



This is “Introducing Group Communication”, chapter 1 from the book [An Introduction to Group Communication \(index.html\)](#) (v. 0.0).

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Chapter 1

Introducing Group Communication

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

1. Think of five words that express what you want to do and where you want to be five years from now. Share your five words with your classmates and listen to their responses. What patterns do you observe in the responses? Write a paragraph that addresses at least one observation.
2. With the results of our introductory exercises #1 in mind, please list what you can do and where you could be in five years without support, interaction, or collaboration with anyone other than yourself. Share and compare your results with classmates.
3. Create a list of at least 10 groups to which you belong. Family, church, friends or clubs, online groups, and even this class count! Share and compare your results with classmates.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead

Getting Started

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Communication is an activity, skill, and art that incorporates lessons learned across a wide spectrum of human knowledge. Perhaps the most time-honored form of communication is storytelling. We've told each other stories for ages to help make sense of our world, anticipate the future, and certainly to entertain ourselves. We gather around in groups and hear or see stories that say something about our world, our community, who we are. How did we learn the stories we tell each other? From each other. Groups and teams come together to create amazing movies. Artists gather together to produce songs that inspire us. People, effectively working together, can do the impossible.

Telling a story to your friends or peers draws on your understanding of yourself, your message, and how you communicate it to a group that is simultaneously communicating back to you. They respond to your story, perhaps tell a few of their own, and you feel like you are in a group. You are an individual, and a member of the group, at the same time. You are a member of many groups. Knowing how to communicate effectively as a member of a team or in a group is key to your success. You were not born knowing how to write, or even how to talk—but in the process of growing up you have probably learned something about how to tell, and how not tell, a story. When people stand around and want to know what comes next you know you have their attention. They are as much a part of the story as you are. When everyone is involved and listening or participating, it is a fun experience.

You didn't learn to text in a day, and didn't learn all the codes, from LOL (Laugh Out Loud) to BRB (Be Right Back), right away. In the same way, learning to communicate well requires you to read and study how others have expressed themselves, then to adapt what you have learned to your present task, whether it is texting a brief message to a friend, presenting your qualifications in a job interview, or making a sales presentation. You come to this text with skills and an understanding that will provide a valuable foundation as we explore group communication.

Effective communication, in all its many forms, takes preparation, practice, and persistence. There are many ways to learn communication skills; the school of experience, or "hard knocks," is one of them. But in the real world, a "knock" (or lesson learned) may come at the expense of your credibility through a blown presentation to a client. The classroom environment, with a compilation of information and resources such as a text, can offer you a trial run where you get to try out new ideas and skills before you have to use them to communicate effectively to make a sale, motivate your team members, or form a new partnership. Listening to yourself, or perhaps the comments of others, may help you reflect on new ways to present, or perceive, thoughts, ideas and concepts. The net result is your growth; ultimately your ability to communicate in teams and groups will improve, opening more doors than you might anticipate.

Chapter 1 Introducing Group Communication

As you learn the material in this text, each part will contribute to the whole. The degree to which you attend to each part will ultimately help give you the skills, confidence, and preparation to use communication in furthering your career.

1.1 Why Study Group Communication?

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LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Understand the importance of group communication

Communication is key to your success, in relationships, in the workplace, as a citizen of your country, and across your lifetime. Your ability to communicate comes from experience, which can be an effective teacher, but this text and the related group communication course will offer you a wealth of experiences gathered from professionals across their lifetimes. You can learn from the lessons they've learned and be a more effective team and group communicator right out of the gate. According to Ken Boughrum, Executive Vice President and Managing Director, and Tyler Durham, Vice President and Managing Consultant, Stromberg Consulting, "Great teams are distinguished from good teams by how effectively they communicate. Great team communication is more than the words that are said or written. Power is leveraged by the team's ability to actively listen, clarify, understand, and live by the principle that "everything communicates." The actions, the tone, the gestures, the infrastructure, the environment and the things that are no done or said speak and inform just as loudly as words. O'Rourke, J., and Yarbrough, B, (2008). *Leading Groups and Teams*. Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, p. 2. Effective teams and groups start with effective communication.

Communication Influences Your Thinking about Yourself and Others

We all share a fundamental drive to communicate. Communication can be defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning. Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). *An Introduction to Human Communication: Understanding and Sharing*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill. p. 6. You share meaning in what you say and how you say it, both in oral and written forms. If you could not communicate, what would life be like? A series of never-ending frustrations? Not being able to ask for what you need, or even to understand the needs of others?

Being unable to communicate might even mean losing a part of yourself, for you communicate your **self-concept**¹—your sense of self and awareness of who you are—in many ways. Do you like to write? Do you find it easy to make a phone call to a stranger, or to speak to a room full of people? Do you like to work in teams and groups? Perhaps someone told you that you don't speak clearly, or your grammar needs improvement. Does that make you more or less likely to want to communicate? For some it may be a positive challenge, while for others it may be discouraging, but in all cases your ability to communicate is central to your self-concept.

Take a look at your clothes. What are the brands you are wearing? What do you think they say about you? Do you feel that certain styles of shoes, jewelry, tattoos, music, or even automobiles express who you are? Part of your self-concept may be that you express yourself through texting, or through writing longer documents like essays and research papers, or through the way you speak. Those labels and brands in some ways communicate with your group or community. They are recognized, and to some degree, are associated with you. Just as your words represent you in writing, how you present yourself with symbols and images influences how others perceive you.

On the other side of the coin, your communication skills help you to understand others—not just their words, but also their tone of voice, their nonverbal gestures, or the format of their written documents provide you with clues about who they are and what their values and priorities may be. Active listening and reading are also part of being a successful communicator.

Communication Influences How You Learn

When you were an infant, you learned to talk over a period of many months. There was a group of caregivers around you that talked to each other, and sometimes you, and you caught on that you could get something when you used a word correctly. Before you knew it you were speaking in sentences, with words, in a language you learned from your family or those around you. When you got older, you didn't learn to ride a bike, drive a car, or even text a message on your cell phone in one brief moment. You need to begin the process of improving your communication skills with the frame of mind that it will require effort, persistence, and self-correction.

You learn to speak in public by first having conversations, then by answering questions and expressing your opinions in class, and finally by preparing and delivering a “stand-up” speech. Similarly, you learn to write by first learning to read, then by writing and learning to think critically. Your speaking and writing are reflections of your thoughts, experience, and education, and part of that

1. Your sense of self and awareness of who you are.

combination is your level of experience listening to other speakers, reading documents and styles of writing, and studying formats similar to what you aim to produce. Speaking and writing are both key communication skills that you will use in teams and groups.

As you study group communication, you may receive suggestions for improvement and clarification from professionals more experienced than yourself. Take their suggestions as challenges to improve, don't give up when your first speech or first draft does not communicate the message you intend. Stick with it until you get it right. Your success in communicating is a skill that applies to almost every field of work, and it makes a difference in your relationships with others.

Remember, luck is simply a combination of preparation and timing. You want to be prepared to communicate well when given the opportunity. Each time you do a good job, your success will bring more success.

Communication Represents You and Your Employer

You want to make a good first impression on your friends and family, on your instructors, and on your employer. They all want you to convey a positive image, as it reflects on them. In your career you will represent your business or company in teams and groups, and your professionalism and attention to detail will reflect positively on you and set you up for success.

