PART I

FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATION

1 START RIGHT HERE

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

1.1. Explain the meaningfulness of communication presence, including the importance of balancing communication options.

1.2. Define communication, identifying its essential elements and visualizing them in action.

1.3. Describe the core principles of communication.

1.4. Evaluate the benefits of and skills necessary for communicating effectively.

A playbook is a game plan—a plan of action designed to achieve results. What can we gain from employing a playbook approach to our study of communication? What results can we achieve? Let's start right here! The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020–2021 has given a whole new meaning to the idea of communication *going viral*. At the outset, as a result of the unique coronavirus, we found ourselves having to quarantine in our homes with little, if any, opportunity to interact face-to-face with others in the "real world." To compensate, we relied on those "digital world" replacements for face-to-face communication that we have at our fingertips, such as FaceTime, TikTok, Houseparty, Zoom, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, and a host of other apps designed to facilitate our engaging socially, but from a distance.

To be sure, though wired for connection, many of us suffered from feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Were you one of the many? While physically separated from friends, did you devote some time to thinking about how much you missed being with them? When "hunkering down" at home, did you spend more of your time talking silently to yourself? And when the "stay at home" rules were relaxed, how then did you adjust your communication with others?

When it comes to the communication effects of Covid-19, we may now speak of how things were *BC* (before Covid-19), *DC* (during Covid-19), and hopefully, before too long, *AC* (after Covid-19). Before Covid-19, we pretty much took communication for granted. During Covid-19 we adapted to using digital means to communicate with others beyond our home base. After Covid-19, we will have a whole new appreciation for the significant ways in which communication affects our lives.

Covid-19 is teaching us how important it is to be present during communication. It has reminded us to practice **mindfulness**—to be aware of ourselves, our behavior, and how our communication affects others. It has shown us that social networking can fill some communication voids but not others. It taught us how interconnected our world has become. It taught us the risks of appearing distracted or inattentive and of not listening. It taught us that words matter. It taught us that nonverbal messages speak. It taught us that empathy helps. It taught us the importance of effective leadership, problem solving, and decision making while at the same time alerting us to the dangers of groupthink. It taught us the perils of disinformation and misinformation. It demonstrated the critical role of public presentations—both informative and persuasive. It proved the value of having a communication playbook to ensure reliable information was relayed to the public. It demonstrated that though the pandemic was a medical emergency, it also was a communications emergency.[1] It reminded us that communication touches every aspect of our lives and makes a difference.

As we adapt to the new normal of living in the age of Covid-19, we face communication challenges that a playbook approach best prepares us to meet: We need to be able to transfer what was learned in general about communication effectiveness during the health crisis to our lives specifically. To this end, we need to be able to acquire skills that criss-cross communication contexts and demonstrate our ability to adapt our communication accordingly.

Now that we are aware of communication's importance, consider how to answer these questions: After spending time with you, might others say that you were present or distracted, credible or untrustworthy, authentic or fake, empathetic or distant? What words would colleagues use to describe you as a coworker or team member? Might they find you to be cooperative and collaborative, or might they instead judge you to be self-concerned and a blocker? When delivering a speech, how might those in your audience assess your speech-making abilities? Would they say you were prepared and persuasive or ill prepared and uninspiring? And when roles are switched, how might they describe you as a member of their audience? Might they report that you were attentive and encouraging, or would they believe you to be bored or "out to lunch"? The adjectives others ascribe to our communicative behavior tell us what they think of our communication presence, specifically whether they think we're an effective communicator or not.

The purpose of this playbook is to help us make communication work as effectively as we can in all the social, civic, and professional settings we frequent, whether we are engaging with others online or face-to-face. With this in mind, welcome to *The Communication Playbook*, your resource for developing communication skills for life and career success.

COMMUNICATION PRESENCE MATTERS

We AC (after-Covid) communicators face complex challenges. Each of us bears personal and social responsibility for having and sustaining an effective **communication presence**—the composite of communication characteristics that others use to describe us as communicators in both the physical and the online world. Effectively, we each have a real-world or face-to-face identity and a digital-world or virtual identity. It is as we navigate between these two spaces—the physical and the digital—that our unique communication presence takes shape, and it speaks volumes. How others in both the physical and the digital world perceive us as communicators affects their opinions of us and our relationships with them. The objective, of course, is for our communication presence to be perceived as positive and authentic, and for it to serve as a catalyst for success in life.

Becoming adept at connecting with others, whether they are actually present or digitally dispersed, is one skill we all should want to master. As you begin your study of communication, consider what you seek to express about yourself to others.

SKILL BUILDER
NAME YOUR NETWORK

In an effort to influence others' reactions, Wi-Fi network names have morphed from boring series of digits to personalized monikers much like vanity license plates. If you haven't yet done so, give your Wi-Fi network a name. Choose a Wi-Fi name that you believe will reveal to others something they may not know about you. For example, one ballet dance instructor branded her Wi-Fi network "PointToMe."[2]

What would you like your chosen Wi-Fi network name to communicate about you? What impressions do you hope it sends to others? Are there any unintended conclusions your network's name might cause others to assume about you? In your opinion, is there anything you can do to keep others from forming opinions about you based on unintentional messages they receive?

