Preface

In order to understand what it means to communicate successfully in groups, students must develop both a foundation of communication skills and an understanding of the key elements critical to achieving group success. I wrote this book to provide a framework for learning these necessary skills in a way that emphasizes the uniqueness of each group and each individual within the group. Successful group communication starts with strong relationships. This text emphasizes the necessary skills in building and maintaining these relationships in order to problem solve and make decisions—that is the essence of group work.

When we look at the dynamics of small-group communication, it is easy to see why it can be a challenging topic to teach. Experience in groups is what students need, yet this takes time. Until they get this experience, it is up to the teacher to provide them with the conceptual foundation and introduce them to the skills necessary for understanding and implementing successful group communication. This text will help with these teaching challenges.

I had three main goals in writing this text:

- **Accuracy** This book is the result of many years of facilitating, researching, and teaching in group communication. It is important to teach our students skills that are based in research from both the field of communications and other related disciplines. This book places a clear emphasis on teaching skills first but also ensures that those skills are based on solid research.

- **Simulation of the group experience** To describe and explain group communication concepts, this book uses realistic examples to help students get inside what group work is really like. In addition to examples, I have provided dialogues of interacting groups so students can "watch" the group process unfold. Both types of examples will help students distinguish between effective and ineffective group communication practices, as well as help them identify the practices they wish to adopt to improve their group interaction.

- **A structured approach** I have defined group communication in terms of five key elements that can be used to evaluate group effectiveness. These elements—group size, interdependence of group members, group identity, group goals, and group structure—are introduced in Chapter 1 and integrated throughout the book in the boxed feature *Putting the Pieces Together*. This framework allows students to place new information and skills development into a larger context.

Approach

The title of this book, *Communicating in Groups: Building Relationships for Effective Decision Making*, speaks to two fundamental components of group interaction: building relationships and making good decisions. In this text, students will discover the unique dynamics of group communication, the essential skills that lead to success, and the group roles, tasks, and processes that pave the way for effective group work. By examining groups from each of these viewpoints, students come to understand the dynamic capacity of each group and learn to treat each group as a unique communication opportunity. To be competent in group communication, as this text emphasizes, students must learn to identify each group situation as unique, assess what skills are needed, and effectively apply the appropriate skills and procedures. In essence, the goal of this text is to provide a toolbox from which students can draw in any group situation—whether planning a function with a social club on campus or participating in a task-oriented group project in an academic or business context. To start this process, students must first become aware of their own communication in groups and the ways in which it can be improved to enhance group dynamics. The emphasis here is on critical thinking, skills assessment, and practice.

Features

This book contains a number of features to enhance student learning:

- *Putting the Pieces Together* **boxes** The five core elements in defining a group are used as a structure for evaluating group effectiveness. The five elements are group size, interdependence of members, group identity, group goals, and group structure. These elements are introduced in Chapter 1 and integrated in every chapter as a special feature so that students become more aware of how communication inhibits or facilitates group success.
- **Skills grounded in a solid research base** The best advice for communicating in groups is drawn from group research and theory, which has identified the most effective processes and results for group interaction. Thus the skills presented and suggested in the text are research based. For example, in Chapter 3, the stages of group development are used to help students understand the life cycle of groups and the ways in which communication differs in different stages. Functional theory is used as a framework in Chapter 8 to evaluate decision-making procedures. And situational leadership is used in Chapter 10 to help students identify and compare leadership styles and choose the most effective style for a particular group situation.
- **Extensive use of realistic examples** In addition to describing what is happening in groups through the use of extensive examples, this text provides transcripts of group dialogues so students can see the communication process unfold. Group dialogues also provide an opportunity to

suggest and test different communication approaches. Using the dialogue examples in this way can help students analyze how the group's conversation might have proceeded differently if alternative communication strategies were employed.

