Images are influential communication tools. Suncor Energy uses pictures of alternative power generators in their brochures and on their website to communicate their environmental mission.

Communicating at Suncor Energy Inc.

“Once we understand where our organization wants to go, we communicate, communicate, and communicate some more, with our employees, our shareholders, our communities,” says Sue Lee, Suncor Energy’s senior vice-president of Human Resources and Communications. A leading North American energy producer, Suncor pursues a dual vision: meeting Canada’s need for energy through oil sands development while exploring new energy sources for the future.

The company produced its billionth barrel of synthetic crude oil in 2006 and currently operates two wind power projects, SunBridge in southwestern Saskatchewan and Magrath in southern Alberta. Together, these wind farms can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 115 000 tonnes each year. Believing in “sharing perspectives, information, and knowledge,” Suncor’s decision-making includes extensive stakeholder consultation. Whether employees work on the oil fields or in laboratories and company offices, the company seeks their input to improve business. And through collaborating with local community and environmental groups, Suncor can respond to their concerns while meeting the demand for energy.

To communicate effectively with 5500 employees, community organizations, government agencies, and the general public, Sue Lee and her staff must tailor Suncor’s communications for each audience. Two-page newsletters filled with photos and brief
articles update communities on local operations. The extensive annual sustainability report, available through the website, provides detailed information on Suncor’s environmental performance. Investor-oriented webcasts and presentations inform shareholders on the company’s financial picture. According to Lee, Suncor’s communication managers “think through and document all our key processes—everything from how we put out a news release to how we develop a comprehensive communication plan.”

It’s up to Sue Lee to ensure that both internal and external communications not only keep employees and communities informed of Suncor’s activities, but also engage them in shaping the company’s direction. If you were in Sue Lee’s position, what would you do to keep communication flowing smoothly and efficiently? How would you overcome the possible barriers to communication as you prepare the messages you send to Suncor’s stakeholders?

Achieving Career Success Through Effective Communication

Organizations such as Suncor Energy understand that achieving success in today’s workplace is closely tied to the ability of their employees and managers to communicate effectively. Whether competing to get the job you want or to win the customers your company needs, your success or failure depends largely on your ability to communicate. In fact, to stand out from your competition in the job market, improving your communication skills might be the single most important step you take. Employers often express frustration at the poor communication skills of many employees—particularly recent graduates who haven’t yet learned how to adapt their casual communication style to the professional business environment. If you learn to write well, speak well, listen well, and recognize the appropriate way to communicate in various business situations, you’ll gain a major advantage that will serve you throughout your career.

Whether exchanging emails, giving a formal presentation, or chatting with co-workers at lunch, you are engaging in communication, the process of sending and receiving messages. However, communication is considered effective only when others understand your message correctly and respond to it in the way you want. Effective communication helps you manage your work flow, improves business relationships, enhances your professional image, and provides a variety of other important benefits (see Figure 1–1). In all these activities, the essence of successful communication is sharing—providing data, information, and insights in an exchange that benefits both you and the people with whom you communicate.

Effective communication is at the centre of virtually every aspect of business because it connects the company with all its stakeholders—the groups that your company affects in some way and who themselves have some influence on your company. For example, as a customer or an employee of a particular business, you are a stakeholder. Other stakeholders include government regulators, who create guidelines that businesses must observe, and the media, which reports on business and influences public opinion.

If you want to improve efficiency, quality, responsiveness, or innovation, you’ll do so with the help of strong communication skills. Conversely, without effective communication, people misunderstand each other and misinterpret information. “Unclear communication not only results in errors and missed deadlines, but also lies at the root of many other serious workplace issues, such as low morale and poor job performance,” says Diane Domeyer, executive director of Office Team, a temporary employment firm. Canada’s leading executives believe that 15 percent of each workweek, or almost eight weeks per year, is wasted because of poor communication. At every stage of your career, communication is the way you’ll
succeed, and the higher you rise in your organization, the more important it becomes. In fact, top managers spend as much as 85 percent of their time communicating with others.⁶

What Employers Expect from You

No matter how good you are at accounting, law, science, or whatever professional specialty you pursue, most companies expect you to be competent at a wide range of communication tasks. Employers spend millions of dollars on communication training every year, but they expect you to come prepared with basic skills, so that you can take full advantage of the learning opportunities they make available to you. Check the Employability Skills 2000+ chart, prepared by the Conference Board of Canada (Figure 1–2) for the skills you need for career success. In addition, search the Essential Skills Profiles, compiled by Human Resources and Social Development Canada, to see the abilities required by various occupations. (http://srv108.services.gc.ca)

Employers are constantly evaluating your communication skills.

In fact, employers start judging your ability to communicate before you even show up for your first interview, and the process of evaluation never really stops. Improving your communication skills helps ensure that others will recognize and reward your talents and contributions. Fortunately, the specific skills that employers expect from you are the very skills that will help you advance in your career:

1. Organizing ideas and information logically and completely. You’ll often be required to find, process, and organize substantial amounts of raw data and random information, so that others can easily grasp its significance.

2. Expressing and presenting ideas and information coherently and persuasively. Whenever you’re asked to offer an opinion or recommendation, you’ll be expected to back it up with solid evidence. However, organizing your evidence well is not all you will need to do; you’ll also need to and convince your audience with compelling arguments.
### Employability Skills 2000+

**The skills you need to enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work—whether you work on your own or as a part of a team.**

These skills can also be applied and used beyond the workplace in a range of daily activities.

#### Fundamental Skills

*The skills needed as a base for further development*

**Communicate**
- read and understand information presented in a variety of forms (e.g., words, graphs, charts, diagrams)
- write and speak so others pay attention and understand
- listen and ask questions to understand and appreciate the points of view of others
- share information using a range of information and communications technologies (e.g., voice, e-mail, computers)
- use relevant scientific, technological and mathematical knowledge and skills to explain or clarify ideas

**Manage Information**
- locate, gather and organize information using appropriate technology and information systems
- access, analyze and apply knowledge and skills from various disciplines (e.g., the arts, languages, science, technology, mathematics, social sciences, and the humanities)

**Use Numbers**
- decide what needs to be measured or calculated
- observe and record data using appropriate methods, tools and technology
- make estimates and verify calculations

**Think & Solve Problems**
- assess situations and identify problems
- seek different points of view and evaluate them based on facts
- recognize the human, interpersonal, technical, scientific and mathematical dimensions of a problem
- identify the root cause of a problem
- be creative and innovative in exploring possible solutions
- readily use science, technology and mathematics as ways to think, gain and share knowledge, solve problems and make decisions
- evaluate solutions to make recommendations or decisions
- implement solutions
- check to see if a solution works, and act on opportunities for improvement

#### Personal Management Skills

*The personal skills, attitudes and behaviors that drive one’s potential for growth*

**Demonstrate Positive Attitudes & Behaviours**
- feel good about yourself and be confident
- deal with people, problems and situations with honesty, integrity and personal ethics
- recognize your own and other people’s good efforts
- take care of your personal health
- show interest, initiative and effort

**Be Responsible**
- set goals and priorities balancing work and personal life
- plan and manage time, money and other resources to achieve goals
- assess, weigh and manage risk
- be accountable for your actions and the actions of your group
- be socially responsible and contribute to your community

**Be Adaptable**
- work independently or as part of a team
- carry out multiple tasks or projects
- be innovative and resourceful: identify and suggest alternative ways to achieve goals and get the job done
- be open and respond constructively to change
- learn from your mistakes and accept feedback
- cope with uncertainty

**Learn Continuously**
- be willing to continuously learn and grow
- assess personal strengths and areas for development
- set your own learning goals
- identify and access learning sources and opportunities
- plan for and achieve your learning goals

#### Teamwork Skills

*The skills and attributes needed to contribute productively*

**Work with Others**
- understand and work within the dynamics of a group
- ensure that a team’s purpose and objectives are clear
- be flexible: respect, be open to and supportive of the thoughts, opinions and contributions of others in a group
- recognize and respect people’s diversity, individual differences and perspectives
- accept and provide feedback in a constructive and considerate manner
- contribute to a team by sharing information and expertise
- lead or support when appropriate, motivating a group for high performance
- understand the role of conflict in a group to reach solutions
- manage and resolve conflict when appropriate

**Participate in Projects & Tasks**
- plan, design or carry out a project or task from start to finish with well-defined objectives and outcomes
- develop a plan, seek feedback, test, revise and implement
- work to agreed quality standards and specifications
- select and use appropriate tools and technology for a task or project
- adapt to changing requirements and information
- continuously monitor the success of a project or task and identify ways to improve

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Download this pamphlet from [www.conferenceboard.ca/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.htm](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.htm) and use it as a reference throughout your schooling and career. Where do you stand now in regard to the three skill areas? Where do you need to improve your skills? How do you plan to do this?
3. **Listening to others effectively.** Effective listening is not as easy as you might think. Amidst all the distractions on the job, you’ll need to use specific skills to detect the real meaning behind their words. (For a more extensive discussion of listening, see Chapter 2.)