Make Effective Communication Choices

We have numerous communication options available to us. To be sure, some means of communicating become more popular than others at different times in our lives. For example, for many of us, texting remains the most prevalent form of interaction.[3] But for better or worse, communication options evolve. The question is: *Do we make sound decisions about how to communicate most effectively and appropriately with others?*

Once we understand what makes communication work across the spectrum of communication choices available to us, we will know how to make it work for us. Ultimately, because the communication presence we present and share in social, civic, and professional arenas affects our relationships, our ability to engage with others, and our life satisfaction, we can never be too effective at communicating.

Rebalance Your Communication–Social Media Mix

What is your preferred "go-to" means of communicating? Many of us rely on social media platforms to communicate and maintain relationships. If you're like many 21st-century students, your smartphone serves as your prime personal connector. Most of us can't imagine life without it. You likely use it to check Facebook, text, tweet, or post to Instagram or TikTok—but less frequently to make a phone call. For some, actually talking to another person causes discomfort. Such individuals find digital technology freeing, because they don't have to be in the physical presence of others. They find physical distancing comforting. It lets them say what they want without fear of being interrupted or even having to listen to the other's response. In what ways is communicating via social media easier or more challenging for you than communicating face-to-face?

Recognize the Benefits and Drawbacks of Social Media. Social media present users with both benefits and drawbacks. Based on your experiences, do their benefits outweigh their costs or vice versa?

When it comes to benefits, social media foster friendship, professional, and romance connections. They enhance relationship building by facilitating our keeping in touch with one another. Especially beneficial for persons who are shy, they provide an agreeable setting for communication. They also help alleviate feelings of loneliness for those who are hesitant or unable to leave their homes. Additionally, they serve as alternative support networks for individuals with marital, substance abuse, or mental health issues, and they also provide the means for advocating for movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter or for fundraising via sites such as GoFundMe.

Despite presenting benefits, social media are not without drawbacks. Many of the relationships fostered on social media can be superficial and/or deceptive. Though we may count the number of online friends we have in the hundreds, a much smaller number, approximately 15, are "real" friendships. In fact, having too many online friendships may limit our time spent communicating face-to-face, resulting in off-line relational problems. Because people also can easily misrepresent themselves online, users should, at the least, approach online interactions with a healthy dose of skepticism. According to a Pew Research Center study, 89% of smartphone owners said they used their phones during the last social gathering they attended. They also reported that they were not happy about it because it impeded conversation.[4] This leads us to the next concern.

Are We Addicted? Some years back, a YouTube video titled "I Forgot My Phone" went viral. By now, the video has been viewed more than 50 million times. At the video's start, we see a couple in bed. The woman stares into space while her boyfriend focuses on his smartphone. The scenes that follow show the woman in the midst of a series of dystopian situations. Her friends ignore her and stare at their phones during lunch. Concertgoers are too busy recording the performance to enjoy it. The guest of honor at a birthday party takes selfies while his friends sing. The last scene finds the couple back in bed. Her boyfriend is still phone obsessed.

Are we addicted to smartphones and social media? According to research, we well might be captives of our devices. Many of us use our phones more than we even imagine we do. In fact, when asked to estimate their smartphone usage, participants estimated an average of 37 uses daily. The actual number is about 86 times daily for those between the ages of 18 and 24, or at least once every 10 minutes or so.[5]

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are hypnotically compelling for many of us, in part because they deliver unscheduled "variable rewards"—much like slot machines do. Messages, alerts, notifications, photos, and "likes" sent to us randomly, making it virtually impossible for us not to react to them. They induce large numbers of us to become compulsive site checkers looking for a dopamine boost—almost as if seeking a fix.

Significantly, heavy use of social media is linked with social anxiety, deficient self-esteem, inferior social skills, and feelings of loneliness.[6]

The Upshot. What is the future of person-to-person conversation as texting replaces talking? We have to be able to connect both remotely and in person, in a social or professional network, or in a social or professional circle. Whenever and

The majority of smartphone users report using their device when with each other.

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wherever we connect, the goal is to make communication work—and that is the primary goal of this playbook.

Capitalize on Social Capital

What will it take to make communication off-line and online work for you? Neither job-specific talent, nor technical expertise, nor graduating from college alone will guarantee you upward mobility or the attainment of goals. In fact, many of us get our jobs because of our **social capital**, the people we know, rather than our human **capital**, our skills, knowledge, and experience, or what we know.[7] This might be because, although our communities and workplaces are prime environments for connecting with others, the Internet makes it relatively easy today to find out anything we don't know.

Connect Communication and Success

What differentiates people who ascend both personal and professional ladders of success from those who do not? The answer is superior communication skills. Communication is at the heart of all our effective relationships. Understanding how to communicate enables us to develop healthier relationships with family members, friends, and romantic partners. It shapes our relationship future.

Communication also makes a difference in our physical and emotional health. Having others whom we can turn to for support in times of stress improves our mental well-being and enhances our physical well-being too. In contrast, suffering the loss of close relationships can compromise general health and even precipitate death.

Communication also impacts employability. Among the top 10 skills employers seek when hiring college graduates is the ability to communicate with others both inside and outside of the organization. Employers especially seek job candidates with problem-solving and teamwork abilities.[8] Although not guaranteed, people with good communication skills are more likely to be promoted rapidly, be happy in relationships, and believe their lives are rich and fulfilling. Whatever your age, sex, marital status, or employment history, it is never too late to learn skills that will enrich and improve your career and life.

