

SIXTH EDITION

Business & Professional Communication

PLANS, PROCESSES, AND PERFORMANCE



James R. DiSanza · Nancy J. Legge

 Pearson

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Preface

Given that many textbooks never make it to a sixth edition, we're pleased to have had the opportunity to write this latest version of *Business and Professional Communication: Plans, Processes, and Performance*.

This textbook was originally designed as a radical departure from traditional B&P fare. We wanted to avoid repeating units covered in basic public speaking courses and avoid hashing theories from business management and social psychology. Instead, our focus remains on the basic communication skills required in any business or professional career. Like all previous editions, this book also introduces students to material that is largely ignored in other business and professional textbooks, including interpersonal politics, technical presentations, risk communication, and crisis communication.

New to this Edition

Like the last edition, the sixth edition emphasizes easy-to-ready tables and now includes eight new Technology Briefs developed by Dr. Jasun Carr, an expert in digital media at Idaho State University.

- Chapter 3: Virtual Conferencing
- Chapter 5: Social Media Research and Lockdown
- Chapter 5: Doing a Job Interview Using VoIP Platforms
- Chapter 6: Online Survey Platforms
- Chapter 7: Assessing Reliability of Internet Sources
- Chapter 7: The Web of Knowledge Approach
- Chapter 8: Finding Images and Avoiding Copyright Violations
- Chapter 13: Social Media Strategies for Crisis Communication

In today's complex society, succeeding in a business or professional setting requires that you work collaboratively with others, efficiently adapt to change (technical or otherwise), innovate, and communicate effectively. According to Greg Satell, writing in *Forbes* (2015), collaboration and innovation are indispensable for organizational success and effective communication is the key to both these processes.

In an effort to help you meet the challenges and opportunities of the future, and more easily adapt to the challenges of our globally connected economy, we have revised our book for a new edition. The sixth edition of *Business and Professional Communication: Plans, Processes, and Performance* has been thoroughly updated to reflect the

latest research in the field. What follows are some of the specific changes that are new to the this edition:

- We have invited Dr. Jasun Carr, an expert in digital communication at Idaho State University, to update the Technology Briefs throughout the book.
- Chapter 1: The introduction has been recast to focus on employee engagement and collaboration. The concept of empathy is introduced into the discussion of feedback.
- Chapter 2: A new definition of empathic listening is provided, and the importance of empathic listening in relationships and organizational teams is discussed.
- Chapter 3: The discussion of team membership competencies has been redesigned to emphasize working knowledge, empathy, and conversational turn-taking. An entirely new discussion of group collaboration channels discusses the ease of use, effectiveness, and optimal uses of message boards, e-mail, text messages, memos, formal letters, voice mail, videoconferencing, and face-to-face meetings. A new Technology Brief covers the use of popular Voice over Internet Protocols (VoIP) for conducting videoconferences.
- Chapter 4: A discussion on creating political power includes new information on the importance of under-promising and over-delivering and the fine line between grandiosity and narcissism. An updated section focuses on helping women build informal network ties, including a discussion of the "labyrinth of challenges" that women face, including "Prove-it-Again," "The Tightrope," and "The Maternal Wall." A variety of new suggestions have been discussed for overcoming the "labyrinth of challenges," including e-mentoring and adopting both masculine and feminine communication patterns. There is an expanded section on the Leader Member Exchange model of superior-subordinate relationships.
- Chapter 5: The chapter includes an expanded section on cultivating opportunities using interpersonal networks, LinkedIn, and online job posting and search engine boards. There is an updated discussion of industry-specific job posting and search engine boards. We have rewritten the unit that discusses male and female dress standards for interviews. There is a new Technology Brief on doing job interviews over VoIP and other online platforms. Another Technology Brief discusses how to

lockdown your social media pages of embarrassing information. The section on verbal interviews has been entirely rewritten to cover both traditional and behavioral job interviews. There is an updated discussion of salary negotiation.

- Chapter 6: A new section helps students develop open- and closed-ended questions for audience analysis and explains how to avoid faulty questions, double-barreled questions, and loaded questions. A new Technology Brief shows how to use online survey platforms such as SurveyMonkey and Google Forms.
- Chapter 7: The unit on Internet research has been thoroughly updated to include the strengths and weaknesses of various search engines, how Google search results are prioritized, and various specialized search engines. There is an updated section on assessing the reliability of Internet search results. A new Technology Brief explains how to conduct a Web of Knowledge search.
- Chapter 8: There is a new discussion of Prezi presentations.
- Chapter 9: There is a new section on gaining and holding the audience's attention during technical presentations.
- Chapter 10: The chapter includes updated examples throughout.
- Chapter 11: The chapter has been entirely reorganized to emphasize sales relationships. There is a new unit on building the sales relationship that emphasizes asking questions, empathy, building trust, listening to metaphors, and adapting to different decision styles.
- Chapter 12: Examples have been updated to reflect current risk assessments.
- Chapter 13: Every example in the chapter has been updated, and many reflect crisis communication in large sports organizations such as the National Football League and the National Hockey League. The typology of organizational crisis types has been simplified. A new Technology Brief explains how to use social media to manage organizational crises. A new section describes the tactics that are most likely to restore the organization's image in the eyes of the audience.