4. **Communicating effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences.** You’ll often be called on to communicate with people who differ from you in gender, ethnic background, age, profession, technical ability, and so on.

5. **Using communication technologies effectively and efficiently.** You’re already familiar with email, instant messaging, and online research. Increasingly, employers will also expect you to use web conferencing, electronic presentations, and a variety of other technological tools.

6. **Following accepted standards of grammar, spelling, and other aspects of high-quality writing and speaking.** You and your friends are probably comfortable with informal communication that doesn’t put a high value on precision and correctness. However, to be successful in business, you will need to focus on the quality of your communication efforts. Particularly with audiences who don’t know you well, careless writing and disregard for accepted standards reflects poorly on both you and your company. Rather than giving you the benefit of the doubt, many people will assume you either don’t know how to communicate or don’t care enough to communicate well.

7. **Communicating in a civilized manner that reflects contemporary expectations of business etiquette.** Even when the pressure is on, you’ll be expected to communicate with courtesy and respect in a manner that is appropriate to the situation.

8. **Communicating ethically, even when choices aren’t crystal clear.** Whether you’re simply reporting on the status of a project or responding to a complicated, large-scale crisis, you’re certain to encounter situations that call for you to make sound ethical choices. (See Promoting Workplace Ethics: Ethical Boundaries: Where Would You Draw the Line?)

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**PROMOTING WORKPLACE ETHICS**

### Ethical Boundaries: Where Would You Draw the Line?

At the very least, you owe your employer an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay: your best efforts, obedience to the rules, a good attitude, respect for your employer’s property, and a professional appearance. Such duties and considerations seem clear-cut, but where does your obligation to your employer end? For instance, where would you draw the line in communication situations such as the following?

> Writing your résumé so that an embarrassing two-year lapse won’t be obvious.
> Telling your best friend about your company’s upcoming merger right after mailing the formal announcement to your shareholders.
> Hinting to a co-worker (who’s a close friend) that it’s time to look around for something new, when you’ve already been told confidentially that she’s scheduled to be fired at the end of the month.
> Saying nothing when you witness one employee taking credit for another’s successful idea.
> Preserving your position by presenting yourself to supervisors as the only person capable of achieving an objective.
> Pirating computer software; that is, using one copy on more than one computer instead of paying for licences to duplicate the product.
> Making up an excuse when (for the fourth time this month) you have to pick up your child from school early and miss an important business meeting.
> Calling in sick because you’re taking a few days off and you want to use up some of the sick leave you’ve accumulated.
Characteristics of Effective Communication

You can have the best ideas that will help your company run productively, but they’re not good to your employer or your career if you can’t express them clearly and persuasively. Employers demand oral and written communication skills from all job candidates, from seasonal and entry-level workers to management employees.

To make your messages effective, make them practical, factual, concise, clear about expectations, and persuasive:

1. **Provide practical information.** Give recipients useful information, whether it’s to help them perform a desired action or understand a new company policy.
2. **Give facts rather than impressions.** Use concrete language, specific detail, and information that is clear, convincing, accurate, and ethical. Even when an opinion is called for, present compelling evidence to support your conclusion.
3. **Clarify and condense information.** Highlight the most important information, rather than forcing your reader to determine the key points. Most business professionals find themselves wading in a flood of data and information. Messages that clarify and summarize are more effective than those that do not. In today’s time-pressured business environment, clear and concise messages are highly valued.
4. **State precise responsibilities.** Write messages to generate a specific response from a specific audience. Clearly state what you expect from audience members or what you can do for them. You will see many examples in this book with action requests.
5. **Persuade others and offer recommendations.** Show your readers precisely how they will benefit from responding to your message the way you want them to. Including reader benefits is the key to persuading employers, colleagues, customers, or clients to adopt a plan of action or purchase a product.

Keep these five important characteristics in mind as you review Figures 1–3 and 1–4. Both emails appear to be well-constructed at first glance, but Figure 1–3 is far less effective, as explained in the
margin comments. It shows the negative impact that poorly conceived messages can have on an audience. In contrast, Figure 1–4 shows how an effective message can help everyone work more efficiently (in this case, by helping them prepare effectively for an important meeting).

Communication in Organizational Settings

In every part of the business organization, communication provides the vital link between people and information. When you join a company such as Suncor, you become a key element in its communication chain. Whether you’re a high-level manager or an entry-level employee, you have information that others need to perform their jobs, and others have information that is crucial to you. You exchange information with people inside your organization, called internal communication, and you exchange information and ideas with others outside your organization, called external communication. This information travels over both formal and informal channels (see Figure 1–5).

Communicating internally is essential for effective functioning. As an employee, you are in a position to observe firsthand attitudes and behaviours that your supervisors and co-workers cannot see: a customer’s reaction to a product display, a supplier’s brief hesitation before agreeing to a delivery date, or a slowdown in the flow of customers. Managers and co-workers need such minute information in order to do their jobs. If you don’t pass that information along,

No matter what your level in the organization, you have an important communication role.
Hi Team,

The instant messaging (IM) consultant we discussed at last week’s status meeting is available to meet with us next Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. For those of you who missed the meeting, Dushan Pavlovic has helped a number of customer service organizations implement IM programs. He’s agreed to spend several hours with us before submitting a project proposal for our new IM system, both to learn about our needs and to answer any questions we have about IM.

This meeting is a great opportunity for us to learn about IM applications in customer service, so let’s make sure we get the most out of it. I’d like each of the project leaders to brainstorm with your teams and prepare questions that are relevant to your specific parts of the IM project. Please e-mail these questions to Pete (peter.laws@sprenco.com) by the end of the day Thursday, and he’ll forward them to Mr. Pavlovic before the meeting.

Details:
Wednesday, March 12
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Mt. Shasta room

We’re ordering in sandwiches; please register your choice on the intranet by Friday at 5:00 p.m. For those of you who can’t attend in person, please dial in on the conference line. You’ll be able to see the PowerPoint slides via WebEx, as usual. If you have any questions about the meeting, feel free to drop by my office any time on Friday.

Thanks,
Michelle

Michelle Dupond
Group Manager, Retail Systems
Office: 306-579-1852
Mobile: 306-443-6868

nobody will—because nobody else knows. Communicating freely helps employees develop a clear sense of the organization’s mission and helps managers identify and react quickly to potential problems.

Like internal communication, external communication is conducting business smoothly. Companies constantly exchange messages with customers, vendors, distributors, competitors, investors, journalists, and community representatives. Whether by letter, web, phone, fax, or video, good communication is the first step in creating a favourable impression. Extremely careful planning is required for messages such as statements to the press, letters to investors, advertisements, and price announcements. Therefore, such documents are often drafted by a marketing or public relations team—a group of individuals whose sole job is creating and managing the flow of formal messages to outsiders.

Carefully constructed websites, for example, convey an important message to outsiders about your organization’s products and services. A website’s appearance and organization can entice web surfers to explore it past the home page, and perhaps become your company’s customers.