We are not born knowing how to make communication work. We learn and develop communication skills. If you want to improve your ability to relate to people in your social life, job, or academic life, now is the time to start making communication work better for you!

THE NATURE AND ESSENTIALS OF COMMUNICATION

We are all communicators. We engage in intrapersonal (with ourselves), dyadic (one-to-one), small-group (one to a few), public (one to many), and mass communication (communicating messages that are shared across great distances with potentially large audiences through a technological device or mass medium). We also engage in computer-assisted or online communication.

Defining Communication

Every time we knowingly or unknowingly send a verbal or nonverbal message to anyone, communication takes place. We define **communication** as the deliberate or accidental transfer of meaning. It is the process that occurs whenever someone observes or experiences behavior and attributes meaning to that behavior. As long as what someone does or says is interpreted as a message—as long as the behavior of one person affects or influences that behavior of another—communication is occurring. Communication is our link to the rest of humanity and serves a number of purposes.

Which of the following quotations, if any, do you find most applicable to your own communication experiences?

- Talk and change the world. (Slogan of a group of U.S. senators who happened to be female)

- Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care for people will hear them and be influenced by them for good or ill. (Buddha)

- We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve. (Bill Gates)

- The best way to solve problems and fight against war is through dialogue. (Malala Yousafzai)

- Two monologues do not make a dialogue. (Jeff Daly)

It's your turn! Add a quotation to the list that expresses your personal thoughts about an aspect of communication important to you.

Types of Communication

Because our focus is communication, we need to distinguish among the types of communication we use.

- During **intrapersonal communication**, we think about, talk with, learn about, reason with, and evaluate ourselves. We listen and interact with the voice in our head.

- When we engage in **interpersonal (or dyadic) communication**, we interact with another, learn about them, and act in ways that help sustain or terminate our relationship.

Communication is the deliberate or accidental transfer of meaning, whether by words, looks, or behavior.

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- When we participate in **group communication**, we interact with a limited number of others, work to share information, develop ideas, make decisions, solve problems, offer support, or have fun. Every person in a group can actively participate with others in the group.

- **Organizational communication** is conducted with larger, more stable collections of people who work together to achieve the organization's goals. Organizations include corporations, nonprofits, entertainment, sports, health operations, and political, religious, and charitable groups. Health communication practitioners, for example, advocate for communications that have a positive influence on health.

- Through **public communication**, we inform others. We also persuade the members of various audiences to hold certain attitudes, values, or beliefs so that they will think, believe, or act in a particular way. We also function as members of different audiences, in which case another person will do the same for us.

- During **mass communication**, the media entertain, inform, and persuade us. Messages are sent to large dispersed audiences using electronic and print media. We, in turn, have the ability to use our viewing and buying habits to influence the media.

  - **Masspersonal communication** is a newer label describing the mixing of personal and public communication. Video-sharing services such as YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok let users upload their own content. Some of the videos originally intended for limited numbers of viewers end up going viral.[9]
  - When engaged with **digital and social media**, we navigate cyberspace as we converse, research, exchange ideas, and build relationships with others using computers and the Internet. Social media are more personal than the mass media. The size of the intended audience in social media varies, and the communication itself can be more interactive.

Assessing our communication experiences and thinking about how we can improve are essential for developing more effective relationships.

SKILL BUILDER
WHAT I LEARNED FROM "HOW'S MY COMMUNICATION"

List five individuals with whom you recently shared a sustained interaction, and enter the names of each of those persons below. Then, for each person, consider the specific *nature of your relationship* (e.g., was the person your instructor, parent, boss, friend, or significant other?), the *context* in which the interaction occurred (was it a classroom, office, home, or restaurant?), the *channel(s)* used to communicate the messages that were sent and received (did you communicate face-to face, e-mail, phone, text, or via social media?), and the *outcome* of the exchange (what happened as a result of your communicating?).

Finally, and this is most important, determine whether or not you consider the interaction successful, identifying the specific criteria you are using to decide the effectiveness or competence of your interaction.

<u>Person</u> <u>Context</u> <u>Channel</u> <u>Outcome</u> <u>Success Criteria</u>

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

After reviewing your self-evaluations, how would you replay any of the preceding interactions if given the opportunity? Be specific. For example, might you opt not to text while walking down a street with a friend? Would you decide not to answer your phone when dining with a coworker?

If it were up to you, would you opt to increase or decrease the number of online versus face-to-face interactions that you shared? Why?

The Essentials of Communication

Whatever the nature or type of communication in which we are involved, the communication act itself is characterized by the interplay of seven elements. All communication interactions have these common elements that together help define the communication process. The better you understand these components, the easier it becomes for you to develop your own communicative abilities. Let's begin by examining the **essentials of communication**, those elements present during every communication event.

People

Obviously, human communication involves people. Interpersonal, small-group, and public communication encounters take place between and among all types of **senders** (people who encode and send out messages) and **receivers** (people who take in messages and decode). Although it is easy to picture a communication experience beginning with a sender and ending with a receiver, during communication the role of sender does not belong exclusively to one person and role of receiver to another. Instead, the processes of sending and receiving occur simultaneously. Even if only one person is speaking, others can communicate through facial expression, attentiveness, or raising a hand to ask a question.