The sixth edition also introduces the concept of empathy and discusses its importance in work teams and sales

relationships. The chapter on groups and teams includes an extensive discussion of electronic collaboration channels, including message boards, texting, and videoconferencing. An updated unit on networking focuses on the challenges women face in moving up in organizations, including "Prove-it-Again," "The Tightrope," and "The Maternal Wall." Chapter 5, on interviewing, includes updated material on online job boards and salary negotiation. New material on sales communication focuses on developing sales relationships. Finally, every chapter includes up-to-date examples and illustrations.

Available Instructor Resources

The following instructor resources can be accessed by visiting <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc>

Instructor Manual

Detailed instructor's manual with learning objectives, chapter outlines, discussion questions, activities and assignments.

PowerPoint Presentation

Provides a core template of the content covered throughout the text. Can easily be added to customize for your classroom.

Test Bank

Exhaustive test banks with MCQs, fill-in-the-blanks, and essay type questions.

MyTest

Create custom quizzes and exams using the Test Bank questions. You can print these exams for in-class use. Visit: <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/mytest>

Acknowledgments

Writing a book is never an individual accomplishment. Without the help of a variety of people, this project could not have been accomplished. The new edition has been enriched by the enthusiasm and pedagogical suggestions made by our colleagues at Idaho State University, including Bruce Loebs, John Gribas, Jasun Carr, Jackie Czerepinski, Sharon Sowell, Jill Collins, Angeline Underwood, and Annick Dixon.

*James R. DiSanza
Nancy J. Legge*

Chapter 1

The Role of Communication in Business and the Professions



Learning Objectives

- 1.1 Explain how communication occurs due to effective encoding and decoding of messages flowing between the source and the receiver
- 1.2 Indicate that shared meaning is the goal of most business and professional communication
- 1.3 Describe two ways of getting the desired response from an audience
- 1.4 Report the need for communicators to adjust their tactics for different audiences and goals

The last few years have produced enormous changes in business and professional life. Many of these changes stem from ongoing globalization and the introduction of technology that have moved many jobs from the developed to the developing world. The hang-over from the Great Recession still hampers organizational success and, therefore, job creation in North America and Europe. In addition, current challenges, including income inequality and global climate change, will increase the size and scope of the government's influence on corporations and organizations. Despite these wrenching changes, many people agree on one thing: Organizational and individual success continues to depend in large measure on the ability to communicate with others.

There is a clear link between communication and organizational success. Watson Wyatt, a worldwide consulting firm, has surveyed more than 750 companies representing more than 12 million employees to uncover the relationship between communication and business performance. They found that companies with strong communication performance provided 47% higher total return to shareholders over 5 years, and they were four times more likely to report high levels of employee engagement than low-communication-performance companies. In addition, high-performance companies were 80% more likely to report lower turnover than poor performers.¹

Globalization, technology, and severe recession have forced organizations to do more with fewer employees, and the concept of employee engagement has become

vitaly important. An engaged employee exerts extra effort for customers and clients, speaks highly of the organization to outsiders, and intends to stay with the organization. According to Christine Comaford, author of *Smart Tribes: How Teams Become Brilliant Together*, our current organizational and leadership practices have created a workforce that is "deeply disengaged" and can't be counted on to produce their best work.²

Employee engagement tends to be hurt, perhaps seriously, when employees are afraid for their jobs or witness others being downsized. Lack of communication during such situations adds to the problem because in the "absence of information, employees fill the vacuum with speculation and rumor that, while usually incorrect, is nevertheless damaging."³ According to consultants Greg Harris, F. Leigh Branham, and Mark Hirschfeld, leaders can mitigate these problems by keeping communication "open and robust."⁴ To overcome resistance to change, leaders must also be able to listen effectively so that they can assess others' needs, wants, problems, and fears.

Even bad news can create a more engaged employee. In a study of communication practices in business, researchers found that "the company with the highest bad news to good news ratio appeared to be performing very well, in terms of employee satisfaction and economic performance."⁵ As the researchers explained, when bad news is candidly reported, problems can be solved or reduced before they are company threatening. In addition, reporting bad news makes good news more believable.

Creative high-tech organizations such as Google and Pixar know that their success is tied to employees' communication abilities. Google asks

every applicant for any job how he or she “has flexed different muscles in various situations to mobilize a team,” executive chairman Eric Schmidt has reported. The company is also interested in every applicant’s “collaborative nature.” You’d still better be really smart, but you won’t have a chance of working there if you aren’t also off-the-charts good at interacting with others.⁶

To ensure creativity in a competitive environment, employees must be able to exchange mundane news. Innovativeness is spurred when people from different parts of an organization talk casually, compare notes on problems, and work together to create new solutions and opportunities. At Google, every element of the organization’s physical structure, down the cafeteria lines and lunch tables, is orchestrated to encourage interaction.