As an effective member of the team, you will benefit from having the ability to communicate clearly and with clarity. These are skills you will use for the rest of your life. Positive improvements in these skills will have a positive impact on your relationships, your prospects for employment, and your ability to make a difference in the world.

Communication Skills Are Desired by Business and Industry

Oral and written communication proficiencies are consistently ranked in the top ten desirable skills by employer surveys year after year. In fact, high-powered business executives sometimes hire consultants to coach them in sharpening their communication skills. According to the National Association of Colleges <http://www.nacweb.org/press/quick.htm>. and Employers, the top five personal qualities/skills potential employers seek are (NACE, 2009):

1. Communication skills (verbal and written)
2. Strong work ethic

3. Teamwork skills (works well with others, group communication)
4. Initiative
5. Analytical Skills

Knowing this, you can see that one way for you to be successful and increase your promotion potential is to increase your abilities to speak and write effectively.

Teams and groups are almost universal across all fields because no one person has all the skills, knowledge, or ability to do everything with an equal degree of excellence. Employees work with each other in manufacturing and service industries on a daily basis. An individual with excellent communication skills is an asset to every organization. No matter what career you plan to pursue, learning to interact, contribute, and excel in groups and teams will help you get there.



Effective communication skills are assets that will get you there.

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KEY TAKEAWAY

Communication helps you understand yourself and others, learn new things, and build your career.

EXERCISES

1. Imagine that you have been hired to make “cold calls” to ask people whether they are familiar with a new restaurant that has just opened in your neighborhood. Write a script for the phone call, and focus on the climate, the environment, and the service. Ask a classmate to co-present as you deliver the script orally in class, as if you were making a phone call to the classmate. Discuss your experience with the rest of the class.
2. Imagine you have been assigned the task of creating a job description for a Social Media Manager. Search online and find at least two sample job descriptions, and create one. Make sure you pay attention to words like “effective in virtual teams” and other details that highlight the importance of communication skills. Please present the job description to the class and share what you learned on how communication skills play a role in the tasks or duties you have included.

1.2 What Is Communication?

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define communication and describe communication as a process.
2. Identify and describe the eight essential components of communication.
3. Identify and describe two models of communication.

Many theories have been proposed to describe, predict, and understand the behaviors and phenomena of which communication consists. When it comes to communicating in the workplace, we are often less interested in theory than in making sure our interactions generate the desired results. As a member of a group or team we are often collectively judged on what we produced, not what we individually contributed to the final product. Working in a team can be a challenge, but it can also produce results no individual member could have accomplished alone. Knowing what makes for a productive group starts with effective communication underscore how valuable it can be to understand what communication is and how it works.

Defining Communication

The root of the word “communication” in Latin is *communicare*, which means to share, or to make common. Weekley, E. (1967). *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (Vol. 1). New York: Dover Publications, p. 338. **Communication**² is defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning. Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). *An Introduction to Human Communication: Understanding and Sharing*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, p. 6.

At the center of our study of communication is the relationship that involves interaction between participants. This definition serves us well with its emphasis on the process, which we’ll examine in depth across this text, of coming to understand and share another’s point of view effectively.

2. The process of understanding and sharing meaning.

The first key word in this definition is the word **process**³. A process is a dynamic activity that is hard to describe because it changes. Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). *An Introduction to Human Communication: Understanding And Sharing*. Boston: McGraw-Hill. Imagine you are alone in your kitchen, thinking to yourself. Someone you know (say, your mother) enters the kitchen and you talk briefly. What has changed? Now imagine that your mother is joined by someone else, someone you haven't met before—and that this stranger listens intently as you speak, almost as if you were giving a speech. What has changed? Your perspective might change, and you might watch your words more closely. The feedback or response from your mother and the stranger may cause you to re-evaluate what you are saying. When we interact, all of these factors and many more influence the process of communication.

The second key word is **understanding**⁴. “To understand is to perceive, to interpret, and to relate our perception and interpretation to what we already know.” McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. If a friend tells you a story about falling off a bike, what image comes to mind? Now your friend points out the window and you see a motorcycle lying on the ground. Understanding the words and the concepts or objects they refer to is an important part of the communication process.

Next comes the word **sharing**⁵. Sharing means doing something together with one or more other people. You may share a joint activity, as when you share in compiling a report; or you may benefit jointly from a resource, as when you and several co-workers share a pizza. In communication, sharing occurs when you convey thoughts, feelings, ideas or insights to others. You can also share with yourself—a process called intrapersonal communication—when you bring ideas to consciousness, ponder how you feel about something, or figure out the solution to a problem and have a classic “Aha!” moment where something becomes clear.

Finally, **meaning**⁶ is what we share through communication. The word “bike” represents both a bicycle and a short name for a motorcycle. By looking at the context the word is used in, and by asking questions, we can discover the shared meaning of the word and understand the message.

3. A dynamic activity that is hard to describe because it changes.

4. To perceive, to interpret, and to relate our perception and interpretation to what we already know.

5. Doing something together with one or more other people.

6. What we share through communication.

Eight Essential Components of Communication

In order to better understand the communication process and how it provides a foundation for group communication, let's break it down into eight essential components. Each component serves an integral function in the overall process.

Source

The **source**⁷ imagines, creates, and sends the message. In a public speaking situation, the source is the person giving the speech. He or she conveys the message by sharing new information with the audience. The speaker also conveys a message through his or her tone of voice, body language, and choice of clothing. Taking a turn as a group member can sometimes feel like a speech as all eyes are on you. The speaker begins by first determining the message—what they want to say and how they want to say it. The next step involves encoding the message by choosing just the right order or the perfect words to convey the intended meaning. The third step is to present the information, sending the information to the receiver, audience, or group members. Finally, by watching for the audience’s reaction, the source perceives how well they received the message, and responds with clarification or supporting information.

Message

“The **message**⁸ is the stimulus or meaning produced by the source for the receiver or audience.”McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p. 10. When you plan to give a speech or write a report, your message may seem to be only the words you choose that will convey your meaning. But that is just the beginning. The words are brought together with grammar and organization. You may choose to save your most important point for last. The message also consists of the way you say it—in a speech, with your tone of voice, your body language, and your appearance—and in a report, with your writing style, punctuation (!), and the headings and formatting you choose. In addition, part of the message may be the environment or context you present in and any noise which may make your message hard to hear or see.

Imagine, for example, that you are addressing a large audience of sales reps and are aware there is a World Series game tonight. Your sales team members might have a hard time settling down, but you may choose to open with, “I understand there is an important game tonight.” In this way, by expressing verbally something that most people in your audience are aware of and interested in, you might grasp and focus their attention.

Channel

“The **channel**⁹ is the way in which a message or messages travel between source and receiver.”McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p.10. For example, think of your television. How many channels do you have on your television? Each channel takes up some space, even in a digital world, in the cable or in the signal that brings the message of each channel to your

7. Person who imagines, creates, and sends the message.

8. The stimulus or meaning produced by the source for the receiver or audience.

9. The way in which a message or messages travel between source and receiver.

home. Television combines an audio signal you hear with a visual signal you see. Together they convey the message to the receiver or audience. Turn off the volume on your television. Can you still understand what is happening? Many times you can, because the body language conveys part of the message of the show. Now turn up the volume but turn around so that you cannot see the television. You can still hear the dialogue and follow the story line.