Messages

A **message** is the content of a communicative act. During every communication act, we all send and receive verbal and nonverbal messages. What you talk about, the words you use to express your thoughts and feelings, the sounds you make, the way you sit and gesture, your facial expressions, and even your touch or smell communicate information.

Some messages we send are private (a kiss accompanied by "I love you"); others are public and may be directed at hundreds or thousands of people. We send some messages purposefully ("I want you to know . . .") and others accidentally ("I had no clue you were watching or 'lurking'").

Gestures convey messages.

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Everything a sender or receiver does or says is a potential message as long as someone is there to interpret it.

Channels

Channels are the media we use to carry messages. We classify channels according to which of our senses carries or receives the message; whether the message is being delivered verbally, nonverbally, or both; and the primary means of communication we use to deliver the message, that is, whether we use face-to-face interaction, text messaging, or a mass medium such as television or a podcast.

We use multiple channels. We receive sound messages (we hear noises from the street), sight messages (we size up how someone looks), taste messages (we enjoy the flavor of a particular food), smell messages (we like the scent of a friend's perfume), and touch messages (we feel the roughness of a fabric).

Which channel are you most attuned to? To what extent do you rely on one or more channels while excluding or ignoring others? Effective communicators are adept channel switchers. They recognize that communication is a multichannel experience. The following dialogue between a husband and wife illustrates the multichannel nature of communication:

Wife: Jim, you're late again. Is that a drink I smell on your breath? Now, we'll never get to the Adams's on time.

Husband: No, I didn't stop for a drink. You must be smelling what's left of my cologne. I tried my best to be on time (places a consoling hand on her shoulder).

Wife: (Sarcastically) Sure, you tried your best. (Drawing away and shaking her finger) I'm not going to put up with this much longer. My job is every bit as demanding as yours, you know.

Husband: (Lowering his voice) Ok. Ok. I know you work hard, too. I don't question that. Listen, I really did get stuck in a conference. (Smiles at her) Let's not blow this up. I'll tell you about it on the way to Bill and Ellen's.

What message is the wife (the initial source-encoder) sending to her husband (the receiver-decoder)? She is letting him know with her words, her voice, and her physical actions that she is upset and angry. Her husband responds in kind, using words, vocal cues, and gestures in an effort to explain his behavior. Both are affected by the nature of the situation (they are late for an appointment), by their attitudes (how they feel about what's happened), and by their past experiences.

Noise

In the context of communication, **noise** is anything that interferes with or distorts our ability to send or receive messages. Although we are accustomed to thinking of noise as a particular sound or group of sounds, noise can have both internal and external causes. Internal noise is attributed to a communicator's psychological makeup, intellectual ability, or physical condition. External noise is attributed to the environment. Thus, noise includes distractions such as a loud siren, a disturbing odor, and a hot room; personal factors such as prejudices, daydreaming, and feelings of inadequacy; and semantic factors such as uncertainty about what another person's words are supposed to mean.

We receive messages via multiple channels simultaneously. For instance, we see, taste, and smell an ice-cream cone as we hold it and our tongue touches it.

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Context

Communication always takes place in a **context**, or setting. Sometimes a context is so natural that we barely notice it. At other times, however, the context exerts considerable control over our behavior. Would your behavior be the same at a friend's 21st birthday party and at a baby shower? Both are parties, but the context is different. Consider how your present environment affects the way you act toward others. Also, consider the extent to which certain environments might cause you to alter your posture, manner of speaking, attire, or means of interacting.

Feedback

Whenever we communicate, we receive feedback in return. The verbal and nonverbal cues that we perceive in reaction to our communication function as **feedback**. Feedback tells us how we are coming across. A smile, a frown, a chuckle, a sarcastic remark, a muttered thought, or simply silence in response to something we do or say can cause us to change, continue, or end a communication exchange.

Feedback that encourages us to continue behaving as we are is **positive feedback**; it enhances behavior in progress. In contrast, **negative feedback** extinguishes a behavior; it serves a corrective rather than a reinforcing function. Note that the terms *positive* and *negative* should not be interpreted as "good" and "bad"; these labels simply reflect the way the responses affect behavior.

Both positive and negative feedback can emanate from internal or external sources. **Internal feedback** is feedback you give yourself as you monitor your own communicative behavior. **External feedback** is feedback from others who are involved in the communication event. To be an effective communicator, you must be sensitive to both types of feedback.

Effect

As we communicate, we are changed in some way by the interaction. Communication has an effect and can be viewed as an exchange of influences. An **effect** can be emotional, physical,

cognitive, or any combination of the three. Communication can elicit feelings of joy, anger, or sadness (emotional); it can cause you to fight, argue, become apathetic, or evade an issue (physical); or it can lead to new insights, increased knowledge, the formulation or reconsideration of opinions, silence, or confusion (cognitive). Some effects are not always visible or immediately observable. Effects can be delayed.

Visualizing the Communication Process

Through communication, we share meaning with others by sending and receiving messages—both intentionally and unintentionally. Thus, communication includes every element that could affect two or more people as they knowingly or unwittingly relate to one another. At this point, we need to reiterate that communication occurs whenever one person assigns significance or meaning to another's behavior. But, you might ask, will knowing this enable you to understand or establish better and more satisfying relationships with your friends, significant other, employer, parents? The answer is yes! If you understand the processes that permit people to contact and influence each other, if you understand the forces that can impede or foster the development of every kind of effective communication, then you stand a better chance of communicating effectively yourself.