Effective communication is also essential for individual career success. A 2015 study issued by the National Association of Colleges and Employers reports the top eight qualities or skills that employers look for in new hires:

1. Leadership
2. Ability to work in a team
3. Communication skills (written)
4. Problem-solving skills
5. Strong work ethic
6. Analytical/quantitative skills
7. Technical skills
8. Communication skills (verbal)⁷

Although several of these skills relate to personality (e.g., work ethic), most of the rest relate to communication, including verbal and written communication, teamwork skills, leadership, and problem-solving skills. According to Annette Gregorich, a vice president of human resources for Multiple Zones International, “I’ve actually seen people lose promotions because they couldn’t write a proposal or stand in front of the management team and make a presentation.”⁸

Despite the emphasis on communication by many companies, employees and managers lack these skills. A survey of 470 human resource executives rated communication as the most critical employee shortcoming. Managers of human resource departments consistently cite communication as one of the most critical areas for additional development.⁹ In a survey by the American Management Association, corporate executives admit that the majority of their employees, managers, and leaders are below average in communication skills, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.¹⁰

Susan Tardanico, the CEO of Authentic Leadership Alliance, says that the current economic times call for “bold, confident, courageous leadership.”¹¹ Anyone, no matter

their position in an organization, can exercise leadership if they can improve their communication skills in a variety of areas. Tardanico discusses 10 behaviors deployed by courageous leaders, including seeking feedback and listening, communicating openly and frequently, and leading change. Karen Woodard-Chavez, president of Premium Performance Training, says that leadership involves being informative, persuasive, and inspirational.¹² Finally, David Thompson, founder of Total Awareness Coaching, says that effective leadership involves awareness, clarity, and inspiration.¹³ Today’s collaborative, team-based work environments, such as those in high-tech, marketing, advertising, and health care organizations, require all employees to act as both followers and leaders. Therefore, people with the strongest communication skills will be the ones who prosper in those work environments.

One of the most pronounced threats to career success is the outsourcing of jobs to other countries where labor is cheaper than it is in North America. Although this trend started in the early 1990s with manufacturing jobs, it is moving quickly up the skill chain to software engineers and financial analysts. Between 2001 and 2013, the United States lost 3.2 million jobs to China; three-quarters of those were in manufacturing.¹⁴ Jobs that can be easily routinized (broken down into discrete parts), even jobs in engineering, accounting, and financial analysis, are liable to move overseas in the coming years. Jobs that are not leaving the United States include management, leadership, sales, teaching, training, entrepreneurial, and consulting jobs that require directing and interacting with people, managing and leading the work of others, and constant face-to-face consultation in work teams. Each of these jobs requires strong communication skills.

No low wage worker in Shanghai, New Delhi, or Dublin will ever take Mark Ryan’s job. No software will ever do what he does, either. That’s because Ryan, 48, manages people—specifically, 100 technicians who serve half a million customers of Verizon Communications Inc. out of an office in Santa Fe Springs, Calif. A telephone lineman before moving up the corporate ladder, Ryan is earning a master’s degree at Verizon’s expense in organizational management, where he is studying topics like conflict resolution. That’s heady stuff for a guy who used to climb poles.¹⁵

Strong communication skills play an important part in a person’s ability to manage and lead employees. As we move further into the new century, communication skills will be the key to fulfilling your own professional aspirations.

But what exactly is communication, and how does it function? This chapter answers these questions by defining communication in two parts: First we will define and explain the concept of meaning, and then we will explain how messages flow between communicators. This leads us to the two overarching goals of most business and professional

communication: shared meaning and ambiguity. We close the chapter with a discussion of strategic communication.

1.1: What Is Communication?

1.1 Explain how communication occurs due to effective encoding and decoding of messages flowing between the source and the receiver

The term *communication* has become an important one for people in business and industry. When pressed to define exactly what the term means, however, many managers are at a loss. What exactly is communication? For our purposes, **communication** is an exchange of messages between individuals for the purpose of creating or influencing the meaning that others assign to events. To fully understand our definition of communication, it is first necessary to understand our definition of *meaning*; then we will explain how communicators exchange messages.

1.1.1: Meaning

Meanings are interpretations we develop for particular experiences. For example, going to a job interview is an experience that some relish and others despise. The difference is in the interpretation or meaning that each person associates with the activity.¹⁶ The meaning that we give to an event is not carried by the event itself; rather, events gain particular meanings as people converse about them. For example, most people hate the game playing and intrigue associated with organizational politics. Nevertheless, in Chapter 4, we argue that the strategic thinking required in organizational politics can be enjoyable. If you agree, your interpretation of organizational politics may change. As such, the meaning of any situation not only varies from person to person but also can change for individuals over time, based on their communication with others.