Similarly, when you speak or write, you are using a channel to convey your message. Spoken channels include face-to-face conversations, speeches, telephone conversations and voice mail messages, radio, public address systems, and voice-over-internet protocol (VOIP). Written channels include letters, memorandums, purchase orders, invoices, newspaper and magazine articles, blogs, e-mail, text messages, tweets, and so forth.

Receiver

“The **receiver**¹⁰ receives the message from the source, analyzing and interpreting the message in ways both intended and unintended by the source.”McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p.10. To better understand this component, think of a receiver on a football team. The quarterback throws the message (football) to a receiver, who must see and interpret where to catch the football. The quarterback may intend for the receiver to “catch” his message in one way, but the receiver may see things differently and miss the football (the intended meaning) altogether. When the quarterback and receiver, as well as the rest of the team, fail to communicate, an interception—like a miscommunication—is bound to occur.

As a receiver you listen, see, touch, smell, and/or taste to receive a message. Your team members “size you up,” much as you might check them out long before you open your mouth. The nonverbal responses of your listeners can serve as clues on how to adjust your opening. By imagining yourself in their place, you anticipate what you would look for if you were them. Just as a quarterback plans where the receiver will be in order to place the ball correctly, you too can recognize the interaction between source and receiver in a business communication context. All of this happens at the same time, illustrating why and how communication is always changing.

10. Receives the message from the source, analyzing and interpreting the message in ways both intended and unintended by the source.

11. Messages the receiver sends back to the source.

Feedback

When you respond to the source, intentionally or unintentionally, you are giving feedback. **Feedback**¹¹ is composed of messages the receiver sends back to the source. Verbal or nonverbal, all of these feedback signals allow the source to see

how well, how accurately (or how poorly and inaccurately) the message was received. Feedback also provides an opportunity for the receiver or audience to ask for clarification, to agree or disagree, or to indicate that the source could make the message more interesting. As the amount of feedback increases, the accuracy of communication also increases. Leavitt, & Mueller, R. (1951). some effects of feedback on communication. *Human Relations*, 4, 401–410.

For example, suppose you are a sales manager participating in a conference call with four sales reps. As the source, you want to tell the reps to take advantage of the fact that it is World Series season to close sales on baseball-related sports gear. You state your message, but you hear no replies from your listeners. You might assume that this means they understood and agreed with you—but later in the month you might be disappointed to find that very few sales were made. If you followed up your message with a request for feedback (“Does this make sense? Do any of you have any questions?”) you might have an opportunity to clarify your message, and to find out whether any of the sales reps believed your suggestion would not work with their customers.

Environment

“The **environment**¹² is the atmosphere, physical and psychological, where you send and receive messages.” McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p. 11. The environment can include the tables, chairs, lighting, and sound equipment that are in the room. The room itself is an example of the environment. The environment can also include factors like formal dress, that may indicate whether a discussion is open and caring or more professional and formal. People may be more likely to have an intimate conversation when they are physically close to each other, and less likely when they can only see each other from across the room. In that case, they may text each other, itself an intimate form of communication. The choice to text is influenced by the environment. As a speaker, your environment will impact and play a role in your speech. It’s always a good idea to go check out where you’ll be speaking before the day of the actual presentation.

Context

“The **context**¹³ of the communication interaction involves the setting, scene, and expectations of the individuals involved.” McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p.11. A professional communication context may involve business suits (environmental cues) that directly or indirectly influence expectations of language and behavior among the participants.

12. The atmosphere, physical and psychological, where you send and receive messages.

13. Involves the setting, scene, and expectations of the individuals involved.

A meeting, presentation, or personal conversation does not take place as an isolated event. When you came to class, you came from somewhere. So did the person seated next to you, as did the instructor. The degree to which the environment is formal or informal depends on the contextual expectations for communication held by the participants. The person sitting next to you may be used to informal communication with instructors, but this particular instructor may be used to verbal and nonverbal displays of respect in the academic environment. You may be used to formal interactions with instructors as well, and find your classmate's question of "Hey Teacher, do we have homework today?" as rude and inconsiderate when they see it as normal. The nonverbal response from the instructor will certainly give you a clue about how they perceive the interaction, both the word choices and how they were said.

Context is all about what people expect from each other, and we often create those expectations out of environmental cues. Traditional gatherings like weddings or quinceaneras are often formal events. There is a time for quiet social greetings, a time for silence as the bride walks down the aisle, or the father may have the first dance with his daughter as she transforms from a girl to womanhood in the eyes of her community. In either celebration there may come a time for rambunctious celebration and dancing. You may be called upon to give a toast, and the wedding or quinceanera context will influence your presentation, timing, and effectiveness.

In a business meeting, who speaks first? That probably has some relation to the position and role each person has outside of the meeting. Context plays a very important role in communication, particularly across cultures.

Interference

Interference, also called noise, can come from any source. "**Interference**¹⁴ is anything that blocks or changes the source's intended meaning of the message." McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p. 11. For example, if you drove a car to work or school, chances are you were surrounded by noise. Car horns, billboards, or perhaps the radio in your own car interrupted your thoughts, or your conversation with a passenger.



Context is all about what people expect from each other.

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Psychological noise is what happens when your own thoughts occupy your attention while you are hearing, or reading, a message. Imagine that it is 4:45 p.m. and your boss, who is at a meeting in another city, e-mails you asking for last month's

14. Anything that blocks or changes the source's intended meaning of the message.

sales figures, an analysis of current sales projections, and the sales figures from the same month for the past five years. You may open the email, start to read, and think “Great—no problem—I have those figures and that analysis right here in my computer.” You fire off a reply with last month’s sales figures and the current projections attached. Then, at 5 o’clock, you turn off your computer and go home. The next morning, your boss calls on the phone to tell you he was inconvenienced because you neglected to include the sales figures from the previous years. What was the problem? Interference: by thinking about how you wanted to respond to your boss’s message, you prevented yourself from reading attentively enough to understand the whole message.

Interference can come from other sources, too. Perhaps you are hungry, and your attention to your own situation interferes with your ability to listen. Maybe the office is hot and stuffy. If you were a member of an audience listening to an executive speech, how could this impact your ability to listen and participate?

Noise interferes with normal encoding and decoding of the message carried by the channel between source and receiver. Not all noise is bad, but noise interferes with the communication process. For example, your cellphone ringtone may be a welcome noise to you, but it may interrupt the communication process in class and bother your classmates.

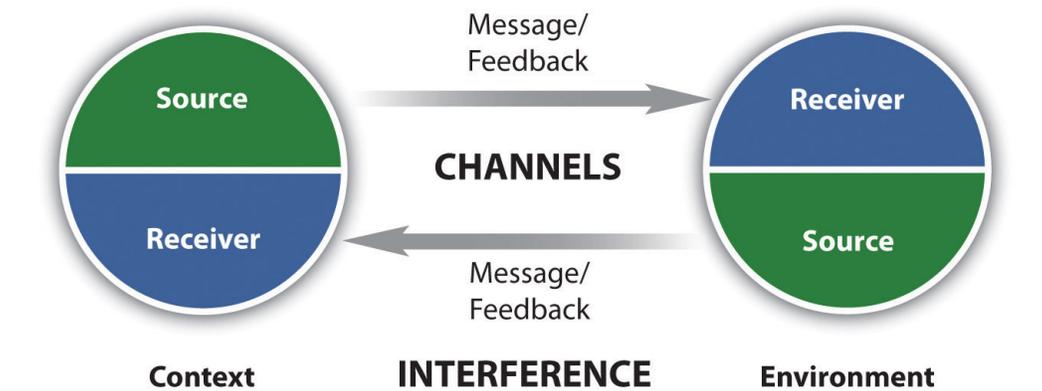
Two Models of Communication

Researchers have observed that when communication takes place, the source and the receiver may send messages at the same time, often overlapping. You, as the speaker, will often play both roles, as source and receiver. You’ll focus on the communication and the reception of your messages to the audience. The audience will respond in the form of feedback that will give you important clues. While there are many models of communication, here we will focus on two that offer perspectives and lessons for effective communicators.