A Transactional Model of Communication

Now that we have examined the basic elements of communication, we are ready to see how we can use a picture, or model, that is descriptive of the communication process to reflect our understanding of communication in action. Modeling is a useful tool in discovering how communication operates and in examining your own communication encounters.

The model of communication in Figure 1.1 is a transactional one. A **transactional communication model** depicts communication as a continuous circle with sending and receiving as simultaneous rather than separate acts. Such a model enables us to visualize the vital complexity and dynamic nature of communication. Each person in the model is pictured sending and receiving messages (including feedback) through one or more channels at the same time as the other, because both persons have sending and receiving responsibilities and their messages will build upon and affect one another.

Each person's field of experience—their culture, past experiences, education, biases, and heredity—influences the interaction. Of consequence is the extent to which their fields of experience overlap. In theory, the more individuals communicate with each other, the more overlap they create.

In addition, we see that noise can enter the interaction at any point—it can pop up in the message, be present in the channel, come from one's field of experience, or derive from the context. Such noise can affect the sending and/or the receiving abilities and effectiveness of the communicators.

Every interaction we have with another has an impact on our future interactions with that person and potentially with others.

KEY COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Simply communicating frequently does not mean that you are as effective a communicator as you could be. Too often, we neglect problems with our communicative relationships. When we either lack empathy or fail to consider the feelings of others, our relationships suffer. There is no such thing as being too effective at establishing, maintaining, and controlling personal and public contacts with others. Being mindful of the principles discussed in this section can help you to improve your communication skills.
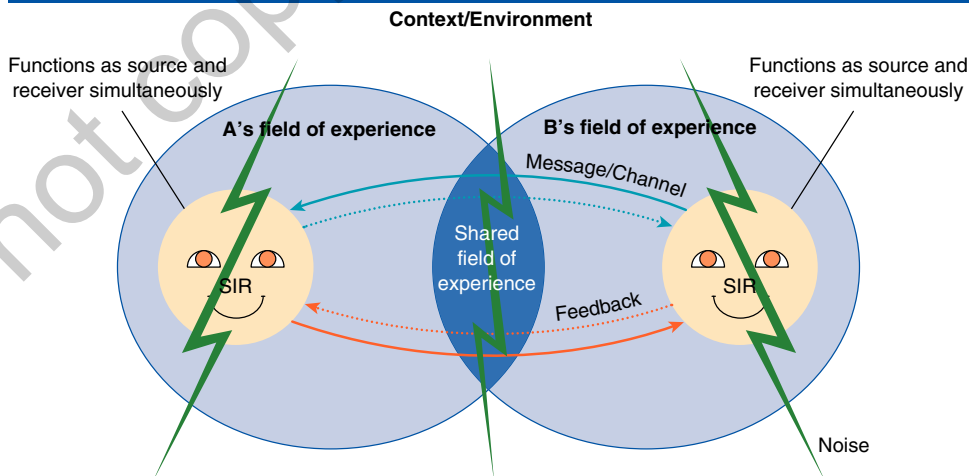
Communication Is Dynamic

When we call communication a dynamic process, we mean that all its elements constantly interact with and affect each other. Because we are interconnected, whatever happens to one person determines in part what happens to others.

Relationships evolve. Nothing about communication is static. Everything is accumulative. We communicate as long as we are alive. Thus, every interaction we engage in is part of a series of connected happenings. Present communication experiences can be thought of as points of arrival from past encounters and as points of departure for future ones. In what ways do your experiences support this?

Communication Is Unrepeatable and Irreversible

Every human contact we experience is unique. It has never happened before and will never again happen in just the same way. Our interpretation of the adage "You can never step into the same river twice" is that the experience changes both you and the river forever. A communication encounter similarly affects and changes people so that one encounter can never occur exactly in the same way a second time.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Gamble and Gamble's Model of Communication

In addition to being unrepeatable, communication is also irreversible. We cannot take back something we have said or tweeted any more than we can erase the effects of something we have done. Just as toothpaste cannot be squeezed back into a tube, the e-mails, texts, and tweets we send are going to be out there forever.

When has the unrepeatable and irreversible nature of communication caused you a problem?

Communication Has No Opposite

We often assume that communication is purposeful and that we communicate only because we want to. Although this sometimes is true, it is also true that sometimes we communicate without any awareness of doing so—and just as often, even without wanting to.

Whenever we are involved in an interaction, we respond in some way. Even if we choose not to respond verbally, even if we maintain absolute silence and attempt not to move a muscle, our lack of response is itself a response; it constitutes a message, influences others, and communicates. We can never stop behavior—because behavior has no opposite. No matter how hard we try, we cannot not communicate, because all behavior is communication and therefore is a message.

Culture Influences Communication

As we will learn in Chapter 2, how we formulate and interpret messages depends on our culture—the shared beliefs, values, and practices of a group of people. Of what cultures are you a member? Cultural diversity, including race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and age, influences the meanings we attribute to communication. While we may feel empowered in some cultural settings, others may contribute to our feeling disempowered. Cultural differences exist not only between people who speak different languages but also between people who speak the same language. Every cultural group has its own rules or preferences for interaction. When these are unknown or ignored, we are apt to misinterpret the meaning of messages received and miscalculate the impact of messages sent.