Shared meaning occurs when two people share agreement in their interpretation of an experience or event.¹⁷ Shared meaning may develop independently—for example, when two people learn that they both hate job interviews. More frequently, we attempt to negotiate shared meaning with others through communication. When businesspeople talk about effective communication, they usually mean communication that creates shared meaning between people. For example, salespeople work to persuade potential buyers to share their assessment of a product's value. On the other hand, **ambiguity** is the opposite of shared meaning. It occurs when a message sender's intent and the receiver's interpretation do not correspond.¹⁸ Although businesspeople tend to emphasize the importance of shared meaning, ambiguity plays an important

role in a variety of professional communication contexts, including organizational politics and organizational crises.

Communication creates or influences shared meaning through the use of signs and symbols. **Signs** are involuntary expressions of emotion and are usually nonverbal rather than verbal cues. Facial expressions, eye contact, posture, gesture, and vocal variations are all examples of nonverbal signs. Signs are involuntary because they are not normally under conscious control. When angry, you do not need to think about raising your voice, scowling, and slamming your fist. You exhibit these cues as a natural extension of your anger. As such, signs usually illustrate and emphasize the verbal portion of a message, although they can contradict a message, producing ambiguity and confusion for the listener.

Symbols, on the other hand, are voluntary expressions that stand for or represent something else. Symbols are voluntary because the choice of whether and how to express yourself symbolically is more conscious than is the case for signs. Letters are symbols because they stand for certain sounds. Words are symbols because they stand for objects, ideas, or states of mind. Symbols are necessary because my picture of a tree, for example, cannot be transmitted to you directly. Instead, our culture has agreed that the word *tree* stands for objects with roots, a trunk, branches, and leaves or needles. If my use of the word *tree* creates a corresponding picture of a similar tree in your head, then this symbol has created shared meaning. If, however, when I use the word *tree* I am thinking of a Joshua tree (a variety common in the desert of the U.S. Southwest), but the word makes you think of a maple tree, then the symbol has been only partly successful in helping us share the meaning. However, sharing meaning is never as simple as selecting the one correct symbol to represent



Communication is an exchange of messages for the purpose of creating or influencing meaning.

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an idea. Effective communicators consider the logical and psychological meanings of their symbols as well.

To create shared meaning, the communicator must consider the logical relationship between a symbol and the thing it represents. This involves selecting the right words to stand for the objects, events, or states of mind to which the speaker refers. Although tools such as dictionaries aid this selection, the chore is complicated by the fact that almost every word has more than one definition. If I said, in response to the CEO's motivational presentation, "The boss's rhetoric is quite nice," this could be taken in two ways depending on my meaning for the term *rhetoric*. In one meaning, rhetoric is the art or science of using words effectively; thus, my comment is a compliment. If, on the other hand, I meant rhetoric as artificial eloquence, showiness, and unnecessary elaboration of language and literary style, then my comment is an ironic insult. Multiple definitions increase the beauty and power of language, but do so at the cost of precision.

In addition to the sheer number of definitions for each symbol, the fact that these symbols are abstract (removed from the things they represent) further complicates the possibility of shared meaning. This abstraction is sometimes depicted as a ladder of possibilities (see Figure 1.1).¹⁹ At the bottom of the ladder in Figure 1.1 is an event: an employee's lateness for work. The statements above the line are symbolic, meaning they represent the actual event. As we climb the ladder of abstraction, we increase the power of our description, moving from describing three events to describing the employee's general approach to work. But that increase in power also increases the ambiguity of the description. All language operates on a continuum that at one end may be highly precise but only minimally descriptive and at the other end is broader but more ambiguous.

In addition to the logical properties of language, psychological meanings must also be considered. Psychological meanings are the private associations that individuals have for a symbol. For example, although the dictionary definition for the term *radiation* focuses exclusively on the emission of a wave or particle from an unstable substance such as plutonium, the psychological meanings that some people have for *radiation* include accident, cancer, death,

and so forth. These idiosyncratic meanings remind us that ambiguity lurks in the use of any symbol. If shared meaning is an important goal, then communicators must take account of psychological meanings through careful word choice and clear definitions.

Signs and symbols have enormous influence on the meanings people give to events. (Remember that events do not have inherent meanings.) People use symbols and signs to label or relabel events, thereby changing the meaning an event has for others.

Although automobile dealers still sell used cars, they don't often refer to them that way anymore. The label *used* lacks the class and cachet desired by car buyers, even those of us who can't afford a new vehicle. Thus the phrases *previously owned* and *near new* have jumped into our language to remove the negative stigma (interpretation) associated with a "used car."

History is rife with moments when people change a label, hoping to persuade others to think differently about something. For example, while mahi-mahi is a popular seafood item at many upscale restaurants, it used to be known as dolphin fish in many parts of the United States. This is true despite the fact that it is a fish and definitely not a dolphin. So that people wouldn't feel squeamish about eating Flipper, the Hawaiian name, mahi-mahi, which means "strong," was adopted by marketers. This label suggests exotic and tropical meanings.