FORMAL COMMUNICATION NETWORK The formal communication network is typically shown as an organizational chart such as the one in Figure 1–6. Such charts summarize the lines of authority; each box represents a link in the chain of command, and each line represents a formal channel,
or route, for the transmission of official messages. Information may travel down, up, and across an organization’s formal hierarchy.

> **Downward flow.** Organizational decisions are usually made at the top and then flow down to the people who will carry them out. Most of what filters downward is geared toward helping employees do their jobs and carry out company objectives. From top to bottom, each person must understand each message, apply it, and pass it along.

> **Upward flow.** To solve problems and make intelligent decisions, managers must learn what’s going on in the organization. Because they must delegate work to be efficient, executives depend on lower-level employees to furnish
Every employee informally accumulates facts and impressions that contribute to the organization’s collective understanding of the outside world.

Grapevines flourish when employees don’t receive information they want or need.

Company websites are designed to project a particular image. What sort of image does the website of TELUS, a telecommunications company, project? Does the TELUS home page encourage you to explore their website? Why?

INFORMAL COMMUNICATION NETWORK Every organization has an informal communication network—a grapevine—that supplements official channels. As people go about their work, they have casual conversations with their friends in the office. Although many of these conversations deal with personal matters, one study found that about 86 percent of the information that travels along the grapevine pertains to business. Some executives are wary of the informal communication network, possibly because it threatens their power to control the flow of information. However, smart managers tap into the grapevine. It provides them with a sense of employees’ concerns and anxieties. The grapevine also helps employers determine if their formal means of communication are effective: grapevines tend to be most active when employees believe the formal network is not providing the information they want or need. Eliminating the grapevine is virtually impossible, so sophisticated companies minimize its importance by making certain that the official word gets out.

INFORMAL OUTSIDE COMMUNICATION Although companies often communicate with outsiders in a formal manner, informal contacts with outsiders are important for learning about customer needs. As a member of an organization, you are an important informal channel for communicating with the outside world. In the course of your daily activities, you unconsciously absorb bits of information that add to the collective knowledge of your company. What’s more, every time you speak for or about your company, to your friends, potential sales contacts, customers, and so on, you send a message. Many outsiders may form their impression of your organization on the basis of the subtle, unconscious clues you transmit through your tone of voice, facial expression, and general appearance. Although these interactions are informal, they can still be vital to the company’s success, so they require the same care and skill as formal communication.

In fact, these informal exchanges are considered so important that a new class of technology is springing up to enable them. Social networking software, such as Spoke Connect, and websites, such as LinkedIn.com and Ryze.com, help companies take advantage of all the connections their employees may have. These solutions typically work by indexing email and instant messaging address books, calendars, and message archives and then looking for connections between them with accurate, timely reports on problems, emerging trends, opportunities for improvement, grievances, and performance. Typically, documents generated by lower-level employees for high-level or outside readers are reviewed by a manager. Furthermore, sensitive or complex messages created by upper-level employees are also approved by superiors before being signed off.

> Horizontal flow. Communication also flows laterally, from one department to another. This horizontal communication helps employees share information and coordinate tasks. Project teams are one example of horizontal communication: in these teams, employees from different departments work together to solve problems and improve the operation of their company. Formal organizational charts illustrate how information is supposed to flow. In actual practice, however, employees across the organizational hierarchy communicate with each other informally.

Company websites are designed to project a particular image. What sort of image does the website of TELUS, a telecommunications company, project? Does the TELUS home page encourage you to explore their website? Why?

Every employee informally accumulates facts and impressions that contribute to the organization’s collective understanding of the outside world.
names. For instance, you might find that the sales lead you’ve struggled to contact at a large customer might be a golf partner of someone who works down the hall from you.10

**THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS** Communication doesn’t occur haphazardly. Nor does it happen all at once. It is more than a single act. Communication is a dynamic, transactional, or two-way, process that can be broken into six phases (see Figure 1–7).

1. **The sender has an idea.** You conceive an idea and want to share it.
2. **The sender encodes the idea.** When you put your idea into a message that your receiver will understand, you are **encoding** it. In other words, you are deciding on the message's form (word, facial expression, gesture), length, organization, tone, and style—all of which depend on your idea, your audience, and your personal style or mood.
3. **The sender transmits the message.** To physically transmit your message to your receiver, select a medium (telephone, letter, memo, email, report, face-to-face exchange). The choice of medium depends on your message, your audience’s location, the media available to you, your need for speed, and the formality required.
4. **The receiver gets the message.** For communication to occur, your receiver must first get the message. If you send a letter or email, your receiver has to read it before understanding it. If you’re giving a speech, your listeners have to be able to hear you, and they have to pay attention. You have no guarantee that your message will actually get through. In fact, one of the biggest challenges you’ll face as a communicator in today’s crowded business environment is cutting through the clutter and noise in whatever medium you choose.
5. **The receiver decodes the message.** Your receiver must decode—that is, absorb and understand—your message. If obstacles do not block the process, the receiver interprets your message correctly; that is, the receiver assigns the same meaning to your words as you intended and responds in the way you desire.
6. **The receiver sends feedback.** After decoding your message, the receiver has the option of responding in some way. This feedback enables you to evaluate the effectiveness of your message: Feedback often initiates another cycle through the process, which can continue until both parties are satisfied with the result. Successful communicators place considerable value on feedback, not only as a way to measure effectiveness but also as a way to learn.

**Objective 4** Discuss six factors that make business communication unique.

Senders and receivers connect through a six-step process.
Be aware that this is a simplified model; real-life communication is usually more complicated. Both sender and receiver might be talking at the same time, or the receiver might be trying to talk on the phone with one person while instant messaging with another, or the receiver may ignore the sender’s request for feedback, and so on.

Understanding Why Business Communication Is Unique

Business communication is far more demanding than the communication you typically engage in with family, friends, and school associates. Expectations are higher on the job, and the business environment is so complex that your messages can fail for many reasons, such as human oversight or a technological glitch. Business communication is affected by factors such as globalization of business and the increase in workforce diversity, the increasing value of information, the pervasiveness of technology, the growing reliance on teamwork, the evolution of organizational structures, and numerous barriers to successful communication.

The Globalization of Business and the Increase in Workforce Diversity

Today’s businesses increasingly reach across international borders to market their products, partner with other businesses, and employ workers and executives—an effort known as globalization. A number of companies and brands that you may think of as North American (including Ben & Jerry’s, Dr. Pepper, Pillsbury, and Carnation) are in fact owned by organizations based in other countries. Many companies headquartered in North America, such as Boeing, Microsoft, Coca-Cola, and Ford, frequently communicate with customers and colleagues abroad. Over 2 million North Americans now work for foreign employers. Increased globalization and workforce diversity mean that employees must understand the laws, customs, and business practices of many countries besides being able to communicate with people who speak different languages. Between 1991 and 2001, 1.8 million people immigrated to Canada. Altogether, Canadians come from more than 200 different ethnic backgrounds. In Toronto, which attracts the highest percentage of new immigrants, there are 62 different ethnic groups of at least 10,000 people. It has been said that Canada’s multiculturalism “makes us so well liked around the world.”

As Chapter 3 discusses in more detail, successful companies realize two important facts: (1) the more diverse their workforce, the more attention they need to pay to communication, and (2) a diverse workforce can yield a significant competitive advantage by bringing more ideas and broader perspectives to bear on business challenges.

The Increasing Value of Business Information

As competition for jobs, customers, and resources continues to grow, the importance of information continues to escalate as well. An organization’s information is now every bit as important as its people, money, raw materials, and other resources. Even companies not usually associated with the so-called Information Age, such as manufacturers, often rely on knowledge workers: employees at all levels of the organization who specialize in acquiring, processing, and communicating information.
The valuable information you’ll be expected to communicate on the job addresses such key areas as competitive insights, customer needs, and regulations and guidelines:

> **Competitive insights.** Successful companies work hard to understand their competitors’ strengths and weaknesses. The more you know about your competitors and their plans, the more able you will be to adjust your own business plans.

> **Customer needs.** Most companies invest significant time and money in the effort to understand their customers’ needs. This information is collected from a variety of sources and needs to be analyzed and summarized, so that your company can develop goods and services that better satisfy customer needs.

