak, include:

Accuracy

When you approach an audience, you are implicitly seeking trust. If even one member of your audience recognizes a factual error, you are in trouble. Inaccuracy, in business, takes several typical forms: insufficient data, misinterpretation of the data, ignorance of key factors, unconscious bias, and exaggeration. Guard against them all to preserve and enhance your credibility.

Clarity

Clarity is hard won. To function efficiently, an organization depends on accurate and complete information, intelligible instructions, and policies capable of guiding the decision-makers in both routine and unexpected situations. Misunderstandings, ambiguity, and confusion cost money and cause frustration.

Some teachers and managers adhere to the slogan KISS—Keep It Simple, Stupid. But most business situations don't lend themselves to simple or stupid solutions; clarity results from careful preparation. To achieve it, you must include, interpret, and organize. Achieving clarity in business writing and speaking requires clear thinking and expression.

Clarity of Thinking

If you haven't thought through the rationale for your proposal, the plan of action to achieve it, and the possible consequences, then you can't expect your audience to follow you. Most bad writing or speaking is the result of shoddy thinking or slapdash preparation.

Clarity of Expression

Over the last 15 years or so, many corporations, including General Motors, have instituted large and expensive programs to train their managers to write and speak in clear English. Correctness, conforming to standard grammar and usage, is the baseline for effective communication; errors in spelling or sentence structure will call

into question your ability to manage information. But for many communications, correctness is not enough. While it may ensure clarity in instructions for routine procedures, in policy statements, reports, persuasive presentations, and memos, you may have to discard many “correct” sentences before your language clearly conveys your meaning. If you find that you can’t write or speak your communication clearly, you need to reexamine the thinking that has led you to your conclusion.

Brevity

Good managerial communications should be brief, to accomplish much in few words. Brevity is a cardinal virtue whether your communication is going to the president, to a junior executive, or to hourly employees. Everyone’s time is valuable; no one enjoys sitting through needlessly long communications when there’s work to be done. Some companies, such as Procter & Gamble, legislate brevity; executives won’t read a memo that runs over one or two pages. Such limits cut down on the flow of paper, although they can’t guarantee that the memo says what needs to be said. Concision does not mean writing exclusively in short sentences or omitting necessary detail. It means making every word count.

Vigor

Vigor means vividness and memorability. People in organizations have multiple responsibilities and receive communications from many sources each day. Mintzberg has shown that managers usually can give ideas and information their attention for only short periods. Interruptions, distractions, and competing responsibilities all characterize managerial work. A vigorous style helps your communication stand out from the clutter.

Vigor results partly from accuracy, clarity, and brevity and partly from your choice of words, images, and sentence patterns. Vigorous sentences boast active verbs, concrete nouns, and a minimum of well chosen modifiers (see Chap. 16, Effective Writing, and Chap. 17, Effective Speaking, in Part Three for examples). Vigorous language aids understanding and makes your message more memorable. It also conveys confidence and conviction.

No one will be fooled by typical organizational doublespeak such as “We plan to devote considerable effort to the study of developing requirements and will seek to develop proposed solutions to the various possible needs we can foresee well in advance of the time that a decision will be needed.” This sentence violates all the criteria for good business writing. “We plan to” should be “We’re acting now.” Repeated words, such as *develop* and *developing*, and repeated meanings, such as *considerable* and *well*, are padding. Useless modifiers such as *proposed* and *possible* weaken the impact of key nouns. “Will be needed,” a passive construction, begs the questions *by whom* and *when*? “We will present our recommendations for expanding your product line on November 1” takes one-third the space, sticks in the mind, and conveys much more useful information.

Effective use of language will be the subject of exercises throughout the following course. You can hone your writing, speaking, and general communication skills only by practicing them. This means attuning them to a variety of audiences. The more successful you are as a manager, the more likely it is that these audiences

will be multicultural. Therefore, as a general rule, the practical cases we ask you to consider building from typical middle-management situations to major organizational, external, and even international communication challenges.

WHY BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IS UNIQUE

Lamar N. Reinsch Jr. surveyed “Business Communication as a Field of Study” (*Management Communication Quarterly*, Thousand Oaks, 1996). He examined the field from Aristotle’s teaching on rhetoric in ancient Athens to modern practitioners of management communication training and reached several conclusions worth noting by contemporary students of communication. He concluded that effective business communication must embrace both *knowing what* and *knowing how*.