Rather than looking at the source sending a message and someone receiving it as two distinct acts, researchers often view communication as a **transactional**¹⁵ process (Figure 1.1 "The Transactional Model of Communication"), with actions often happening at the same time. The distinction between source and receiver is blurred in conversational turn-taking, for example, where both participants play both roles simultaneously.

15. Model of communication in which actions happen at the same time.

Figure 1.1 *The Transactional Model of Communication*



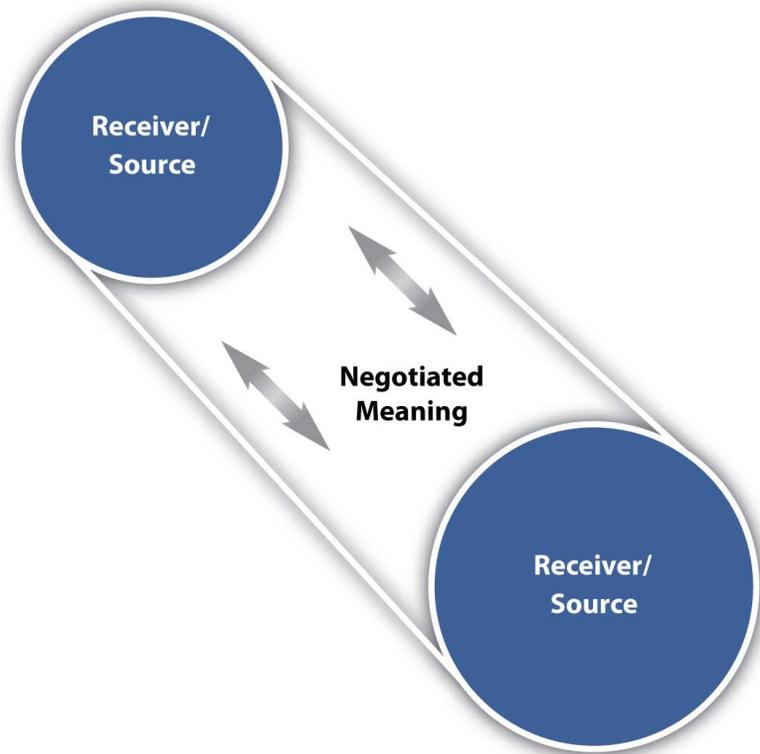
Researchers have also examined the idea that we all construct our own interpretations of the message. What I said (or wrote) and what you heard may be different. In the **constructivist**¹⁶ model (Figure 1.2 "The Constructivist Model of Communication"), we focus on the negotiated meaning, or common ground, when trying to describe communication. Pearce, W. B., & Cronen, V. (1980). *Communication, Action, and Meaning: The Creating of Social Realities*. New York: Praeger. Cronen, V., & Pearce, W. B. (1982). The coordinated management of meaning: a theory of communication. In F. E. Dance (Ed.), *Human Communication Theory* (pp. 61–89). New York: Harper & Row.

Imagine that you are visiting Atlanta, Georgia, and go to a restaurant for dinner. When asked if you want a “Coke,” you may reply, “sure.” The waiter may then ask you again, “what kind?” and you may reply, “Coke is fine.” The waiter then may ask a third time, “what kind of soft drink would you like?” The misunderstanding in this example is that in Atlanta, the home of The Coca-Cola Company, most soft drinks are generically referred to as “Coke.” When you order a soft drink, you need to specify what type, even if you wish to order a beverage that is not a cola or not even made by The Coca-Cola Company. To someone from other regions of the United States, the words “pop,” “soda pop,” or “soda” may be the familiar way to refer to a soft drink; not necessarily the brand “Coke.” In this example, both you and the waiter understand the word “Coke,” but you each understand it to mean something different. In order to communicate, you must each realize what the term means to the other person, and establish common ground, in order to fully understand the request and provide an answer.

16. Model of communication focusing on the negotiated meaning, or common ground, when trying to describe communication.

Because we carry the multiple meanings of words, gestures, and ideas within us, we can use a dictionary to guide us, but we will still need to negotiate meaning.

Figure 1.2 *The Constructivist Model of Communication*



KEY TAKEAWAY

The communication process involves understanding, sharing, and meaning, and it consists of 8 essential elements: source, message, channel, receiver, feedback, environment, context, and interference.

EXERCISES

1. Draw what you think communication looks like. Share your drawing with your classmates.
2. List three environmental cues and indicate how they influence your expectations for communication. Please share your results with your classmates.
3. How does context influence your communication? If you could design the perfect date, what activities, places, and/or environmental cues would you include to set the mood? Please share your results with your classmates.

1.3 Communication in Context

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Identify and describe five types of communication contexts.

Now that we have examined the eight components of communication, let's examine this in context. Is a quiet dinner conversation with someone you care about the same experience as a discussion in class or giving a speech? Is sending a text message to a friend the same experience as writing a professional project proposal or a purchase order? Is working in a team or group the same as working together as a family? Each context has an influence on the communication process. Contexts can overlap, creating an even more dynamic process. You have been communicating in many of these contexts across your lifetime, and you'll be able to apply what you've learned through experience in each context to group communication.

Intrapersonal Communication

Have you ever listened to a speech or lecture and gotten caught up in your own thoughts so that, while the speaker continued, you were no longer listening? During a phone conversation, have you ever been thinking about what you are going to say, or what question you might ask, instead of listening to the other person? Finally, have you ever told yourself how you did after you wrote a document or gave a presentation? As you "talk with yourself" you are engaged in intrapersonal communication.

Intrapersonal communication¹⁷ involves one person; it is often called "self-talk." Wood, J. (1997). *Communication in Our Lives*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, p.22. Donna Vocate's Vocate, D. (Ed.). (1994). *Intrapersonal Communication: Different Voices, Different Minds*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. book on intrapersonal communication explains how, as we use language to reflect on our own experiences, we talk ourselves through situations. For example, the voice within you that tells you, "Keep on Going! I can DO IT!" when you are putting your all into completing a

17. Communication that involves one person; it is often called "self-talk."

five-mile race; or that says, “This report I’ve written is pretty good.” Your intrapersonal communication can be positive or negative, and directly influences how you perceive and react to situations and communication with others.

What you perceive in communication with others is also influenced by your culture, native language, and your world view. As the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas said, “Every process of reaching understanding takes place against the background of a culturally ingrained preunderstanding.” Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. 1). Boston: Beacon Press, p. 100.

For example, you may have certain expectations of time and punctuality. You weren’t born with them, so where did you learn them? From those around you as you grew up. You learned from your family, or the group of people who raised you. What was normal for them became normal for you, but not everyone’s idea of normal, is the same.