> **Regulations and guidelines.** Today’s businesses must understand and follow a wide range of government regulations and guidelines covering such areas as employment, environment, taxes, and accounting. Your job may include the responsibility of researching and understanding these issues and then communicating them throughout the organization.

The Pervasiveness of Technology

Technology now has a powerful influence in virtually every aspect of business communication. However, even those technological developments intended to enhance communication can actually impede it if not used intelligently. Moreover, keeping current with technology requires time, energy, and constant improvement of skills. If your level of technical expertise doesn’t match that of your colleagues and co-workers, the imbalance can put you at a disadvantage and complicate the communication process. For example, if instant messaging becomes popular in your organization but you resist or avoid it, you’ll be excluded from an important communication channel.

For a concise overview of the technologies you’re most likely to encounter, see “Using Technology to Improve Business Communication,” later in this chapter. Throughout this course, you’ll learn about numerous technological tools and systems, and it’s important to have a general understanding of the internet and its uses.

The Evolution of Organizational Structures

As Figure 1–6 illustrates, every business has a particular structure that defines the relationships between the various people and departments within the organization. These relationships, in turn, affect the nature and quality of communication throughout the organization. Tall structures have many layers of management between the lowest and highest positions, so they can suffer communication breakdowns and delays as messages are passed up and down through multiple layers.
To overcome such problems, many businesses are now adopting flatter structures that reduce the number of layers. With fewer layers, communication generally flows faster and with fewer disruptions and distortions. On the other hand, with fewer formal lines of control and communication in these organizations, individual employees are expected to assume more responsibility for communication. For instance, you may be expected to communicate across department boundaries with colleagues and team members across the company.

In the pursuit of speed and agility, some businesses have adopted flexible organizations that pool the talents of employees and external partners. For instance, when launching a new product, a company might supplement the efforts of internal departments with help from a public relations firm, an ad agency, a marketing consultant, a web developer, and a product distributor. With so many individuals and organizations involved in the project, everyone must share the responsibility for giving and getting necessary information, or communication will break down.

Regardless of the particular structure a company uses, your communication efforts will also be influenced by the organization’s corporate culture, the mixture of values, traditions, and habits that give a company its atmosphere and personality. Successful companies encourage employee contributions by ensuring that communication flows freely down, up, and across the organization chart. Open climates encourage candour and honesty, helping employees feel free enough to admit their mistakes, disagree with the boss, and express their opinions. Since taking the helm at Suncor in 1991, Chief Executive Officer Rick George has fostered an open culture. As the company’s leader, he, and other members of upper management, routinely consult with staff about Suncor’s business decisions and performance. This open communication has resulted in early identification of problems and the generation of innovative ideas. Under George’s leadership, Suncor’s oil production increased from 60,000 barrels a day to 225,000, an increase of almost 400 percent.15

Of course, as with any honest relationship, sending or receiving negative news is not always easy. In Chapter 8, you’ll learn effective strategies for crafting messages that convey bad news in a professional and respectful manner.

The Growing Reliance on Teamwork

Successful companies such as Suncor no longer limit decisions to a few managers at the top of a formal hierarchy. Instead, organizations use teams and collaborative work groups to make the decisions required to succeed in a global and competitive marketplace. You’ll probably find yourself on a number of teams throughout your career.

When teams replace or complement the formal channels in the organization chart, information may no longer be conveyed automatically, so every team member becomes more responsible for communication. This responsibility includes both sending and receiving messages; for example, you might seek out needed information...
rather than waiting for someone to deliver it to you. In fact, you and your fellow team members may have to invent your own communication processes to ensure that everyone gets the right information at the right time. This extra attention to communication can pay off dramatically in higher performance and a more satisfying work experience.

The Barriers to Effective Communication

Throughout your career, you'll find that perfectly effective messages can fail for a variety of reasons. When interference in the communication process distorts or obscures the sender's meaning, it is called a communication barrier, or noise. Your attempts to transmit and receive messages can be disrupted, distorted, even blocked by communication barriers such as these:

> **Distractions.** Business messages can be interrupted or distorted by a wide variety of distractions. Physical distractions range from bad connections and poor acoustics to illegible printing and uncomfortable meeting rooms. Technology has brought us spam and unnecessary emails—both interfering with efficient workflow. Emotional distractions, such as anger or fear, on the part of either sender or receiver can affect the way you prepare and deliver messages and the way your audience interprets those messages. Poor listening is another kind of distraction. We all let our minds wander now and then, and we are especially likely to drift off when we are forced to listen to information that is difficult to understand or that has little direct bearing on our own lives.

> **Information overload.** The sheer number of messages that people receive on the job can be distracting. Too many messages can result in information overload, which not only makes it difficult to discriminate between useful and useless information but also amplifies workplace stress. One study found that business people send and receive about 90 email messages a day, and “power emailers” devote more than three hours each day to read, forward, and reply to them.

> **Perceptual differences.** Our minds organize incoming sensations into a mental map that represents our individual perception of reality. As a sender, you choose the details that seem important to you. As a receiver, you try to fit new details into your existing pattern; however, if a detail doesn’t quite fit, you are inclined to distort the information rather than rearrange your pattern—a process known as selective perception. The more experiences you share with another person, the more likely you are to share perception and thus share meaning (see Figure 1–8).

> **Figure 1–8 How Shared Experience Affects Understanding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Little shared experience</th>
<th>Average amount of shared experience</th>
<th>Large amount of shared experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meanings dissimilar</td>
<td>Meanings similar</td>
<td>Meanings very similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstanding</td>
<td>Average degree of understanding</td>
<td>High degree of understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
> **Language differences.** The very language we use to communicate can turn into a barrier if two people define a given word or phrase differently. When a boss asks for something “as soon as possible,” does that mean within 10 seconds, 10 minutes, 10 days? When you communicate with non-native speakers of English, you may have to explain such expressions as “he nailed it” and “thinking outside the box.”

> **Restrictive environments.** Companies that restrict the flow of information, either intentionally or unintentionally, limit their competitive potential. With their many levels between top and bottom, tall hierarchies often result in significant loss of message quality in both directions. If an organization does not provide an effective means for employees to share their ideas, they will believe management is not interested in them and will avoid conveying their opinions.

> **Deceptive tactics.** Language itself is made up of words that carry values. So merely by expressing your ideas in a certain way, you influence how others perceive your message, and you shape expectations and behaviours. An organization cannot create illegal or unethical messages and still be credible or successful in the long run. Still, some business communicators try to manipulate their receivers by using deceptive tactics: they may exaggerate benefits, quote inaccurate statistics, or hide negative information behind an optimistic attitude. They may state opinions as facts, leave out crucial information, or portray graphic data unfairly. Unscrupulous communicators may seek personal gain by making others look better or worse than they are. And they may allow personal preferences to influence their own perception and the perception of others.

### Communicating More Effectively on the Job

No single solution will overcome all communication barriers. However, a careful combination of strategies can improve your ability to communicate effectively. For example, you can minimize distractions, adopt an audience-centred approach, improve your basic communication skills, make your feedback constructive, and be sensitive to business etiquette.

#### Strategy 1: Minimizing Distractions

Everyone in the organization can help overcome distractions. Start by reducing as much noise, visual clutter, and interruption as possible. A small dose of common sense and courtesy goes a long way. Turn off that cell phone before you step into a meeting. Don’t talk across the tops of cubicles when people inside them are trying to work. Be sensitive to your employer’s policies about playing music at work: some people may be able to work with soft music playing, but others can’t.

Don’t let email, instant messaging, or telephones interrupt you every minute of the day. Set aside time to attend to messages all at once, so you can think and focus the rest of the time. In fact, one of the most important steps you can take is simply sending fewer messages. You never want to undercommunicate, but sending unnecessary messages or sending the right message to the wrong people is almost as bad. Email is compounding this problem, making it so easy to send and forward messages to dozens or hundreds of people at once. Think before you click that “Send” button.