EXPLORING DIVERSITY
FOCUS ON HATE

Years ago, researcher Gordon Allport wrote the following in his now classic book *The Nature of Prejudice*:

> See that man over there?
> *Yes.*
> Well, I hate him.
> *But you don't know him.*
> That's why I hate him.

Although Allport wrote the preceding words a long time ago, his observations remain true today and are being magnified by social media. To what extent do you believe that enhanced understanding can help resolve this? Why does a lack of knowledge or familiarity help breed hate? Why might some people experience "hate" when encountering individuals from a new or unfamiliar culture or group?

Gender Influences Communication

"To be an 'I' at all means to be gendered."[10] Our culture shapes our conceptions of gender, and conceptions of gender shape our communication.[11] We learn socially accepted variations in the definitions of gender differences as we grow up. Because of what they are told when very young, for example, girls learn to "play nice," while boys learn to act tough. Gender is a relational construct with individuals promoting the gender ideologies they accept. Did you know that during the coronavirus pandemic men were less likely than women to wear face masks to protect themselves against Covid-19? This was because they believed themselves more invincible and deemed it "not cool" and "a sign of weakness."[12] Could that be a contributing factor in why the virus hit men harder than women?

To what extent do you believe that your communication has been influenced by gender constructions or restrictions and what society considers "normal"?

Digital and Social Media Influence Communication

Decades ago, media critic Marshall McLuhan cautioned, "The medium is the message."[13] In McLuhan's view, different channels of communication affected both how a sender encoded a message and how a receiver responded to it. This means that the same words delivered face-to-face, on paper, via text, or with a tweet do not constitute the same message. The channel of communication changes things. What channel would you use to say good-bye to someone who was moving away? Which would you use to tell someone "I'm sorry?" What about "I love you?"

New communication forms—new channels—alter our communication experiences. Technology and social media are game changers. Using them speeds up communication. Instead of valuing sequential understanding and careful logic, we seek immediate gratification and emotional involvement with people near and distant, close to home and around the world. As our real and virtual communication repertoires expand, we exist simultaneously both in the physical world and online.

Cultural differences influence the encoding and decoding of messages.

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A message received via Twitter will not have the same meaning as the same message received in person or via a handwritten note.

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Some gender differences are taught to us by the society in which we live. Much of the U.S. associates girls with pink and boys with blue, but this is not true elsewhere in the world.

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Influencer Culture

Do you follow any of the social media stars who have turned their lives into virtual brands? Do you ever imagine reinventing yourself by transforming from a follower into a influencer? If so, what is it that you envy?

Social media influencers lead very public lives. Many, in an effort to garner followers, can go too far with their "insta-worthy" efforts. Emphasizing the importance of physical appearance and consumerism, influencer culture feeds on our insecurities. However, image and reality are not the same thing.

Has another's filtered living brand ever made you green with envy? Keep in mind that acquiring followers and reposts are not requirements for happiness. Social media pressures exact a toll.

Social Media Paradoxes

Can we depend on social media? On the upside, they influence our cultural sensibilities, making it easier for many among us to identify like-minded people who share our interests. On the downside, they make it less likely that we will expose ourselves to different points of view. Also on the downside, they make it possible for us to remain anonymous or to disguise ourselves. But on the upside, if we do remain anonymous, our online communication will be evaluated more for what we write than for how we look. On the downside, again, social media allow us to present our lives through filters—delivering a carefully curated image of ourselves to the world—but then again, those filters also can be problematic.[14]

Social media reshape human consciousness and relationships. Because there are only so many hours in a day, the time we spend using social media takes time away from other activities. Social media impede our living "in the moment." Rather than enjoying the company of others or an event or celebration, we tweet, use Snapchat, or check Instagram and Facebook. They also foster our dependency on others—we wait anxiously to see if our post will receive approval and affirmation.[15] On the other hand, they do make it more possible for marginalized groups to find support. And they were there for us during the pandemic. They have upsides and downsides, downsides and upsides.

Being a communicator in a digital age adds multiple layers to our communication experiences. For one thing, our messages become more permanent. For another, ethically challenged individuals can troll our pages, hack into our files, make our private messages public, and forward to other people something that we had no intention of communicating to them. What happens online influences off-line realities.

Personal Ethics Influence Communication

Every time we communicate, we decide implicitly or explicitly if we will do so ethically. **Ethics** are the moral principles, values, and beliefs that members of society use to guide behavior. Since communication has consequences, it involves judgments of right and wrong. When the agreed-upon standards of behavior are violated, the behavior is judged unethical. For example, most of us expect those with whom we interact to be honest, play fair, respect our rights, and accept responsibility for their actions.

Communication Is Rule Guided

Rules reveal the behaviors that are appropriate, whether preferred or prohibited, in specific communication contexts. Some rules are explicit; these are clearly expressed and understood, such as not yelling "fire" when there is none at a crowded concert. Others are implicit; although not formally articulated, these rules are followed by most of us, such as "Don't bully someone to get your way." What are the implicit rules you follow when it comes to communicating with social media and when face-to-face?

