

# PART 1

## COMMUNICATION in Daily Life

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# CHAPTER 1

## The Building Blocks of Communication

### Executive Summary

**Communication always has been a prime human objective. Grunts and gestures used by humans in the Stone Age have advanced to complex meanings and nuances. Communication today is not simple. To be an effective communicator, you must know how the process works and how your skills add to or detract from effective communication.**

**Communication theories help to interpret the communication challenges of a new millennium**

Our transactional communication model shapes the business communication discussion in this book.

**How a message is shaped is called framing**

Framing also determines how a message is interpreted or evaluated by others. Such factors as how concepts are communicated by leaders and the media, and how they are accepted by the culture, form an important role in the adoption process. How management views the communication process and shapes its messages has a significant impact on how the public views an organization.

**Why a person listens to or understands one message rather than another depends on the communicator's knowledge of the many complex elements involved**

For example, non-verbal language is more difficult to read, is culture bound and requires rigorous attention to interpretative meanings. In addition, listening is not necessarily hearing, and barriers reduce the number of messages that influence us.

**Communicative skills are vital to sending and receiving messages**

Today's business world requires an understanding of modern communication principles and ultimately their application to create effective messages. ■

# The Building Blocks of Communication

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“*In this age of audience fragmentation, global presence, data overload, niche marketing, downsizing, reorganizing and accountability, effective oral and written communication skills are in demand.*”

## Introduction to Integrated Communication

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How important is effective communication in your daily business and personal life? The answer is obvious; without effective communication even everyday tasks are difficult, if not impossible. The average person takes messages at face value without evaluating the true meaning and intent of the communication.

Here's a quick scenario. You didn't quite understand what the weather man predicted this morning on the radio and, because you didn't take your broly or mackintosh, you are now soaked. You were focused on your wet shoes and hair when you ordered lunch at the local café, and consequently you are eating a sandwich with mustard. You hate mustard. You received a low grade on your class report because your professor said you didn't address the issue (you didn't tell her you couldn't read your rain-soaked notes). Your boss at your part-time job got angry because you didn't say you would be running late (you had to change out of your wet clothes before going to work). Your car battery went dead because you left your lights on in the parking lot after driving in the rain, and you missed meeting your friend for dinner. When you finally arrived home and collapsed in a heap on the sofa, you rued the horrible day that you had experienced. How could everything have gone so wrong?

If you were to think back over the day's events you would see that, because of one simple misunderstanding, the rest of the day's events were affected by your failure effectively to receive, interpret, understand and evaluate the meaning of simple daily messages.

Now let's consider the consequences of poor communication in terms of a catastrophic natural disaster.

In late August 2005, as water poured into the US city of New Orleans and thousands of citizens began to evacuate the low-lying areas of the region, many people received mixed messages. Some understood that the Superdome, a huge sports arena near the centre of the city, was the emergency shelter. Others heard reports that they were to assemble at the Convention Centre on the edge of the Mississippi River.

Conditions were difficult for those who made it to the Superdome. There were just a few doctors on hand, limited supplies, little food or water and the authorities were keeping a tenuous peace. It took several days for these people to be boarded on buses and helicopters and evacuated out of the city.

Meanwhile at the Convention Center there was total chaos: no organization, no ruling authority, no food or water, no medical services and no communication.

News crews from around the world covered the unfolding story both at the Superdome and at the Convention Center. The reporters made passionate on-air appeals for help at the Convention Center.

Why the disparity between conditions at the two sites?

After three days of chaos, and in spite of the worldwide distribution of photos and video footage of the awful situation at the Convention Center, the head of the US Federal Emergency Management Agency claimed on camera, “I didn’t know they were there until today”.

Where was the communication? How had his team, trained to respond to emergency rescue procedures, missed the hours of continuous media coverage of the people at the Convention Center?

It was ineffective communication on the part of many coordinating agencies that did not know what their counterparts were doing.

Communications is at the root of everything you will do in your personal and professional lives. Consequently, you need to master and use communication tools effectively and strategically.

### **Silo mentality**

In the past, organizations have suffered from a **“silo” mentality**. A silo is a huge, vertical container used to store grain. When people in a given part of an organization such as a department have information and refuse to share it with others, they reinforce the walls of their silo. Historically, this was thought to give that department within the organization additional power as it had control over information that other departments didn’t possess.

In these vertical silos, it is also difficult to share information from the top of the organization to the bottom, and vice versa. This makes it unlikely for everyone in the organization to be “on the same page”, resulting in less effective communication, loss of time, lack of quality performance and ultimately the loss of potential profit.

Today we believe sharing information, rather than hoarding it, makes the total organization stronger. Cooperation encourages connections between ideas and actions by drawing information from across the organization.