In addition, if you must send a message that isn’t urgent or crucial, let people know so that they can prioritize. If a long report requires no action from
recipients, tell them up front, so they don’t have to search through it looking for action items. Most email and voicemail systems let you mark messages as urgent; however, use this feature only when it’s truly needed. Too many so-called urgent messages that aren’t particularly urgent will lead to annoyance and anxiety, not action.

Try to overcome emotional distractions by recognizing your own feelings and by anticipating emotional reactions from others. When a situation might cause tempers to flare, choose your words carefully. As a receiver, avoid placing blame and reacting subjectively.

Strategy 2: Adopting an Audience-Centred Approach

An audience-centred approach means focusing on and caring about the members of your audience, making every effort to get your message across in a way that is meaningful to them. Learn as much as possible about the biases, education, age, status, style, and personal and professional concerns of your receivers. If you’re addressing strangers and unable to find out more about them, project yourself into their position by using your common sense and imagination. Remember that your audience wants to know, “What’s in it for me?”

The more you know about the people you’re communicating with, the easier it will be to concentrate on their needs—which, in turn, will make it easier for them to hear your message, understand it, and respond positively. For instance, the presentation slide in Figure 1–9 takes an audience-centred approach. Rather than trying to cover all the technical and legal details that are often discussed in insurance plans, this slide addresses the common fears and worries that employees might have as their company moves to a new health insurance plan.

If you haven’t had the opportunity to communicate with a diverse range of people in your academic career so far, you might be surprised by the different communication styles you will surely encounter on the job. Recognizing and adapting to your audience’s style will improve not only the effectiveness of your
communication but also the quality of your working relationship as well. The audience-centred approach is emphasized throughout this book, so you’ll have plenty opportunity to practise this approach to communicating more effectively.

**Strategy 3: Improving Your Business Communication Skills**

Your own skills as a communicator will be as much a factor in your business success as anything else. No matter what your skill level, opportunities to improve are numerous and usually easy to find. As mentioned earlier, many employers provide communication training in both general skills and specific scenarios, but don’t wait. Use this course to begin mastering your skills now.

Lack of experience may be the only obstacle between you and effective communication. Perhaps you’re worried about a limited vocabulary or uncertain about questions of grammar, punctuation, and style. If you’re intimidated by the idea of writing an important document or appearing before a group, you’re not alone. Everyone gets nervous about communicating from time to time, even people you might think of as “naturals.” People aren’t born writing and speaking well; they master these skills through study and practice. Someone who has written 10 reports or given 10 speeches is usually better at it than someone who has produced only 2, so seek out opportunities to practice. Even simple techniques, such as keeping a reading log and writing practice essays, will improve not only your writing skills but also your scholastic performance.

This course lets you practise in an environment that provides honest and constructive feedback. You’ll have ample opportunity to plan and produce documents, collaborate in teams, listen effectively, improve nonverbal communication, and communicate across cultures—all skills that will serve your career well.

**Strategy 4: Making Your Feedback Constructive**

Feedback doesn’t end when you leave school. While searching for employment and once on the job, you will encounter numerous situations in which you are expected to give and receive feedback. Whether giving or receiving criticism, be sure you do so in a constructive way. Constructive feedback, sometimes called constructive criticism, focuses on the process and outcomes of communication, not on the people involved (see Table 1–1). In contrast, destructive feedback delivers criticism with no effort to stimulate improvement. For example, “This proposal is a confusing mess, and you failed to convince me of anything” is destructive feedback. Your goal is to be more constructive: “Your proposal could be more effective with a clearer description of the construction process and a well-organized explanation of why the positives outweigh the negatives.” When giving feedback, avoid personal attacks and give the person clear guidelines for improvement.

When you receive constructive feedback, resist the all-too-human impulse to defend your work or deny the validity of the feedback. Remaining open to criticism isn’t always easy when you’ve put long nights and much effort into a project, but feedback is a valuable opportunity to learn and improve. Disconnect your emotions from the work and view it simply as something you can improve. Many writers also find it helpful to step back, think a while about the feedback, and let their emotions settle down before making corrections. For all that, don’t automatically assume that even well-intentioned feedback is necessarily correct. You are responsible for the final quality of the message, so ensure that any suggested changes are valid ones.
Strategy 5: Being Sensitive to Business Etiquette

In today's hectic, competitive world, the notion of *etiquette* (the expected norms of behaviour in a particular situation) can seem outdated and unimportant. However, the way you conduct yourself can have a profound influence on your company's success and your career. When executives hire and promote you, they expect your behaviour to protect the company's reputation. The more you understand such expectations, the better chance you have of avoiding career-damaging mistakes.

In any setting, long lists of etiquette “rules” can be overwhelming. You’ll never memorize all of them or remember to follow all of them in the heat of the moment. Remember three principles that will get you through almost any situation:

> respect
> courtesy
> common sense

Moreover, these principles will encourage forgiveness if you do happen to make a mistake. As you encounter new situations, take a few minutes to learn the expectations of the other people involved. You can begin with reading travel guidebooks; they are a great source of information about norms and customs in other countries. Don’t be afraid to ask questions, either. People will respect your concern and curiosity. You’ll gradually accumulate considerable knowledge, which will help you feel comfortable and be effective in a wide range of business situations. In Chapter 3, you will learn some rules of etiquette when conducting business with people of other cultures.
Today’s businesses rely heavily on technology to improve the communication process. Companies and employees who use technology wisely can communicate more effectively and therefore compete more successfully.

You will find that technology is discussed extensively throughout this book, with specific advice on using common tools to meet communication challenges. Some aspects of communication technology are undergoing exciting changes almost daily. Technologies such as the following have the potential to dramatically enhance business communication:

> **Voice technologies.** The human voice will always be central to business communication, and it is supplemented by a variety of new technologies. Voice synthesis regenerates a human speaking voice from computer files that represent words or parts of words. Voice recognition converts human speech to computer-compatible data. Both technologies continue to improve every year, gaining richer vocabularies and more human-sounding voices.

> **Virtual agents.** The dream of replicating or even surpassing human capabilities with computers has been driving artificial intelligence research for years. Virtual agents are a limited form of machine intelligence, also known as bots (derived from robot), verbots, and V-reps. These virtual operators are used in customer service departments and other areas where people tend to ask similar questions repeatedly. Through a combination of voice recognition, voice synthesis, and basic problem-solving skills, these virtual operators are some 40 percent faster than menu-based Touch-Tone calls, and they cost about half as much as a call handled by a human. A variation on virtual phone communication is the virtual meeting, in which technology creates the illusion of sitting next to someone who might actually be thousands of miles away.

> **Mobile communication.** If you’re accustomed to studying on the go, moving from dorm room to coffee shop to library, you’ll fit right in with today’s untethered work environments. In many cases, mobile workers don’t even have traditional offices, using temporary cubicles at work, home offices, cars, airports, and even new internet-equipped airplanes for office space. Location data from the Global Positioning System (GPS) is also creating new forms of mobile communication, such as remote monitoring of medical patients and trucking fleets.

> **Networking advances.** You might already use four new networking technologies that are now making serious inroads into the corporate world. As noted earlier, instant messaging allows two or more people to exchange text instantaneously, without the delays of central email servers. Peer-to-peer (P2P) computing extends this concept by letting multiple PCs communicate directly, so that they can share files or work on large problems simultaneously. Wireless networking, commonly known as Wi-Fi, extends the reach of the internet with wireless access points that connect to PCs and handheld devices via radio signals. Short messaging service (SMS) is a text communication feature that has been common on mobile phones in other parts of the world for several years and has recently gained a presence in North America. The First National Bank in South Africa uses SMS to improve internet banking security for its customers. Whenever an account is accessed online, the bank immediately sends a text message to the customer, so he or
she can verify that the access is legitimate.27 (Note: While instant messaging and text messaging perform a similar function, instant messaging is generally considered a computer-to-computer activity and text messaging is a phone-to-phone or computer-to-phone function.)

Even though such impressive enhancements are available, anyone who has used a computer knows that the benefits of technology are not automatic. When poorly designed or inappropriately used, technology can hinder communication more than it helps. Communicate effectively by keeping technology in perspective, using technological tools productively, spending time and money on technology wisely, and disengaging from the computer frequently to communicate in person.