- **A wide range of group types** The text speaks to students' experiences by providing information about a wide variety of groups including family and social groups, work teams and high-performance task groups, civic and community groups, and discussion and decision-making groups. Whether students' experiences are with groups that are formal or informal, personal or professional, task-oriented or relationally oriented, they need communication skills to build and maintain relationships that support effective problem solving and decision making.

- **Three types of pedagogical boxes emphasizing skills development**

  - *Evaluating Group Success:* This boxed feature provides students with the opportunity to use an assessment technique to determine the influence of their own communication style on the eventual success or failure of the group. This feature is designed to help students understand their stake in and responsibility for group effectiveness.

  - *Mastering Group Skills:* Throughout the text, this feature helps students isolate skills critical to group interactions, analyze them, and then use information from the analyses to adapt or change a group communication skill.

  - *Skill Builders:* Integrated throughout the text, these boxes give students an opportunity to test, develop, and practice their group communication skills through exercises and activities.

- **Other in-text learning aids**

  - Skills previews: At the beginning of each chapter, there is an overview for students about which skills they will be learning and practicing in a given chapter.

  - End-of-chapter summaries and discussion questions and exercises.

  - Glossary.

  - Extensive list of references for further study.

Revision Highlights

This second edition has a number of revisions to benefit students:

- **Updated research** The literature has been thoroughly updated, drawing from recent communication and interdisciplinary group research.

- **Skills development** The text provides a stronger emphasis on skills development while continuing to draw from a contemporary research base.

- **Emphasis on accessibility** Theoretical language is simplified and clarified with clear and succinct definitions and examples throughout the text.

- **New chapter on communicating in diverse groups** This coverage was formerly combined in the relationships chapter. With this revision, there is expanded coverage and a stronger emphasis on developing skills to address issues of diversity.
- **New chapter on assessing and implementing decisions** This emphasizes the distinction between the communication skills needed for making decisions and those needed for assessing and implementing decisions.
- **Streamlined coverage** This reduces redundancy and increases the emphasis on skills, practice, and application.
- **New appendix on creating and delivering group presentations** This appendix identifies group presentation skills and provides advice for students who have to give group presentations as class assignments.

Organization

To provide a foundation, Chapters 1–4 describe basic communication concepts as they apply to groups or teams. By increasing their abilities to effectively send and receive messages—which, in turn, create the group's structure—students accomplish the first step in achieving more effective group participation. Chapters 5–7 focus on the communication processes among group members, the processes upon which group relationships develop and are maintained. These chapters assist students in becoming more competent group communicators capable of establishing and maintaining relationships with diverse group members. Chapters 8–11 address decision making, problem solving, leadership, and conflict management—both as interaction opportunities and interaction problems that are a regular and dynamic aspect of group interaction. Increasing students' skills in decision making, problem solving, leadership, and conflict management will help them maximize their group interaction efforts.

Despite the extensive research on group interaction, there is no blueprint for group success. What works in one group situation may fail in another. Thus Chapters 12–13 cover meeting management, facilitation skills, and techniques for providing feedback to the group. Whether in the role of leader or member, students should be able to facilitate their group's interaction to help the group stay or get back on track. Armed with specific principles, procedures, and feedback techniques, students can make more informed choices about how to help their group.

Instructors' Resources

To assist in teaching with this text, I have updated the *Instructor's Manual.* This manual includes the teaching philosophy that was a foundation for this book, syllabus examples for the group communication course, methods of obtaining feedback from students about the course and their learning experiences and expectations, chapter-by-chapter teaching resources and exercises, a chapter-by-chapter test bank with both objective and essay questions, and suggestions for term-long group projects.

A website (www.mhhe.com/keytongroup2) has additional information for both instructors and students. For example, instructors can review recent contributions to the group communication literature and find other resources for teaching the course. Students can find information about and links to groups portrayed in the media, as well as links to the type of groups in which they regularly participate. The website is regularly updated with new features and content.

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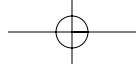
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