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To clarify the concept of shared information, think about your favourite sports team. When specific plays are designed by the coach, each team member has specific duties to perform for the play to work successfully. If one person fails to do his or her part, the play can fail, and the end result will be a loss for the team. The same is true for effective business communication. If only a select group of people know the information and keep it to themselves, the other players within the organization don't have all the facts to make responsible decisions.

One of the leading cultural management firms in the European Union had this to say about informational silos:

Even functions, once regarded as monolithic silos, standing proudly on their own, are in need of reconciliation. Time was when the workplace simply manufactured things that the sales force then tried to sell to customers. But the modern corporation cannot be like that. Increasingly we have customized workplaces, customized to not just what customers are asking for, but to what growing, learning, ever-more-complex employees seek to learn, to discover, and to express. The boundaries between functions are dissolving into integrated capabilities (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2004, p. 14).

How do you use communication to gather, interpret and synthesize information? How do you communicate this information to receivers? How do you evaluate your message? How does the message find its meaning in and through various environments? How do you employ strategy to ensure communication success? How do you evaluate your message to see if it was indeed received as you intended?

These are just a few of the questions that need to be addressed. And we hope that by now you see how complex the idea of communication can be. If you do a simple Google search of "communication", you will get 619 million hits. While much communication occurs outside business, it is often difficult to draw a definitive distinction. But Google "communication business" and you will receive 245 million hits. Change the words around to "business communication" and you will get 262 million hits. There is much to know, and much to learn.

## **Why Does Integrated Business Communication Work?**

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In this age of audience fragmentation, global presence, data overload, niche marketing, downsizing, reorganizing, research demanding and accountability, communication has to

work. It must be strategically employed to achieve measurable results. Everyone has to be on board, everyone has to buy in. Engagement is the key. Only by totally integrating all business communication from department to department, division to division, employee to executive, president to branded image, engineer to customer, retail to mail order, and advertising to the CEO's appearance on a talk show can you make the most of your communication resources. Making sure your company speaks with one voice is the challenge of the future. It will take understanding and a coordinated effort by everyone, but especially by young, fresh executives like you who will be running the companies of the world far into the future.

Creating and sustaining an integrated business communication programme must be a priority in today's business climate. As the *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman reminds us, around 2000 the world entered a new era of globalization where the playing field is level (Friedman, 2005). Your success in what has become a small world, owing to instant communication access, demands that you are able to communicate and compete with people in literally every corner of the globe. So let's prepare for your future in this global marketplace. We'll start with the communication approach that, if practised skillfully, will help you build strong linkages to customers, employees, stockholders, financial institutions, suppliers and other stakeholders.

Our collective practical experience in a variety of market sectors convinces us that a planned communication approach that considers the goals and values of an organization, the needs of its stakeholders and the demands of a changing marketplace will help ensure profitability and institutional success in a global environment.

To learn how to use integrated business communication practices, you must first understand how this process of communication works from the bottom up. So we will embark upon a journey of breaking up, investigating, probing and reconfiguring the communication process so that you will be able to construct a viable world of integrated business communication that will be useful in whatever career path you take and in whatever part of the world you choose to go.

## What Is Communication?

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**Communication** is simply the sending of a message from a source to a receiver. But history shows that communication is never simple – from medieval coded messages that prohibited the messenger from knowing what the message contained to the misinterpretation of Japan's answer to the US demand for unconditional surrender before dropping the atomic bomb toward the end of World War II, you will recognize the need for clear, accurate communication.

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Perhaps because the warning (to surrender unconditionally) was only a general statement, the Japanese ... chose to ignore it, employing the ambiguous word *mokusatu*, which means literally “to kill with silence”... Tokyo radio used the word, saying the government would *mokusatu* the declaration and fight on. The English translation became “reject”, and the president took it as a rebuff (Ferrell, 1960).

The first communication models sought to explain how a message is sent and received. They tended to concentrate on one message being sent from a sender to a receiver who in turn then sent a return message.

This was soon seen as too simplistic. As the field of communication took root in academic disciplines, the early linear models fell short of modern findings. Those who began to study this science of communication asked the following questions:

- Is just one message being sent at a time?
  - Does the receiver wait for the completion of a message before he/she sends a response?
  - Do messages have a distinct beginning and ending?
  - Why do different people interpret the same message differently?
- Are non-verbal messages being read and what is their influence on the verbal message?
  - What factors interfere with communication?

Communicating is not simple. Once we accept this basic fact, we can begin to think not only about how and why we communicate, but to whom and in what manner we do so. Getting our message across in the way in which we want it to be received takes time and effort. This realization opens the gate to developing successful communication techniques.

### Strategic Thinking



Effective communication is crucial, especially when lives are on the line.