Communication Is Competence Based

A communication scholar once said that if communication can fail, it will.[16] Our challenge is determining how we can prevent communication from failing. One solution is to make wise choices. In certain situations, some messages are appropriate and okay to say to particular receivers, whereas others are not. Making wise choices means recognizing that behavior doesn't always mean what you first assume it to mean—that you don't jump to a conclusion, but rather consider an array of interpretations. This requires you to be mindful and develop awareness of what you're thinking and feeling in the moment and your available options for responding. When we are mindful, we put responding on "pause" before reacting. We think before we act rather than relying too heavily on our first impression, which might well be wrong.

Even though we all have different communication strengths and weaknesses, we can all benefit from getting better at communicating. When we add to our knowledge and make a commitment to develop the skills to apply that knowledge across an array of communication situations or contexts, we gain communication competence. For example, included among the skills necessary for effective communication is the ability to think critically. When we think critically, we have the ability to examine ideas reflectively and to decide what we should and should not believe, think, or do, given a specific set of circumstances.[17]

Competent communicators consider how their communication affects others, and they monitor their communication behavior accordingly. *High self-monitors* observe their own

behavior, keeping track of what works and doesn't with different people in different contexts. Contrastingly, *low self-monitors* go about their communication business with nary a concern, unaware of how their behavior impacts others and how others react to them. While developing self-awareness is typically a plus, being too much of a self-monitor may cause you to be perceived as too focused on acting or dissembling and may contribute to others concluding they will never come to know the real you.

WHY WE STUDY COMMUNICATION AND WORK TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Every communication experience serves one or more functions. For example, communication can help us discover who we are, help us establish more meaningful personal and professional relationships, or prompt us to examine and try to change either our own attitudes and behaviors or the attitudes and behaviors of others. We study communication for an array of reasons, including to develop skills we can use to enhance the effectiveness of our communication connections and improve our communication outcomes. By enriching our communication repertoires, we acquire a range of communication options that we can apply to make our lives better.

To Gain Self-Understanding and Insight Into Others

One key function of communication is self–other understanding: insight into ourselves and others. When we get to know another person, we also get to know ourselves and when we get to know ourselves, we learn how others affect us. We depend on communication to develop self-awareness.

We need feedback from others all the time, and others are constantly in need of feedback from us. Interpersonal, small-group, public, and mediated and digital forms of communication offer us numerous opportunities for self–other discovery. Through communication encounters we are able to learn why we are trusting or untrusting, whether we can make our thoughts and feelings clear, under what conditions we have the power to influence others, and whether we can effectively make decisions and resolve conflicts and problems.

Modern communicators need to be able to interact with people culturally different from themselves. Although it might be feasible in the virtual world to seek comfort in similarity, insulating ourselves from intercultural contact in our social networks, communities, and workplaces is neither possible nor desirable. It is through communication that we reveal to others what is important to us and what we stand for.

To Form Meaningful Relationships

In building relationships, we cannot be overly concerned with ourselves but must consider the needs and wants of others. It is through effective communication that our basic physical and social needs are met.

Communication offers each of us the chance to satisfy what psychologist William Schutz calls our "needs for inclusion, control, and affection."[18] The **need for inclusion** is our need to

be with others, our need for social contact. We like to feel that others accept and value us, and we want to feel like a full partner in a relationship. The **need for control** is our need to feel that we are capable and responsible, that we are able to deal with and manage our environment. We also like to feel that we can influence others. The **need for affection** is our need to express and receive love. Because communication allows each of these needs to be met, we are less likely to feel unwanted, unloved, or incapable if we are able to communicate meaningfully with others.

Communication also gives us the chance to share our personal reality with people from our own and different cultures. Whether we live in an East Coast urban area, a southern city, a desert community, a home in sunny California, a village in Asia, a plain in Africa, or a town in the Middle East, we all engage in similar activities when we communicate. We may use different symbols, rely on different strategies, and desire different outcomes, but the processes we use and the motivations we have are strikingly alike. Equally significant is the fact that insensitivity to another's needs and preferred ways of interacting can hamper our ability to relate effectively.

To Influence Others

Communication touches all our lives. During all kinds of communication, we have ample opportunities to influence each other subtly or overtly. We spend a great deal of time trying to persuade others to think as we think, do what we do, like what we like. Sometimes our efforts meet with success. In any case, our experiences with persuasion afford each of us the chance to influence others so that we may try to realize our personal and professional goals and advocate for what we believe is important.

For Career Development

Most of us will end up spending as much time communicating professionally as we do personally, making communication central to our professional lives. Like personal fulfillment, career success turns on our ability to communicate with others. Employers are concerned about the lack of communication skills in new hires. In fact, most are less concerned about technical skills and more concerned with the abilities of potential employees to relate to and engage with others in the workplace.[19] Among the perennial complaints of employers are the poor written communication and presentation abilities of applicants, along with their lack of interpersonal skills. Employers report that recent college graduates tend to ramble when asked to explain something, have difficulty making a point, and are prone to sending e-mails and texts that are far too casual for the professional world.[20]

Remember, a positive relationship exists between the ability to communicate and career success. Employers seek to hire those

A lack of satisfying social relationships is associated with loneliness and poorer health.