Using Technological Tools Productively

You don't have to become an expert to use most communication technologies effectively, but you will need to be familiar with the basic features and functions of the tools your employer expects you to use. This includes using everyday tools such as word processing and email efficiently and adapting to new tools such as blogging, podcasting, and virtual meetings as they become available.

People who are proficient at using their technological tools can produce impressive results, but the expectations of production quality seem to increase with every new capability. The norm for presentations about 10 years ago was typed content on overhead transparencies. Today's standard is computer-based, full-colour presentations on liquid crystal displays (LCDs). The presentations are certainly more attractive and sometimes more effective, but the technology has forced millions of businesspeople to learn a new set of skills. At some point in the future, you might have to learn how to program your virtual identity robot to attend meetings for you. Technology will always require some new skill to be learned. Whatever the tool, if you learn the basics, your work will be less frustrating and far more productive.

Reconnecting with People Frequently

In spite of technology's efficiency and speed, it may not be the best choice for every communication situation. First, even in the best circumstances, technology can't match the rich experience of person-to-person contact. Suppose you email a colleague asking how her sales presentation to an important client went, and she simply replies “Fine.” What does fine mean? Is an order expected soon? Did she lose the sale? Was the client rude and she doesn't want to talk about it? If you reconnect with her, perhaps visit her in person, she might provide additional information, or you might be able to offer advice or support during a difficult time.

Second, most people need to connect with other people. You can create impressive documents and presentations without ever leaving your desk or meeting anyone in person. But if you stay hidden behind technology, people won't get to know you nearly as well. You might be funny, bright, and helpful, but you're just a voice on the phone or a name on a document until people can interact with you in person. As technological options increase, people seem to need the human touch even more.
Making Ethical Communication Choices

Ethics are the accepted principles of conduct that govern behaviour within a society. Put another way, ethical principles define the boundary between right and wrong. Ethics has been defined as “knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is the right thing to do.” To make the right choices as a business communicator you have a responsibility to think through not only what you say but also the consequences of saying it.

Of course, people in a society don’t always agree on what constitutes ethical behaviour. For instance, the emergence of stealth marketing, in which customers don’t know they’re being marketed to, has raised a new set of concerns about ethics. Two common stealth marketing techniques are sending people into public places to use particular products in a conspicuous manner and then discuss them with strangers—as though they were just regular people on the street, when in fact they are employed by a marketing firm—and paying consumers (or plying them with insider information and other benefits) to promote products to their friends without telling them it’s a form of advertising. Critics complain that such techniques are deceptive because they don’t give their targets the opportunity to raise their instinctive defences against the persuasive powers of marketing messages.

Ethical behaviour is a companywide concern, of course, but because communication efforts are the public face of a company, they are subjected to particularly rigorous scrutiny from regulators, legislators, investors, consumer groups, environmental groups, labour organizations, and anyone else affected by business activities. Ethical communication includes all relevant information, is true in every sense, and is not deceptive in any way. In contrast, unethical communication can include falsehoods and misleading information (or withhold important information). Some examples of unethical communication include:

- **Plagiarism.** Stealing someone else’s words or other creative product and claiming it as your own
- **Selective misquoting.** Omitting damaging or unflattering comments deliberately to paint a better (but untruthful) picture of you or your company
- **Misrepresenting numbers.** Increasing or decreasing numbers, exaggerating, altering statistics, or omitting numerical data
- **Distorting visuals.** Making a product look bigger or changing the scale of graphs and charts to exaggerate or conceal differences

An ethical message is accurate and sincere. It avoids language and images that manipulate, discriminate, or exaggerate. On the surface, such ethical practices appear fairly easy to recognize, but deciding what is ethical can be a considerable challenge in complex business situations.

Distinguishing an Ethical Dilemma from an Ethical Lapse

Every company has responsibilities to various groups: customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, neighbours, the community, and the nation. Unfortunately, what’s right for one group may be wrong for another. Moreover, as you attempt to satisfy the needs of one group, you may be presented with an option that seems right on the surface but somehow feels wrong. When people
must choose between conflicting loyalties and weigh difficult trade-offs, they face a dilemma.

An **ethical dilemma** involves choosing among alternatives that aren’t clear-cut. Perhaps two conflicting alternatives are both ethical and valid, or perhaps the alternatives lie somewhere in the vast grey area between right and wrong. Suppose you are president of a company that’s losing money. You have a duty to your shareholders to reduce your losses and to your employees to be fair and honest. After looking at various options, you conclude that you will have to lay off 500 people immediately. You suspect you may have to lay off another 100 people later on, but right now you need those 100 workers to finish a project. What do you tell them? If you confess that their jobs are insecure, many of them may quit just when you need them most. However, if you tell them that the future is promising, you’ll be stretching the truth.

Unlike a dilemma, an **ethical lapse** is making a clearly unethical (and frequently illegal) choice. Suppose you have decided to change jobs and have discreetly landed an interview with your boss’s largest competitor. You get along great with the interviewer, who is impressed enough with you to offer you a position on the spot. The new position is a step up from your current job, and the pay is much more than what you’re getting now. You accept the job and agree to start next month. Then, as you’re shaking hands with the interviewer, she asks you to bring along profiles of your current company’s 10 largest customers when you report for work. Do you comply with her request? How do you decide between what’s ethical and what is not?

### Ensuring Ethical Communication

Ensuring ethical business communications requires three elements:

1. ethical individuals
2. ethical company leadership
3. appropriate policies and structures to support employees’ efforts to make ethical choices

Moreover, these three elements need to work in harmony. If employees see company executives making unethical decisions and flouting company guidelines, they might conclude that the guidelines are meaningless and emulate their bosses’ unethical behaviour.

Employers have a responsibility to establish clear guidelines for ethical behaviour, including business communication. Many companies establish an explicit ethics policy by using a written **code of ethics** to help employees determine what is acceptable. A code is often part of a larger program of employee training and communication channels that allow employees to ask questions and report instances of questionable ethics. For example, at Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE), employees can seek advice on matters regarding ethical behaviour and report illegal or unethical behaviour using the Business Conduct Help Line, which is available on a 24/7 basis.

Whether formal guidelines are in place, every employee has the responsibility to communicate in an ethical manner. Although ethics can be a murky place to navigate, a good place to start is with the law. If something is illegal, you don’t do it. No questions asked. Many companies have lawyers on staff or outside attorneys that you can call on for advice when necessary.
Like many Canadian corporations, such as Nortel, Bank of Montreal, and Suncor, BCE posts its code of ethical behaviour on its website. Why does an organization do so? Examine several corporate codes of ethics. What similarities do you find among them? What differences do you see?
However, the law doesn’t cover every situation that you’ll encounter in your career. In the absence of clear legal boundaries or ethical guidelines, ask yourself the following questions about your business communications:

> Have you defined the situation fairly and accurately?
> What is your intention in communicating this message?
> What impact will this message have on the people who receive it, or who might be affected by it?
> Will the message achieve the greatest possible good while doing the least possible harm?
> Will the assumptions you’ve made change over time? That is, will a decision that seems ethical now seem unethical in the future?
> Are you comfortable with your decision? Would you be embarrassed if it were printed in tomorrow’s newspaper or spread across the internet?

If all else fails, think about a person whom you admire and ask yourself what he or she would think of your decision. If you wouldn’t be proud to describe your choice to someone you admire and respect—someone whose opinion of you matters—that’s a strong signal that you might be making a poor ethical choice.

### Applying What You’ve Learned

At the beginning of this chapter, you met Suncor’s Sue Lee in “On the Job: Communicating at Suncor.” Lee is just one of the many real business professionals you’ll meet throughout this book—people who successfully handle the same communication challenges you’ll face on the job. Every chapter opens with a similar slice-of-life vignette, and as you read through each chapter, think about the person and the company highlighted in the vignette. Become familiar with the various concepts presented in the chapter, and imagine how they might apply to the featured scenario.