The European Commission report on the “Impact of Multicultural and Multilingual Crews on Maritime Communication” (MARCUM, 1998) cites the following example from *The Ethnography of Communication* that occurred when relationships between Egypt and Greece were strained.

Egyptian pilots radioed (in English) their intention to land at an airbase on Cyprus, and the Greek traffic controllers reportedly responded with silence. The Greeks intended thereby to indicate refusal of permission to land, but the Egyptians interpreted silence as assent.

The result of the misunderstanding in this case was the loss of a number of lives when the Greeks fired on the planes as they approached the runway (Buck, 2002).



## The Development of Theory

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Communication theory is important to the study of communication and its role in business in the global marketplace. The history of communication theory begins with the social sciences but today can be found in many other disciplines such as media, organizational development and mathematics.

### The boom years

The 1930s was a **boom decade** for communication theory. One of the names you should be familiar with during this era is Sigmund Freud whose new theories of psychoanalysis coloured the communication landscape. You should also know the name Edward Bernays, the public relations guru and nephew of Freud. Bernays, who died in 1995, furthered Freud's studies in the USA by incorporating them into the new ideas he was using to promote goods and services across the country.

In 1948, political scientist Harold Lasswell described communication as *who says what through which channel to whom and with what effect*.

The study of communication grew rapidly both in academic circles and in the professional arena. Advertisers helped speed the development of communication theories. Ever ready to consider a new theory or idea that would help sell their products or services, advertising agencies began to employ social and behavioural scientists to help them communicate messages to consumers about their products.

### Dig Deeper



Modern communication models to read about: visit [www.ccms-infobase.com](http://www.ccms-infobase.com).

The Lasswell formula deals with components: communicator, message, channel, receiver and effect.

The Osgood and Schramm circular model presents communication in a circular pattern including elements of encoder, decoder, interpreter and message.

Gerbner's general model shows communication as a dynamic event with a focus on the communicating agent. He is known for his theories on violence in the media.

Ronald B. Adler's transactional model is perhaps the most practical model. It is the one we have used as a basis of our model for discussion of effective communication.

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New terms were introduced and studied:

- Feedback made senders play a role as receivers of information.
- Communication was seen as simultaneous and continuous.
- Encoding became a point of study.
- Decoding was deconstructed and analysed.
- The medium or channel took on characteristics that added complexity to the communication model.
- Noise was defined as external or internal.

What became important was not just communicating, but communicating effectively. A new definition was created: effective communication is when a message is understood by the receiver in the manner in which it was intended by the sender.

For example, I explain to my friend how to get to a certain store. I use the directional phrase, “It’s a way down the street”. Now in my mind that means 15 blocks or so. But effective communication doesn’t hinge solely on what I mean, it also depends on the receiver’s interpretation of “way down”. If we disagree as to what the actual distance is, then my friend may think I have given him wrong directions. He may begin to look for the store by the third or fourth block and perhaps will continue looking for a few more blocks. But, confused and now assuming he received the wrong message, he may give up altogether, well before he goes 10 blocks further.

### **Communication education today**

Today, universities are revamping their curricula to reflect the need for greater communication skills in the business world, but there is a debate about how much focus should be on theory and what concentration should be placed on practicality. In “Teaching Communication to Business Management Students”, Laurie Cohen, Gill Musson and Susanne Tietze explain that most business students are not educated in communication-related study, “the area seems to have remained curiously untouched and ... more practically, there is an apparent need for competent communicators in all sectors of our economy” (Cohen *et al.*, 2005, p. 281). The authors, citing Cameron (2000, pp. 180–181), contend that “a competent communicator is someone who exercises choice and judgement” and understands “how her choices will be received and interpreted” (Cohen *et al.*, 2005, p. 286). They conclude: “Understanding how language works in the construction of social and organizational realities is fundamental

to management practice. To deny students of management access to these theoretical ideas simply perpetuates the theory and/or practice divide so characteristic of management education” (Cohen *et al.*, 2005 p. 286).

Most business schools have a full timetable teaching management, marketing, sales, accounting and other necessary courses. Communication is often an optional course in another department, if at all.

But that is changing. Once thought to be the domain of public relations or human resource departments, communication is now being valued across the multilayered spectrum of business. Many employers are demanding that recruits be well versed not only in practical presentation skills but also in the theoretical realm of what constitutes sound communication principles and how they can be applied to changing situations. Business students are expected to be effective communicators with the ability to analyse, evaluate, adapt and connect to a changing business landscape and a multinational workforce.

## Forms of Communication

In this text we will introduce you to intrapersonal, interpersonal and mediated communication. Our primary focus, however, is on business communication.