This insight, simple as it may seem, captures the essence of business communication. Knowing what, as we’ll describe in the next chapter, means defining your goal clearly. Knowing how takes up the rest of the book: how to understand yourself, understand your audience, design your message, develop a logical argument, choose the right media to send it, remain sensitive to style and tone. Citing Mary Munter’s classic text and other research, he emphasizes the uniqueness of business communication. Because it’s designed to produce results, unlike, say, a novel, which is intended to produce contemplation and enjoyment, business communication should:

1. Focus on your conclusions rather than the thought process that led you to them.
2. Be direct and emphasize your purpose at the beginning.
3. Highlight your main points by using headings, bolding, italics, and numbered or bullet-points. In the case of presentations, achieve emphasis by repetition, tone, and the support of clear graphics. The ultimate recipient of your document or statement—someone you may never talk to directly—may be so busy she or he will only skim it.
4. Emphasize the positive impact of your proposal on its immediate audience, your organization, and the larger community.
5. Be sensitive to the fact that in a country—and a world—where there are many varieties of English, you should make sure your message gets through to all your key constituencies.

EVOLVING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

This book focuses on the principles and practices that produce effective communication in any medium. But while we will explore all the traditional channels of management communication—writing, speaking, graphics, meetings, actions—much if not most business communication today is electronic. E-mail, websites, blogs, text-messaging, and the Internet as a whole are rapidly reshaping both the structures of organizations and how they communicate both internally and externally. Many shrewd observers believe this trend will expand exponentially over the next couple of decades. Ray Kurzweil, a futurologist with a strong record of invention and accurate prediction in the field of electronic communication and artificial intelligence, argues

in *The Singularity is Near*¹ that the exponential growth of information technologies will soon produce a transformational melding of mind and machine.

The recent explosion of the Internet supports this point. Discounting the financial collapse of many e-companies in the late 1990s as a necessary correction, Kurzweil argues: “New models based on direct personalized communication with the customer will transform every industry, resulting in massive disintermediation of the middle layers that have traditionally separated the customer from the ultimate source of products and services . . . The boom and bust cycle in these information technologies was strictly a capital-markets (stock value) phenomenon . . . actual business-to-consumer revenues grew smoothly from \$1.8 billion in 1997 to \$70 billion in 2002. Business to business had a similarly smooth growth from \$56 billion in 1999 to \$482 billion in 2002. In 2004 it is approaching \$1 trillion.”² (103)

If one believes that the primary product of the future will be information, these trends have enormous implications for the future of management communication, including:

1. Relatively soon, organizations will be contacting their customers and constituencies, and shaping opinions of their products and services, primarily through websites, blogs, online advertising, and other modes of electronic communication we haven’t even imagined yet.
2. Information technologies will provide ever more sophisticated tools to shape organizations’ response to consumer demand, radically increasing their efficiency. Kurzweil writes, “Companies in every industry are using AI (Artificial Intelligence) systems to control and optimize logistics, detect fraud and money laundering, and perform intelligent data mining on the hoard of information they gather each day. Wal-Mart, for example, gathers vast amounts of information from its transactions with shoppers. AI-based tools using neural nets and expert systems review this data to provide marketing reports to managers. This intelligent data mining allows them to make remarkably accurate predictions of the inventory required for each product in each store for each day.”³ (283) This sort of software is already incorporating automatic capabilities to repair and optimize its functions without the intervention of the human user.
3. Odds are that the companies of the future, in order to maximize these technological advantages, will increasingly resemble the relatively egalitarian model of high-tech companies such as Apple or Microsoft rather than the hierarchical models of 20th-century manufacturing corporations. This has profound implications not only for how an organization communicates with its customers or constituents, but also how it communicates internally, and suggests the gradual elimination or transformation of traditional middle management. In an increasingly egalitarian work environment, more and more electronic options are available to circumvent executives who hoard information to retain power.

In this environment, many of your closest colleagues and important customers may be people you never meet. Two cautions here. First, the fact that one can conduct a successful international business with a desk and a computer doesn’t

¹(New York: Viking, 2005).

²Ibid., p. 103.