At the end of each chapter, you’ll take part in an innovative simulation called “On the Job: Performing a Communication Task.” You’ll play the role of a person working in the highlighted organization, and you’ll face a situation you could encounter on the job. You will be presented with communication scenarios, each with several possible courses of action. It’s up to you to recommend one course of action from the simulations as homework, as teamwork, as material for in-class discussion, or in a host of other ways. These scenarios let you explore various communication ideas and apply the concepts and techniques from the chapter.

Now you’re ready for the first simulation (page 28). As you tackle each problem, think about the material you covered in this chapter and consider your own experience as a communicator. You’ll probably be surprised to discover how much you already know about business communication.
Summary of Learning Objectives

1 Explain why effective communication is important to your success in today’s business environment. Your ability to communicate can help your company become more efficient, innovative, and responsive. As your career advances and you achieve positions of greater responsibility, your communication skills will gain in importance because you will communicate about increasingly important matters to larger and larger audiences. Employers will recognize your communication abilities and value you as an employee.

2 Identify eight communication skills that successful employers expect from their employees. Employers expect their employees to organize ideas and information effectively, express and present ideas coherently and persuasively, and listen carefully for the true meaning behind words. They also want employees to communicate well in a diverse workplace, use communication technologies, and follow the standards of correct writing and speaking. Finally, employers expect their workers to practise courtesy and respect and communicate in an ethical manner.

3 Describe the five characteristics of effective business communication. Effective business messages supply information that helps others complete tasks, provide factual support for opinions, and clarify and summarize information to help audiences comprehend documents quickly. Good business writing also states the desired action, so that the reader knows how to respond, and persuades audiences by showing benefits.

4 Discuss six factors that make business communication unique. Teamwork is a unique quality of business communication: businesses increasingly rely on teams and expect every team member to communicate effectively in a team setting. The evolution toward flatter organizational structures is another factor: these structures reduce the number of layers of management, giving employees more responsibility for communication. In addition, globalization and diversity create opportunities to learn more about markets and communicate more effectively with various market segments. Technology provides workers with the challenges of using it intelligently and keeping up to date with innovations. The increasing value placed on business information has created the need to understand evolving regulations and customer needs. Finally, barriers to effective communication, such as information overload and language differences, can affect the success of message transmission and reception.

5 Describe five strategies for communicating more effectively on the job. One method is to reduce distractions caused by technology, sounds, and emotional concerns. Successful communicators also focus on the needs of their audience and adapt to their communication styles, practise their communication skills, provide constructive feedback, and learn the norms of business etiquette in a variety of situations.

6 Explain three strategies for using communication technology successfully. Employees who use communication technology effectively adapt it to their own and their audiences’ needs, and realize that it does not necessarily supplant traditional communication forms. Employees should also be familiar with the strengths of modern technology as well as its weaknesses. Finally, employees who use communication technology wisely know that face-to-face communication adds the human touch, which is essential for professional relationships.

7 Discuss the importance of ethics in business communication and differentiate between an ethical dilemma and an ethical lapse. Ethics is crucial to effective business communication because it can support, or damage, a company’s reputation in the eyes of all its stakeholders. Ethical communicators do not deceive their audiences through language, images, and behaviours that manipulate, discriminate, or exaggerate. An ethical dilemma involves choosing between two or more alternatives that are neither clearly ethical nor clearly unethical, such as alternatives that are all ethical but conflicting or alternatives that lie somewhere in the grey areas between right and wrong. An ethical lapse involves choosing an alternative that is clearly unethical or illegal, perhaps placing your own desire or ambition above the welfare of others.

Go to MyBusCommLab at “http://www.mybuscommlab.ca” for online exercises and problems.
On the Job  
**PERFORMING COMMUNICATION TASKS AT SUNCOR ENERGY INC.**

As Suncor’s senior vice-president of Human Resources and Communications, Sue Lee plays a vital role in keeping communication flowing and ensuring that everyone receives necessary information by helping employees and outside stakeholders overcome potential barriers to effective communication. To assist her with a growing workload of internal and external communication tasks, she has recently hired you as an assistant with special responsibilities for communication. Use your knowledge of communication to choose the best response for each situation. Be prepared to explain why your choice is best.

1. The company’s medical insurance plan for the next year contains substantial changes from this year’s plan. To maintain Suncor’s open communication climate, how should this information be distributed to employees?
   - **a** Have Sue Lee, vice president of Human Resources and Communications, present the information at an all-staff meeting, so that employees can give their reactions to the changes.
   - **b** Detail the changes in a single email message sent to all staff.
   - **c** Post the details on the corporate intranet site.
   - **d** Describe the changes in a benefits statement sent to each employee.

2. A manager has asked for your help. Her team is responsible for shipping replacement parts to crews working on the oil rigs in Fort McMurray. Some team members are not filling orders in a timely manner, and she confides that they are not giving their best to the job. As one way of improving performance, she wants to send a memo to everyone in the department, and she’s asked you to recommend an approach.
   - Which approaches would be the most ethical and effective?
     - **a** Tell employees that the team’s performance is not as good as it could be, and ask for ideas on how to improve the situation.
     - **b** Explain that you’ll have to fire the next person you see giving less than 100 percent (even though you know company policy prevents you from actually doing so).
     - **c** Ask employees to monitor one another and report problems to their team leader.
     - **d** Tell all employees that if team performance does not improve, wages will be reduced and evaluations will not be positive.

3. A rumour begins circulating that oil production will be reduced and many workers in the oil sands will be laid off. The rumour is false. What is the first action you should take?
   - **a** Put a notice on the company intranet denying the rumour.
   - **b** Publish a denial in a memo asking all managers to tell their employees that the rumour is false.
   - **c** Schedule a meeting with all employees about working at the oil sands. At the meeting have the company CEO explain the facts and publicly state that the rumour is false.
   - **d** Ignore the rumour. Like all false rumours it will eventually die out.

**Test Your Knowledge**

1. Define **stakeholders** and explain why they are important.
2. How is globalization changing communication in the workplace?
3. How does effective communication help employees interact with customers and colleagues in this age of technology?
4. How does internal communication differ from external communication?
5. In what directions can information travel within an organization’s formal hierarchy?
6. What is the grapevine? Why should managers know how it works?
7. In which of the six phases of the communication process do messages get encoded and decoded?
8. Why should communicators take an audience-centred approach to communication?
9. How does corporate culture affect the communication climate within an organization?
10. Define **ethics**. Explain the ethical responsibilities of communicators.
Apply Your Knowledge

1 Why do you think good communication in an organization improves employees’ attitudes and performance? Explain.

2 Under what circumstances might you want to limit the feedback you receive from an audience of readers or listeners? Explain.

3 Would written or spoken messages be more susceptible to noise? Why?

4 As a manager, how can you impress on your employees the importance of including both negative and positive information in messages?

5 Ethical Choices Because of your excellent communication skills, your supervisor always asks you to write his reports for him. When you overhear the CEO complimenting him on his logical organization and clear writing style, he responds as if he’d written all those reports himself. What kind of ethical choice does this represent? What can you do in this situation? Briefly explain your solution and your reasoning.

RUNNING CASES

>CASE 1 Noreen

Noreen is working towards a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and takes her studies via distance education through a Canadian university. She works fulltime at Petro-Go, an international fuel company, in one of their call centres as a customer service representative (CSR). She is the team leader for a group of CSRs located in the “Go Points” program department. Her future career goal is to complete her BBA and obtain a senior management position within a large international firm.

Noreen is on the social committee and her manager asks her to organize a potluck lunch for 40 employees in her call centre department.

QUESTIONS

a) Suggest an appropriate type of communication (e.g., casual conversation, formal letter, meeting, memo, email, bulletin board notice) and briefly explain your choice.

b) Is this a horizontal flow or a downward flow of communication? Formal or informal?

c) What must Noreen consider when planning this event?

d) What must Noreen consider when communicating the plans?

e) What communication barriers might she encounter and how should she overcome those barriers?

YOUR TASK

Assume all the plans are arranged and now Noreen just needs to notify the guests. Write a memo that she will distribute to the 40 employees in her call centre department. Ensure the necessary details are in the invitation memo. Exchange memos with another student and ask for constructive criticism on how to improve your communication.