### Intrapersonal communication

**Intrapersonal communication** is communicating with ourselves. That little voice we consult before we ask a favour from a friend, plead for an assignment deadline extension from a professor or request a promotion from a boss is invaluable as a sounding board. We all talk to ourselves, some of us more than others. And that is a good thing. Hashing over available options is part of a self-monitoring mechanism that allows us to evaluate and correct our behaviour both before and after our actual performance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Donna Vocate addresses some of the theoretical thinking behind this type of communication in *Intrapersonal Communication: Different Voices, Different Minds* (Vocate, 1994).

### Definition of Discourse

A connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitute a way of talking about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and respond to that issue (Watson, 1999).

The study of semiotics has led to an emphasis on the receiver's role in meaning-making. Understanding that “meaning systems are arbitrary, culturally mediated and operating at a largely subconscious level” and knowing that receivers “influence how a text is decoded and understood” is a valuable management skill (Cohen *et al.*, 2005).

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Therapists explore the workings of intrapersonal communication and usually adhere to the school of thought that says individuals can enhance their self-esteem by talking to themselves in a positive manner. So instead of saying, “I was awful in accounting, no one will hire me”, individuals should turn the negative into a positive and say to themselves, “I didn’t do so well in accounting class, but I can be of great value to a company because of my financial analysis skills”. Many experts believe that what people say to themselves ultimately affects their feelings of self-worth.

### **Interpersonal communication**

**Interpersonal communication**, the exchange of information between two or more senders and receivers in a casual context, is a science unto its own. Interpersonal communication is neither always personal nor always private. It is about real relationships that take root through communication between and among individuals, verbal and non-verbal. Scholars began to consider components that affect communication as closeness of the parties, context (business or personal), length of contact (momentary or extended), friendly or adversarial tone, etc.

Scholars took up the discipline and theories were formed: social exchange, uncertainty reduction and reward theory.<sup>2</sup> Julia Wood suggests that interpersonal communication exists on a continuum from extremely personal to extremely impersonal (Wood, 2000). The information available regarding interpersonal communication is extensive. We will cover some of the relevant components to our discussion of business communication, but for a more detailed study you can search the Internet or your library for sources.

### **Mediated communication**

The mass media developed their own communication models. Communication researcher Wilbur Schramm and psychologist Charles E. Osgood created the circular model. In their model, the sender becomes the encoder and the receiver is the decoder. They were concerned with why individuals receiving identical messages interpret them differently and what happens when feedback is delayed. For example, if a newspaper prints a story, it may take time to receive reader feedback. Of course the Internet enables nearly immediate feedback as viewers and readers are directed

<sup>2</sup> See Thibaut & Kelly (1959). *The Social Psychology of Groups*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

to websites to express their opinions, vote for a favourite singing idol, access more information on a story or log on to receive free soap opera updates. Some theorists like David L. Evans who has studied stereotypes in the media (Evans, 1995) and A. Silverblatt who has explored media literacy issues (Silverblatt, 1995) are important figures in **mediated communication** research. George Gerbner, the guru of media analysis theory, identified the “three Bs” of television’s impact on society: blurs, blends and bends (Gerbner, 1990).

### ***Media richness***

With roots in computer-mediated communications, **media richness** theory is built on the assumption that organizations select a form of communication based on their ability to reduce uncertainty and equivocality (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Some scholars describe media richness as the ability to carry information, defined as its data-carrying capacity and its symbol-carrying capacity (Daft, Lengel & Kiebe, 1987). Using these two criteria, some media are classified as more effective in meeting specific communication objectives than others.

Media can be ranked from “rich” to “lean” on the basis of the following considerations:

- Interactivity or speed of feedback. Face-to-face conversations would be considered rich media in this case, whereas email would be rated low or lean. In face-to-face communication the message can be adjusted quickly if the sender believes that the message is not being accurately received.
- Multiple clues. Rich media provide a variety of verbal, kinetic and spatial clues. Again, face-to-face would be considered a rich medium, whereas a videoconference or text-based chat would be less so. When the sender and receiver can “read” each other through both verbal and non-verbal cues, the message has a greater chance of being understood.
- Message tailoring. Rich media enable the sender to shape the message to the needs of the receiver, whereas lean media, such as databases, restrict the sender’s ability to tailor the message but also leave little room for ambiguity.
- Emotions. Some media allow the sender to infuse personal feelings and emotions into the message. Face-to-face meetings allow the sender to show, both verbally and non-verbally, what she or he feels about a particular message or situation, whereas an annual report leaves little room for emotion (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Daft, Lengel & Kiebe, 1987).