When your supervisor invites you to a meeting and says it will start at 7 p.m., does that mean 7:00 sharp, 7-ish, or even 7:30? In the business context, when a meeting is supposed to start at 9 a.m., is it promptly a 9 a.m.? Variations in time expectations depend on regional and national culture as well as individual corporate cultures. In some companies, everyone may be expected to arrive 10-15 minutes before the announced start time to take their seats and be ready to commence business at 9:00 sharp. In other companies, “meeting and greeting” from about 9 to 9:05 or even 9:10 is the norm. When you are unfamiliar with the expectations for a business event, it is always wise to err on the side of being punctual, regardless of what your own internal assumptions about time and punctuality may be.

Interpersonal Communication

The second major context within the field of communication is interpersonal communication. **Interpersonal communication**¹⁸ normally involves two people, and can range from intimate and very personal to formal and impersonal. You may carry on a conversation with a loved one, sharing a serious concern. Later, at work, you may have a brief conversation about plans for the weekend with the security guard on your way home. What’s the difference? Both scenarios involve interpersonal communication, but are different in levels of intimacy. The first example implies a trusting relationship established over time between two caring individuals. The second example level implies some previous familiarity, and is really more about acknowledging each other than any actual exchange of information, much like saying hello or goodbye.

18. Normally involves two people, and can range from intimate and very personal to formal and impersonal.

Group Communication

Have you ever noticed how a small group of people in class sit near each other? Perhaps they are members of the same sports program, or just friends, but no doubt they often engage in group communication.

“**Group communication**¹⁹ is a dynamic process where a small number of people engage in a conversation.” McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p. 14. Group communication is generally defined as involving three to eight people. The larger the group, the more likely it is to break down into smaller groups.

To take a page from marketing, does your audience have segments or any points of convergence/divergence? We could consider factors like age, education, sex, and location to learn more about groups and their general preferences as well as dislikes. You may find several groups within the larger audience, such as specific areas of education, and use this knowledge to increase your effectiveness as a communicator.

Public Communication

In **public communication**²⁰, one person speaks to a group of people; the same is true of public written communication, where one person writes a message to be read by a small or large group. The speaker or writer may ask questions, and engage the audience in a discussion (in writing, examples are an email discussion or a point-counter-point series of letters to the editor), but the dynamics of the conversation are distinct from group communication, where different rules apply. In a public speaking situation, the group normally defers to the speaker. For example, the boss speaks to everyone, and the sales team quietly listens without interruption.

This generalization is changing as norms and expectations change, and many cultures have a tradition of “call outs” or interjections that are not to be interpreted as interruptions or competition for the floor, but instead as affirmations. The boss may say, as part of a charged-up motivational speech, “Do you hear me?” and the sales team is expected to call back “Yes Sir!” The boss, as a public speaker, recognizes that intrapersonal communication (thoughts of the individual members) or interpersonal communication (communication between team members) may interfere with this classic public speaking dynamic of all to one, or the audience devoting all its attention to the speaker, and incorporate attention getting and engagement strategies to keep the sales team focused on the message.

19. A dynamic process where a small number of people engage in a conversation.

20. Communication in which one person speaks or writes a message to a group of people.

Mass Communication

How do you tell everyone on campus where and when all the classes are held? Would a speech from the front steps work? Perhaps it might meet the need if your school is a very small one. A written schedule that lists all classes would be a better alternative. How do you let everyone know there is a sale on in your store, or that your new product will meet their needs, or that your position on a political issue is the same as your constituents? You send a message to as many people as you can through mass communication. Does everyone receive mass communication the same way they might receive a personal phone call? Not likely. Some people who receive mass mailings assume that they are “junk mail” (i.e., that they do not meet the recipients’ needs) and throw them away unopened. People may tune out a television advertisement with a click of the mute button, delete tweets or ignore friend requests on Facebook by the hundreds, or send all unsolicited email straight to the spam folder unread.

Mass media is a powerful force in modern society and our daily lives, and is adapting rapidly to new technologies. **Mass communication**²¹ involves sending a single message to a group. It allows us to communicate our message to a large number of people, but we are limited in our ability to tailor our message to specific audiences, groups, or individuals. As a business communicator, you can use multimedia as a visual aid or reference common programs, films or other images that your audience finds familiar yet engaging. You can tweet a picture that is worth far more than 140 characters, and are just as likely to elicit a significant response. By choosing messages or references that many audience members will recognize or can identify with, you can develop common ground and increase the appeal of your message.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Communication contexts include intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication.

21. Involves sending a single message to a group.

EXERCISES

1. Please recall a time when you gave a speech in front of a group. How did you feel? What was your experience? What did you learn from your experience? If given a second opportunity, how would you approach the group differently?
2. If you were asked to get the attention of your peers, what image or word would you choose and why?
3. If you were asked to get the attention of someone like yourself, what image or word would you choose and why?
4. Make a list of mass communication messages you observe for a one hour period of time. Share your list with classmates.

1.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Working in Groups

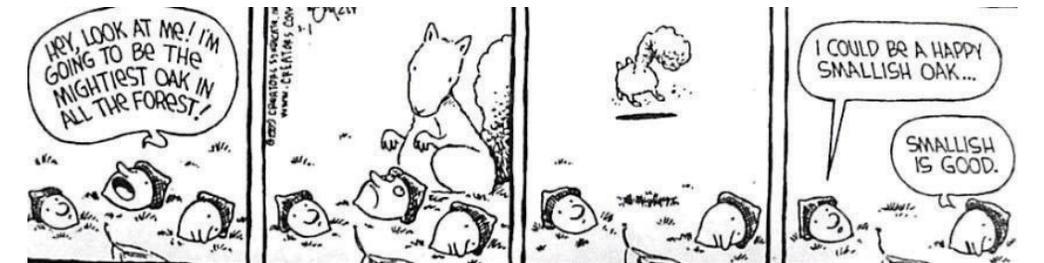
PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify ways in which group communication differs from interpersonal communication.
2. Identify relationship and task advantages and disadvantages of working in groups *versus* individually.

“It used to be argued that slavery was abolished simply because it had ceased to be profitable, but all the evidence points the other way: in fact, it was abolished despite the fact that it was still profitable. What we need to understand, then, is a collective change of heart. Like all such great changes, it had small beginnings.” Ferguson, N. *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British Empire and the Lessons for Global Power*, quoted in Steffen, A. (2006). *Worldchanging: A User’s Guide for the 21st Century*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.

- Niall Ferguson



All human beings exist, spend time, and behave both individually and in groups. When you're a student, you spend a great deal of your time in groups. In the working world, whether you're already in it or not, you spend even more. O'Hair, D. & Wiemann, M.O. (2004). *The Essential Guide to Group Communication*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, p. 7.

Of course, many times you have no choice whether you'll work alone or in a group. You're just told what to do. Still, you're best apt to be prepared if you know what to expect of each status.

Differences between Group and Interpersonal Communication

The mere fact that groups include multiple people leads to at least four consequences. Whether these consequences prove to be advantageous or not depends on the skill level and knowledge of a group's members.

First, since not everyone in a group can talk at the same time (at least, not if they intend to understand and be understood by each other), members have to seek permission to speak. They need to decide how to take turns. In this respect, a group is inherently more formal than a single individual or a dyad.

Second, members of a group have to share time together. The larger the group, the less average time per person is available and the fewer opportunities each member will likely have to contribute to discussions.