³Ibid., p. 283

obviate the need for human contact and personal social skills. Second, while rapid technological advances can do more and more internal and external management communication mechanically, human beings, as everyone who has tried to get a mortgage from a recently globalized local bank or advice on a faulty product over the telephone will testify, have a resistance to communicating with machines, although it's perfectly possible that we'll live to see machines that can express sympathy and sense frustration, or come up with a creative solution to a unique personal situation. To a frustrated consumer, a human voice can make a lot of difference, even if it's coming from another continent. In a more profound sense, having a "voice"—that is, a set of values, an appropriate tone, and a message shaped to the needs of your audience—will never become obsolete even if it is being expressed electronically or through machines you have programmed.

The impact of these trends pervades this text, but we have also included classic cases, written before the advent of E-mail, that emphasize the fundamental elements of successful communication. We urge the student to review Chapter 15, Electronic Communication, early in the course, and discuss how these enduring principles and practices apply in the age of the Internet.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

This book has three major purposes. First, it presents the tools that can help you define and master business communication situations. Second, it encourages you to exercise the skills needed for clear, persuasive writing and speaking. Third, it invites you to test yourself against a representative range of managerial challenges. In each instance someone must produce written, oral, or electronic communication that addresses the demands of a specific managerial situation, such as motivating employees, persuading a superior, building consensus, introducing change, explaining a financial position, providing feedback to a colleague, getting a proposal adopted, making a sale, interacting with the media, or coordinating a strategy.

Part One of this book focuses on how to use the basic elements of communication analysis—source, audience, goal, context, message, media, and feedback—to achieve your desired result. Part Two invites you to apply these tools to a representative variety of business situations. Part Three consists of brief guides to effective writing and speaking which we recommend that you review early and use as references throughout the course.

HOW TO PREPARE A CASE

A word about the use of case studies in this text. Every manager brings certain strengths, weaknesses, biases, ideas, and assumptions to any communication situation. An effective manager understands his or her own and others' points of view—how to respond to disagreement, willingness to modify a plan in the face of audience analysis or new information, the ability to get diverse constituencies committed to a single goal. In our experience, cases and actual practice—writing, speaking, role playing—provide the best way to develop communication understanding and skills in the classroom.

Cases also enable us to bring together the various techniques and topics covered in the previous paragraphs. In real business situations, tasks and opportunities don't usually arrive in packages labeled *finance situation*, *marketing opportunity*, or *public relations crisis*. Defining the challenge is often the hardest task facing a manager. Only effective analysis can help you reach this point. We believe these cases will help you develop the knowledge, tool kit, skills, sense of style, flexibility, and leadership needed to succeed in a business communication situation. It's a reasonable assumption that preparing a case means reading it, but nothing could be further from the truth. Preparing a case means deciding how to resolve the problems it raises, comparing the data in the exhibits to the case narrative, and developing a plan of action you're willing to defend in class discussion. Most of the value of a good case discussion comes from a clash of perspectives on basic situation analysis and on what to do next. Come to class prepared with specific recommendations and justifications for them. Often it's wise to look over the Study Questions first and make marginal notes to address while you're reading the case and examining the exhibits.

CONCLUSION

Business students rank communication skills as among the most important they have to master. Executives say they spend more time communicating than doing anything else. However, unlike production, marketing, managerial economics, or accounting, communication doesn't have a number at the bottom. Consequently, its results are hard to measure. Moreover, as technology provides faster and more various means of communication, managers must develop better communication *instincts*. You are likely to respond more impulsively in an E-mail than in a letter that you would review and edit before sending.

This means that to improve as a communicator, you must listen to your only real judge—your audience. This can be a classmate, instructor, informal or social group, client, boss, employee, colleague, meeting, department, division, workforce, top management, government, interest groups, stockholders, the media, or the public. Every successful manager, at one time or another, is likely to address these audiences.

This analytical model begs an obvious and important question: Who is my appropriate audience? This usually means: Who can make the decision I want? Sometimes, to accomplish your goal, you just need one person's signature. In such cases, a broader communication strategy that might alert opponents isn't wise. Try to identify the decision-makers and approach them through the strategies suggested in this book. Don't struggle your way up through the bureaucracy if you can get your proposal directly to the person or audience that will decide the issue. Technologies such as websites and E-mail offer more opportunities for this approach than were available in the more hierarchically structured organizations of the 20th century.

While trenchant analysis provides the crucial underpinnings for a successful communication process, only practice can ensure that effective communication becomes second nature to you as a manager. The following discussions, cases, and exercises ask you to test yourself against a representative range of business communication challenges.