A great deal of persuasion is based on the ability of signs and symbols to label or relabel events for others. This persuasive function is vital for a variety of professional goals, including sales presentations and crisis communication. Through the use of signs and symbols, people attempt to influence and manage meaning for others in organizations. Let's examine how signs and symbols are combined into messages.

1.1.2: The Flow of Messages

The model depicted in Figure 1.2 illustrates the flow of messages between people.

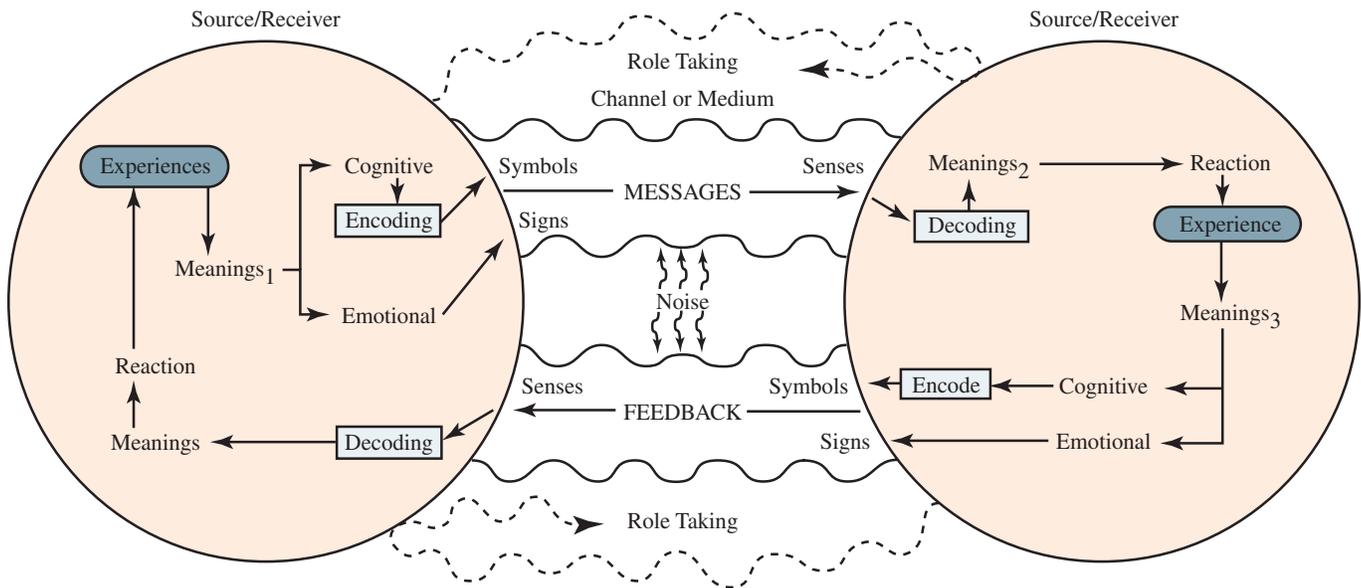
The two large circles represent **source-receivers**, people who send and receive messages. Because communication is a circular process, we could begin anywhere in the

Figure 1.1 The Ladder of Abstraction

Symbols	<p>You are a poor worker.</p> <p>You have a poor attitude toward your work.</p> <p>Your poor attitude is reflected in poor attendance.</p> <p>You have been late a variety of times this month.</p> <p>You have been late three times this month.</p>
An Event	<p>Late for work three times</p>

Figure 1.2 A Model of Message Transmission

SOURCE: Based on a model by Christopher L. Johnstone, Pennsylvania State University, © James R. DiSanza.



model, but for convenience sake we will begin with the left source-receiver. In the upper-left quadrant of the circle is **experience**, which is anything that happened to us in the past. Follow the arrow from experience to meaning. As stated earlier, meanings are the interpretations or attitudes we assign to our experiences. The subscript 1 after meanings emphasizes that these are unique to the individual and cannot be transmitted whole to another person.

For purposes of simplicity, meanings can be classified into two categories: cognitive and emotional. **Emotional meanings** are feelings such as sadness, surprise, and curiosity. Feelings are usually expressed directly in the form of signs, although it is also possible to put feelings into words, such as by saying, “I feel great about this project.” On the other hand, **cognitions** are ideas, and before these can be sent they must be encoded into symbols. **Encoding** is the process of selecting symbols to stand for or represent cognitions. When trying to share meaning, we select symbols that we hope represent similar meanings in the receiver. We have covered some of the complexities of this selection process.

Messages are composed of signs and symbols that travel along a **channel**. Common channels for oral communication include audio, visual, and tactile channels. There are also technological channels such as messages boards, texting, and videoconferencing. **Noise** can interfere with communication anywhere in the channel and tends to produce ambiguity. **Physical noise** is any concrete interference with the process of communication, such as the speaker talking too fast, a construction crew working in the next room, or children crying in the audience. **Psychological noise** is any internal interference with

listening, such as a bias against the speaker or a dislike for the subject.