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In an effort to attract readership, traditional newspapers are encouraging journalists to post supplemental writings on weblogs. They hope this will establish a dialogue with new techies. The French *Le Monde* provides weblogs to selected subscribers to “create a club of bloggers” and increase loyalty. “The reader is a partner, not a passive audience”, says Stephane Mazzorato, editor and publisher (World Editors Forum, 2006).

### Business communication

Business communication falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum with intrapersonal communication at one end and mass communication at the other.

**Business communication** refers to the transfer of messages that pertain to the world of business, from personal email, office memos, sales presentations and conferences to daily greetings, departmental meetings and corporate branding strategies. Of course, there is much intermingling of message types in the workplace. A study by Ted Zorn investigates the communication among “bosses and buddies” in the office (Zorn, 1995). It uncovers numerous ways that people cope with the uncertainty of contradictory messages as messages are sent among friends, co-workers, bosses and subordinates.

### Integrated business communication

**Integrated business communication** in this book refers to *the process of planning, executing and evaluating unified messages that create stakeholder relationships and build brand recognition.*<sup>3</sup>

In this book, the model of transactional communication forms the basis of our discussion on how organizational communication works and the role of integrated communication in that process.



**Figure 1.1** Intrapersonal communication is at the far left of the continuum and is an internal communication process. Interpersonal communication involves two or more people, but usually involves small groups where members interact with one another. Business communication reaches both small and large audiences, all of which have something in common – a stake in the organization. Mass communication is on the far right, reaches an impersonal public audience.

<sup>3</sup> This definition is based on Tom Duncan’s definition in *Advertising & IMC* (2005) but views business communication in a broader perspective.

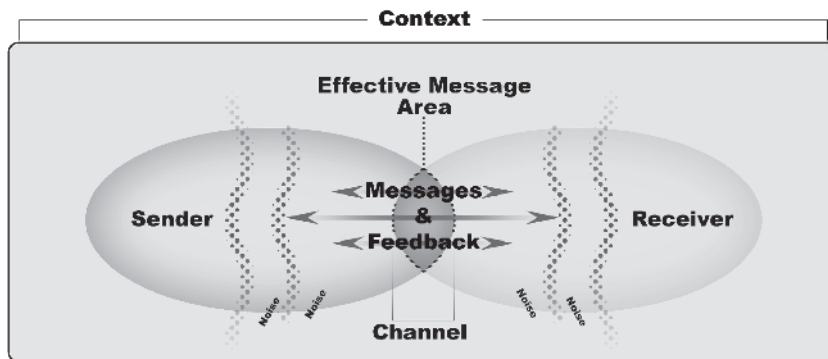
## Understanding What This Means to You

Understanding communication and how it works in the business world is crucial. Not only is the way we communicate changing, but people’s expectations and standards of that communication are also changing. Businesses are both senders and receivers of messages. As such they must communicate both horizontally and vertically within and outside their organization. A “this is the way we’ve always done it” won’t work in the global marketplace. Because communication needs to be integrated into every facet of the organization, informational silos, the tall vertical depositories of information, are out. Horizontal seas of information shared between various departments and management levels, consumers and employees, shareholders and stakeholders are the new ideal.

So let’s look at a model that depicts many of the elements involved in effective communication. We will call it the ‘transactional communication model’.<sup>4</sup>

Consider the components of the transactional communication model.

The **sender**, also called the encoder, is the oval on the left. The sender’s mission is to compose a message embedded with meaning from his/her world, while considering the interpretative resources the receiver, the oval on the right, will use to decode the



**Figure 1.2** Transactional communication model, illustrating the communication process.

<sup>4</sup> There are other models that focus more or less on various components. Sometimes they are called transmission or transactional models. Leading theorists in the field are Shannon and Weaver, Adler, Lasswell, Osgood and Schramm, Berlo and Gerbner. There are critics, too: Ang, Cherry, Reddy and Underwood, to name just a few. For more information, see Baran and Davis (2000) and Lowery and DeFleur (1995).

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message. Let's say this in another way. The sender must formulate a message based in his/her own world which includes such factors as education level, socio-economic status, prejudices and cultural concepts, among other considerations, and then relinquish control of that message as it enters the world of the receiver.

The **receiver** then has to decode the message and give it meaning, but that is not so easy. Judgements have to be made on the basis not only of the actual words the person is hearing but also of an infinite number of subtle cues, such as tone of voice, a smile, a handshake, a furtive eye, ambiguous word usage, etc. The receiver's world is individualistic and thus different from that of the sender. We will talk about how we perceive and try to understand the world of our receiver later.

