Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces you to a model of communication and explains how communication happens, how it can fail, and how you can apply strategies to ensure it succeeds. You’ll learn how communication for business involves more than just creating written texts, and you’ll discover the directions in which messages flow between individuals within organizations. Finally, you’ll see why it’s important to be able to write for the broadest possible audiences in today’s diverse, global work environments.

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn to do the following:
1. Describe the communication process.
2. Identify communication barriers and apply strategies for overcoming them.
3. Identify core competencies for interpersonal communication.
4. Explain the importance of non-verbal communication.
5. Analyze the systems and mechanisms for communicating inside and outside organizations.
6. Examine the flow of communication within organizations.
7. Contrast the communication differences between high-context and low-context cultures.
8. Ease the flow of communication between and across cultures.
Key Concepts

**Active listening**: Listening that demands close attention to a message’s literal and emotional meaning and a level of responsiveness that shows the speaker the message was both heard and understood. (p. 53)

**Body language (kinesics)**: Non-verbal communication conveyed by gestures, eye contact, posture, and facial expressions. (p. 50)

**Bypassing**: Misunderstanding that results from the receiver inferring a different meaning from a message based on the different meanings of the words that are used (p. 42)

**Channel**: A communication pathway or medium over which a message travels. (p. 40)

**Channel barriers**: Inappropriate choices of channel that impede communication (p. 42)

**Channel overload**: The inability of a channel to carry all transmitted messages. (p. 42)

**Chronemics**: The study of the use and interpretation of time in non-verbal communication. (p. 50)

**Communication barriers**: Problems that can affect the communication transaction, leading to confusion or misunderstanding. (p. 42)

**Communication theory**: A system of ideas for explaining communication. (p. 38)

**Culture**: The shared values, customs, and patterns of behaviour of a particular group or society, including its rules, beliefs, language, and structures. (p. 57)

**Cybernetics**: The study of how information is processed and how communication systems function. (p. 38)

**Decoding**: The act of extracting meaning from spoken, written, and non-verbal communication. (p. 40)

**Downward communication flow**: The movement of information from superiors to subordinates. (p. 55)

**Dyadic**: The form of communication that involves a group of two. (p. 43)

**Emotional intelligence**: The ability to be in touch with one’s own emotions, manage one’s emotional displays, and understand and respond to the emotions of others to foster strong interpersonal relationships. (p. 44)

**Emotional interference**: A psychological factor that creates problems with the communication transaction. (p. 42)

**Encoding**: The act of converting ideas into code in order to convey a written, an oral, or a non-verbal message. (p. 40)

**Ethnocentrism**: The tendency to make false assumptions, based on limited experience, that one’s own cultural or ethnic group is superior to others. (p. 57)

**Environmental interference**: Interference that results from preconceptions and differing frames of reference. (p. 42)

**External communication**: Communication with audiences who are part of an external environment. (p. 53)

**Feedback**: The receiver’s response to a message that confirms whether the original message was received and understood. (p. 40)
**Formal communication channels**: Official internal communication pathways that facilitate the flow of information through an organization’s hierarchy. (p. 55)

**Formal communications network**: A system of communication sanctioned by organizational management. (p. 54)

**High-context cultures**: Cultures in which communication depends not only on the explicit wording of a message but also on its surrounding context. (p. 57)

**Horizontal communication flow**: The movement of information that enables individuals at the same organizational level to share ideas and exchange information. (p. 55)

**Informal oral network**: Unofficial internal communication pathways that carry gossip and rumours—sometimes accurate, sometimes not. (p. 54)

**Information overload**: A condition whereby a receiver cannot process all messages because of their vast number. (p. 42)

**Internal communication**: Communication that takes place within an organization. (p. 53)

**Low-context cultures**: Cultures that favour direct communication and depend on explicit verbal and written messages exclusive of context. (p. 58)

**Message**: Any type of oral, written, or non-verbal communication that is transmitted by a sender to an audience. (p. 40)

**Mixed messages**: Conflicting perceptions of a signal or message that may result in miscommunication. (p. 42)

**Noise**: Any form of physical or psychological interference that distorts the meaning of a message. (p. 40)

**Non-verbal behaviours**: Gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and posture that convey feelings, attitudes, and other information. (p. 48)

**Paralanguage (vocalics)**: Non-verbal vocal qualities of communication. (p. 50)

**Physical and technical interference**: Interference external to the sender and receiver. (p. 42)

**Proxemics**: The study of the use and perception of space. (p. 49)

**Receiver**: The person for whom a message is intended, who decodes the message by extracting meaning from it. (p. 41)

**Rhetoric**: The use of language to persuade an audience. (p. 38)

**Semantics**: The study of the words and symbols we choose. (p. 38)

**Semantic interference**: Interference caused by ambiguity, jargon, language, or dialect differences, or different ways of assigning meaning. (p. 42)

**Semiotics**: The study of how meaning is assigned and understood. (p. 38)

**Sender**: The participant in a communication transaction who has an idea and communicates it by encoding it in a message. (p. 40)

**Upward communication flow**: The movement of information from subordinates to superiors. (p. 55)
Review Questions

For sample answers, see below.

1. What are four barriers to effective communication?
2. How can communication barriers be avoided?
3. What is emotional intelligence?
4. Why are interpersonal skills important?
5. How can social competence be improved?
6. How do internal and external communication differ?
7. What are the characteristics of active listening?
8. What are three possible types of information flow in an organization?
9. What are the five key ways in which cultures differ from one another, according to Geert Hofstede?
10. What is the main difference between high-context and low-context cultures?
Review Questions: Answers

1. Some barriers to effective communication are channel overload, information overload, emotional interference, semantic interference, physical and technical interference, mixed messages and channel barriers, and environmental interference. (p. 42)

2. Communication barriers can be avoided if communicators are timely and time-sensitive, purposeful, good listeners/readers, context-sensitive, and proactive. (pp. 42–43)

3. Emotional intelligence is our ability to understand and manage our own emotions and to understand other people’s emotions. It helps develop strong relationships. (p. 44)

4. Strong interpersonal skills help to reduce workplace drama, deal with insubordination, give and receive feedback, deal with rudeness, have difficult conversations, counsel employees, demonstrate good leadership, and repair relationships. (p. 45)

5. Reading people’s emotions and managing relationships (through awareness of your own and others’ emotions) are key for social competence. (p. 44)

6. Internal communication goes through the channels of an organization; external communication involves audience members who are not part of the writer’s organization. (p. 53)

7. In active listening, the listener pays close attention to the literal and emotional meaning of the message and responds in a way that tells the speaker that the message was heard and understood. (pp. 53–54)

8. Three types of information flow in an organization are upwards, downward, and horizontal. (pp. 55–56)

9. Cultures may differ in the way or degree they expect and accept unequal power (power distance), handle or tolerate new or unknown situations (uncertainty avoidance), integrate into groups (individualism vs. collectivism), balance gender roles and values (masculinity vs. femininity), and value either the future or the past and present (short-term vs. long-term orientation). (pp. 58–59)

10. In a high-context culture, communication relies heavily on non-verbal, contextual, and shared cultural meanings; they do not say “no,” and meaning depends on how something is said; social standing is important. In a low-context culture, meaning depends on what is said, not the context; “no” is said directly, and individualism and self-assertion are valued. (pp. 57–58)