After the message completes its passage along the channel, it encounters the sense organs of the other source-receiver. The message is **decoded**, meaning that the receiver selects meanings to attach to the signs and symbols. It is important to emphasize that meanings are not sent; rather, the receiver selects meaning from within herself and attaches that meaning to the message. This is the reason for the subscript 2 behind meanings. The message then becomes part of the receiver’s experience, and the receiver may further examine and interpret it.

Once a message is fully interpreted, this meaning becomes part of a new message, which includes both cognitive and emotional components. The cognitive components are encoded into symbols, and the emotional components are emitted as signs that travel along a channel. These are received by the first source-receiver through the senses, decoded, and then interpreted to create a new meaning.

The return message is referred to as **feedback**. **Feedback** includes information about how the first message was received. For example, a person who shakes his or her head no and frowns while you finish a proposal is indicating how the message was received. A person’s ability to correctly interpret another person’s sign (nonverbal) behavior and respond in an appropriate way is referred to as **empathy** or **perspective taking**. Empathy is a social sensitivity skill that is absolutely vital for providing feedback and sharing meaning. In Figure 1.2, the wavy dashed lines from each source-receiver indicate the ability to view one’s own communication from the point of view of the other person—to put yourself in the other person’s shoes,

so to speak. This form of **role taking** involves anticipating a reaction to a message rather than waiting for the person's feedback.²⁰ Thus, role taking can help a speaker anticipate difficulties or objections and develop ways to overcome these problems prior to actually speaking. As such, role taking also serves to reduce ambiguity and increases the chances of sharing meaning.

By representing the flow of messages, the model depicts the components and processes of communication. Encoding and decoding are complicated and, depending on how they are handled by communicators, serve to increase either shared meaning or ambiguity. Noise can interfere with message transmission, increasing the likelihood of ambiguity. Feedback empathy, and role taking, on the other hand, facilitate the process of shared meaning. We will refer to elements of this model throughout the rest of the book.

1.2: Goals of Communication

1.2 Indicate that shared meaning is the goal of most business and professional communication

The model presented in this chapter suggests two overarching goals for communication in business and the professions. These goals are the foundation for the material in later chapters, and we will refer to them repeatedly throughout the book.

1.2.1: Shared Meaning Is the Objective of Most Business and Professional Communication

As we have noted, shared meaning results when the sender's intent and the receiver's interpretation correspond. When consultants, for example, talk about converting employee fears about restructuring into support for needed changes or discuss the importance of corporate values, they encourage managers to create shared meaning. Selling a product or service also requires shared meaning. Informing other people about safety or environmental procedures depends on the ability to share information accurately. In short, shared meaning is vital to a variety of organizational functions and goals.

However, shared meaning is not an "either-or" proposition; it exists on a continuum. At the low end of the continuum is **contractual shared meaning**.²¹ In this form of sharing, two parties each give up something they would rather not part with to get something valuable from the other person. For example, salespeople might not want to put forth extra effort to exceed sales quotas but do so in

order to receive a bonus at the end of the month. Similarly, organizations do not want to spend money on bonuses but do so to increase sales. Contractual shared meaning does not require that employees agree with the organization's sales goals or the choices of products it markets. All that is required is for each party to give up something in order to receive something else that cannot be achieved alone.

For example, despite their importance, safety regulations are notoriously difficult to enforce in manufacturing operations. Employees see regulations as excessive, and the demands of the job encourage them to drift away from anything that is not directly connected to productivity. However, rewarding safe workers and punishing unsafe workers will improve compliance regardless of whether the employee thinks the regulations are important. This minimal form of shared meaning is the basis of many professional interactions, and we will discuss it more fully in Chapters 3 and 4 on group and interpersonal communication, respectively.

A second kind of shared meaning represents relatively greater correspondence between the sender and receiver; we refer to this as **consensual shared meaning**.²² When parties share consensus, they agree about basic objectives and values. If an employee follows safety precautions because he or she believes they protect both the employee and the organization, he or she expresses a point of view shared by the plant management. Consensual shared meaning is the basis for most persuasive communication and is covered in Chapters 10 and 11 on persuasive proposals and sales communication, respectively.

Although it is safe to say that shared meaning is an important goal for business and professional communicators, there are also times when ambiguity is valuable.

1.2.2: Ambiguity Is the Objective of Some Business and Professional Communication

As we indicated in our model, ambiguity is a constant presence in the communication process. Ambiguity occurs when there is little overlap between a sender's intent and a receiver's interpretation. It is a myth, however, to believe that effective communication must always be clear.

Ambiguity is useful to leaders developing group or organizational mission statements. Ambiguous mission statements provide a sense of shared direction while leaving room for individual interpretation.²³ Ford's "Quality Is Job 1" assertion clearly sets company direction but leaves employees free to develop their own means to achieve quality. We will discuss a leader's use of ambiguity as a motivational technique in Chapter 3 on groups and teams.