The **channel** is how the information is being sent: face-to-face, email, phone, fax, text messages, advertising, group presentation, etc. While this may sound like the easiest element of the model to understand, there is much to think about when selecting a channel. Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* introduced the concept "the medium is the message" and directed scholars to focus on how content is influenced by what a medium "says" (McLuhan, 1964). Why do we choose to call a friend to impart bad news, rather than write an email? Why is a story broadcast on the evening news more believable than a story in a tabloid newspaper? Is a television commercial just an ad with motion? Each channel has not only certain requirements inherent in the medium but also implicit expectations on the part of both senders and receivers.

An **effective message** is not just *any* message. While we may get a message across, perhaps even many messages, they would not be considered effective unless they are received in the manner in which the sender intended. The level of effectiveness depends on the overlapping areas of the worlds of the sender and receiver, the union set of the two ovals; the bigger the overlap, the better the chance of a message being effective. In other words, the greater the extent to which a sender and receiver share commonalities, the better the chance they have to understand one another. However, no amount of common background, culture, religion, education or shared experiences can ensure success, but "being on the same page" at least opens the door for understanding to occur.

**Noise** is just that – noise that interferes with the transmission of a message. It can be external (a sudden loud noise, a sneeze, a power shortage, etc.) or internal (lack of education, prejudice, stubbornness, etc.).

**Feedback** is made up of all the verbal and non-verbal messages sent back and forth between sender and receiver as communication proceeds. It may or may not be noticed, heard or understood, but it exists nonetheless and often determines the future direction a message will take.



**Context** refers to the occasion, time and place of the communication. It comprises all the underlying and overarching factors that impact a message. The phrase, “come and see me” has different meanings when said by a sister, professor or boss. Likewise, its meaning changes if it is received by a lover, truant or employer. Its meaning is dependent on where it is said, by whom, at what time and on what occasion.

**Simultaneous and continuous** describe actions in the communication process. Many messages are sent simultaneously in the guise of a smile, toss of the hair, accent, nod, furtive eye or yawn. Messages are also continuous; even though words have a starting and an ending point, non-verbal messages do not. They never stop.

This transactional model is used throughout our discussion of integrated business communication in the global marketplace. Think about the various components and how they influence effective business messages.

## Shaping the Communication Process

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Now that you have been introduced to our transactional communication model used in this text, let’s examine other concepts that influence the **communication process** and that are important to your understanding of the role of integrated communication in the business sector. You will encounter these concepts in future chapters of the book.

### Dig Deeper



There are varying statistics on how people learn information. Lee and Bowers used university students to determine learning performance (Lee & Bowers, 1997). Lawrence Najjar compiled a literature review of research-based learning principles and applied these to website construction (Najjar, 1998). You can find many other studies by searching the Web. Faraday and Sutcliffe tracked eye movement patterns during multimedia sessions and documented these tips for improving learning performance (Faraday & Sutcliffe, 1997):

- Spoken words reinforce an image.
- Symbols direct attention to specific objects and locations.
- Object motion can attract attention.
- Revealing information systematically controls viewer attention.
- Concurrent presentation of several pieces of information hinders viewer focus.

### Framing

As we have discussed, the effectiveness of a message depends on many factors including whether the sender and receiver understand each others' spoken language. The context of the message or the frame used in shaping it contributes to how the message is interpreted, and thus understood.

Suppose you missed a class and sent your instructor an email with the following message: "Did I miss anything important today in class?"

How might your message be interpreted by an instructor who had spent time and effort in preparing the day's lecture? How will the instructor's answer be framed? Will it be tongue-in-cheek? Serious? Sympathetic? Angry?

Can you see how your choice of language influences the instructor's response?

Robert Entman defines **framing** as "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution" (Entman, 2004).<sup>5</sup>

Consider this example of how a major world leader framed his response to a national crisis. On 7 July 2005, the British Prime Minister Tony Blair was attending the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, when he received word that terrorists had bombed London's Underground as well as a double-decker bus. Blair used the backdrop of this meeting of world leaders to frame terrorism as "not an attack on one nation but on all nations and on all civilized people everywhere" (Associated Press, 2005).

Would Blair have framed the event in similar terms had he not been hosting world leaders? Did the circumstance of the meeting make his message all the more poignant? It seems clear that the militant group who carried out the bombing chose that particular day because it knew its cause would be a featured topic in worldwide media.

Organizational leaders from politicians to CEOs to managers to shop supervisors knowingly – or unwittingly – frame their messages to address issues of strategic and tactical importance. How the media choose to use the message, or, in this case, frame the event, shapes how the public perceives it.

If you understand the communication process, you will have a clearer idea how best to communicate a message. The frames you choose in that communication process may determine how well your message is understood and ultimately accepted by the audience you are trying to reach. In Chapter 2 we will further

<sup>5</sup> Framing has been studied across many disciplines from issues of risk such as a fire and explosion at an oil refinery (Hornig, 1992; Duhé & Zoch, 1994/1995) to political and health issues (Clarke, 1992; Lupton, 1994).

examine framing as it applies to integrated business communication in a global marketplace.