Third, communication in groups is generally less intimate than in interpersonal settings. Because there are so many personalities and levels of relationship to consider, people in groups are less inclined to share personal details or express controversial views.

Finally, group work is more time-consuming than individual or interpersonal effort. Why? For one thing, group members usually try to let everyone share information and views. Also, the more people are involved in a discussion, the more diverse opinions may need to be considered and allowed to compete.

As we've noted earlier, groups apply themselves toward reaching aims and accomplishing things. In addition to this task-oriented characteristic, however, they include and depend upon relationships among their members. Although these two elements are usually intertwined rather than discrete and separate, an overview of the pluses and minuses of each can help you make the most of your experience in a group.

Relationship Advantages

The columnist David Brooks interpreted research as indicating that human beings are "wired to cooperate and collaborate, just as much as we are to compete." Galanes, G., & Adams, K. (2013). *Effective Group Discussion: Theory and Practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 5. What's in it for you in terms of relationships, then, if you work in a group instead of alone? Well, you may have a number of your most important human needs satisfied. Here are some specifics:

- You may enjoy fellowship and companionship.
- You may receive moral and emotional support for your views and objectives.
- You may meet three important needs identified by William Schutz, which we'll discuss more in **Chapter 2 "Group Communication Theory"**: Galanes, G., & Adams, K. (2013). *Effective Group Discussion: Theory and Practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 5. inclusion, affection, and control.
- You may have your impulsiveness curbed or your reticence challenged.
- You may cultivate ties that yield future personal or career advantages.

In the next chapter we'll further explore the ideas William Schutz, who theorized about levels of basic human needs and how they may vary from person to person and according to people's circumstances. We'll also review Abraham Maslow's model of human needs.

Relationship Disadvantages

Despite the advantages it offers, working in groups almost invariably presents challenges and disadvantages in the realm of relationships. These are some of the chief dangers you may encounter as part of a group:

- It will probably take a lot of time to create, maintain, and repair the human relationships involved in a group.
- Your group may generate conflict which hurts people's feelings and otherwise undermines their relationships.
- You may misunderstand other group members' intentions or messages.
- Some group members may attempt to deceive, manipulate, or betray the trust of other members.

Task Advantages

Anthropologists have asserted that a major feature of mainstream culture in the United States is a relentless pressure to do things—to accomplish things. Tom Peters is credited with first calling this cultural feature “a bias for action.” One best-selling business self-help book reinforced this national passion for dynamic behavior. Its title is *A Bias for Action: How Effective Managers Harness Their Willpower, Achieve Results, and Stop Wasting Time*. Bruch, H., & Ghoshal, S. (2004). *A Bias for Action: How Effective Managers Harness Their Willpower, Achieve Results, and Stop Wasting Time*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press. Without doubt, accomplishing tasks constitutes a central purpose of most human behavior in the modern world.

When you're trying to get something done, working in a group promises many positive possibilities, among them being the following:

- The group will most likely have access to much more information than any member possesses.
- The group can focus multiple attentions and diverse energy on a topic.
- The group may be more thorough in dealing with a topic than any individual might be. This thoroughness may arise simply because of the number of perspectives represented in the group, but it also owes to the fact that members often “propel each other’s thinking.” Wood, J.T. (1997). *Communication in Our Lives*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, p. 270.
- The group may harness and exploit conflict to generate new and better ideas than an individual could. When tension and disagreement are resolved constructively, chances of achieving group goals increase.
- The group may attain deeper understanding of topics. One analysis of studies, for instance, indicated that students in group-based learning environments learned more, and remembered more of what they learned, than did counterparts exposed to more traditional methods. Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., & Smith, K.A. (1998, July/August). Cooperative learning returns to college. *Change*, 30(4), 31.
- **Synergy**²²—a combined effect greater than the simple sum total of individual contributions—can arise. Sometimes synergy results through enhanced creativity as group members share and build upon each other’s strengths and perspectives. You can probably think of examples of an athletic squad or business group comprising members with modest individual strengths that performed superlatively together.
- The group may spur needed social change. Margaret Mead wrote, “Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” It may be reasonable to question whether the world always works the way Mead described, but many examples do exist of small groups which initiated changes which spread to larger and large parts of society. All other things being equal, a group of committed individuals will project more credibility and engender more support than will a solitary person.

Task Disadvantages

Groups aren’t always successful at reaching their goals. You’ve probably experienced many situations in which you became frustrated or angry because a group you were part of seemed to be taking two steps backward for every step forward—or perhaps you felt it was going only backward. Here are some features of

22. A combined effect great than the simple sum total of individual components in a process or entity.

group work which distinguish it in a potentially negative way from what you might be able to accomplish by yourself or with a single partner:

- In order to be successful, groups need broad, ongoing, time-consuming exchanges of messages. They need to invest in coordinating and monitoring what they're doing. With people as busy as they are in the twenty-first century, "out of sight" is indeed often "out of mind." If they don't keep in touch frequently, group members may forget what they've most recently discussed or decided as a group. They also run the risk of losing track of the structures and processes they've put in place to help them move toward their goals.
- Some group members may engage in "**social loafing**"²³. When one or two people are assigned a task, they know they're being watched and are apt to shoulder the burden. In a larger group, however, any given member will feel less personally responsible for what takes place in it. If too many members follow the natural tendency to observe rather than act, a group may lose its efficiency and thereby find it much more difficult to reach its aims.
- **Groupthink**²⁴ may sap the creative potential of the members. Too much diversity in outlooks and work styles may act as a barrier to a group, but too little diversity also represents a threat to success. If they too easily adopt and hold onto one viewpoint or course of action, people may fall prey to two dangers. First, they may overlook flaws in their thinking. Second, they may fail to anticipate dangers that they might have been detected with closer scrutiny and longer reflection.

KEY TAKEAWAY

To accomplish tasks and relate effectively in a group, it's important to know the advantages and disadvantages inherent in groups.

23. The tendency of members of a large group to feel diminished personal responsibility and to rely on the rest of the group to perform necessary tasks.

24. A unified view or approach adopted by a group which may arise out of members' desire to conform and be approved of, and which members resist giving up even when presented with reasonable opposing evidence.

EXERCISES

1. Identify two groups of which you're a member. Describe
 - a. how each group determined how to take turns in communicating—or, if you weren't part of determining this process, how people take turns now;
 - b. the most controversial view you can recall being expressed in each group; and
 - c. a task which feel each group performed better than any of its individuals might have done alone.
2. Describe an experience in which you observed people cooperating or collaborating when they might instead have competed. What do you believe motivated them to cooperate?
3. Identify two examples of your personal or vocational growth which you feel you owe to participation in a group.
4. Identify a group you've been part of which contributed to positive social change. How did it establish its credibility and influence with other people and groups?

1.5 Group Communication and Social Media

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the nature and types of social media.
2. Identify ways in which social media can foster and endanger group communication.
3. Identify safeguards which groups can adopt when communicating via social media.