Ambiguity also plays a vital role in organizational crisis communication. In circumstances in which a clear apology creates unacceptably high legal liabilities, an ambiguous apology may be warranted. We will cover the methods and ethical implications of the ambiguous apology in Chapter 13 on crisis communication. Although less vital than shared meaning, ambiguity serves important functions in professional settings.

1.3: Effective Communication Is Audience Centered

1.3 Describe two ways of getting the desired response from an audience

The audience is vital to the success of all communication. In the professions, people communicate to accomplish goals. If these goals could be achieved individually, people wouldn't bother with communication. Thus we communicate to get a desired response from an audience. What does the audience know about the topic? Do they have a positive or negative attitude toward it? How did they arrive at that attitude? Knowing the answers to such questions can help a communicator adjust the content and delivery of the message, increasing the likelihood of the desired response.

The communication model indicates two methods of adapting to the audience. By paying attention to feedback, a communicator can adapt to better suit the audience. Does the audience need you to slow down? Have you lost your supervisor during a complicated explanation? By paying attention to feedback, a communicator can answer such questions and make appropriate adjustments.

Role taking is another means of assessing the audience. While role taking, a communicator imagines how others will react to his message. Ling, for example, owns a small landscaping company and wants to get a contract at the new shopping mall. After sketching out his sales pitch to the mall's management team, he attempts to imagine the members' concerns about or objections to his proposal. Are they concerned about quality? Is cost a concern? Will they want to know about liability insurance? Are they concerned about the small size of the company? The answers to these questions will help Ling adjust his content to address relevant concerns. Effective role taking allows communicators to adapt to feedback prior to actual interaction, thereby increasing the chances that receivers will respond in the desired way. Another term for role taking is *audience analysis*, which we will cover extensively in Chapter 6.

1.4: Effective Communication Is Strategic

1.4 Report the need for communicators to adjust their tactics for different audiences and goals

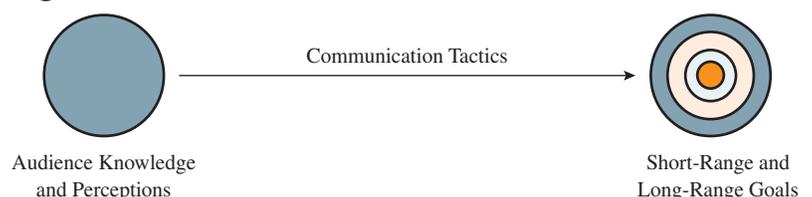
As we have noted, people communicate to accomplish individual, group, and organizational goals that they cannot accomplish alone. Achieving your own and others' goals during communication requires the ability to think strategically. **Strategic communication** is a conscious process wherein the communicator specifies the goals that he or she wants to accomplish, learns about the audience and its position regarding the goals, and then selects communication tactics that will move the audience closer to those goals. This process is depicted in Figure 1.3.

Strategy is a term that refers to the objectives or goals that you want to accomplish. Prior to delivering any important message, you should stop to consider the short- and long-range goals you have for that situation. Short-range goals are those that can be immediately obtained from a particular audience in a particular setting. For example, Lainey, the public relations director for a chemical manufacturing company, needs to conduct a public relations campaign to achieve the short-range goal of reducing the community's concern about her plant's safety record.

Long-range goals, however, can't be achieved with a single message or within a single setting, but may take years and many messages to accomplish. Lainey's long-range goals include creating a positive impression of the plant as an important economic asset and contributor to community causes. Lainey aims most of her campaign at changing the community's impression of safety, but she also plans to include information about the firm's importance to the local economy and even mentions its charitable contributions. Although these comments probably won't change a lot of opinions, they are at least a first step to achieving her long-range plan. A person's short- and long-range goals are referred to as the person's *strategy*, which is depicted by a target-like circle on the right side of Figure 1.3.

Step 2 in the strategic communication process involves learning about the audience's position regarding your goal. As we stated in the previous section, role taking and its more formal counterpart, audience analysis, are

Figure 1.3 A Model of the Process of Strategic Communication



two methods by which communicators can learn about the knowledge and attitudes of the audience. Like most risk communicators, for example, Lainey knows that she must learn about her audience prior to structuring messages for them. If she assumes that the plant's safety record makes the public fearful when they are not or, worse yet, assumes people aren't concerned about the safety record when they really are, then her persuasive message is likely to backfire. In order to learn more about the audience, Lainey plans to conduct a brief phone survey of 100 community leaders to find out what they know about the chemical plant's safety record and their perceptions of that record. The results of this survey will provide Lainey with an understanding of what the audience knows and believes about the plant's safety record and will help her make decisions about message channels, structure, and content.