How we frame messages is of key consideration in how the message is processed and received.

## Diffusion of innovation

Organizations that create a climate where creativity and innovation are encouraged and supported will have a stronger chance of surviving global competition. Change is the key word in today’s business climate. To understand the process of change and the role of communication in that process, you need to understand the theory of **diffusion of innovation**.

Diffusion theory grew out of the high rate of change occurring during the Industrial Revolution. In the 1890s, French sociologist Gabriel Tarte wondered why some innovations succeeded while others failed. Tarte posed a theory of imitation based on psychological concepts, but his theory failed to see the connection between the adoption of innovation and the power of the mass media to stimulate awareness (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995, p. 117).

British and German–Austrian scholars noticed that the process of adoption seemed to follow the S-curve or the standard normal curve. In other words, when a new product became available, it was slow to take off. Eventually the product would be adopted by the mainstream. However, some individuals simply ignored the invention altogether.

It wasn’t until American rural sociologists Bryce Ryan and Neal Gross published their important article on the diffusion of the practice of using hybrid seed corn in two Iowa communities that social scientists began to understand the role of communication in the process of diffusion (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

Ryan and Gross discovered that adopting the practice of planting hybrid seed corn did not happen overnight but was influenced by both interpersonal contacts and the attention of mass media.

For example, you need to convince your employees to adopt a new standard of practice or perhaps you have a revolutionary new product to introduce in the marketplace. You will want to know how long it will take to implement your new ideas or to make a profit on your innovation.

Words are framed by their history and use. Reترonyms are words adapted to explain the past in terms of the present. These words are usually due to new innovation or increased specialization (Dalvi, 2003).

What was once called:	Is now referred to as:
A book	A printed book
Mail	Snail-mail
A fireplace	A wood-burning fireplace
A phone	A landline phone
Coffee	Regular coffee
Airline ticket	Paper ticket
Reality	Real reality

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Many factors influence effective messaging. The role of diffusion of innovation in the marketplace is crucial to the success of an organization.

We will explore how these forces affect the integrated communication process in a later chapter.

### Opinion leaders

The diffusion theory points out not only the role of the media in influencing the adoption of new ideas but also the importance of intervening publics or opinion leaders. Business decisions are influenced by a variety of factors including those individuals to whom we turn for advice on particular issues. **Opinion leaders** include politicians, business leaders, religious figures and other individuals we deem experts. Indeed, our very definition of “expert” will vary depending on the issue and circumstance.

Your company wants to buy property in an area with easy access to transportation, connection to public utilities, an available labour force and a positive business climate. Who would you consult? A likely first choice is an estate agent who deals in industrial development. However, your search for expertise needs to extend beyond the real estate broker to education officials, government bureaucrats and politicians. Who are the leaders in the community whose opinions on economic development are valued?

As a future business executive you will need to analyse and evaluate the role opinion leaders play in the decision-making process.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter you were introduced to the concept of integrated business communication and its vital role in the global marketplace. The transactional communication model components – the sender or encoder, receiver or decoder, channel and the effective message, plus noise, feedback, context and simultaneous and continuous actions – influence how the message is received.

Several concepts – framing, diffusion of innovation and the role of opinion leaders – will underscore much of our discussion. As a future business leader you need to consider how you frame messages as well as how they have been framed for you.

The survival of organizations in a global society depends in part on how well companies adapt to competition and change. The theory of diffusion of innovation helps you to understand the role of mass media and opinion leaders in influencing the change process.

Effectively communicating may be a complex process, but communication is more an art than a science. ■

## Learning From Others

Despina Kartson is Chief Marketing Officer for Latham & Watkins, a global law firm with over 1800 attorneys with offices in the UK, USA, Singapore, France, Belgium, Germany, China, Italy, Russia and Japan. The firm has received the highest honours from industry watchdogs in areas such as “associate relations” and “openness regarding finances”.

Kartson is charged with furthering the company's global business developmental initiatives and will coordinate her efforts with the Marketing Strategy Committee. She shares her insight on some of the global communication issues addressed in this textbook.

**Q. How important is integrated business communication in a global marketplace?**

**A.** Integrated communication is critical in a global marketplace as the need for regular and consistent information delivery can positively impact the organization's business model and client relationships.

**Q. With whom do you communicate on a regular basis?**

**A.** My daily communication is with firm leadership, department personnel, media, outside vendors, clients and prospective clients, located literally around the world. Internal communication covers topics from planning and organizational matters to policy issues and client concerns. Much of my daily external communication is in the broad area of public relations which includes media alerts, press releases and case notes.