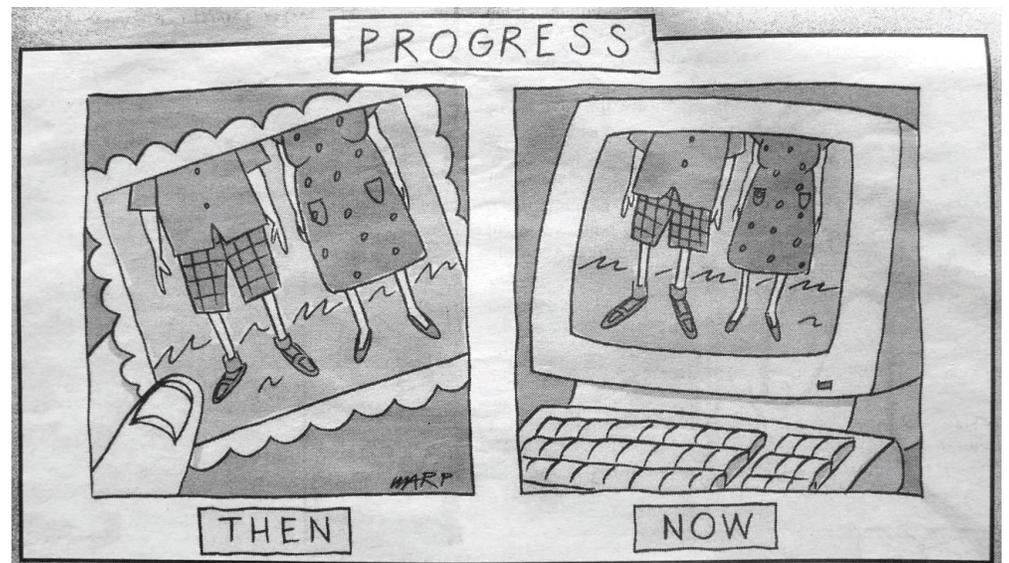
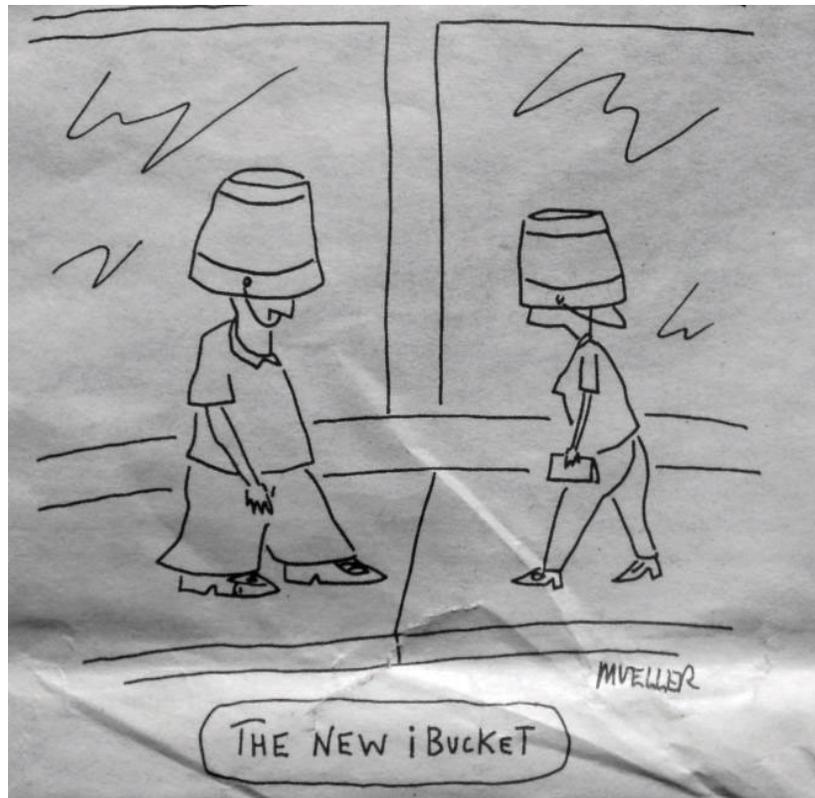
Progress might have been all right once, but it's gone too far.

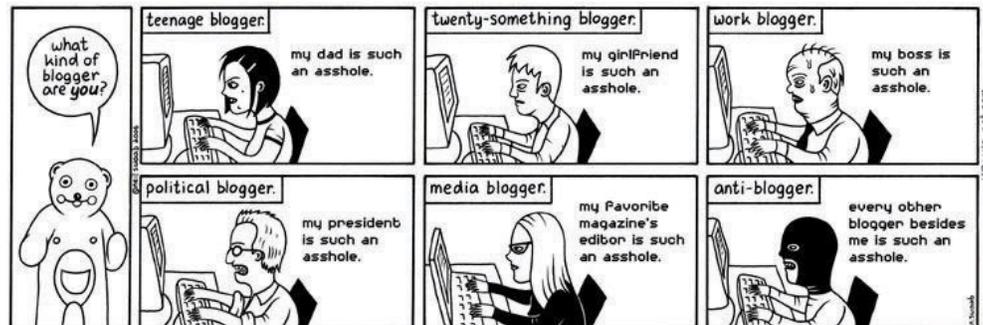
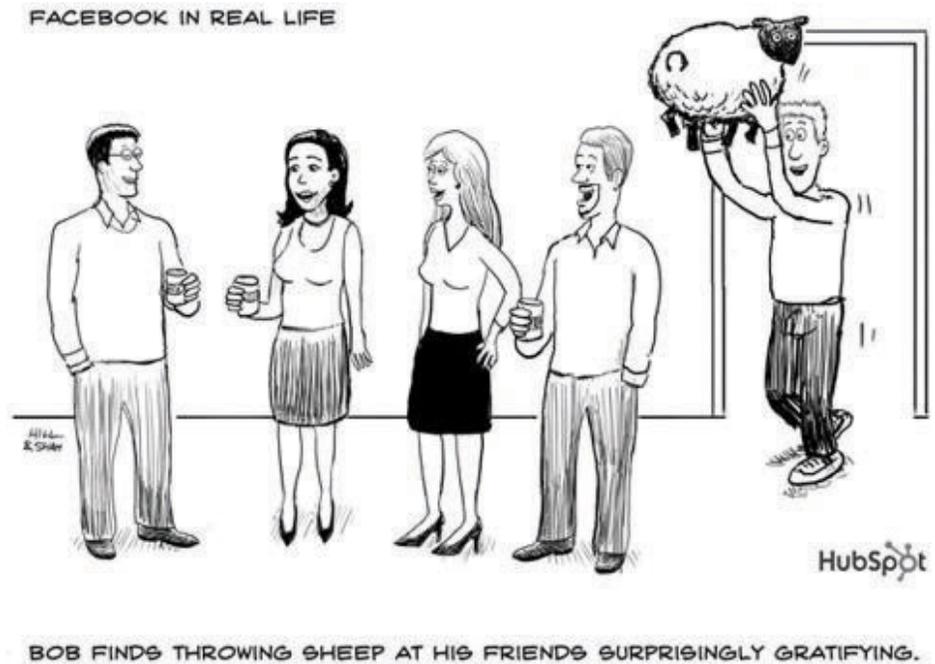
- Ogden Nash

I would trade all of my technology for an afternoon with Socrates.