>CASE 2 Kwong

Kwong, a new Canadian, is enrolled in a 3-year Accounting, co-op diploma program at a local college. He is currently in his third semester and will be placed in a co-op position next term. There he will apply what he has learned in his studies and, at the same time, gain valuable work experience. His future career goal is to complete the CGA (Chartered General Accountant) requirements and then open his own accounting firm.

Kwong will be interviewed by a prospective co-op employer. He needs to be successful in the interview to obtain the placement.

QUESTIONS

a) What research should Kwong do before the interview?

b) Which employability skills do you think Kwong may currently possess and which skills may he still need to develop? (Refer to Figure 1.2)

c) How will he emphasize his strong skills and de-emphasize his weaker skills during the interview?

d) What ethical choices may Kwong have to make?

e) What communication barriers may Kwong be faced with (both oral and written)? Give a specific example.

YOUR TASK

Make a list of the employability skills you believe you possess. Make a list of the employability skills you believe you need to improve. Visit the Conference Board of Canada website for the employability skills survey results at <www.conferenceboard.ca/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.htm>.

Questions that test your critical-thinking skills.
CHAPTER 1 > ACHIEVING SUCCESS THROUGH EFFECTIVE BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Read the following document and then (1) analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each sentence and (2) revise the document, so it follows this chapter’s guidelines.

It has come to my attention that many of you are lying on your time cards. If you come in late, you should not put 8:00 A.M. on your card. If you take a long lunch, you should not put 1:00 P.M. on your time card. I will not stand for this type of cheating. I simply have no choice but to institute a time-clock system. Beginning next Monday, all employees will have to punch in and punch out whenever they come and go from the work area.

The time clock will be right by the entrance to each work area, so you will have no excuse for not punching in. Anyone who is late for work or late coming back from lunch more than three times will have to answer to me. I don’t care if you had to take a nap or if you girls had to shop. This is a place of business, and we do not want to be taken advantage of by slackers who are cheaters to boot.

It is too bad that a few bad apples always have to spoil things for everyone.

EXERCISES

1.1 Internal Communication: Planning the Flow
For these tasks, identify the necessary direction of communication (downward, upward, horizontal), suggest an appropriate type of communication (casual conversation, formal interview, meeting, workshop, web conference, instant message, newsletter, memo, bulletin board notice, and so on), and briefly explain your suggestion.

a. As personnel manager, you want to announce details about this year’s company picnic.

b. As director of internal communication, you want to convince top management of the need for a company newsletter.

c. As production manager, you want to make sure that both the sales manager and the finance manager receive your scheduling estimates.

d. As marketing manager, you want to help employees understand the company’s goals and its attitudes toward workers.

1.2 Communication Networks: Formal or Informal?
An old school friend suddenly phoned you to say: "I had to call you. You’d better keep this quiet, but when I heard my company was buying you guys out, I was shocked. I had no idea that a company as large as yours could sink so fast. Your group must be in pretty bad shape over there!" Your stomach turned suddenly queasy, and you felt a chill go up your spine. You’d heard nothing about any buyout, and before you could even get your friend off the phone, you were wondering what you should do.

Choose one course of action and briefly explain your choice.

a. Contact your CEO directly and relate what you’ve heard.

b. Ask co-workers whether they’ve heard anything about a buyout.

c. Discuss the phone call confidentially with your immediate supervisor.

d. Keep quiet about the whole thing (there’s nothing you can do about the situation anyway).

1.3 Ethical Choices
In less than a page, explain why you think each is or is not ethical.

a. Keeping quiet about a possible environmental hazard you’ve just discovered in your company’s processing plant

b. Overselling the benefits of instant messaging to your company’s management; they never seem to understand the benefits of technology, so you believe that stretching the truth just a bit is the only way to convince them to make the right choice

c. Telling an associate and close friend that she’d better pay more attention to her work responsibilities or management will fire her

d. Recommending the purchase of unnecessary equipment to use up your allocated funds before the end of the fiscal year, so your budget won’t be cut next year

1.4 The Changing Workplace: Personal Expression at Work
Blogging has become a popular way for employees to communicate with customers and other parties outside the company. In some cases, employee blogs have been beneficial for both companies and their customers by providing helpful information and “putting a human face” on formal and imposing corporations. However, in some other cases, employees have been fired for posting information that their employers said was inappropriate. One particular area of concern is criticism of the company or individual managers. Should employees be allowed to criticize their employers in a public forum such as a blog? In a brief email message, argue for or against company policies that prohibit any critical information in employee blogs.

1.5 Internet
Industry Canada prepares reports for consumers, researchers, and businesspeople. Visit Industry Canada’s website, and review
their report on Voluntary Codes: A Guide for Their Development and Use. Read the section titled Features of Voluntary Codes. Next, find a Canadian corporation that has a code of ethics posted on the internet (other than BCE). Does the code of ethics you found follow the features? Write two or three paragraphs describing the extent to which the code you found follows the features, and describe how it can be improved. Submit your essay to your instructor.

1.6 Communication Process: Know Your Audience
Top management has asked you to speak at an upcoming executive meeting to present your arguments for a more open communication climate. Which of the following would be most important for you to know about your audience before giving your presentation? Briefly explain your choice.

a. How many top managers will be attending.

b. What management style members of your audience prefer.

c. How firmly these managers are set in their ways.

1.7 Ethical Choices
Your boss often uses you as a sounding board for her ideas. Now she seems to want you to act as an unofficial messenger, passing her ideas along to the staff without mentioning her involvement and informing her of what staff members say without telling them you’re going to repeat their responses. What questions should you ask yourself as you consider the ethical implications of this situation? Write a short paragraph explaining the ethical choice you will make in this situation.

1.8 Communication Etiquette
Potential customers frequently visit your production facility before making purchase decisions. You and the people who report to you in the sales department have received extensive training in etiquette issues because you deal with high-profile clients so frequently. However, the rest of the workforce has not received such training, and you worry that someone might inadvertently say or do something that would offend a potential customer. In a two-paragraph email, explain to the general manager why you think anyone who might come in contact with customers should receive basic etiquette training.

1.9 Teamwork
Your boss has asked your work group to research and report on corporate childcare facilities. Of course, you’ll want to know who (besides your boss) will read your report. Working with two team members, list four or five other things you’ll want to know about the situation and about your audience before starting your research. Briefly explain why the items on your list are important.

1.10 Communication Process: Analyzing Miscommunication
Use the six phases of the communication process to analyze a miscommunication you’ve recently had with a co-worker, supervisor, classmate, teacher, friend, or family member. What idea were you trying to share? How did you encode and transmit it? Did the receiver get the message? Did the receiver correctly decode the message? How do you know? Based on your analysis, identify and explain the barriers that prevented your successful communication in this instance.

1.11 Ethical Choices
You’ve been given the critical assignment of selecting the site for your company’s new plant. After months of negotiations with landowners, numerous cost calculations, and investments in ecological, social, and community impact studies, you are about to recommend building the new plant on the Lansing River site. Now, just 15 minutes before your big presentation to top management, you discover a possible mistake in your calculations: site-purchase costs appear to be $50,000 more than you calculated, nearly 10 percent over budget. You don’t have time to recheck all your figures, so you’re tempted to just go ahead with your recommendation and ignore any discrepancies. You’re worried that management won’t approve this purchase if you can’t present a clean, unqualified solution. You also know that many projects run over their original estimates, so you can probably work the extra cost into the budget later. On your way to the meeting room, you make your final decision. In a few paragraphs, explain the decision you made.

1.12 Communication Etiquette
In group meetings, some of your colleagues have a habit of interrupting and arguing with the speaker, taking credit for ideas that aren’t theirs, and criticizing ideas they don’t agree with. You’re the newest person in the group and not sure if this is accepted behaviour in this company, but it concerns you both personally and professionally. Should you adopt their behaviour or stick with your own communication style, even though your quiet, respectful approach might limit your career potential? In two paragraphs, explain the pros and cons of both approaches.