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who know how to make communication work. If you develop the ability to speak so that others listen, listen when others speak, critically evaluate what you read and hear, adapt to differences in cultural perspectives, handle conflicts and solve problems, and make sound decisions, then you will exhibit skills valued by employers.[21]

ETHICS AND COMMUNICATION

ASSESSING COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AT WORK

1. Using what you have learned to this point, list the skills that you think distinguish effective from ineffective communicators, and the behaviors that distinguish ethical from unethical employees when in a work setting. Then give yourself a grade (A, B, C, D, or Fail) for each skill and behavior listed.
2. Elaborate on how improving specific communication skills could benefit you professionally.
3. Identify the pros and cons of virtual versus face-to-face workplace interactions.
4. Explain how developing a specific digital communication skill could enable you to make a difference in your workplace.
5. View an episode of a reality show such as *Undercover Boss*. Based on what you've learned about communication in this chapter, rate each participant in the episode on their communication skills by awarding each an A, B, C, D, or F grade. Identify the attributes that contributed to some participants coming across as more effective and more ethical than others. What steps do you recommend the weaker participants take to improve their professional communication competence and standing?

To Improve the Quality of Our Lives

Good relationships, whether at home or in social or professional settings, positively affect our health, both psychologically and physically. Psychologists tell us that we need other people just as we need water, food, and shelter. When we are cut off from human contact, we become disoriented and maladjusted, and our life itself may be placed in jeopardy. People who are isolated from others—people who lack satisfying social relationships—are more likely to experience health problems and to die earlier than those who have an abundance of satisfying relationships. Thus, as we experienced during the pandemic, effective and quality communication, even via social networks, can improve our health. In fact, having meaningful professional relationships and effective social ties contributes to feelings of overall well-being, enabling us to better control stressors that otherwise might make us ill. Communication helps make our lives happier, healthier, and more fulfilling.[22]

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: PRACTICE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The primary purpose of this playbook is to help you gain an understanding of communication and to assist you in developing your interpersonal, small-group, public, and digital and social media skills. Engaging with the following tasks will give you a great start.

Commit to Enhancing Communication Competence

Once you commit to putting the principles we discuss into practice, you are on your way to becoming a better communicator. Use the learning objectives in this text to clarify your personal communication objectives. Use the embedded self-assessments and boxed features to further explore what you must know and do to become a more effective communicator.

Make the Effort to Increase Both Self-Awareness and Awareness of Others by Developing the Following Assets

- An appreciation of the extent to which gender, culture, and digital and social media affect communication

- The capacity to listen to and process information

- Sensitivity to the nonverbal messages that you and others send

- Knowledge of how words affect us

- An understanding of how relationships develop

- A realization of how feelings and emotions affect relationships

- The ability to disagree without being disagreeable

- An understanding of how beliefs, values, and attitudes affect the formulation and reception of messages and the development of speaker–audience relationships

Demonstrate Belief in Yourself

Above all else, you need to believe that you are worth the time and effort required to develop your communication skills. You also need to believe that developing these skills will improve the quality of your life immeasurably. As motivational speaker and self-development author Brian Tracy has affirmed that communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding a bicycle or typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life.

COMPLETE THIS CHAPTER 1 CHECKLIST

1.1 I understand the meaningfulness of communication presence, including the importance of balancing communication options.

Communication presence is the composite of characteristics that others perceive us to present in the physical and online world. Effectively, we each present a real-world or face-to-face identity and a digital-world or virtual identity to which others respond.

1.2 I can define communication, identifying its essential elements and visualizing them in action.

Communication is the deliberate or accidental transfer of meaning. Human communication takes place interpersonally (one-to-one), in small groups (one to a few), in public forums (one to many), and via digital and social media.

The essential elements of communication are people, messages, channels, noise, context, feedback, and effects. Each element influences and is influenced by the other elements. Though the elements are constantly in flux, they are interdependent.

A transactional communication model illustrates the communication process in action. It depicts communication as a continuous circle with sending and receiving as simultaneous rather than separate acts, helping us to visualize the vital complexity and dynamic nature of communication.

1.3 I can describe the core principles of communication.

Communication reflects a number of general principles. First, because communication is a dynamic process, each interaction is part of a series of interconnected communication events. Second, every communication experience is unique, unrepeatable, and irreversible. Third, behavior has no opposite. Fourth, culture influences communication. Fifth, gender influences communication. Sixth, digital and social media influence and continue to transform communication. Seventh, ethics influence communication. Eighth, communication is competence based.

1.4 I can evaluate the benefits of and skills necessary for communicating effectively.

Effective communication promotes self–other understanding, helps us establish meaningful relationships, enables us to examine and attempt to change the attitudes and behaviors of others, enhances career development, and affects our state of well-being. Developing communication skills is a lifelong process. This book explains the strategies you can use to assess your communication abilities, improve the effectiveness of your communication relationships, and enhance the quality of your life. Once you become involved in the study of communication, commit to setting and tracking personal goals, and demonstrate belief in yourself, you are on the road to mastering communication skills to last a lifetime.

BECOME A WORD MASTER

capital	context
channels	digital and social media
communication	effect
communication presence	essentials of communication

ethics
external feedback
feedback
group communication
internal feedback
interpersonal communication
intrapersonal communication
mass communication
masspersonal communication
message
mindfulness
need for affection
need for control
need for inclusion
negative feedback
noise
organizational communication
positive feedback
public communication
receivers
senders
social capital
transactional communication model