- Steve Jobs







You may disagree with the whimsical words of Ogden Nash and the more philosophical statement by Steve Jobs. Perhaps you feel that today's electronic technologies are nothing but wonderful. Whatever your opinion, though, you'll have a hard time arguing that the Internet is a small part of people's lives in today's world. Consider these facts about social media:

- Facebook was expected to register its one-billionth user sometime in 2012.
- Ten hours of video recordings are uploaded to YouTube every minute.
- Flickr provides access to more than three billion photographs.
- More than three-quarters of everyone worldwide who uses the Internet takes part in social media. Hunter, C. (2012, January 23). Number of Facebook users could reach 1 billion by 2012. *The Exponent*

Online Retrieved from http://www.purdueexponent.org/features/article_8815d757-8b7c-566f-8f8e-49528d4d8037.html; Kaplan, A.M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53, 59–69.

Do you remember the first time you saw the ocean? Did it awe and overwhelm you, as it did the authors of this book? Did you feel small and insignificant?

The ocean can affect us emotionally, but it can also make an intellectual impression. Knowing its scientific side, we realize that people can interact with the ocean in sundry ways. We also know it's not possible for us as individuals or groups to go everywhere on the ocean at once or to tap all its potential. So it is with social media in the Digital Age.

The vastness, breadth, and ease of access of social media are unprecedented in human history. But they resemble the ocean in other ways besides their size. When we go to sea, bad things can happen. We can fall prey to storms, find ourselves becalmed and bored, or discover that we don't have the right gear to snag a particular kind of fish. We may also fall overboard and drown. Similar perils are associated with social media.

What Are Social Media?

A simple definition of **social media**²⁵ is that they are Web-based and mobile technologies which enable interaction among people. Social media may be divided into six types: collaborative projects, such as Wikipedia; blogs and microblogs, such as Twitter; **content communities**²⁶, such as YouTube; social networking sites, such as Facebook; virtual game worlds; and virtual social worlds. Of these types, the first four are most likely to be valuable for serious and purposeful group communication.

How Social Media Help Groups

Until just a few generations ago, members of a group who wanted to communicate with each other at the same time needed to move themselves to a shared physical location to do so. Today, social media make it unnecessary for people to “transport their atoms” like this. These media also facilitate communication within groups in the several ways. First, they allow physically separated people to communicate in real time. Such communication is called “**synchronous**²⁷,” whereas interchanges that don't follow each other are referred to as “**asynchronous**²⁸.” Just the “wow” factor of seeing and hearing people simultaneously when they're dispersed over hundreds or thousands of miles can propel a group forward.

25. Web-based and mobile technologies which enable interaction among people.
26. A group of people who create, store, and make available text, images, or other digital data on line—e.g., video recordings on YouTube.
27. Exchange of messages in real time—i.e., such that each person's message is immediately perceived by its receiver(s).
28. Exchange of messages by senders and recipients who do not reach each other or generate responses immediately.

Social media also allow people in different places to collaborate on projects. As information related to tasks emerges over time, people can sustain their focus and attention on individual and shared responsibilities.

Social media permit people to keep contact with each other when they're not meeting formally. Electronic availability makes it possible for people to enjoy a sense of proximity and familiarity with each other.

Social media enable group members to identify and collect information pertinent to their aims. Visiting forums, blogs, podcasts, and other Internet sites can make it possible for members to enlarge their understanding of the topics they deal with.

Finally, social media can benefit members by focusing attention primarily on messages instead of "status markers" such as titles, age, and attire.

Communicating through social media frees groups from the constraints of place and time that until recently used to apply to all human interactions. It can also save considerable money and time that people used to have to spend.

How Social Media Endanger Groups

If you're using a butter knife and drop it on your foot, your foot will hurt. If you're using a chain saw and drop it on your foot, you may become permanently disabled. When it comes to group communication, social media resemble chain saws much more than they do butter knives. People may fracture friendships, lose jobs, squander opportunities, and wreck reputations through their use and misuse of social media.

Groups may encounter many kinds of dangers when they use social media. For one thing, social media can constitute a huge time sink. Nearly half of all Facebook and Twitter users sign in to their accounts during the night or first thing in the morning. Is social media the new addiction? *Marketing Profs*. Retrieved from <http://static.vizworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Social-Network-Map3.png>, 2010. Because these resources are so multifaceted and visually enticing, they may distract groups from both their task-related and group maintenance functions. Trying to select and learn to use social media can lead groups down blind alleys.

Social media also make it easy to distribute hurtful or dubious material. Misunderstandings can spread quickly and widely via electronic media, and they can be difficult to correct once people's feelings have been hurt or enflamed. Even just few intemperate words composed in haste, or comments intended to be taken

in jest but open to multiple interpretations, can create lasting problems within a group.

Third, social media may drain the sense of “**social presence**”²⁹ from interactions because they transmit people’s nonverbal messaging incompletely, if at all.

Last of all, groups using social media may leave dirty “digital tracks.” Nothing that members of a group post to the Internet should be considered private, and inappropriate messages or images can easily prompt criticism or even legal action.

Social media make it possible to transmit messages faster and more widely than face-to-face communication can. At the same time, reactions to messages exchanged via social media may vary dramatically because the media lack “personalness” and are processed by each individual according to that person’s circumstances and frame of mind.

Safeguards for Groups Using Social Media

To make the most of the convenience that social media offer while avoiding the pitfalls they may present, groups should be careful how they operate. As a general rule, it’s best not to say or do anything using social media that you wouldn’t do in a face-to-face setting. Here are some specific steps your group can take to best communicate via social media:

1. Set guidelines for how you intend to use social media. A full-blown “policy” may not be necessary for small and informal groups, but it never hurts to put something in writing that your group members can refer to as they work or that you can offer to new members as part of their orientation to the group. These guidelines should probably identify ways in which social media are to be used to support group members. In addition, a statement should probably be included which indicates that all group members are expected to behave professionally when using social media.
2. Check the privacy settings on the social media sites you use. Make sure you know how much of your communication is shared with which potential audiences. If you’re not sure whether a message or post will be accessible to the whole world, assume that it will be and act accordingly.
3. Monitor your group’s online “persona” regularly. Find out what other people see when they enter the group’s name or other details in a search engine.

29. The sensation of being in immediate, direct contact with other human beings rather than being distant in time or space from them.

4. Never divulge passwords from your group's social media resources. Though the likelihood is slight, someone with access to such information could post objectionable content while posing as a group member.
5. Take care to share messages and information with only the individuals you mean them for. Pause, think, and look carefully before pressing any "send" or "share" button.
6. Be sure you know the copyright status of any materials you draw upon as you conduct your group's business. If you're not sure it's legal or ethical to borrow or copy a particular item without asking, assume that it isn't.

Real-time communication through social media makes it possible for group members to gauge each other's attitudes and feelings with some accuracy. Responses to asynchronous messages transmitted via social media may not arrive in a timely fashion, however. As a result, using social media to explore topics and solve problems requires tact, patience, and flexibility.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Social media are pervasive and can facilitate the operation of groups, but they must be used carefully to avoid causing serious harm.

EXERCISES

1. Identify two social media you or your friends have used regularly. Describe a problem you solved while using the media.
2. Describe a misunderstanding you've experienced while using social media. How might it have been avoided in a face-to-face setting?
3. Imagine that you and five classmates or work colleagues have established communication via a social medium. What rule or guideline would you adopt above all others to govern your activities?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Interpretive Questions

- a. What assumptions are present in transactional model of communication?
- b. How does our native language or culture influence our communication or style of presentation?

2. Application Questions

- a. Observe two people talking. Describe their communication. See if you can find all eight components and provide an example for each one.
- b. Find an example of a model of communication where you work and provide an example for all eight components.

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