**Q. What communication issues do you face when dealing with different cultures?**

**A.** As a global firm without a headquarters location, we are extremely sensitive to the use of terms that are too US-centric. For example, we do not refer to our European and Asian offices as “non-US” or “foreign”. Instead, we refer to them as European, Asian or US, as appropriate. We also steer clear of colloquialisms that would not be understood outside the US.

**Q. How do you ensure that your messaging is heard the way you intend?**

**A.** If possible, we test market our communication prior to finalizing it. For example, we send communications to appropriate staff in the receiving market and ask them to confirm the message they receive.

**Q. What are your thoughts on the importance of effective corporate leadership?**

**A.** As a leader, it is critical to listen to superiors and other leaders, to peers, to subordinates, to constituents and to key influencers. Equally important are effective communication skills. Many college graduates have weak communication skills – they

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cannot craft a compelling written piece or cover letter and generally lack the ability to communicate their thoughts. A solid communicator who can write clearly and present effectively is respected and well regarded.

**Q. How important is teamwork to an organization?**

**A.** Teamwork is very important, especially in a global organization. Most initiatives, projects and day-to-day assignments require participation by multiple individuals, and are rarely done solo.

**Q. Finally, integrated business communication uses multiple channels of communication effectively to reach audiences with one voice/one message and works to ensure that messages are received the way they are intended. Do you think it is important for students to understand this concept?**

**A.** Integrated business communication is important in the global economy of which many students will likely be a part. Understanding the differences in learning styles and knowing how to reach receivers on many levels with meaningful messages will make our students effective leaders in the future global marketplace.

### Case Study – Simultaneous Message Systems (SMS)

Does the innovation of Internet messengers, mini-homepages and simultaneous message systems (SMS) signal the death of email? If young people in Korea are seen as early innovators, it may.

A poll of 2 000 middle, high school and college students in Gyeonggi and Chungcheong provinces, conducted by a professor at Chungbuk University in October 2004, reported that two-thirds of the respondents “rarely used or didn’t use email at all”.

Why? Email was viewed as too much like a chore.

In addition, they noted that it is impossible to tell whether the respondent receives the message if the reply is not immediately forthcoming.

One communication executive observed: “Email efficiency fails in terms of promptness, convenience and credibility”.

Professor Lee Ok-hwa who conducted the survey said, “The new generation hate [sic] agonizing and waiting and tend to express their feelings immediately”.

Koreans are considered early adopters in integrated technology. Do you think this trend is a prediction of the future? What might hinder the acceptance of Internet messengers, mini-homepages and SMS messages? (Ki-hong, 2004). ■

## Class Exercises

1. Think about a time when you misunderstood a set of directions, a procedure, a recipe or a task. Try to pinpoint which element in the transactional communication model went wrong. What could have made the communication more effective?
2. With a partner, agree on a person (famous or a professor) that you both think is an effective communicator. Separately make a list of why you each think so. Compare your lists. Where do you agree or disagree? Why do you think you and your partner are able to agree on certain points and disagree on others?
3. Do some Web research and see if you can find an organizational leader, politician or corporate executive who has framed a business message in such a negative way that he/she has jeopardized his/her reputation. Check out CNN.com, 18 February 2004; Conan O'Brien apologizes to Canadians. Available from <http://www.cnn.com/2004/SHOWBIZ/TV/02/18/leisure.obrien.reut> (CNN.com, 2004).

## Action Plan



In an essay called “Innovation Diffusion” for TechnologyReview.com, Michael Schrage makes this statement: “The big lie of the Information Age is that ‘nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come’. What nonsense. In reality, nothing in this world is more powerful than an innovation that has diffused to the point where it enjoys both global reach and global impact. Ready access to ideas promotes awareness, but ready access to innovation promotes empowerment and opportunity” ([www.technologyreview.com/articles/or/12/schrage1204.0asp](http://www.technologyreview.com/articles/or/12/schrage1204.0asp)) (Schrage, 2005).

Explore with your classmates the differences between ideas and innovations. Can you give examples? Then take either side of this argument and prepare an oral or written argument to share with your classmates.

## Websites



Research any of these concepts that are of interest to you:

Find out how psychology impacts communication at <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/topic.htm> (Green, 2006).

Learn about Edward Bernays, the father of modern public relations and some of his theories at [http://www.prmuseum.com/bernays/bernays\\_1915.html](http://www.prmuseum.com/bernays/bernays_1915.html) (Public Relations Museum, 2006).

How important are innovations to companies? Look at the corporate website from Pella, a manufacturer of windows and doors, at [www.pella.com/about/history.asp](http://www.pella.com/about/history.asp) (Pella Corp., 2005).

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