The third step in the strategic communication process involves selecting specific **communication tactics** (represented by the arrow in Figure 1.3) that are designed to move the audience toward the intended goal. After Lainey discovered that people believed the plant had a poor safety record and were disturbed about the risk of a chemical spill, she decided to develop a persuasive campaign to reassure the community that the risks were small, that the plant was ready for any spill, and that the plant's safety

record had improved. Lainey decided to host regular plant tours for the general public because she knew that making an audience more familiar with a risky situation tends to reduce their fears (see Chapter 12). She also decided to hold several public meetings and explain the plant's safety record in an interview with the environmental writers at the local paper. Once she selected these channels, Lainey needed to develop specific informative and persuasive appeals that would explain the plant's procedures and reassure the public about their safety. She also needed to prepare responses to potentially hostile questions from community members. And, because the interview with the newspaper was to be conducted with a knowledgeable expert in environmental reporting, her comments to this person had to be set up differently than her comments to the lay public. Lainey used her short- and long-range goals and her understanding of audience knowledge and perceptions.

Strategic communication is a complicated process of focusing your goals, anticipating the audience, and consciously making tactical choices. Fortunately, strategic communication abilities can be improved with practice. If you devote yourself to learning the material in this book, you will achieve significant progress in your ability to think and communicate strategically.

Summary

Despite enormous changes in business and the professions, most people agree that effective communication is vital for both individual and organizational success. Communication is the exchange of messages between individuals for the purpose of creating or influencing the meaning that others assign to events. Meanings are interpretations or attitudes that we develop for particular experiences. Events do not have a particular meaning; rather, meaning is given to events by people, and meanings change through communication with others. Shared meaning occurs when two people agree in their interpretation of an event. Ambiguity occurs when a message sender's intent and the receiver's interpretation do not correspond.

The communication model depicts source-receivers who want to influence each other's interpretations. Interpretations are influenced through signs and symbols. Signs are involuntary (usually nonverbal) emotional expressions. Symbols are voluntary expressions that stand for or represent something else. Signs and symbols

form messages that travel through a channel that can be affected by noise. Messages are decoded by the receiver when he or she selects meanings from within himself or herself to attach to the signs and symbols. This meaning is always somewhat different from the meaning that the original person intended to communicate. The return message is referred to as feedback. Role taking is the ability of communicators to put themselves in the position of other people to anticipate their reaction to a message. Feedback and role taking can improve shared meaning.

Shared meaning is the goal of most business and professional communication. Ambiguity, on the other hand, is sometimes useful in professional settings. Effective communication is audience centered, meaning that a communicator must adapt to the receiver's needs and preferences for the greatest effect. Effective communication is strategic, meaning that communicators must adjust their tactics for different audiences and goals.

Questions and Exercises

- 1.1 Can you think of an instance of communication in which a misunderstanding occurred because someone didn't take account of the logical or psychological meaning of a term or phrase? What were the consequences of this misunderstanding? What could have been done to prevent the misunderstanding?
- 1.2 In the communication model, what happens to individuals who do not pay attention to feedback? Can you provide an example of this kind of miscommunication? What were the consequences of this problem?
- 1.3 Have you ever had a job in which you shared consensus with most managerial decisions and actions? If so, how did your approach to this job differ from your approach to other jobs where you were merely fulfilling a contractual agreement?
- 1.4 Describe some of the things managers do to encourage consensual shared meaning among employees. Are these techniques effective? Why or why not?
- 1.5 In this chapter we suggested that symbols are used to influence the meanings that people apply to events. The following quotes present two opinions about the health care reforms proposed by the Obama administration in 2009 and fully implemented in 2014.

From an advocate of health care reform:

"The fact that the current US system is broken and needs a complete overhaul with government involvement is becoming increasingly apparent to almost anyone except for those who have some kind of visceral reaction to the government being involved in anything. It is because of the stark reality faced by ordinary people that, despite the incessant propaganda against single payer public plans by the

health industry and its allies in Congress and the media, the polls are pretty clear that people favor a greater government involvement in the health care system. . . .

"So let's stop talking about 'popular opposition' to government involvement in health care. The people who are opposed are the people in the current system who benefit from the sickness of others or have a knee-jerk reaction to anything that involves the government. What they are really scared of is that the public plan will be so popular that everyone will want to join in. Currently estimates of the people who will want to get in can get as high as 119 million, a number suggested by one of the health industry's main lackeys, Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa)."²⁴

The following statement is inspired by opponents of health care reform.

I can't think of an interaction with any government entity—be it local, regional, state, or federal—that I willingly engage. I despise going to the DMV. I despise getting my car inspected. I hate getting a new passport. All of these things are inefficiently managed and involve a lot of time spent waiting. This same thing happens to those who are forced to rely on government for health care. These people spend a lot of time waiting—a huge, gigantic amount of time waiting. No one needs to spend more time waiting. Government employees are usually unionized and no one should be subject to a gaggle of unionized employees.

How are the word choice and sentence structure of each quotation designed to influence people's interpretation? Point to specific words or sentences and the effect they are designed to have on the reader's interpretation.